

### THE NEED

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- *At least 21% of Tennessee teens were bullied on school property*
- *At least 10% have experienced sexual assault*
- *8% have chosen to miss school because they felt unsafe*

Data from the CDC's latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey for Tennessee and the Tennessee Department of Health's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System revealed that a large number of students suffer adverse experiences and/or violence at school at some point during their youth -- the results of which can impact academic success, emotional wellness, discipline incidents at school, attitudes about risky behavior, and even physical health. Data has also shown that when students live in poverty, their odds of experiencing toxic stress and its lasting physical and emotional effects increase. 72% of students in Metro Nashville Public Schools live at or below the poverty line, making this a major issue in our district. A growing body of research clearly demonstrates that social and emotional support and a climate of connectedness in the school building are integral to promoting overall health and academic success.

Social Emotional Learning, or SEL, is a framework for student support and school improvement that focuses on teaching social and emotional skills to both teachers and students while creating and maintaining a safe, caring learning environment. SEL core competencies include self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills.

### THE TACTIC

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In 2011, the Behavioral Health Alignment Team recognized an urgent need to educate teachers and school staff in Social Emotional Learning competencies and practices, in order to create long-term systemic change around positive school climate, stronger support systems for students, improved student health, academic engagement, and overall success. The A-Team undertook an effort to begin embedding SEL into MNPS and the wider Nashville community by presenting an annual collaborative professional development event called The Social Emotional Learning Conference. The first conference, in July of 2011, brought mental health providers, SEL experts, and other community partners together around a common goal to provide a variety of workshops throughout the day for educators, promoting understanding and awareness of SEL and how it impacts school climate and academic engagement, and also teaching on-the-ground skills that allow teachers to become models of SEL practice for their students. The first conference served around 150 people and offered 20

workshops and a small student panel.

The conference has grown substantially over the years both in size and in popularity. The A-Team has worked to add in new features each year such as national keynote speakers, an expanded schedule, a pre-conference SEL Basics workshop, and more. This year's conference was held June 19, 2015 at Cane Ridge High School in Antioch, Tennessee and is the fifth installment of this popular and informative event, bringing in over 720 registrations. The 2015 conference was titled **Grow, Achieve, Empower Through SEL** and featured a keynote address from renowned SEL expert Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade, San Francisco State University Professor of Raza Studies and East Oakland high school teacher with experience teaching students dealing with toxic stress. Volunteer presenters from around the city provided over 50 unique workshops during four breakout session slots. Subjects ranged from exploring Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their effects on school behavior and performance, SEL practices for students with autism, mindfulness techniques in the classroom, child brain development, engaging parents in SEL development, and beyond. An exhibitor hall was featured where 25 businesses and organizations that support SEL and mental health in Nashville and beyond were on hand to share information about their services and provide freebies. Additionally, thanks to generous sponsorships, the Behavioral Health A-Team was able to provide boxed lunches for free to all attendees, exhibitors, and presenters.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Community engagement is a key component to the sustainability of the SEL Conference. The tactic relies on community partners to provide workshops and financial support for the conference. Not only does engaging community partners make the conference viable and cost effective, it also ensures that the catalog of workshop offerings comes from diverse perspectives and stays current and relevant from year to year.

The Behavioral Health A-Team released two Invitations to Participate™ for this tactic: one to attract workshop presenters and one to solicit sponsor-exhibitors. A diverse group of agencies from across the Middle Tennessee area, and even a few from out of state, answered the call. The team received 59 responses for workshops offerings and 24 responses for exhibitors. Of these responses, 78 partners rendered services at the conference.

The team also called on area businesses to provide financial support for attendee lunch and refreshments, acquiring sponsorships from Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital, KidLink, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee, and Delek Fund for Hope.

## OUTCOMES & OUTPUTS

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### LONG TERM OUTCOMES:

Increased graduation rates

Improved children's health (BMI, Youth Risk Behavior Data)

### **MIDTERM OUTCOME:**

GOAL: 10% increase in MNPS school staff reporting an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their schools (Baseline: TELL Survey 2012; 66%)

ACTUAL: 77% of school staff responded positively in 2015

GOAL: 10% increase in MNPS school staff reporting their schools as safe places to work (Baseline: TELL Survey 2012; 89%)

ACTUAL: 93% of school staff responded positively in 2015

### **SHORT TERM OUTCOME:**

30% increase in available professional development, resources, and other supports for teachers, administration, and Central Office staff to increase positive school climate

*ACTUAL: In addition to the annual SEL Conference, there is at least 80% more institutionalized SEL-related professional development training currently offered to MNPS staff and teachers as a result of partnerships created over the multi-year development of the conference. This includes Olweus bullying prevention, Responsive Classroom techniques, Restorative Practices discipline alternatives, and more.*

### **OUTPUTS**

**Goal: 25 volunteer-offered workshops**

**Actual: 54 volunteer-offered workshops**

## THE IMPACT

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Highlighting the recognition Social Emotional Learning is now receiving in Nashville and across the country for its ability to improve student outcomes, the opening remarks of the conference were given in part by Nashville Mayor Karl Dean. His remarks included an inaugural award presented to MNPS superintendent Dr. Jesse B. Register from the Behavioral Health A-Team for excellence in his dedication to ensuring SEL is embedded across the district. Mayor Dean spoke about Dr. Register's hard work to implement and promote SEL understanding and on-the-ground practice among educators during his tenure as MNPS Director of Schools.

