

Strategies to Gain Access to
Social and Emotional Learning
Frameworks
in Public Schools

Checkmate on Secrecy

Winning Transparency for Our Children

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Strategies to Gain Access to SEL Frameworks in Public Schools

A Practical Guide for Parents and Citizens

**“The best defense is a strong offense.
Document everything. Request everything.
Demand citations for every denial.”**

Parents on the Level

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Strategies to Gain Access to SEL Frameworks

A Practical Guide for Parents and Citizens Seeking Transparency in School Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Materials

Introduction

Educators often emphasize access and equity, yet parents frequently face barriers when requesting to review SEL content. This guide outlines proven strategies to overcome common obstacles.

Parents on the Level is laser focused on protecting the family worldview. SEL concepts should be fully understood by parents, especially since the contents therein may be highly controversial and/or ideological with goals of transforming a child's worldview. Local participation is required to protect your children because, honestly, there is no cruise control for education.



A. Understanding and Overcoming Access Barriers

Parents with enrolled children generally have the strongest rights to review curricula and materials in public schools. In most states, you can request immediate access to programs, frameworks, and data related to your child. For non-parents (and additional depth for parents), use public records requests (see Section B).

Common Excuses Used by K-12 Administrators to Limit or Prevent Parental Review of SEL Curriculum

Administrators frequently use the following tactics, often progressing from soft deflections to stronger barriers:

1. Minimizing the Materials

- a. Downplaying the content as “just resources,” “suggestions for independent reading,” “links we don’t actually teach,” or “we don’t teach that module—nothing to see here,” even when multiple copies of the books are in the school library.

2. Offering Partial or Misleading Access

- a. Providing only a scope and sequence document as if it were full access.
- b. Giving a curated “demo” of selected “benign” lessons while withholding the complete program.

3. Denial Based on Classification or Adoption Status

- a. Claiming the materials are “not adopted as curriculum” and “that is not taught in standard instruction” (failing to reveal they are administered through SEL framework applications).
- b. Classifying them as a mental health resource rather than curriculum.
- c. Labeling them as private surveys or “trade secrets” of the publisher.
- d. Citing third-party control (mental health agencies or vendors) as a firewall.

4. Procedural and Logistical Barriers

- a. Huge volume – many programs exceed 400 hours of content.
- b. Restricted gating – lessons unlock only in sequence.
- c. Supervised or limited review, often restricted to school-day hours.
- d. Citizen denial – claiming only parents (not other citizens) may review.

5. Access and Technical Obstacles

- a. Claims that no public record exists for access codes because they “must be created.”
- b. Vendor licensing restrictions that supposedly prevent sharing.

6. Legal and Policy Excuses

- a. Citing FERPA (similar to HIPAA) violations – clarify in writing that you are requesting only blank student-facing materials, not any student data.
- b. Invoking copyright restrictions to prevent screenshots or exposure.
- c. Broad licensing restriction claims, often with threats of legal violation.

7. Stalling and Time-Wasting Tactics

- a. Suggesting parents wait for the publisher’s license to expire.
- b. Limiting review to narrow school-day windows.

8. Soft Reassurances Without Accountability

- a. Offering “sugar sandwich” assurances – vague verbal promises, usually by phone and never put in writing.

9. Escalation and Intimidation

- a. Heavy use of technical jargon and appeals to authority/expertise. “Mental health professionals are very careful to curate these surveys for the best outcomes.” This is common- applies to educators, librarians and mental health professionals as if parents should sign away their own influence.
- b. Immediate intimidation or referral to an attorney, knowing that the time, expense and lack of experience in litigation stifles most parents and advocates.

The Ultimate Goal: Home Access with Full Codes to expose illegal processes and applications.

The entire purpose of this review process is for all to be able **to obtain the actual access codes so you can examine every SEL module, video, assignment, survey questionnaire and pathway in the privacy and comfort of your own home**, at your own pace, without time pressure or supervision. Schools frequently insist on supervised review only during school-day hours at the district office. This creates an undue and unconscionable burden on working parents who discover – often by accident – that their child has been placed in a “mental health” program without their full knowledge or consent. It is unacceptable for schools to claim that parents lack the skill or ability to understand these “deep nuances” of mental health. Anyone – parent or concerned citizen – should be able to gain access and decide if these materials promote true health. These are the very programs influencing and, in many cases, radicalizing our youth today. Demand the codes as your legal and moral right.

A publisher’s copyright “fears” should not overwrite parental rights.



B. Create a Public Record at Every Step – And Leverage Open Records Requests

Always create a paper trail. Follow every verbal conversation with an email recap using the “sugar sandwich” method (thanks + facts + next steps). All emails become part of the public record.

Public Records Requests (FOIA / State Open Records Laws)

Submit clear, specific written requests. These apply to digital materials and are available to both parents and citizens.

What You Can Request:

- Full SEL curricula, student-facing videos, modules, and teacher guides.
- Vendor contracts and pricing.
- Staff training and professional development materials.
- Data collection policies, surveys, and screeners.
- MTSS framework documents and SEL integration plans.
- Emails, meeting notes, and grant applications related to the program.
- Grant information and MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding)

Sample Request Language:

“Please provide all records related to the [Name of SEL Program], including student-facing materials, vendor contracts, training documents, and data policies from [date range]. This request is made under [your state’s public records law].” **Note: cite supporting court cases using AI.**

Handle Denials Strategically

If any request is denied, immediately ask in writing that the school or district **cite the specific legal code**, statute, policy, or regulation they are relying on. This creates accountability and a stronger record for appeals.

