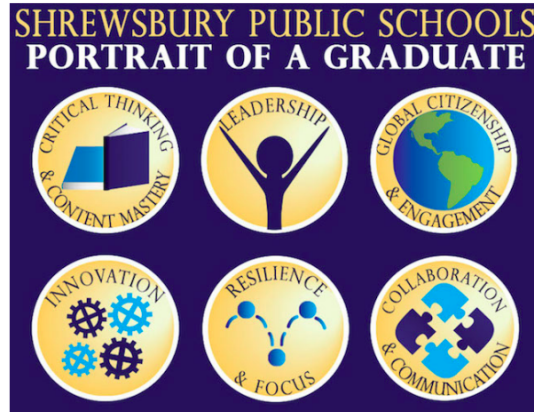


### Our Mission

The Shrewsbury Public Schools, in partnership with the community, will provide students with the skills and knowledge for the 21st century, an appreciation of our democratic tradition, and the desire to continue to learn throughout life.



## Shrewsbury Public Schools Report on Social and Emotional Learning & Well-Being Initiatives

Dr. Jane O. Lizotte  
Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships and Well-Being

June 8, 2023

Dear Members of the Shrewsbury School Committee,

*Enhanced Well-Being of All* has served as a strategic priority in the Shrewsbury Public Schools over the past five years and will continue to be one of three essential commitments in [SPS's Strategic Plan 2023-2027](#). This report serves as an update to the community on goals, action steps, assessments, and next steps, as those relate to social and emotional learning and well-being in our schools and school district. School districts play a pivotal role in modeling and creating the conditions for all schools to prioritize and advance SEL. We are called upon to prioritize SEL in strategic planning, allot financial and human resources to support implementation, provide professional learning opportunities, and create a vision and long-term plan for implementing, integrating, and continuously improving SEL

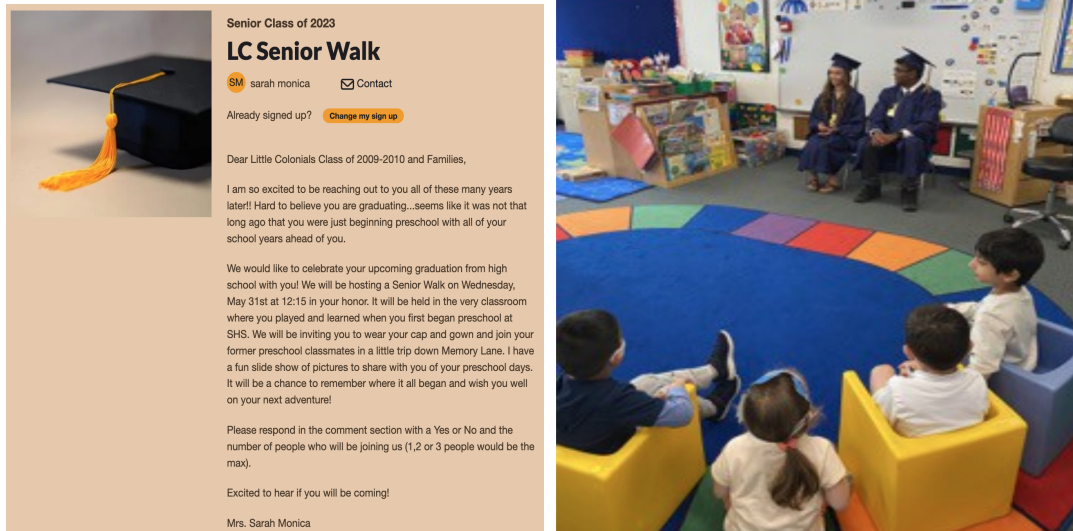
practices. [Our students are amazing](#) and this is due to the love and support of their families, the community, and **all** SPS staff Pre-K through grade 12!

