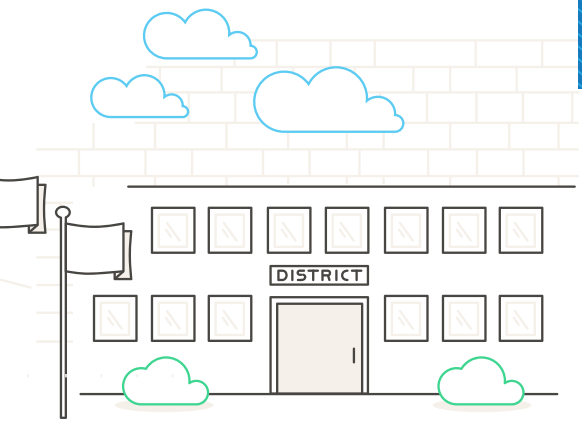
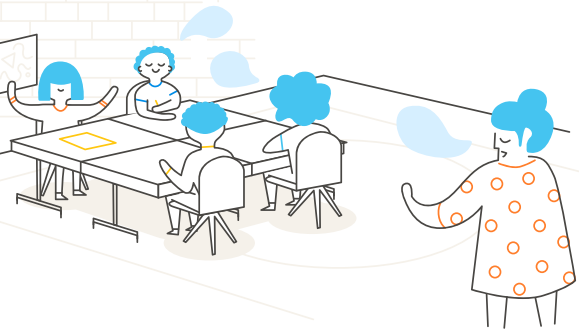
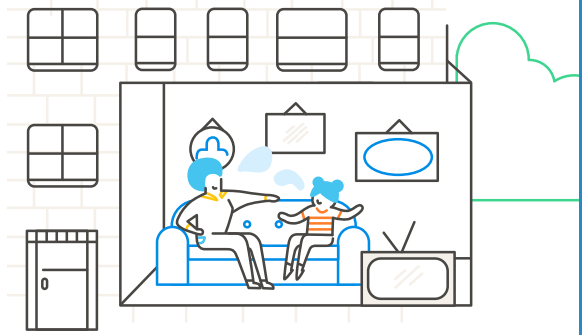


DISTRICTWIDE SEL ESSENTIALS FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

A Toolkit to Support District Leadership in Systemic Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning





This toolkit includes curated content from CASEL's District Resource Center, accessible at **drc.casel.org.**

CASEL in collaboration with AASA THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

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Anchorage School District
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Boston Public Schools
Atlanta Public Schools
Austin Independent School District
Chicago Public Schools
Cleveland Metropolitan School District
Dallas Independent School District
Denver Public Schools
DuPage Regional Office of Education
El Paso Independent School District
Guilford County Schools
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
Minneapolis Public School
Oakland Unified School District
School District of Palm Beach County
Sacramento City Unified School District
Tulsa Public Schools
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Loudoun County Public School District
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Monroe Township School District
Naperville Community School District 203
Norton School District
Okmulgee School District
Orange County Public School District
Pittsburgh Public School District
Preston School District
River Edge Public Schools
River Edge School District
Rochester School District 535
Salt Lake City School District
Schaumburg Community Cons School District 54
Shenandoah County Public Schools
Sioux Falls School District 49-5
Stevenson Carson School District 303
Strasburg High School
Stratford Public Schools
Teton County School District 1
Thomasville City School District
Upper Arlington City School District
Washington School District
Waukegan Public Schools District 60
Wayne-Westland Community School District
Westfield Washington Schools
Winterset Community School District
Wissahickon School District
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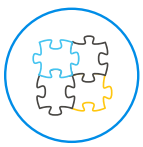

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ABOUT THE SUPERINTENDENT'S SEL TOOLKIT

Those who take action have a disproportionate impact. The power of one is to move many.

— Elizabeth May

More than two decades of research have shown that social and emotional learning (SEL) is integral to high-quality education. Study after study have demonstrated the broad, positive impacts of SEL for both students and adults. Recognizing this impact, principals, teachers, parents, students, and business leaders have demanded SEL in schools.

Superintendents are critical to answering this demand. Through policy, strategy, and the way they shape district culture, superintendents have the power to inspire, motivate, and lead a vision of transformational social, emotional, and academic education.

To implement SEL effectively and systemically, the superintendent sets the tone, priority, and structures that enable all stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the implementation of SEL.

By "systemic," we mean SEL occurs throughout the education system. More than a single program or add-on, SEL is an *approach* that impacts all students and adults and takes place in all schools, classrooms, and settings where students and adults interact.

In our shared goal of providing SEL for all students, CASEL and AASA, the School Superintendents Association, have partnered to create this superintendent's SEL toolkit to guide and support leadership in building a districtwide SEL movement. Understanding the intense demands superintendents face, we have designed and curated resources to provide the most essential guidance and tools for the superintendent's crucial role in SEL implementation.

CASEL and AASA are grateful to a dedicated and knowledgeable group of superintendents who helped us to develop the activities. These superintendents volunteered their time and expertise as part of their role in the CASEL Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) Superintendent Roundtable and the AASA SEL Cohort, a learning community engaged in dialogue about how SEL contributes to the whole child.

CASEL and AASA are committed to supporting superintendents in improving outcomes for all students through SEL. We are optimistic that this toolkit will be a key resource in this vital endeavor.

Lead the way!

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The information in this toolkit aligns with CASEL's comprehensive framework for systemic implementation of SEL, based on research and the learnings from CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI). The initiative offered an opportunity to test and refine this framework, and an analysis of the participating districts revealed demonstrable improvements in SEL competence, school climate, behavior, attendance, graduation rates, and academic achievement. Districts across the country can learn more about CASEL's framework and access curated resources from the CDI districts through the CASEL District Resource Center (drc.casel.org), a free online guide.

Adapted from the District Resource Center, The Superintendent's SEL Toolkit offers practical guidance for implementing districtwide SEL specifically tailored for district leaders. At its heart are 10 high-leverage superintendent actions. Each action provides an overview of the action and why that action is valuable for district leaders. Each action also contains the following elements:

Process:
Instructions and guidance for taking the action.

First Steps:
Introductory steps for those leaders who are beginning their SEL leadership journey.

Resources:
Links to further information, tools, and examples to help you on your way.

The ten actions are organized within the four focus areas of the CASEL Framework. An introduction to the Framework can be found on page 7 of this Toolkit. In order to help you orient yourself within the Toolkit, the above icons and the colors on each page are coordinated with the color of the focus area.

We recommend that you access the Superintendent's SEL Toolkit electronically at drc.casel.org/superintendent/
This version of the toolkit provides active links to articles, tools, and resources.

Partnering with School Boards to Promote SEL

Within the ten high leverage superintendent actions, you'll notice callout boxes describing opportunities to partner with your board of education to promote SEL. Superintendents who have led their districts toward successful SEL implementation have engaged board members throughout the process in discussing the importance of SEL in promoting student achievement and learners' social, emotional, and physical growth and development. You may want to review the CASEL tool: Partnering with School Boards to Promote SEL in the District and Community.

In addition, you and your staff are encouraged to access tools and articles available for free on CASEL's websites:

CASEL District Resource Center

drc.casel.org

CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL

schoolguide.casel.org

CASEL SEL Financial Sustainability Website

financialsustainability.casel.org

CASEL Website

casel.org

Note: In order to access the downloadable tools on the CASEL District Resource Center and the Guide to Schoolwide SEL, you will need to create a free registration using an email address.

Mapping Your Journey Through the Superintendent's SEL Toolkit

You may wish to read this toolkit from cover to cover, or you may choose to use it more as a reference book, browsing the topics that are most relevant to you. We recommend first reviewing the introduction, then prioritizing actions that are most relevant to your context. While all of the actions can support you in any stage of SEL implementation, you may want to begin with those that are most pertinent.

KEY SUPERINTENDENT ACTION		You may want to prioritize this action when...
#1	**Building the Foundation**	• Getting started or needing to reinvigorate SEL implementation • Considering how to engage the school board or other key stakeholders in SEL • Faced with challenges/issues related to stakeholder "buy-in" • You are experienced in SEL but new to a district
#2	**Vision**	• Getting started or needing to reinvigorate SEL implementation • Faced with challenges/issues related to stakeholder "buy-in" • You are experienced in SEL but new to a district
#3	**Communication**	• Rolling out an SEL implementation plan or initiative • Connecting SEL to district goals, such as student academic success, safety, and/or equity
#4	**Resource Allocation and Alignment**	• Engaged in budget planning • Faced with budget challenges • Establishing an SEL team or department • Allocating staffing for the SEL initiative
#5	**District Organization**	• Establishing an SEL team or department • Updating or rolling out major district initiatives or frameworks related to academics, school improvement, or equity
#6	**Strengthen Your Superintendent SEL Knowledge**	• You are a new superintendent coming into a district implementing SEL • SEL implementation has already begun in your district • You're interested in deepening your understanding of SEL and incorporating SEL into your leadership style
#7	**Lead Adult SEL Culture**	• Staff morale is an issue • You are about to launch a new SEL program or initiative • You're interested in deepening your understanding of SEL and incorporating SEL into your leadership style
#8	**Policy Alignment**	• Examining how SEL implementation is supported and aligned across the district • Working closely with school board to support SEL
#9	**Family and Community Engagement**	• Engaging stakeholders to create a sustained district SEL initiative • Working to create alignment between in-school and out-of-school time SEL efforts • Building a community oriented SEL movement
#10	**Equitable Outcomes**	• Reviewing or rolling out district efforts related to equity • Developing a district SEL continuous improvement cycle

WHAT IS SEL?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

CASEL has identified the following five core social and emotional competencies. Most states and districts with SEL standards or benchmarks have developed them based on these competencies, and many evidence-based curriculum programs and approaches have been developed to address them.

Self-awareness	The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."
Self-management	The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.
Social awareness	The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
Relationship skills	The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.
Responsible decision-making	The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

For more information, visit casel.org/core-competencies.

CASEL and AASA Recommend a Systemic Approach to SEL

The Superintendent's SEL Toolkit promotes a systemic approach that infuses SEL into every part of students' daily lives—across all of their classrooms, throughout the day, and in homes and communities. This approach intentionally cultivates a caring, participatory, and equitable learning environment and evidence-based practices that actively involve all students in their social, emotional, and academic growth.