## THE REACH

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- While MNPS has given a stipend to teachers and district staff for attending the conference in the past, the 2015 conference did not offer this benefit and still sold out at over 720 registrations - clearly showing MNPS educators' knowledge of and commitment to SEL.
- 100% of attendees surveyed reported they would recommend the conference to others.
- Twitter hashtag "#SELConference" garnered over 200 tweet mentions, and was the top trending hashtag in the Nashville metropolitan area for several hours on the day of the conference.
- 94% of attendees surveyed found the partner-offered workshop sessions informative and useful.

## Thoughts from attendees of the conference

*"I LOVED the keynote speaker [Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade] and his speech. His words resonated with me and were applicable to students in our school. It confirmed we've done some things right in our school and the results are evident in our school's data."*

*"I appreciated the many sessions that focused on social & emotional health of teachers/staff/parents as a means of promoting social and emotional health of our students."*

With another successful year under its belt, the SEL Conference is well on its way to institutionalization within Metro Nashville Public Schools, and the collaborative event has created systemic change around SEL in Nashville by increasing awareness and understanding among educators and community members of the core competencies of SEL and their impact on student success and

children's health. "Our schools are really taking an interest in SEL and the overall behavioral health of their students," says Debra McAdams, MNPS Executive Director of Exceptional Education. Marcy Melvin of Centerstone, co-chair of the Behavioral Health A-Team, writes: "We've taken a step back from intervention to prevention - providing teachers and administrators with skills that allow them to model SEL with one another as well as their students."

## WHAT'S NEXT

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The A-Team has written an updated Tactical Plan that will set new goals for SEL Conference outputs, short-term outcomes, and mid-term outcomes to respond to the growth of the event over the past five years. Updated goals include increases in repeat attendees reporting they've utilized knowledge gained at past SEL conferences, increases in the number of new attendees, and MNPS staff reporting positively on school atmosphere and safety (TELL Survey), among others. 2016 will see a two-day conference schedule, with more time and flexibility for workshop attendance and a broader range of topics covered, including a major focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma-informed approaches.

## **Participating Organizations**

Austin ISD Department of Social and Emotional Learning  
Austin Peay State University  
Autism Tennessee  
Capstone Pediatrics  
Center for Safe & Supportive Schools at Vanderbilt  
Center on Great Teachers and Leaders  
Centerstone  
College of Health Science  
Creative Genius In You  
DAHeMe Solutions  
Delek Fund for Hope  
End Slavery Tennessee  
FocusWorks Consulting Group  
Golden Rule School  
GoNoodle  
Governor's Children's Cabinet  
HCA - Tristar Skyline Madison Campus  
Hope Community Development Corporation and Teach for America  
Inquiry Adventures  
Isha Foundation  
Jere Baxter Middle Prep  
John Trotwood Moore Middle School  
Juvenile Court of Metropolitan Nashville  
Learner's Edge Consulting  
Lions Clubs International Foundation Lions Quest  
Lions Quest Lions Clubs International Foundation  
Lipscomb University  
Love Helps  
Mental Health Cooperative  
Metro Nashville Public Schools  
Mental Health America  
Mindfulness in Nashville Education  
Nashville Public Library/T.O.T.A.L.  
Nashville Salutes  
PFLAG Nashville  
Responsive Classroom  
Sexual Assault Center  
Social & Emotional Learning Broadcast  
STARS  
TAADAS  
Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors

Tennessee State University  
Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network  
The Bullying & School Safety Foundation  
The Family Center  
TN Voices for Children  
Tomorrow's Leaders for Change  
United4Hope  
University of Virginia Social Development Lab  
University School of Nashville (USN)  
Vanderbilt Medical Center  
Vanderbilt University School of Medicine  
Freeman Webb  
You Have the Power  
Youth Villages

## **Behavioral Health A-Team**

**Co-chair:** Kathy Gracey / Vanderbilt Mental Health Center

**Vice chair:** Kyla Kregel / SEL Department, Metro Nashville Public Schools

Rhonda Ashley-Dixon / Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital

Meg Benningfield / Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Dina Capitani / Compassionate Nashville

Beth Cruz / Public Defender's Office

Nancy DiNunzio-Dickson / Vanderbilt University, Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program

Traci Foyster / Parents Reaching Out

Danielle Giles / Jere Baxter Middle Prep

Tracy Glascoe / Vanderbilt Mental Health Center

Toriano Green / Jere Baxter Middle Prep

Miriam Harrington / Jere Baxter Middle Prep

Johnsie Holt / Coordinated School Health, Metro Nashville Public Schools

Joan Jenkins / Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee

Michael Kirshner / Mental Health Cooperative

Misty Leitsch / Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network

Babs Freeman-Loftis / Mindfulness in Nashville Education

Anna Claire Lowder / Tennessee Voices For Children

Debra McAdams / Exceptional Education, Metro Nashville Public Schools

Cynthia Minnis / Metro Nashville Public Schools

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Amanda Ross / HCA Tristar Skyline, Madison Campus

Sandy Schmahl / STARS Nashville

Angie Thompson / Metro Public Health Department

Denise Yeargin / Unity Church of Music City