Though my district level position of Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships and Well-Being was put on hold due to budgetary constraints and the need for a principal at Paton Elementary School in late spring 2020, this work has continued, as that relates to SEL and well-being, due to the dedication and expertise of staff, students, families, and community partners. I am grateful to district, school, and teacher leaders, including counselors, school psychologists, and service providers, for generously contributing time, energy, and expertise to this critical work year-round, as much of the work is accomplished during the summer months. This report will recognize and celebrate *some* of these endeavors and accomplishments, as they relate to SEL and Well-Being, while recognizing and communicating the significant work needed to move the goals identified in the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan forward.

### **Overview: Belonging, Connections, and Relationships**

Over the past school year, district and school leaders, educators, and staff modeled, communicated and reiterated the importance of making connections with others, while building a sense of belonging and developing trusting relationships in our school communities. These practices are evident in learning spaces throughout the district, as our schools endeavor to provide opportunities to gather together for Town Meetings (SHS), Grade Level Meetings (OMS), Community Meetings (SMS), and All School Meetings (Elementary), to share learning and celebrate accomplishments. Community gatherings continue long after the school day ends, as school leaders and parent groups collaborate to plan cultural nights, recognitions of learning, family socials, food truck nights, and a myriad of celebrations that are inclusive of all. We know that being present to one another is paramount, as we seek to foster relationships and find ways to let others know that we care about them.

Students serve as role models to one another, as older students volunteer at elementary schools, present at Community Meetings (SMS), and show gratitude for educators who have positively impacted their lives. At a recent School Committee meeting, SHS's top ten scholars shared stories of educators and others who made them feel loved, included, and integral to the school and classroom communities of which they were a part from pre-Kindergarten through high school. Some of these students shared specific ways in which teachers positively influenced their "sense of self," while teaching "life lessons" in addition to "academic engagement." End of senior year celebrations including the Little Colonials "Senior Walk" and Parker Road Pre-School's "Reunion" and the "clap outs" at some of our elementary schools, signify the important role that relationship building and community play in our schools.



### **Systemic SEL: Ensuring SEL implementation with fidelity**

Systemic SEL is an approach to create equitable learning conditions that actively involve all Pre-K to Grade 12 students in learning and practicing social, emotional, and academic competencies. All stakeholders in our school communities play an integral role in social, emotional, and academic learning. These conditions require every school community to enhance the personal and professional capacities of adults to:

- implement and continuously improve evidence-based programs and practices
- create an inclusive culture that fosters caring relationships and student voice, agency, and character
- support coordinated school-family-community partnerships to strengthen student growth and development.

Research, data, and lived experiences in schools indicate that academic performance improves when students are provided with intervention and prevention skills, strategies, and programming that are designed to build their skills for managing emotions, showing concern for others, making responsible decisions, and forming positive relationships. It is incumbent upon each of us to do whatever it takes to provide our students with the resources, experiences, and opportunities they need to be kind, caring, empathetic, and engaged members of our community.

Below is a model from CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) that highlights the process through which this work is accomplished, and identifies the process through which systemic SEL is realized. During the summer and continuing through next school year, four level-based SEL leadership teams, representative of various roles, will engage in this planning work. Additional information regarding these efforts is described further in this report.



Figure 1.  
Continuous Improvement for Systemic SEL Implementation

During the 2022-23 school year, SEL school and district teams met to identify areas of strength and need, as those relate to social and emotional learning in our schools. The teams consisted of general education and special education teachers, counselors, psychologists, and service providers. Three of the four teams (Pre-K-4, SMS, and OMS) met monthly, while members of SHS’s Advisory Team met at the beginning of the school year and again mid-year to discuss Advisory, and identify strengths and challenges, with the goal of making improvements to the programming this summer. I had the opportunity to engage with all teams during the year and observe morning meetings and Advisory across the district.

I look forward to further developing and improving upon this critical work during the summer and next school year, as newly formed SEL leadership teams (PreK-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12) will convene in July. It is important that all involved in this planning keep SPS’s new strategic plan at the forefront of our work, as we determine our commitments, action steps, and common practices to ensure all students’ social, emotional, and academic growth. The leadership teams will develop a clear and concise plan moving forward, while clearly communicating with all involved (students, staff, families, community) to coordinate SEL practices across home and school so students experience SEL in all aspects of students’ lives.