The superintendent's role is to establish the conditions within the district and community that spark a system-wide "SEL movement."

When SEL is *systemic*, it is infused throughout the system.
Systemic SEL benefits all students, in all schools and classrooms and out-of-school time settings.
SEL is not confined to a program or an occasional add-on, but is part of what we do and who we are.

For an overview of systemic SEL including many superintendent voices, watch What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and SEL: Creating Safe and Supportive Learning Environments.

INDICATORS OF SCHOOLWIDE SEL

Schoolwide SEL is a systemic approach to integrating academic, social, and emotional learning across all school contexts. This approach provides a learning environment that infuses SEL into all aspects of instruction and promotes equitable outcomes for all students. Central to this system is high-quality professional learning and the use of data for continuous improvement. When fully implemented, schoolwide SEL contributes to more successful and equitable outcomes for young people, and is evidenced by the following indicators:

CLASSROOM	Explicit SEL instruction	Students have consistent opportunities to cultivate, practice, and reflect on social and emotional competencies in ways that are developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive.
CLASSROOM	SEL integrated with academic instruction	SEL objectives are integrated into instructional content and teaching strategies for academics as well as music, art, and physical education.
SCHOOL	Youth voice and engagement	Staff honor and elevate a broad range of student perspectives and experiences by engaging students as leaders, problem solvers, and decision-makers.
SCHOOL	Supportive school and classroom climates	Schoolwide and classroom learning environments are supportive, culturally responsive, and focused on building relationships and community.
SCHOOL	Focus on adult SEL	Staff have regular opportunities to cultivate their own social, emotional, and cultural competence, collaborate with one another, build trusting relationships, and maintain a strong community.
SCHOOL	Supportive discipline	Discipline policies and practices are instructive, restorative, developmentally appropriate, and equitably applied.
SCHOOL	A continuum of integrated supports	SEL is seamlessly integrated into a continuum of academic and behavioral supports, which are available to ensure that all student needs are met.
FAMILY	Authentic family partnerships	Families and school staff have regular and meaningful opportunities to build relationships and collaborate to support students' social, emotional, and academic development.
COMMUNITY	Aligned community partnerships	School staff and community partners align on common language, strategies, and communication around all SEL-related efforts and initiatives, including out-of-school time.
COMMUNITY	Systems for continuous improvement	Implementation and outcome data are collected and used to continuously improve all SEL-related systems, practices, and policies with a focus on equity.

RESEARCH ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SEL

More than two decades of research demonstrates that education that promotes SEL leads to improved outcomes for students. Share these findings when you're communicating with district stakeholders about SEL:

SEL Leads to Academic Outcomes and Improved Behaviors

According to a 2011 meta-analysis of 213 studies involving 270,000+ students:

- SEL programs that address CASEL's five core competencies increase students' academic performance by 11 percentile points compared to students who did not participate in SEL programs.
- Students participating in SEL programs showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school.

SEL Impact Is Long-Term and Global

According to a 2017 meta-analysis of 82 research studies involving 100,000 students worldwide:

Effective SEL programming can have a positive impact on academics, conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use up to 18 years later.

Multiple Benefits for Students

According to a 2018 study and analysis by J. L. Mahoney, J. A. Durlak, and R. P. Weissberg, adding an SEL evidence-based program is likely to bolster student outcomes. When comparing schools with an SEL program with schools that did not have SEL program:

- 57% more students improved their SEL skills.
- 27% more students improved their academic performance.
- 24% more students improved their emotional well-being and social behavior.

11:1 Return on Investment

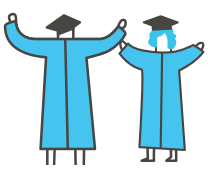
According to a 2015 review from Columbia University:

The average return on investment of SEL programs is 11 to 1, meaning for every dollar invested in SEL evidence-based program, there is an $11 return.

SEL Can Help Reduce Poverty, Improve Economic Mobility

According to a 2015 report from the American Enterprise Institute and Brookings Institution:

SEL competencies are critically important for the long-term success of all students in today's economy, as reflected in the report's recommendation to scale up high-quality, evidence-based SEL programs as a core component of children's education.



SEL Improves Lifetime Outcomes

According to a 2015 national study published in the American Journal of Public Health:

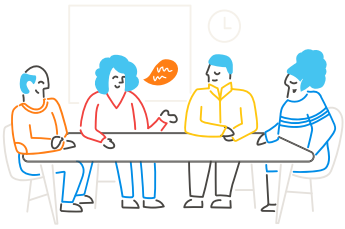
Kindergarten students who experienced intentional SEL skill-building had a decreased likelihood of living in or being on a waiting list for public housing, receiving public assistance, having any involvement with police before adulthood, and spending time in a detention facility.

THE CASEL FRAMEWORK FOR DISTRICTWIDE SEL

The CASEL Framework for Districtwide SEL (shown below) lays out key district activities for high-quality, systemic implementation of SEL. These key activities are organized by four focus areas of implementation: 1) Build Foundational Support and Plan, 2) Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity, 3) Promote SEL for Students, and 4) Practice Continuous Improvement.

Research-based guidance and tools that support this framework are found at the CASEL District Resource Center.

In this toolkit, we have highlighted 10 high-leverage superintendent actions that align and support this framework to help accelerate your leadership of SEL.



FOCUS AREA 1

Build Foundational Support and Plan

Launch SEL with a clear vision and robust plan. Sustain efforts through adequate resources and ongoing commitment.

KEY ACTIVITY

Shared Vision and Plan

KEY ACTIVITY

Communication

KEY ACTIVITY

Organizational Structure

KEY ACTIVITY

Aligned Resources

FOCUS AREA 2

Strengthen Adult SEL competencies and capacity

Foster a staff community that cultivates adults' professional, social, emotional, and cultural competencies.

KEY ACTIVITY

Central Office Expertise

KEY ACTIVITY

Professional Learning

KEY ACTIVITY

Adult SEL and Cultural Competence

KEY ACTIVITY

Staff Trust, Community, and Efficacy

FOCUS AREA 3

Promote SEL for Students

Foster a staff community that cultivates adults' professional, social, emotional, and cultural competencies.

KEY ACTIVITY

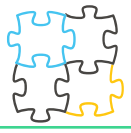
SEL Standards

KEY ACTIVITY

Evidence-Based Programs and Practices

KEY ACTIVITY

Family and Community Partnerships



KEY ACTIVITY

Integration

FOCUS AREA 4

Practice Continuous Improvement

Use a Plan-Do-Study-Act continuous improvement cycle to examine data, track your progress, and refine your plan.

KEY ACTIVITY

Planning for Improvement

KEY ACTIVITY

Documenting Implementation

KEY ACTIVITY

Data Reporting and Reflecting

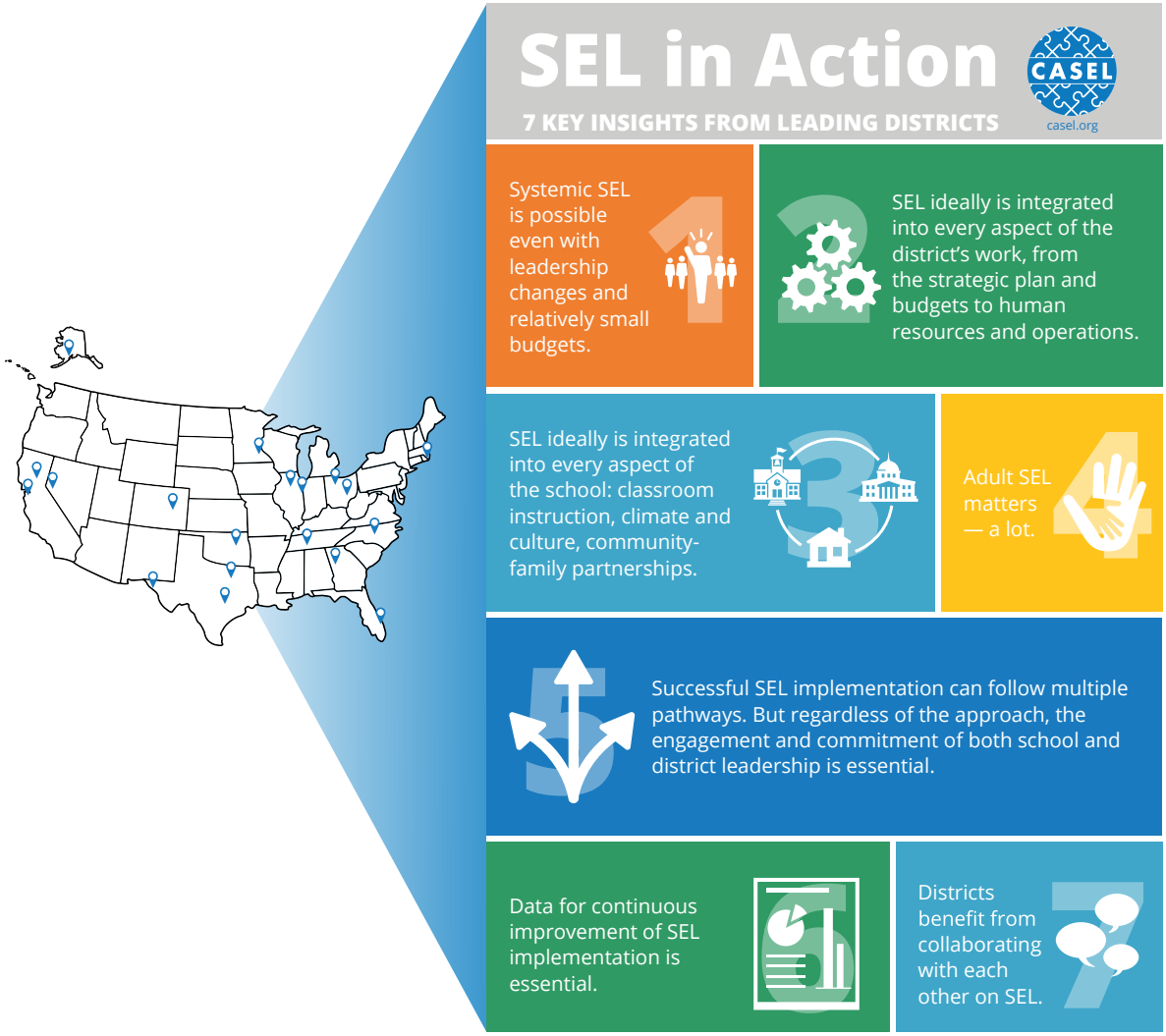
KEY ACTIVITY

Action Planning and Sharing

Note: The role of superintendents in SEL implementation may vary by district size and needs. In particular, small districts may need more direct superintendent engagement in the key activities. You will find in-depth information, processes, tools and resources to support each of the key activities in this framework at the CASEL District Resource Center.

