



**NJPSA Statement
In Support Of
NJ Social and Emotional Learning Competencies
April 5, 2017**

Good afternoon. I am Pat Wright, Executive Director of the New Jersey Principals Association. I am here in support of the resolution to encourage the implementation of the NJ Social and Emotional Learning Competencies. I had the opportunity to be involved in the collaborative process used by the DOE to create the competencies. This effort included stakeholders from various DOE divisions and several stakeholder organizations. I want to publicly thank Nancy Curry and her staff for leading this important work.

As Chair of the Anti-Bullying Task Force, I can assure you that our final report also reflects strong support for schools developing a system-wide approach to SEL instruction.

Research strongly supports the fact that academic and social and emotional learning go hand in hand. We know that preparing students to be “College and Career Ready” means we need to provide them with the social and emotional competencies that will support their success. In fact, the two most recent studies in this area report an 11 to 17 percentile increase in achievement in students who receive this vital instruction. We have long recognized this fact in NJ schools. Social and emotional learning competencies are embedded in several NJ content standards in the areas of Health and Physical Education, Social Studies and English Language Arts. In addition, 21st Century Skill Standards and Career Ready practices also embed needed SEL skills like collaboration, communication, cultural competency and problem-solving. In fact, there are several terms used to discuss these key life skills - soft skills, growth mindset, grit or character to name a few. What we are talking about are the skills and behaviors that allow people to successfully navigate their world – at home, in school, and in the workplace.

Teaching social and emotional learning skills supports the establishment of a positive classroom climate – a climate conducive to learning. Making this instruction a school-wide effort that is linked to clear expectations for student behavior promotes a healthy and safe school climate. As Chair of the Anti-Bullying Task Force, I can assure you that our final report included strong support for schools developing a system-wide approach to SEL instruction.

The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights mandates that all NJ schools implement a yearlong grade- appropriate anti-bullying curriculum. What is an appropriate anti-bullying curriculum? It is a curriculum that teaches students the skills they need to deal with bullying and normal conflict. In other words, skills that teach them social and emotional learning competencies related to self-management, relationship building, tolerance and conflict resolution.

Schools are currently addressing SEL in several ways. SEL is not new to educators in NJ; however, NJ has never had a common set of competencies or centralized resources that help create a common language and focus on SEL to assist educators. Educators need this foundational support to in embed these competencies as a natural link to the content they teach. Throughout this project, I voiced the importance of giving careful consideration to how these competencies are rolled out and communicated to the field. This is not about just ensuring these competencies are written in to current curriculum

document to check off as “Done” – compliance. This is about educators reflecting on what they teach and how they teach it. It is about purposefully including goals and activities that support students in building essential life skills that will help to make them successful adults.

This is why this practice should be encouraged, not mandated. It must be encouraged by providing the appropriate resources, working with the educational organizations to communicate the importance of teaching the whole child and engaging with partners to create meaningful professional learning opportunities to educators. Through this focused support and collaborative partnership, the State Board and the NJDOE can help ensure our students are achieving and growing academically, socially and emotionally. This is the promise of our system of public education, and on behalf of the membership of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association, I am ready to work with our members. The State Board and the Department to make this vision a reality for our students.

Thank you.