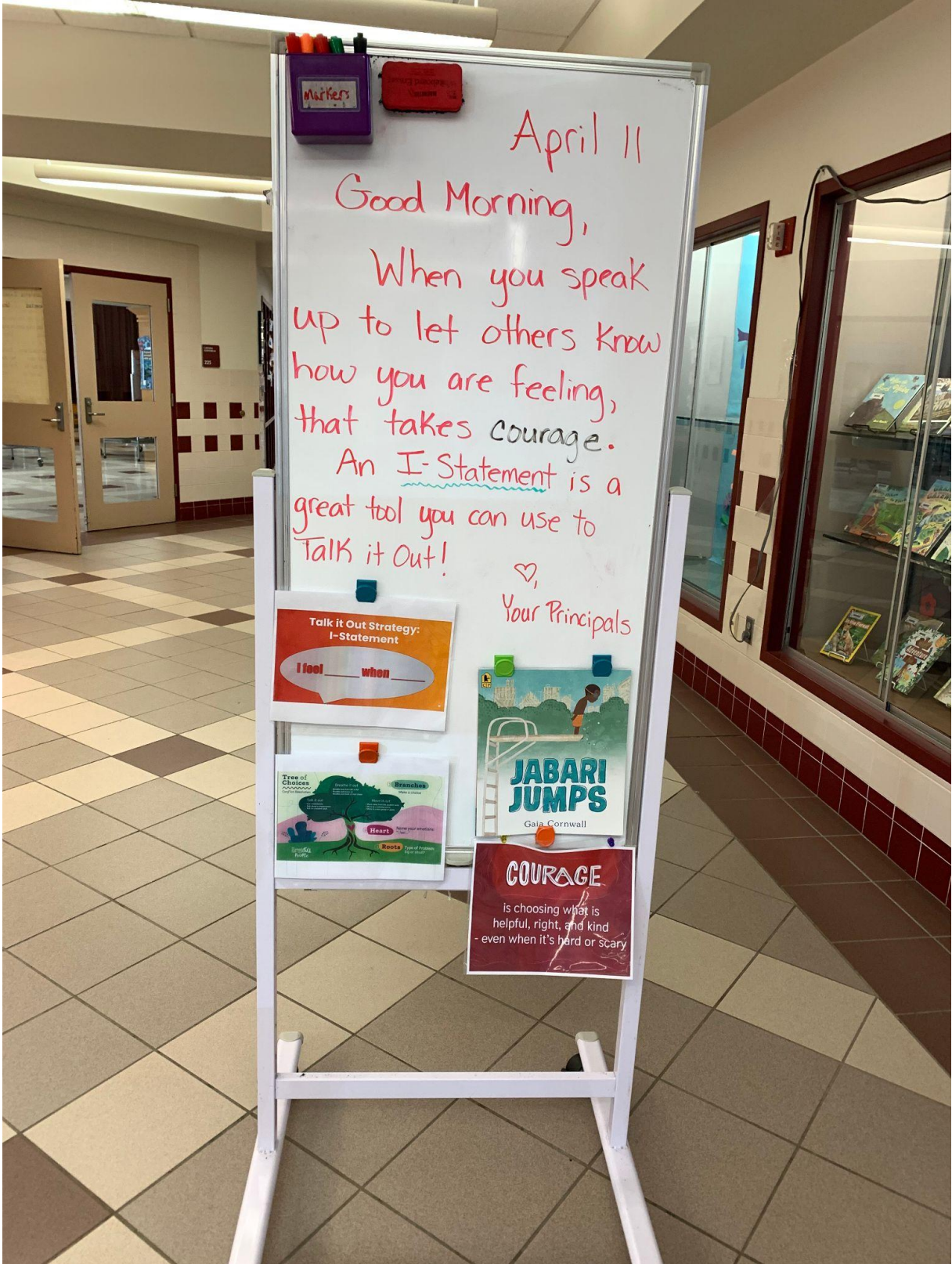
Communication between home and school is essential to social, emotional, and academic learning. There are several ways in which communication occurs in our schools, including phone calls, in-person conferences, e-mail, SeeSaw, Schoology, and classroom and/or school weekly updates.