KEY SEL IMPLEMENTATION INSIGHTS FROM LEADING DISTRICTS

CASEL's district framework is based on learnings from both research and practice. Since 2011, CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), has studied and scaled systemic SEL across school districts across the country. An independent evaluation of this initiative shows that CDI participants are seeing improvements in a variety of important outcomes, including SEL competence, school climate, behavior, attendance, graduation rates, and academic achievement. To learn more about the CDI outcomes, visit casel.org/key-findings.



The CASEL District Resource Center and this Superintendent's SEL Toolkit are based upon these extensive learnings. These resources provide a sense of what SEL looks like in action:

- Key Implementation Insights from the Collaborating Districts Initiative
- SEL approaches and experiences in our partner districts
- In-depth SEL implementation case studies, videos, and budget models

SEL AND EQUITY

SEL can be a powerful lever for advancing equity by cultivating adult and student practices that close opportunity gaps and create more inclusive school communities that support all individuals in reaching their fullest potential.

Systemic SEL implementation both fosters and depends upon an equitable learning environment, where all students and adults feel respected, valued, and affirmed in their individual interests, talents, social identities, cultural values, and backgrounds.

While SEL alone will not solve longstanding and deep-seated inequities in the education system, it can help school districts promote understanding, examine biases, reflect on and address the impact of racism, build cross-cultural relationships, and develop more inclusive learning environments. In doing so, districts can promote high-quality educational opportunities and outcomes for all students.

This requires that SEL is implemented with an explicit goal of promoting educational equity.

CASEL and AASA believe that:

- **SEL is relevant for all students in all schools and affirms diverse cultures and backgrounds.** All students bring to school their identities, strengths, values, lived experiences, and culture. SEL does not seek to have students conform to the values and preferences of the dominant culture, but uplifts and promotes understanding of the assets of diverse individuals and communities and creates improved learning conditions for all students.

  What it looks like: Districts use SEL as a framework to examine the importance of the wide range of adult and student identities and assets, reflect on and appreciate diversity, and foster inclusive environments. Districts guide schools in adopting evidence-based programs and practices that are culturally affirming, respectful, and relevant to everyone in their communities.

- **SEL is a strategy for systemic improvement, not just an intervention for at-risk students.** While SEL reduces risky behaviors and improves mental health (Taylor et al, 2017), the impact is maximized when systemic SEL becomes a coordinating framework that transforms all aspects of schooling—from how the central office is organized, to the philosophy and impact of policies, to how all classroom instruction is delivered and assessed.

  What it looks like: The focus of implementation is on creating the conditions at the central office and at school sites that promote social and emotional growth for all students, including building trusting relationships with adults and students along with creating welcoming learning environments, consistent routines, engaging teaching strategies, culturally relevant practices, and authentic family and community partnerships.

- **SEL is a way to uplift student voice and promote agency and civic engagement.** The goal of SEL is to build skills and competencies that help students successfully navigate and meaningfully contribute to their schools, careers, families, relationships, and their diverse communities. This occurs when SEL goes beyond behavior management and positions young people "as experts in understanding and fashioning a world that is more just and equitable" (Jagers, 2016, p. 3).

  What it looks like: All students have developmentally appropriate opportunities to engage in discussions with adults and each other, raise problems and identify solutions in their schools and communities, productively challenge the inequities that they see, have a voice in how the school district operates, and take on authentic leadership roles.

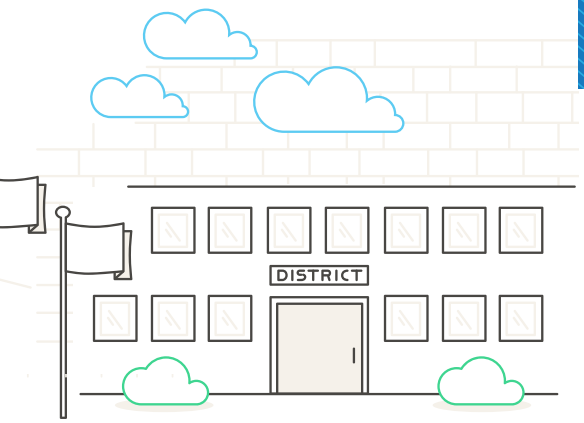
- **SEL supports adults in strengthening practices that promote equity.** SEL offers a way for districts to examine how their own policies and practices may impact equity and acknowledge and address the larger impact that systemic and individual biases, racism, or oppression have on the lives of their students.

  What it looks like: Adults reflect on their own identities, assets, and biases and engage in culturally responsive practices and conversations about equity. District staff examine disaggregated data, analyze root causes of disparities, and engage various stakeholders to co-develop policies and practices that support equitable outcomes for all.

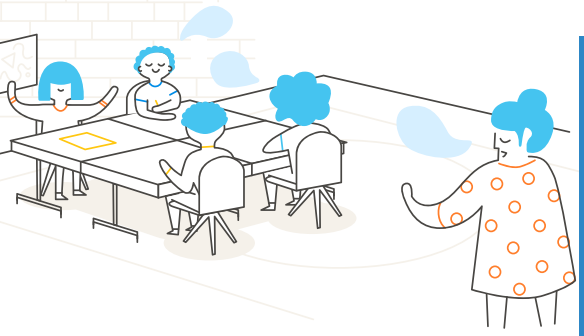
- **Districts engage students, families, and communities as authentic partners in social and emotional development.** The relationships between a district and school staff, students, families, and communities are at the core of systemic SEL. For SEL to affirm the assets of children from diverse backgrounds, schools need to understand the cultures, lived experiences, and values of families and communities, and all students need to feel ownership over their own social and emotional development.

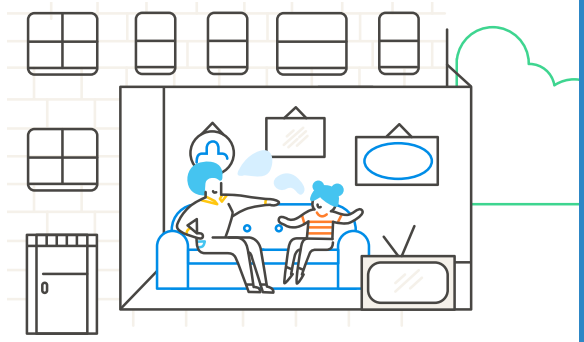
  What it looks like: Students, families, and community partners are active partners in the planning and implementation of SEL and play a role in district decision-making. All students have frequent opportunities to share their perspectives and feedback.

In this toolkit, equity is woven throughout the superintendent actions. We encourage you to continuously center systemic SEL implementation around equity and leverage SEL to create communities that promote equitable outcomes for all students.



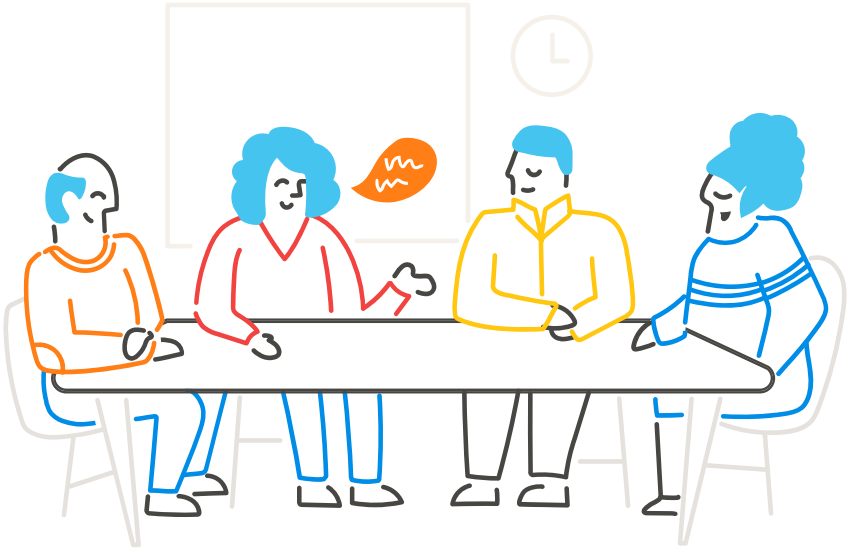
TEN HIGH-LEVERAGE ACTIONS FOR SUPERINTENDENTS TO SUPPORT SEL





This toolkit includes curated content from CASEL's District Resource Center, accessible at **drc.casel.org.**

DISTRICT FOCUS AREA ONE:
BUILDING FOUNDATIONAL SUPPORT AND PLANNING FOR SEL



SEL has the potential to create deep, systemic improvements in a school district, impacting school engagement, attendance, academic achievement, graduation rates, and student readiness for college, career, and civic engagement. SEL implementation is a long-term process that benefits from a strong foundation. This focus area guides districts in building the support and plans they need to ensure SEL can thrive.

As superintendent, you play a critical role, continuously leading stakeholders toward a clear vision and ensuring the district is well-prepared.

Actions in this focus area:

Superintendent Action #1: **Building the Foundation**

Superintendent Action #2: **Vision**

Superintendent Action #3: **Communication**

Superintendent Action #4: **Resource Allocation and Alignment**

Superintendent Action #5: **District Organization**

Key Superintendent Action #1: **Building the Foundation**

Develop Foundational Support for SEL among Key Stakeholders, Including the School Board

By effectively inspiring and mobilizing board members, district and school leaders, teachers, families and other key stakeholders around SEL, the superintendent can build a base of SEL champions whose support will foster sustained, systemic SEL and enable students to thrive.

The Process

1. Know your "why."

Whether you're at the beginning of this journey with SEL or well on your way, you'll want to inspire district employees and community members to lead SEL in classrooms, schools, and workplaces. It's through leading the development of a collective vision about how SEL contributes to a better world for our children that you can motivate people to engage in this change.