Real-World Precedents: Courts Are Rejecting These Excuses

1. Trethewey v. Downingtown Area School District (Pennsylvania, 2025)

Pennsylvania mother Ann Trethewey requested DEI-related instructional materials. The district refused, claiming they were “trade secrets.” After litigation supported by the Goldwater Institute, the Commonwealth Court ruled the materials were not trade secrets and must be disclosed. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court declined the district’s appeal, making the ruling binding precedent. This case dismantles “trade secrets,” proprietary vendor claims, and copyright/licensing barriers.

2. Citizens Defending Freedom (CDF) v. Nassau County School District (Florida, 2024–2025)

Jack Knocke of CDF filed multiple public records requests for the Ripple Effects behavioral health/mental health curriculum (a third-party vendor program used with students). The district and vendor (Starting Point Behavioral Healthcare) refused access, treating it as proprietary and outside normal curriculum review. A Florida Circuit Court judge ruled in favor of CDF in November 2024, ordering full access to the materials and awarding attorney’s fees. The ruling affirmed that such programs are public records subject to transparency laws. (Note: Compliance issues persisted afterward, highlighting stalling and licensing tactics.)

Key Takeaway for Parents: These victories show that “trade secrets,” “mental health resource,” “third-party vendor,” and licensing excuses often fail in court. Cite these cases along with your state’s public records and parental rights laws.

C. Know the Laws and Rules

You don't need to be a lawyer. Use AI tools (cross-check multiple sources) to review your state's education statutes, school board policies, open records laws, and parental rights. Compare board meeting transcripts with state requirements.

D. Recognize Trojan Elements: Mental Health Frameworks vs. Core Curriculum Protections (Including MTSS)

SEL is most often delivered through **mental health and behavioral frameworks**, particularly the **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)** – a tiered system that integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports. *Many parents do not realize that all children are enrolled in this mental health assessment program.*

MTSS Tiers:

- Tier 1: Universal supports for all students (~75-90%)
- Tier 2: Targeted small-group interventions (~10-25%)
- Tier 3: Intensive individualized support (<10%)

Core Curriculum vs. MTSS/SEL: Core subjects usually require formal adoption, public comment, and parental review. MTSS/SEL programs are often classified as “supports” or “interventions,” which frequently bypass these protections, allowing dynamic content updates and personalized pathways with less oversight. Researchers and advocates of parental rights recognize this to be one of the most problematic issues for children today, especially coupled with social media influences. This lack of public scrutiny is what is blinding parents and legislators.

Parents, demand to evaluate EVERY survey!



“These SEL surveys and ‘assessments’ are not innocent check-ins. Managed by AI systems, they systematically scan students’ emotions, values, attitudes, and mindsets — building detailed dispositional profiles and predictive scores on each child. What schools call ‘social-emotional learning’ is increasingly a digital soul scanner — reducing the inner life of a child to data points for lifelong tracking and intervention. Parents deserve full transparency, not hidden algorithms shaping their children’s character.”

— Inspired by the “Soul Scanner” series on [ParentsOnTheLevel.com](https://www.ParentsOnTheLevel.com)

Key Red Flags:

- Scoring of student dispositions and collection of personal/family data.
- Integration of social justice, gender identity, or other ideological content under mental health framing.
- Limited parental opt-out or notification.
- Delivery throughout the day by counselors and teachers.
- Group work and peer-to-peer counseling. (No opt out here.)
- Unknown pedagogical alignment of school staff.

Action Step: *Ask whether the program is treated as curriculum or as a mental health intervention under MTSS, and which laws govern its review and data practices.*

E. After Gaining Access:

Further Research and Support

Once you have secured access and begun reviewing the materials, take one more strategic step to maximize your efficiency and insight:

Check parentsonthelevel.com/webinars to see if your specific SEL publisher or program has already been featured or simply watch to gain inspiration to handle your particular program. Prior analysis there may save you significant time by highlighting key lessons, red flags, or patterns others have already identified. If you need personalized insights on where to begin your review or how to interpret what you find, email parentsonthelevel@gmail.com for assistance.

Additionally, evaluate the publisher's staff – especially curriculum writers – on LinkedIn, Bluesky, and other social media platforms. Many publishers also maintain YouTube channels, broadcast webinars and have email lists to join. Reviewing these sources and “influencers” bring greater understanding. Research to see what universities have trained and influenced these authors, teachers and counselors. Read papers and publications by any and all educators and publishers for insights.

Next Steps Checklist

- Submit initial written request
- Document every interaction, follow up with email of each account
- File public records requests as needed
- Require cited codes for any denial
- Review materials thoroughly
- Share findings responsibly with other parents - Signal, FB Group, etc.
- Connect with advocacy organizations

Final Tip: Don't give up. Whatever the outcome, document and make every aspect part of the story. We have seen information become useful years after the fact is discovered. If you come across something not covered in this document from your school, submit it to us and we'll be sure to add it to our next update. Every voice matters!

Your story will build knowledge for others to use to protect children.

Your children are being "disciplined, mentored and trained" by whatever school you choose. Psalm 1 and Deuteronomy 6 should be greatly considered when placing children in the care of others to mold and shape their minds. Parents hold the responsibility to protect their own children, and our prayer is that this document will help you make the best decisions for your family.

Be sure to access our other helpful exposé documents, e-books and webinars on parentsonthelevel.com.

All my best,
Marsha Metzger,

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