### **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at the Pre-K and Elementary Levels**

Building-based teams met monthly at the elementary level. These teams were facilitated by members of the district SEL Leadership Team. Meetings included the review of SEL Monthly Calendars that were created by the SEL District Leadership Team. These included daily and weekly lessons and activities. As daily and weekly lessons were taught and assessed, building-based team members shared feedback with district team leaders, in order to make changes and improvements along the way. This model will continue next year, though the composition of the district SEL Leadership Team will change, and summer work will inform next steps. We continue to use the Character Strong's PurposeFull People curriculum as our primary SEL resource, while integrating additional resources that complement it.

School leaders do an exceptional job sharing daily messages verbally and visually throughout the school day, greeting students as they enter the building and later during co-led morning announcements with students. Messages including the one in the photo below that appears in the entranceway at Floral Street School reinforces the skills and strategies being taught and revisited in all learning and office spaces throughout our schools. Engaging in this work with fidelity is key to consistency and applied knowledge and experience.





### **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at Sherwood Middle School**

One example of on-going collaboration across levels includes recent visits from Sherwood Middle School's SEL Leadership Team and Faculty Advisory Committee to Floral Street School and Beal School to observe morning arrival. Due to the change in school start times, Sherwood staff and students will experience a 30-minute arrival next school year, which is a change from the 15-minute arrival to which the community has grown accustomed. SMS staff had the opportunity to observe this important part of the day that sets the stage for social, emotional and academic learning, while interacting with classroom teachers and other staff to learn more about routines, transitions, and expectations. SMS staff shared their experiences with their colleagues at the SMS faculty meeting this past Tuesday, with the following observations and goals for their work moving forward:

- Calm and joyful environment in the hallways. Students enter the building, check in with classroom teachers, go to the cafeteria for breakfast, return for the daily check in question and morning work/choice board activities. Teachers were also observed providing 1:1 or small group interventions during this time.
- Interest-based "soft time." WIN Block
- Daily check-ins: Getting a pulse on student voice using strategies including thermometer check-ins and morning messages.
- Morning announcements are shared by students promptly at 9 a.m.
- Class meetings begin directly following announcements.

### **Social and Emotional Learning at Oak Middle School**

Oak Middle School has endeavored to set aside time each week to meet in Advisory teams. Advisory takes place every Wednesday, and includes resources from Character Strong, in addition to supplemental resources that OMS educators have chosen to strengthen the lessons and activities. The planning of Advisory has been highly collaborative among the OMS SEL and Advisory leadership teams, in addition to all professional staff, as educators share resources and engage in opportunities to peer observe, model lessons, and co-teach.

During the school year, OMS educators engaged in "learning walks" during Advisory, as a way to learn from colleagues. They were provided with opportunities to share observations, ask questions, and refine their own practice. While Advisory leaders were participating in learning walks, their students engaged in mindfulness activities with Mindfulness Director, Jordan Grinstein, in the cafeteria. This work will continue during the summer months, as the OMS SEL Leadership Team will further refine the programming, while clarifying teaching and learning goals and expectations for the 2023-24 school year.

### **Social and Emotional Learning at Shrewsbury High School**

In an effort to foster belonging and community at the beginning of the school year, Advisory leaders asked students to complete a questionnaire during their first meeting

together. Students were asked to share their name pronunciations, their pronouns, and who they consider to be their trusted adults in and out of school. They were also asked to share the name(s) of their best friend(s). At the beginning of second semester, students were tasked with setting SEL and academic goals during Advisory. At the end of the semester, students met 1:1 with Advisory leaders to discuss whether or not the students believed they met their goals. Additionally, students and Advisory leaders discussed students' summer plans, including goals they hope to achieve during the summer months.