So ask yourself:

- What do you want all students to know and be able to do upon graduation?
- What academic, social, and emotional competencies will help students reach their fullest potential?
- What do you want all schools in the district to feel like, sound like, and look like? How do you define a high-quality education?
- How does systemic SEL support this vision?

2. Identify stakeholders whose support is critical to SEL implementation and get to know their issues and concerns.

Make a list of the stakeholders who will play an important role in developing and sustaining SEL. Some key players may include:

- The school board members
- Principals and teacher leaders
- PTA/PTO
- Cabinet members
- Unions
- City leaders, community leaders

If you don't already know about a stakeholder group's issues, what powerful individuals care about, and what motivates them, do some research through careful listening at meetings, reading their publications or plans, or discussing over a cup of coffee.

Build a stakeholder map identifying groups and leaders you want to engage. Analyze the levels of interest and influence of stakeholders and list their value-adds (advocacy, decision-making, facilitating, leading, funding, etc.), how SEL could help address their concerns, and some initial key messages that would motivate them to take action to promote SEL.

3. Identify existing bright spots across your district that showcase the potential of SEL.

In CASEL's partnerships with districts, we have learned that all districts have existing SEL implementation efforts, SEL practitioners, SEL champions, and, in most places, SEL leaders. Make a list of these people and ask for their help with enlarging your list. Record their stories, practice sharing these anecdotes, and, where possible, present their data that describe the outcomes of these existing SEL bright spots. Be sure to celebrate your SEL pioneers!

4. Bring together a small informal group of SEL champions from your list.

This group (your "SEL kitchen cabinet") can help you develop a frame for introducing SEL to your targeted stakeholders and can later become the core of a district SEL development/advisory committee. Work with this group to:

- Discuss what SEL is and what it isn't.
- Connect SEL with the district's vision/mission and strategic plan.
- Identify existing SEL practices in the district and community that align with your definition and current vision for SEL.
- Co-create a list of stakeholder groups and individuals to engage as you build initial support. Brainstorm possible dissonant voices and strategies for identifying and addressing their concerns.
- Outline a presentation that makes the case for SEL and identify tailored messages that will resonate with key stakeholder groups. Use tools, resources, and samples from the CASEL District Resource Center as well as the expertise of your "kitchen cabinet" to develop your presentation and a facilitation plan that can be adjusted to serve your goals for each stakeholder group.

5. Through presentations and modeling, build the case for SEL with the board, district leaders (including principals), and key community partners.

Simply hearing about SEL is not as effective as experiencing SEL, so it will be important to provide activities and facilitation that exemplifies SEL. This will be even more powerful if, as superintendent, you take a leading role in these sessions. When participants see a superintendent modeling SEL, they understand that SEL—including adult SEL—is a serious district initiative.

In these sessions, be sure to encourage and gain a commitment to action from participants, such as telling others about SEL, reading an article, signing up to help, going to the CASEL website, or trying an activity in their workplace or at home.

Because these sessions have the potential to build a strong coalition, they need to be skillfully facilitated. If you do not have experience in SEL facilitation, you are encouraged to partner with a teacher leader, another administrator, or an SEL consultant in designing and leading these presentations. While it is possible to delegate these facilitations, superintendents who don't engage in promoting SEL to stakeholders are missing a big opportunity.

Partnering with School Boards to Promote SEL

Establish consensus-driven understanding about the importance of SEL: Successful superintendents work closely with their boards to introduce the concept of SEL and analyze its potential benefits to the district. They recognize the importance of identifying existing programs and practices that are aligned with SEL implementation and outcomes. These district leaders anticipate questions and concerns, patiently building consensus about SEL and the development of an effective SEL implementation plan.

First Steps

Educate yourself about SEL. Attend a conference. View media exemplars of vibrant SEL in action. Read up on SEL at CASEL.org. Review CASEL's District Framework and become familiar with the CASEL District Resource Center. Join others within your district on visits to schools and other districts that are effectively implementing SEL.

Resources

- The What is SEL? page on the CASEL website is a great place to start learning about SEL and exploring how school districts and schools approach SEL.
- How Great Leaders Inspire Action is an 18-minute TED talk from Simon Sinek that should be required viewing for a superintendent beginning a district initiative. Start With Why is an edited version that is only 5 minutes, but if you can invest the time, watch the 18-minute version.
- This tool, Create a Stakeholder Map will help you identify key stakeholders and determine how best to bring in their voice and support in the process of strategic planning and continuous improvement for districtwide SEL implementation.
- The CASEL District Resource Center has several sample presentations you can use to create your own stakeholder presentation.
- A CASEL partner district developed this three-hour experiential introductory SEL session for school boards. Facilitator notes include a link to presentation slides.
- These lists of recommended SEL readings and recommended SEL videos can be used to introduce and build support for SEL

Key Superintendent Action #2: **Vision**

Engage a Diverse Group of Stakeholders to Create a Shared Vision for the District That Establishes SEL as Core to Student Success and Equitable Learning Environments

A shared vision clarifies what you are striving toward and reflects what your district believes is critical to students' education. When SEL is an established part of the district's vision, it creates a shared understanding and commitment among staff, students, families, and community partners. A superintendent supported vision helps ensure that leadership will continue to prioritize SEL within all schools. The vision also becomes the basis for your district's SEL-related goals, plans, allocation of resources, and continuous improvement.

Given the importance of the vision in driving SEL implementation, CASEL and AASA recommend that the superintendent either leads or is directly involved in the visioning and planning process. While your vision should reflect all stakeholders' perspectives, the superintendent's voice matters greatly in laying this important groundwork for planning.

The engagement of the superintendent in visioning also sends a strong signal regarding the importance of the SEL initiative. As your district SEL leaders see you discussing and modeling SEL, they will feel that you care deeply about it. It is also a way for you to help these leaders and stakeholders to write a plan that will be supported by leadership.

A strong shared vision:

- Establishes SEL as essential to the district's educational mission, aligns SEL to core district values, and articulates shared language around SEL.
- Is informed by and shared with all key stakeholders (e.g., students, district and school staff, parents, and community partners).
- Is used to develop aligned SEL goals, including short- and long-term outcomes resulting from equitable learning environments and students' social, emotional, and academic progress.
- Is revisited every two years and updated as needed.

SEL as Core to Student Success

Since systemic SEL is an approach to education, district culture, and organizational development, it should be an integral element of the district vision and strategic plan. Districts have incorporated SEL into goals focused on academic performance, student learning, college and career preparation, climate and culture, equity/equitable environments, and teacher retention/human resources.

Many districts include a "portrait of a graduate" to describe a student who has completed their education and is ready for college, career, and life. This kind of "portrait" expresses the importance of developing social and emotional competencies as a part of the PreK-12 learning experience.

If your district has an existing vision, the CASEL District Resource Center has an activity for analyzing the inclusion of SEL in a district vision and mission statement.

In addition, many districts have chosen to develop a vision specifically for SEL implementation. This may be especially helpful if your district has already established an overarching vision that would be difficult to amend, or if you are in a larger district where a departmental vision would help guide the SEL work.

The Process

The Vision Planning Worksheet in the CASEL District Resource Center provides guidance for developing a districtwide vision establishing SEL as integral to high-quality education. You can use this process either to develop an SEL vision for the SEL implementation plan or to develop a vision that incorporates SEL as part of a districtwide strategic plan.

As a superintendent, how you engage in the process will likely depend upon the size and needs of your district and the capacity of those leading SEL planning. Here are some key steps:

1. Create an SEL leadership team that has the capacity and resources to engage stakeholders and lead the process. Consider:

- Do committee members have a solid understanding of SEL?
- Do they have the time, facilitation skills, relationships, and vision to lead this process?
- What resources and access will they need to ensure they are set up for success?
- Look to the future: Which of these people will be key to making the vision a reality?

2. Ensure an inclusive stakeholder engagement process that brings all voices to the table.

Taking part in visioning develops the passion and ownership of participants, so it is vital to ensure all key stakeholders are included.

Remember:

- Students are important stakeholders. Including authentic student voice in the SEL visioning process will reap significant rewards.
- It's important to include a diversity of perspectives. Ask: Whose voices are sometimes left out of district decision-making? Who might be most critical of SEL or have particular concerns? Welcoming a wide range of perspectives and being open to learning from dissonant voices is SEL in action.

3. Consider the connections of each stakeholder.

What groups does each participant represent and what is the ability of that stakeholder to influence others?

Once you have a core group, explore with them, "Who's missing?" and expand your list accordingly.

4. Engage strategically throughout the visioning process.

This may include being present at key moments to motivate the team, address concerns, support facilitation and writing of the vision, and help keep discussions on track.

Your goal for the process is two-fold: ideally, you'll end up with both a vision statement and an excited group of SEL leaders who will move the SEL initiative forward.
An early part of this vision-development process is to educate the selected stakeholders about SEL and about your and the board's rationale and vision for SEL. Engagement and meaningful experiences are essential for setting the tone.

As the leadership team drafts the SEL vision statement, you have an opportunity for additional engagement. One simple strategy is to get together with them just before they begin drafting and ask if they have any questions for you or the board.

5. Once your vision is co-created, lead the formal adoption process.

Consider how you will integrate the vision into your existing strategic plan and whether this involves school board formal approval at this time.

6. Communicate the vision.

The completion (and adoption) of the vision presents an opportunity to communicate with employees, community, students, parents, and the media. You'll want to communicate:

- The shared vision for SEL and the potential positive impacts on student outcomes.
- That something big is about to take place in your district.

Resources

- The CASEL District Resource Center section Develop a Shared Vision and Plan for SEL offers a detailed process and resources to support the development of your vision.
- Battelle for Kids has developed a Portrait of a Graduate website containing a strategy for developing your district's vision for students, including a design process, example portraits, and supporting materials.
- Examples of SEL embedded in school districts' visions and strategic plans:
  - Chicago Public School's vision and plan integrates SEL throughout its priorities, highlighted best in the section on safe and supportive learning environments.
  - Baltimore City Schools' vision lays out the district's priorities around SEL, literacy, and leadership.
  - Sacramento City Unified School District's strategic plan prominently features and integrates equity and social emotional health throughout and states clear actions and proposed services.
  - Thompson School District in Loveland, Colorado, deeply imbeds SEL throughout their recent strategic plan, Strive 2025. The plan includes a Portrait of a Graduate, which guides their SEL vision and the development of SEL standards describing what a student should know and be able to do.
- Districtwide Indicators of SEL Implementation is a one-pager that paints a picture of what fully implemented SEL looks like in a school district—a good tool for backwards mapping to arrive at your vision.

Key Superintendent Action #3: **Communication**

Communicate Consistently About SEL as a District Priority

As superintendent, you want to ensure that your district develops a strategy for informing and inspiring stakeholders about SEL. In addition, you have a unique opportunity to effectively promote SEL through your own communications.

Clear, ongoing communication is a key strategy in the successful implementation of SEL. Sustained communication about SEL implementation can help you:

- **Influence** district leaders to promote systemic adoption of SEL principles and practices.
- **Engage** principals, teachers and staff to rally behind SEL initiatives and incorporate SEL practices schoolwide.
- **Build enthusiasm** in district students and families and encourage them to adopt SEL practices in the home and community.
- **Motivate** community partners to work with the district to bring SEL into all areas of student lives.
- **Convince** funders to dedicate financial support to SEL implementation.

Here are some real-life examples of how superintendents directly lead SEL through effective communications:

- Make sure that SEL is both infused throughout and directly addressed in the district strategic plan.
- For the first few years of SEL implementation, make SEL one of the top three annual goals, and include this in most verbal and written communications.
- When facilitating meetings, employ the same SEL facilitation strategies used in schools, then call out the strategy and describe where it came from (that is, link it to SEL implementation in schools).
- Highlight the schools and departments that are early adopters and show evidence of their successful SEL outcomes in communications.
- Commit five research facts about the impact of SEL to memory and bring them up throughout communications. While building a coalition to implement and support SEL, bring those facts into the messaging.

CASEL and AASA recommend developing an SEL communications plan. An SEL communication plan provides an important roadmap for getting the word out about SEL, building enthusiasm and support, and informing key stakeholders about your plans and achievements. A strong communications plan:

- Highlights the importance of SEL for all students and adults and includes rollout timelines and expectations for roles and responsibilities.
- Includes consistent messaging about SEL tailored to key stakeholder groups.
- Promotes systemic SEL implementation by communicating about the roles played by employees, community partners, families, and other stakeholders.
- Builds an "SEL brand" that portrays SEL as a high-quality, well-capitalized, and sustained district initiative.
- Supports the superintendent and other district leaders in regularly communicating about the importance of SEL both formally and informally.

The Process

1. Work with your communications team to develop a plan to help produce support and buy-in from key stakeholders including teachers, principals, families, community partners and out-of-school time providers. You'll want to start this communications plan at the very beginning of SEL implementation.

In your communication plan, you'll answer four key questions:

- Who do you want to reach? (Your audience)
- What do you want to achieve? (The goal)
- What do you want them to know? (The message)
- How will you send your message? (The medium)

You can use the Steps for Developing Effective SEL Communication Strategies, located on the CASEL District Resource Center.

2. Prepare to talk clearly and convincingly about SEL as an educational strategy and what it looks like (or will look like) in your school district.

- Be ready to describe how SEL is integral to your strategic plan and annual goals and what SEL looks like in schools.
- Have current stories in mind that bring to life outcomes you've seen from SEL implementation.
- Learn a few key SEL facilitation activities you can confidently model and name as SEL in a variety of contexts.
- Gather and tell stories of students and teachers who demonstrate social and emotional competence. As SEL takes hold in your district, continue to include current stories that describe how your district's SEL approach has impacted your schools, students, and adults.

You can use this tool, SEL Talking Points for Superintendents, as a starting point.

Partnering with School Boards to Promote SEL

Provide board members with regular updates about SEL implementation progress: Updates can include aggregate data and systemic updates as well as showcasing exemplary sites and practices that can be replicated, and can involve a range of SEL leaders in the district, including teachers and administrators.

First Steps

Develop a short elevator speech that includes the SEL definition, the SEL competencies/standards for your district, the research behind SEL, and how SEL promotes better outcomes for all students. Incorporate asset-based language that reflects the value of SEL for every person rather than a deficit-based "fix it" mindset.

Resources

- CASEL District Resource Center: Communicate SEL as a District Priority: Within Focus Area 1 of the CASEL SEL Implementation Framework, you can read an overview of SEL communications strategies, the process of communicating about SEL, and access a large bank of resources so you don't have to reinvent the wheel.
- Steps for Developing Effective SEL Communication Strategies: A step-by-step guide for developing a district SEL communications plan.
- Review sample communication plans as you construct your district's plan, including:
  - The Washoe County School District (WCSD) Communications Plan, which was used to launch SEL across the district. The WCSD SEL Snapshot is a high-impact example of quality SEL communications.
  - The Austin Independent School District Communications Plan, which was used to launch the release of "SEL 2.0," a revised plan after six years of SEL implementation.
- Developing Life Skills in Children: A Roadmap for Communicating with Parents: Based upon in-depth research, the organization Learning Heroes presents excellent recommendations for communicating with parents. One small nugget from this study: 31% of parents in focus groups prefer "life skills" while only 5% preferred "social and emotional learning" when talking about these competencies. A companion slide show can be used by principals and staff to engage with families about SEL at home and at school.

Key Superintendent Action #4: **Resource Allocation and Alignment**

Build SEL Priorities into Staffing, Funding, and Budgeting for Sustained SEL Implementation

Dedicated, long-term funding and staff are key for sustaining SEL implementation and send a strong message that SEL is a priority. As in other initiatives, staffing is the largest cost in the SEL budget, with leadership positions and professional learning as the two largest ongoing investments. You will want to ensure adequate funding and a long-term financial plan to support your multi-year SEL implementation.

SEL implementation, like any initiative designed to enhance student success, is a long-term process. Depending on the size and complexity of your district, it may take up to three to seven years to fully implement and scale. That is why it is so critical to plan for how the district will align resources for long-term SEL implementation.

What Are Aligned Resources to Support SEL?

There are two kinds of aligned resources for supporting SEL:

- **Financial resources:** Funding streams to support SEL leadership, professional development, evidence-based curriculum/programs, and other aspects of SEL implementation. By committing funding, your district signals its recognition of the benefits of SEL for all students. A robust funding strategy also ensures that SEL efforts can survive changes in leadership, politics, and the economy.
- **Human resources:** Dedicated, skilled, and knowledgeable staff who represent the diversity in your district and drive SEL implementation. In the central office, this includes a highly-skilled district lead for SEL and SEL team members who provide guidance, professional learning, and coaching to schools. SEL implementation will also rely on school leaders, teachers, subject matter specialists, and instructional coaches. Finally, your human resources department will need to create policies and procedures for recruiting and retaining staff and teachers who will support SEL implementation.

These two types of resources are intertwined: your funding ensures your district's capacity to staff for SEL, and your plans regarding staffing and training inform your operational budget.

When resources for SEL are well-aligned:

- A strategic long-term budget and plan for equitable SEL funding meet the needs of all schools and all students.
- Funding from diversified sources supports your budget to roll out, adequately staff, and sustain ongoing SEL implementation for all students.
- District human resources practices embed SEL considerations into candidate screening and hiring as well as evaluation and employment policies.
- District and school job descriptions highlight the importance of modeling SEL competencies and include SEL as an expected capability for job candidates. Attention is paid to the diversity of background in candidates and hires.

How Do Districts Financially Sustain SEL?

Most districts have dabbled in SEL in some form, often funding small, short-term projects through grants from a private donor or public source. This funding provides a short-term influx of money that districts use to provide new or expanded programs and services, technical assistance supports, or professional learning to staff. Although these funds may have a positive impact on the district's work, they are, by their nature, temporary, and the initiative stops once the grant funds run out.

The strategies described here focus on developing a multi-year SEL financial plan that is built to withstand leadership change and fiscal challenges so that SEL can take root and flourish.

Districts often underfund their SEL initiatives, not realizing the full expenses for quality implementation, particularly for high quality professional development that enables staff to effectively implement SEL in their schools and classrooms. By strategically planning and aligning fiscal and human resources, districts can implement SEL in a way that weathers the inevitable challenges.

What Are the Human Resources Necessary to Successfully Launch SEL?

A key component of your SEL budget will be funding for staff. This includes a district-level leader who will plan and advocate for SEL. The SEL lead and a district SEL team are instrumental in working with other stakeholders to guide all aspects of SEL work, including planning, professional learning, coaching, and instructional methodology, along with providing resources and tools to support SEL and to ensure common language, approaches, and messaging.

District SEL staffing will look very different in large, medium, and small school districts.

A large school district might have a director of SEL and several SEL coaches, while a medium-sized district may have a full-time SEL Coordinator who is able to provide ongoing professional development and coaching and works with school-based SEL teacher leaders who receive modest stipends for their leadership. In a small school district, SEL leadership might be one of the many duties of the instructional director who works with a cadre of SEL teacher leaders.

Four case studies in the CASEL SEL Financial Sustainability website illustrate four SEL implementation strategies with different staffing models. One of these districts, 13,000-student Wheaton-Warrenville School District, has no budget for district SEL leadership, so they use a strategy in which principals receive SEL turnkey professional learning and then facilitate the professional learning at their schools. An assistant superintendent is responsible for SEL implementation and leads an SEL advisory committee made up of teacher and administrator SEL leaders.

It takes time to increase the expertise of newly hired or designated SEL leadership. They will need ongoing professional learning and planning time. You'll want to ensure you've designated enough time to hire and onboard these staff to support capacity-building and implementation efforts before beginning SEL work at school sites.

In addition to its district-level work, the SEL team is crucial to the implementation of SEL in schools and classrooms. District SEL coaches and specialists support site-based leadership teams and teachers in incorporating SEL into instruction, policies, and practices.

Be sure that the SEL team is prepared to support not only classroom teachers, but also social workers, guidance counselors, special educators, library media specialists, and assistant principals. Also, your team will want to provide professional learning to support staff, including secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, food service workers and others. Engaging the supervisors and leaders of support staff will be crucial to integrating SEL into the practice of support staff and building their social and emotional competencies.

For an example of how one district clarified how SEL staff support the district's goals and strategic plan, see Austin Independent School District's SEL Logic Model.