At SHS, Advisory leaders teach one formal lesson during every seven day cycle. Another day of the cycle is spent working in Advisory groups for check-ins with students. This time is flexible and intentionally unstructured, as a way for students to develop relationships with students and adults in their Advisory group. Grade 9 Advisory homerooms meet with their upperclass student mentors (MVPs) during these flexible times. All staff have access to Advisory lessons and activities created by their peers and the SHS Advisory leaders.

The work of our faculty and staff does not conclude when the school day ends. They support students by attending evening and weekend events including musicals, art shows, dance recitals, athletic activities, and graduation, long after their students have left their classrooms. Our faculty and staff do this because they care about their students and seek to support them – in and out of the classroom.

### **Continued Partnership with WholeSchool Mindfulness**

Jordan Grinstein, SPS Mindfulness Director, continues to work in meaningful ways with students and staff to teach mindfulness, while offering consistent opportunities to practice, with the support of student ambassadors. [Mindfulness ZOOM sessions](#) provided opportunities for a multitude of students and staff to practice together. [Here](#) are responses to a Google Form sent to participating teachers during a recent ZOOM session. It is an understatement to report that Jordan's schedule is overflowing and requests for his facilitation of mindfulness cannot be met. The demand for his time has significantly increased from last year to this year. I am confident that we could fill the schedules of four Mindfulness Directors in our district. Jordan has led hundreds of mindfulness sessions this year to students and staff at all levels. He has continued his work with the Grade 4 Student Ambassador program and developed a similar program with fifth grade teams at Sherwood Middle School.

Jordan frequently checks in with teachers, counselors, and building leaders to identify ways to strengthen mindfulness programming and share observations of student and educator experiences. During the school year, he met with large groups of SHS students in the Presentation Room during Advisory periods, to teach students a variety of mindfulness related practices. He also visited classrooms at SHS and across the district, when requested by individual teachers, or as a way to introduce himself to students and staff.

---



## Well-Being in our Schools: Examples of Student Programming

There are many ways in which our students engage in well-being during and after the school day. The following includes some of these opportunities:

- Jokes of the day and sharing of birthdays during morning announcements
- Paton School's participation in Safe Routes to School walks (school nurse, teachers, principal)
- Vacation programming during February and April school vacation weeks.
- Presentation to **all** SHS students by DetecTogether, a local non-profit organization that teaches ways to recognize warning signs of cancer and empower people to have the right conversations with their doctor, at the right time, to ensure the best outcome-through a strategy called *Three Steps Detect*.
- After school enrichment opportunities including STEM, Girls on the Run, Student Voice, athletic teams at Oak Middle School
- Daily outside activities including recess, physical education, and planting of school gardens
- Music including [this song](#) by Joy Oladokun, playing in the SHS hallways between periods on Fridays, thanks to Mrs. Granados's efforts!

## School Vacation and After School Opportunities for Students in grades K-8:

Thanks to the leadership of Karen Isaacson, Director of Extended Learning, and other SPS staff, opportunities for students to engage in social, emotional, physical, and academic were plentiful. Below are just some examples of activities offered to students.

Examples of Student Participation:

- Project Shine at Sherwood (Girls leadership) - Two sessions: 47 students
- Gap Junction at Tufts Veterinary School and Clinic: 29 students
- February vacation: 204 students participated in 20 classes
- April Vacation: 249 students participated in 24 classes
- ASAP: 632 students participated in 43 classes (fall, winter and spring sessions)
- **Grand Total: 90 classes offered through Karen Issacson's programming with 1,161 student participants.**

## Well-Being in our Schools: Examples of Staff Opportunities

The following are examples of well-being opportunities that are offered to all staff during the school year:

- For Staff, By Staff Offerings
- Book Study Groups
- Staff are encouraged to take time to eat, walk, visit with colleagues, and get outside

- All SPS staff were encouraged to complete an *Adult and Staff Well-Being*, developed through the Panorama Platform.
- Adult Wellness Leadership Team
- Workshops and courses focused on student and staff well-being

***For Staff, By Staff* Wellness offerings**

Thanks to the leadership of Karen Isaacson, Director of Extended Learning, seven, eight-week staff wellness classes were offered across the district this year, with 59 staff members participating. Below is a table that illustrates the offerings and the staff instructors. We are appreciative to the [West Suburban Health Group \(WSHG\)](#) for their financial support of additional adult wellness programming including **Chi Running/Walking** clinics that were offered to both town employees and school staff during the fall and spring, and look forward to our continued collaboration.

Course Name	Instructor	Session	Location	Start Time	# Enrolled
Intro to Ukelele	Skyler Acconcio	Winter	Beal	4:00 p.m.	4
Reiki Healing Meditation	Elyssa Glassman	Spring	Paton	4:00 p.m.	5
Reiki Healing Meditation	Elyssa Glassman	Winter	Paton	4:00 p.m.	7
Express Bootcamp	Erin Burtnyk	Winter	SHS	2:45 p.m.	9
Yoga & Mindfulness	Beth McInerney	Winter	Beal	4:00 p.m.	11
Yoga	Beth McInerney	Spring	Beal	4:00 p.m.	11
Intro to Pickleball	Monica Clune	Spring	Beal	4:00 p.m.	12

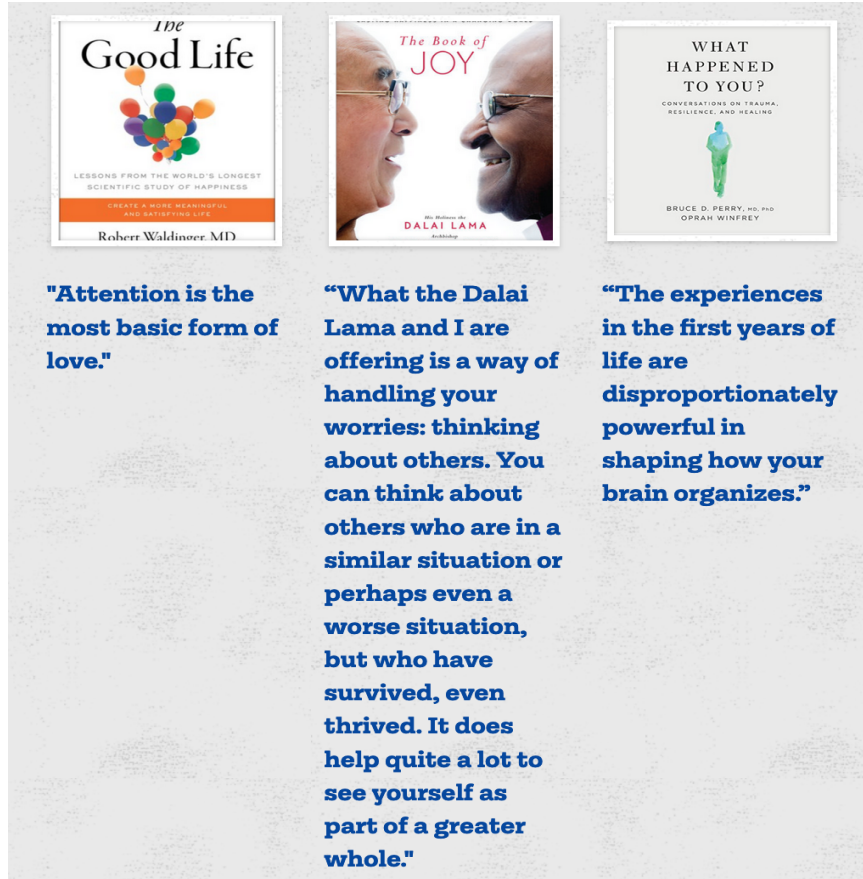
Additionally, Beth McInerney, Grade 2 teacher at Beal School, taught yoga classes on Thursday afternoons from September through June from 4:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.– most of these classes were taught at no cost to her colleagues. Thank you, Beth!