There's another important reason to align your resources for SEL: by dedicating necessary financial and human resources to SEL, your district sends a strong message to teachers, families, district and community leaders, and other stakeholders that SEL is a priority that is here to stay.

The Process

Aligning fiscal and human resources to support SEL is a key component of the CASEL District Framework described on page 7 of this toolkit. In the Align Resources for SEL section of the CASEL District Resource Center, you will find a detailed step-by-step process for creating a strong long-term budget and plan for equitable SEL funding to meet the needs of all schools, as well as human resources practices that embed SEL into hiring and employment policies. This resource will be of great use to your district's SEL lead, your chief business official, and your human resources administrator.

Here are three steps you can take to begin leading the effort to align resources to promote SEL. These steps are based upon Social and Emotional Learning that Lasts: Planning for Financial Sustainability, a CASEL study of SEL Financial Sustainability funded by the R.W. Johnson Foundation.

1. Consider your available resources.

What kinds of resources are or could be available? How does the SEL initiative compete with existing priorities and initiatives? The goal is to create a sustainable, long-term budget for SEL from diversified funding sources. These questions can guide your discussion:

- Are you already implementing other priorities that might align or productively connect with SEL? Examples include professional development efforts, new curricula, and hiring priorities.
- Are dedicated funding sources available for SEL?
- How long will those sources be available?
- How are you using those funding sources now?
- To what extent are you already advancing SEL in your district?
- If so, how and by whom? What resources are already supporting these efforts?

- Does implementing SEL eliminate the need for any other programs or expenditures?
- What are the major barriers to adopting SEL evidence-based programs and practices? For example, are teachers experiencing initiative fatigue from being bombarded by a continuous flow of new programs or requirements?

2. Build an understanding about the desired outcomes and the strategies to achieve them.

It is important to specify how SEL will be implemented and how you will measure outcomes. Outcomes can include improved attendance and behavior; number of students, schools, and teachers engaged; changes in school culture and climate; and increases in students' SEL competencies and skills. Once you have developed detailed descriptions of delivery strategies, focus on establishing costs, decreasing costs, and increasing the quality of outcomes. The Austin ISD SEL 2.0 Logic Model provides an example how to describe a district's SEL initiative.

3. Compare strategies to find ones that fit both your goals and cost constraints. Consider these questions, in the context of your district's SEL goals, to guide your reflection:

- What's more important right now: breadth or depth of SEL implementation?
- Are some components more vulnerable to cuts or attrition? For example, what happens when trained and experienced staff leave?
- Are there lower-cost ways to provide long-term professional development? For example, are there existing instructional coaches or subject matter specialists who can integrate SEL professional development and coaching into their current work?
- Are there one-time investments that present an opportunity for greater financial sustainability over the long term?
- How will a particular strategy be impacted if funding is cut or leadership changes?

Partnering with School Boards to Promote SEL

Ensure board support for sustainability and scalability of SEL initiatives: School boards are critical in supporting the superintendent in identifying and addressing budget priorities. Be transparent about the cost of SEL implementation (as well as the return on investment). Remember to include both start-up costs and projections for expanding and sustaining SEL over multiple years.

First Steps

If you are planning or kicking off a new SEL initiative, CASEL's Financial Sustainability for Social and Emotional Learning website provides a step-by-step guide for laying a solid financial foundation for SEL implementation. If you're new to budget management, you may first wish to review the Build your Knowledge section. There you'll find:

- A video outlining the five keys to successful SEL.
- A brief about planning for financial sustainability.
- A brief with seven lessons learned from studying the sustainability efforts of four school districts.

Then review how other school districts rolled out SEL and how they budgeted to advance and sustain SEL. You can review case studies for four school districts that utilized different strategies to implement SEL across all schools and grade levels in their districts.

Resources

- CASEL District Resource Center: Align Resources for SEL contains an overview of developing financial resources and budgeting and staffing to support SEL, as well as step-by-step guidance, resources, and tools.
- The CASEL Financial Sustainability Website has an in-depth set of strategies and supports for long-term sustainability of SEL. Materials on this site were developed as part of a four-year study by CASEL in collaboration with four school districts funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Some highlights include:
  - Social and Emotional Learning That Lasts: Planning for Financial Sustainability—This brief provides the rationale for incorporating sustainability planning in the design of districtwide SEL.
  - Sustaining Districtwide Social and Emotional Learning: Lessons From the SEL Financial Sustainability Project—This paper identifies challenges to long-term sustainability of SEL and describes practices districts have used to sustain SEL.
  - Four district case studies reveal how districts organized implementation and budgeted for SEL, along with a cost-modeling tool for developing a model budget for your district.
  - The SEL Financial Sustainability Toolkit can help you plan your long-term SEL budget and includes a spreadsheet template for developing a one- to six-year budget

Key Superintendent Action #5: **District Organization**

Organize the District to Promote Collaboration among School and District Leaders around SEL, Academics, and Equity

SEL is a powerful lever for advancing deep academic learning and educational equity. When efforts are siloed, SEL can be viewed as a competing priority or just another district initiative that will come and go. It's critically important that school and district leaders see the connections between SEL, academics, and equity and reflect this connection in their daily work. When district efforts around SEL, academics, and equity are aligned in their goals and strategies, there will be a greater impact on a wide variety of outcomes for all students. Remember: SEL has been demonstrated to improve student achievement, improve classroom behavior, reduce emotional distress, and reduce drug use. See page 6 to review SEL impacts.

While SEL may be a department or a position on your organizational chart, all leaders within the school district and school sites must be engaged in SEL, and they all deserve professional learning, guidance, and support to make this happen. This requires thoughtfully designed structures that connect district departments and ensure school leaders are partnering with central office in planning and setting priorities.

Connecting the dots at the district level leads to greater investment at the school level. Educators choose to use class time for SEL when they see how it helps students get along with one another, stay engaged, improve overall motivation and effort, and increase skills for learning academic content. School leaders embrace SEL when they see it as part of their strategy to improve school climate and connectedness, reduce disciplinary infractions, increase attendance and enrollment, and attract and retain highly skilled staff members. District leaders expand support for SEL when the case is made clear: SEL is a major lever for school and student success and enhances any school improvement effort.

As superintendent, you are the leader in setting the vision and expectation that all adults districtwide will collaborate to learn about SEL, increase and demonstrate their own social and emotional competencies, and provide instruction and experiences to foster SEL, equity, and academic success.

Collaboration in Washoe County School District to Support SEL

In WCSD, SEL is an integral part of teaching and learning for 65,000 students at 100+ schools. The SEL department consists of a half-time coordinator and two SEL specialists.

So how can a large district create and sustain their SEL movement with just 2.5 fulltime-equivalent staff? Here are some of the strategies employed by WCSD to spread SEL across the organizational chart:

1. The SEL coordinator reports to an assistant superintendent who represents SEL in cabinet meetings. In addition, the coordinator is a respected educational leader in the district who has direct connections with the superintendent and cabinet members. She is sought out by many district and site leaders to share her SEL expertise.

2. The SEL department works in close collaboration with key district leaders, their departments, professional developers, and a large number of instructional coaches, (including literacy and mathematics.) These departments include Academics, Professional Learning, Equity and Diversity, Accountability, School Leadership, 21st Century Learning, and Family and School Partnerships. The SEL department has done this by:

   - Providing professional learning and resources for subject specialists to integrate SEL into their professional learning and coaching programs at school sites.
   - Facilitating half- and full-day annual retreats for district departments, integrating adult SEL into all aspects of the retreat.
   - Engaging in joint projects and collaborations with other departments, including inviting other departments to present at SEL professional development sessions.
   - Crosswalking their frameworks and agreeing to promote and utilize selected strategies across departments.
   - Forging agreements to use and promote CASEL's SEL 3 Signature Practices in adult meetings at district and school site levels and as an instructional tool in classrooms.

3. The SEL department provides free quarterly SEL mini-conferences, at which guest speakers, teacher leaders, and site SEL teams provide sessions enabling conference participants to bring back fresh ideas and SEL professional development strategies to their school sites. These mini-conferences are an important strategy for accelerating the district's SEL movement by regularly celebrating SEL, supporting ongoing capacity building, and creating a grassroots network of SEL champions at all levels throughout the district.

4. The SEL department also works directly with school site SEL leadership teams to help them promote SEL at their sites. These school site SEL leadership teams include the principal, teacher leaders, and others, such as a counselor, a psychologist, students, and parents. Time permitting, district SEL specialists partners with SEL leadership teams to provide site-specific professional learning sessions.

The Washoe County School District SEL initiative began in 2011 with a superintendent who had a vision for SEL as a vital part of education. As of 2019, there had been five superintendent transitions, as well as many budget and other crisis in the district, yet SEL continues to thrive. Because of how the district positioned SEL leadership, the strategies they employed, and the SEL leadership of all superintendents along the way, SEL is truly woven into the fabric of the district. This video and case study provide further details about how WCSD budgeted and created a system to build and sustain SEL.

The Process

To ensure that SEL is systemically integrated throughout your district, make authentic and fruitful collaboration a cornerstone of your leadership. This will include developing and leading cross-department collaboration and aligned, coherent strategies.

1. **Review and align your district goals, plans, major initiatives, and frameworks with SEL, academics, and equity.** Working with the support of district SEL leaders, you can initiate integration by outlining the relevance of SEL within other district goals and work streams.

   Where you find disconnects between your SEL plans and academic- and equity-related efforts, bring department or team leads together to discuss, address, and revise. It may also be beneficial to create or discuss shared goals and outline how each department's strategies contribute to these goals.

   Review your SEL implementation plan closely and identify areas where collaboration with other departments or with schools is needed. For example:

   - If SEL is to be part of the curricular and instructional program at all schools, the supervisors of principals must be knowledgeable about and supportive of SEL so that they can ensure that all principals are leading and supporting SEL at their sites.
   - Rolling out an SEL curriculum will require close collaboration with schools to train and support teachers. It will also likely require working with academic departments to ensure the SEL curriculum is aligned to and supported by teaching frameworks or practices and is built into weekly schedules.
   - The equity department or staff are instrumental in helping to review the cultural relevance of the curriculum and identify ways to support teachers in culturally competent SEL instruction.

2. **Review your district's existing departmental structures with an eye toward bridging connected workstreams.**

   You may want to start by looking at the district's organizational chart and, in particular, where the SEL team is housed. Where this team is positioned shapes how your district defines and approaches SEL.

   CASEL and AASA believe SEL is a universal strategy that supports all students. Therefore, we strongly recommend that the SEL team is housed in a department that is focused on all students, rather than specialized student services. Many districts house the SEL team under academic departments such as Teaching and Learning or College and Career Readiness; others have established the SEL team as a part of their Equity department.

   This ensures that SEL efforts are woven into the district's holistic approach to education, not used as an isolated intervention only for at-risk students or schools. This also helps create shared priorities and strategies and promotes regular communication.

Here are some sample organizational charts:

- Sacramento City Unified School District houses SEL within the academic office.
- Austin Independent School District has a central office department that addresses both SEL and multi-tiered systems of support
- Boston Public Schools includes a collaborative SELWell department within the Office of Academics, Student Supports, and Equity

If the SEL team is housed in a separate department from academics and equity, regularly review how these teams come together to plan and share best practices.

3. **Set up collaborative structures between district leaders who are responsible for SEL, academic, and equity initiatives.** After your district has done the work to develop shared goals and aligned frameworks for SEL, academics, and equity, you'll want to ensure collaboration continues throughout implementation. This may include:
   - Holding regular cross-departmental meetings between district leaders in SEL, academics, and equity to share best practices and progress toward goals, collaboratively plan, and reflect on collaboration.
   - Integrating, modeling, and practicing SEL with adults in all meetings at the district level.
   - Creating frequent opportunities for the SEL lead/team to work with school leaders and their supervisors in supporting SEL implementation at all school sites.
   - Holding regular meetings between the SEL lead/team and human resource leadership, communications leadership, and professional development leadership.
   - Including SEL lead/team in district data analysis meetings and meetings around accountability.

4. **Set up structures that allow the district SEL team/lead to have influence at the cabinet level.** This may include planning regular SEL updates to your cabinet, providing a process for the cabinet to provide feedback on key SEL-related decisions, and ensuring that cabinet members actively support the SEL initiative, including integrating SEL into their plans and practices.

   Consider the following questions:
   - How are SEL practices and strategies reflected in cabinet meetings and engagements?
   - How often does the SEL lead meet with the cabinet?
   - How often does the cabinet discuss SEL progress and receive updates on implementation?
   - How often do cabinet members engage jointly on projects involving SEL?

First Steps

Get together with two to four trusted leaders in your district representing academics, equity, accountability, the superintendent's cabinet, and SEL. Prior to meeting, it may be helpful to ask each of the participants to read this section of the Superintendent's SEL Toolkit (High Leverage Action #5: District Organization) and/or have them each complete a rubric measuring where your district is in setting the foundation of SEL.

At the meeting, discuss:

- What academic, equity, accountability, and SEL frameworks do we currently employ in our district? How are they aligned? What are some opportunities for alignment? Develop a list of these frameworks and determine which should be crosswalked.
- What would full collaboration of academics/teaching and learning, equity, accountability, and SEL look like and feel like? What results might we expect to see? Record on paper so that all can see this emerging vision for a collaborative district structure and return to it in subsequent meetings.
- What district organizational structures would we need to adapt or introduce, and what new learning would we all need to have to meet or move toward this vision?

Use the results of this meeting to inform the restructuring of your organizational chart and strategies for fostering collaboration to promote SEL at the district office, in schools, and in the community.

Resources

- CASEL District Resource Center: Organizational Structure contains an overview of why and how to organize your district to promote collaboration around SEL, academics, and equity and a detailed process for performing this work along with resources and tools to support your efforts.
- SEL Trends: Reorganizing District Central Offices provides structures and examples for organizing a district to develop and sustain systemic SEL.
- These district case studies provide four organizational structures and strategies for cultivating collaboration across district departments and schools to develop systemic SEL. These case studies were developed to research SEL financial sustainability, but given the importance of structure to sustainability, these videos and written case studies are very relevant to organizational structures. Even if your district is much smaller than these districts, which range in size from 13,000 to 400,000, you will find great ideas. For example, Chicago Public Schools did not create a new SEL department; instead they combined several existing departments under one SEL department.
- The SEL 3 Signature Practices introductory video – Adult SEL can be used to help facilitators to incorporate SEL into meetings for adults and professional development.

DISTRICT FOCUS AREA TWO:
STRENGTHENING ADULT SEL COMPETENCIES AND CAPACITY FOR SEL

To create conditions for students to engage in SEL, adults need to feel empowered, supported, and valued. This calls on districts to foster a supportive staff community that promotes adults' own SEL development. This focus area helps districts strengthen staff expertise and skills to lead SEL initiatives as well as cultivate social, emotional, and cultural competencies for all adults.

Actions in this focus area:

Superintendent Action #6: **Strengthen your Superintendent SEL Knowledge**

Superintendent Action #7: **Lead Adult SEL Culture**

Key Superintendent Action #6:
Strengthen Your Superintendent SEL Knowledge

Become Versed in the Science of SEL, the Implementation of SEL, and What SEL Looks Like in Schools and Classrooms

As superintendent, you are one of the strongest influences on SEL implementation across your district. While you may rely on a district SEL director or team to provide deep expertise, your own depth of knowledge about SEL and how it is being implemented across your school district will help accelerate SEL and sidestep pitfalls.

SEL is complex, with many moving parts. It is the superintendent's job to ensure that the people responsible for each of the parts is moving in the right direction:

- **The school board** will need to make many decisions from policy to funding in order to support SEL in the district. They are chiefly reliant upon you for their understanding of the rationale and critical elements of SEL, and will want to know whether you're achieving results.
- **District leaders and principals at school sites** will look to you for leadership, guidance, and clear expectations about their roles in the success of the SEL initiative. They want to know how SEL will influence the effectiveness of their work, impact their workload and the work of those they supervise, impact school culture and climate, and lead to improved student outcomes.
- **Teachers** will need to be reassured that SEL is a sustained priority for the district and supported by top leadership, that it supports more effective academic instruction, and that it can improve their teaching, their satisfaction, and outcomes for students.
- **Families and community members** will want to be sure that SEL is enhancing academic instruction, supports rather than usurps their roles, and is improving their student's readiness for college, work, and life.

While there are pockets of SEL programming that may have been in place for years or even decades, systemic district-driven SEL is new to most. It will take a comprehensive and intentional strategy to launch and sustain the effort. Along the way, districts have faced many common challenges that caused them to take some steps back and regroup, reframe their implementation, or simply say, "We wish we would have prepared for that." Since 2011, superintendents and SEL leads have shared with CASEL many common challenges around how SEL is perceived and implemented across their districts.

To avoid these common pitfalls, all superintendents should be able to answer these questions:

1. What is SEL? Why are we prioritizing it in our district?
2. What does SEL look like, feel like and sound like?
3. Why is SEL not just "one more thing"?
4. Why is SEL for all students?
5. How does SEL connect to academics?
6. How does SEL support adults?
7. How is SEL systemically implemented in your district?
8. What outcomes do you see or expect from SEL?

The Process

To strengthen your knowledge about SEL, you'll want to dig into the research and best practices behind SEL, as well as your district's SEL plans. Develop an answer for each of the questions above by taking the following steps:

1. **Describe why SEL is important and what it looks like in practice:** Become fluent in communicating about how your district defines SEL as core to student success and the SEL standards you have for all students. You'll want to be able to explain clearly what SEL looks like, feels like and sounds like across your district. These resources can help you get started:

   - The CASEL Indicators of Schoolwide SEL can help you identify and expand on the SEL practices underway in your district schools.
   - SEL Talking Points for Superintendents can help you craft your messages about the importance of SEL.
   - What does SEL look like in elementary, middle, and high school? is a curated list of articles and videos that can deepen your knowledge about proven and promising SEL practices in elementary, middle, and high schools.
   - Learn about SEL in the classroom, which can take many forms. It is promoted through explicit instruction, often using an evidence-based program, and should also be integrated across classroom instruction and academic curriculum.
   - Knowing what SEL at home and in the community looks like will enable you engage parents and community members as partners in SEL.

2. **Prepare for concerns of "initiative fatigue":** A frequent challenge for district leaders is the perception that SEL is just one more thing being added to an already crowded list of priorities and to-do's. Teachers and principals may feel they can wait out any new mandates or strategic plans, assuming district leadership will soon turn over or another initiative will soon take priority—"this too shall pass."

   If SEL implementation is not fully integrated with other district priorities, it is easy to see why educators would be wary of another "new thing." Rather than adding another layer of initiatives, systemic SEL means leveraging SEL to align all of your work—from strategy and budgeting to hiring and classroom instruction.

   Here are some ways to acknowledge and prepare for the issue of "initiative fatigue":

   - Work with your cabinet/leadership team to identify and analyze recent and current initiatives. How are they going and what issues are staff facing? Can any "fall off the plate?" Can you bring any to closure so it doesn't feel like SEL is competing against them? Are there any high-quality initiatives that you may want to merge with SEL or put under the SEL umbrella?
   - Reinforce to your SEL lead and the SEL team that "initiative fatigue" is real and help them collaborate across departments to align SEL to existing work in the district and schools. One example is to consider whether a new school site SEL leadership team is needed. Perhaps if there are other site teams, such as PBIS or climate and culture, they could be repurposed into the site SEL team.
   - Make the case that SEL, when done well, saves teachers classroom management time, reduces their stress, and improves teaching and learning. Taking an easy first step (such as implementing morning meetings or CASEL's 3 SEL signature practices) will help teachers see SEL, not as a new initiative but as an approach that makes their classroom more welcoming and productive.

3. **Position SEL as a universal (Tier 1) approach:** Make sure, particularly as the SEL initiative launches, that all stakeholders understand that SEL is for all students, not just those identified as needing Tier 2 and 3 supports and/or those facing behavior or mental health issues. Focus your messaging on universal/Tier 1 SEL. Be ready to help expand the thinking of those who want to put SEL in a single box: as mindfulness, as PBIS, or as equated with a single SEL curriculum.