Perhaps the most important wellness opportunities occur daily, as staff make concerted efforts to interact with each other informally. These brief, yet impactful, connections happen frequently-in the hallways, learning and office spaces, as well as during a brisk walk at lunchtime and after school. We need to remind one another of the critical role these interactions play in our daily lives, as research included that shared in *The Good Life*, “Research has shown that people who have a best friend at work are more engaged than those who don’t,” and “If we feel disconnected from others at work, that means we feel lonely for the majority of our waking hours. This is a health concern. As we’ve mentioned elsewhere, loneliness increases our risk of death as much as smoking or obesity.” The time spent together sharing perspectives, life stories, and personal and professional goals is affirming to staff and sends the message that they matter.

One of the popular course offerings being offered at the upcoming 2023 Summer Institute includes **Mindfulness & Well-Being: Living with Purpose & Peace**. This course is being co-taught by Jordan Grinstein, Mindfulness Director, and Beth McInerney, Grade 2 teacher. The course offering quickly reached capacity and closed after 35 staff from the Shrewsbury Public Schools and Westborough Public Schools enrolled. Other examples of well-being offerings include workshops offered by companies and higher education institutions, including *The Science of Well-Being for Teens*, offered by Yale University. Resources including free subscriptions to apps including 10% Happier, are appreciated by staff.

### **After School Book Study Groups**

Staff members (38 in total from across the district) participated in one or more district-wide after school book study over the course of the school year. Below are the books each group read. Participants shared that connecting with colleagues in this way was both enjoyable and informative. We recommend these reads to the community. Additionally, staff at schools including Beal School, were invited to participate in school-based book clubs that culminated in dinner socials at local restaurants.




---

## SEL: Next Steps

Strengthening social and emotional learning in all of our schools, and doing this work with fidelity, continues to be a top priority. This work will continue, thanks to the efforts of SEL leadership teams at each level that will meet over the summer and monthly during the next school year. Below is a brief description of the work ahead.

### Summer 2023-June 2024: SEL Leadership Teams Grades PreK-4, 5-6 (SMS), 7-8 (OMS), and 9-12 (SHS)

#### Why:

- Strengthen Social and Emotional Learning Programming and Supports: Proactively deliver social and emotional learning opportunities to all students and maintain sufficient systems and resources to respond to students' social and emotional needs.
- Continue professional development on current leveled social and emotional learning curriculum and Advisory experiences to ensure implementation with fidelity.

**What:**

- Create a shared vision, mission, and goals, as those relate to SPS's Strategic Plan Commitment to Enhanced Well-Being of All. The groups will strengthen the SEL lessons, activities, etc. that currently exist.

**Who:**

- Representative staff from each of the schools and levels.

**When:**

- 12 in-person hours during the summer months, and after school monthly meetings from September 2023-June 2024

**Adult Wellness: Next Steps**

Our district is committed to working with all staff to prioritize well-being by providing a comprehensive approach to supporting every SPS staff member. Our newly approved strategic plan includes *Enhanced Well-Being of All*. The newly created Adult Wellness Leadership Team includes 35 staff members from across the district, who are representative of different roles and work at different schools and levels. The leadership team will begin its work during the summer months and continue during the next school year and beyond! Below are some of the goals of this leadership team:

**Why:**

- Work-related stress is of increasing concern in our school district and across the globe.

**What:**

- Expand opportunities for all staff to strengthen mental health and physical wellness in support of overall well-being.
- Create and implement a staff wellness program to address workplace stress.

**Who:**

- 35 total representative staff from each of the schools and levels.

**When:**

- 8 in-person hours during the summer months, and after school monthly meetings from September 2023-June 2024