   A good place to start is learning about the science behind universal SEL. More than two decades of research demonstrate that education promoting SEL gets results. The findings come from multiple fields and sources, including student achievement, neuroscience, health, employment, psychology, classroom management, learning theory, economics, and the prevention of youth problem behaviors. CASEL has many online resources that delve into the research behind SEL, including a summary of The Impact of SEL on the CASEL website and The Case for Social and Emotional Learning, a downloadable slide show you can share or integrate into your own presentations.

   Universal SEL is also a good investment: A study out of Columbia University demonstrated that the average return on investment for SEL evidence-based programs is 11 to 1. This means that for every dollar invested in SEL programming, we save 11 dollars on interventions, including remediation and dropout prevention that would have otherwise been needed.

4. **Articulate the strong connection between academics and SEL:** Simply put, it is difficult to sustain SEL unless it is part of the district's core teaching and learning program, connected deeply to the district's vision and mission. SEL should be both explicitly taught and practiced like any other academic subject and should be integrated into teaching and learning across all curriculum areas. The systemic integration of SEL into students' daily classroom experiences is a vital component of what makes schools and students successful. If SEL is perceived as a program focusing on student mental health, behavior, discipline, or social services, it will not last.

Rena Michaud, a fifth-grade teacher at Ravenwood Elementary in the Anchorage School District focuses on explicit social and emotional skills within her classroom and integrates SEL throughout all academic lessons. She builds community and student social and emotional competence, as well as academic skills and knowledge, all day long. In a video about Ms. Michaud's classroom and instructional methodology, she says about SEL:

"It just carries over wherever we go—every content area. The subject matter is different, but the way we talk with each other, the way we focus, the way we assess our needs and the awareness of ourselves and manage that is the same no matter what setting or subject area."

5. **Communicate about adult SEL:** Implementing systemic SEL across a school district involves all adults. Because students are the main reason districts undertake any effort, it is often tempting to develop plans or initiatives without considering adult SEL needs. But one of the biggest insights from CASEL's CDI is that adult SEL matters too. Providing opportunities for staff to build their own social and emotional competencies, professional relationships, a shared purpose, and a strong learning community will increase the odds of successful and sustained SEL for students.

   Be sure to communicate that SEL is about building social and emotional competencies in both students and adults. You can start by building your own knowledge about adult SEL.

   - Focus Area 2 in the CASEL District Resource Center provides guidance and resources on strengthening staff expertise and skills to lead SEL initiatives, as well as cultivating adults' social, emotional, and cultural competencies.
   - Read more about how SEL impacts Teacher Stress and Health in this issue brief created by Pennsylvania State University with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
   - Read more about Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement in this booklet from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

> "I think adult SEL is done best through serious professional development on SEL lasting 4-5 days, where teachers can get their questions answered and gain a deeper understanding of how they can facilitate student social and emotional learning. In studying how to approach SEL with students, issues of adult discomfort emerge and can be addressed. For example, by studying how to teach conflict resolution skills, adults realize the challenge they often face in resolving conflicts and can enter into discussion about how to apply those strategies with other adults in the school or with parents and students."
>
> – Sheldon Berman, Superintendent Andover Public Schools

6. **Drive forth intentional, phased implementation of SEL:** First, you'll want to learn about high-quality, systemic SEL implementation in order to guide your district's SEL implementation plan as it is being written. Once the implementation plan has been adopted, you will want to be able to explain it, promote it, support it, and monitor how it is being enacted.

   To create coherence in SEL implementation across schools, you will need a thoughtful rollout plan that considers local strengths and needs as well as your districtwide shared vision for SEL. You likely will want to use a phased approach to rolling out SEL to all schools. Depending on their needs and sizes, districts have chosen a variety of approaches. Some start with clusters of K-12 schools (high school and "feeder" middle and elementary schools), while others roll out SEL districtwide at specific grade levels or begin with schools that are most eager and ready to implement SEL.

Learn more about effective districtwide implementation:

- CASEL Indicators of Districtwide SEL provides a snapshot of high-quality districtwide implementation.
- Key Implementation Insights from the Collaborating Districts Initiative shares learnings from the multiyear effort to integrate SEL into eight large U.S. districts.
- Austin ISD: A District Embracing SEL (Video) shares the district's SEL implementation journey. The description of their rollout strategy starts at 2:50. The Austin SEL Rollout Timeline shows how they phased in SEL over five years to their 11 high schools and their feeder middle and elementary schools.
- Washoe County Three-Year Implementation Plans—Elementary School, Middle School, and High School—provide examples of how to roll out SEL at three grade-level bands.
- Wheaton-Warrenville School District, a 13,000-student school district in Illinois, utilized a unique strategy to bring SEL to all schools at the same time, but in small doses over a three-year period. Their case study illustrates how they built the capacity of principals to be the SEL leaders at their schools.

7. **Clarify the outcomes you see or expect to see from SEL:** You'll need to know how SEL is being evaluated in your district and what your data shows about the impact of SEL implementation.

If you have not developed an SEL evaluation plan, begin by reviewing the rationale you used to implement systemic SEL. You'll want to guide your team to answer:

- What goals are we aiming to achieve through SEL implementation?
- How can we assess the SEL strategies and practices (inputs) we are putting into place?
- How can we measure the effects on students, adults, schools, and the district (outcomes)?
- Do we have a continuous improvement system to regularly reflect and use data to make course corrections?

If your school district has a director of research, evaluation, or accountability, sit down with that person and your SEL lead and delve into these questions together. Once your evaluation plan is developed, you'll want to make sure to regularly monitor and share data that demonstrates how you're progressing toward your goals.

Here are some examples of how districts have monitored and shared their SEL outcomes:

- The Washoe County School District SEL Data Site connects SEL practice to outcomes. On this website, they tie together their strategic plan, SEL standards, and student SEL competency data to student success measures, including graduation rate.
- Austin Independent School District has highlighted the impact of SEL by comparing attendance and school climate outcomes at schools with different levels of SEL integration and training.
- American Institute for Research's evaluation of districtwide SEL implementation summarizes data from the Collaborating Districts Initiative.

First Steps

If you are just getting started with SEL or you have not been involved in implementing SEL, here are two excellent resources for getting started on your SEL leadership path:

- What is SEL? on the CASEL website provides the definition, describes the five competencies, and more.
- What Does SEL Look Like in Elementary, Middle, and High School is a curated set of links to engaging articles and videos showing what SEL looks like in action.

Resources

There are many resources available to support superintendents in learning what they need to know about SEL to foster an inclusive, safe culture and climate, increase the social and emotional competence of students and adults, and better prepare all students for college, career, and life.

- The District Resource Center Reading List can help you dig deeper into SEL topics.
- The Impact of SEL on the CASEL website describes the research behind SEL and the impact of SEL.
- Implementing Social Emotional Learning from AASA's magazine, School Administrator, provides excellent advice from a superintendent's perspective.
- The Case for Social and Emotional Learning is a presentation introducing SEL and its evidence base which can be adapted for a range of audiences.
- SEL in the Classroom and SEL at Home on the CASEL website are a good starting point for learning about proven and promising SEL practices.
- The CASEL Indicators of Schoolwide SEL Walk Through Protocol was collaboratively developed by CASEL and the Metropolitan Nashville School District.
- A number of school districts have developed SEL learning walks to help observers process the SEL they are seeing in classrooms. Anchorage Public Schools uses this SEL Learning Walk Protocol to organize cross-campus visits.
- A Practice Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens is a comprehensive report from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.

Key Superintendent Action #7: **Lead Adult SEL Culture**

Model SEL Through Interactions With All District Students, Staff, Families, and Communities

As superintendent, you set the tone for districtwide climate by modeling and setting expectations around how staff interact with each other, students, and other stakeholders. By infusing SEL into your leadership practices and promoting a culture that supports adult SEL, you not only jumpstart and accelerate your SEL initiative, but potentially impact the success of all initiatives. When adults feel safe in a socially and emotionally rich culture that supports their work and their spirit, they improve their effectiveness and foster student achievement.

Leading an adult SEL culture includes:

- Reflecting on your own social, emotional, and cultural competencies
- Embedding practices that model SEL into your leadership style and interactions with district staff, families, community members, and students.
- Encouraging and supporting staff in reflecting on their own social, emotional, and cultural competencies
- Prioritizing opportunities for staff to develop practices that affirm and cultivate students' cultures, values, and identities.

What is Adult SEL?

When districts begin implementing SEL, it is easy to focus on students. However, adult SEL is just as critical and an important foundation for districtwide SEL.

This is reflected in the definition of SEL, which includes adults alongside children:

> **SEL is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.**

Studies have found that adults who can recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate their own emotions:

- Are less likely to report burnout (Brackett et al., 2010) and have higher levels of relational trust with their peers at work (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), which lays a foundation for productive collaboration.
- Demonstrate higher levels patience and empathy, encourage healthy communication, and create safe learning environments (Palomera et al., 2008).
- More effectively teach and model social-emotional competence for their students (Brackett et al., 2008).
- Build and maintain stronger relationships with their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), which leads to improved classroom management (Durlak et al., 2011) and fewer discipline problems (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).
- Positively contribute to the school's overall climate (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Cultural competence is closely tied to social and emotional competence. For example, high levels of social awareness involve being able to take the perspective of those of different backgrounds and cultures and to empathize and feel compassion (Jagers et al., 2018).

Cultural competence is critical to creating supportive learning environments that promote all students' SEL. When adults engage effectively in culturally competent practices, students feel respected, valued, and part of the school community. Culturally competent staff practices also help provide an educational experience that students see as relevant to their lives and promote academic motivation (Bui & Fagan, 2013), increased interest in the content they're learning (Martell, 2013), and increased confidence in classroom discussions and test-taking (Hubert, 2014).

Defining "Culture Competence"

The ability to examine the various social and cultural identities of oneself and others, understand and appreciate diversity from a historically grounded and strengths-focused lens, recognize and respond to cultural demands and opportunities, and build relationships across cultural backgrounds.

The Process

1. **Reflect on your own social, emotional, and cultural competence.** This is quiet, individual work, involving reading, reflection, and practice. A good first step is to complete the CASEL Personal Assessment and Reflection Tool: SEL Competencies for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults and set some goals for your personal practice based on your perceived strengths and areas for growth. You can also use the SEL and Equity: Leadership Beliefs and Actions worksheet to reflect on how your beliefs influence how your district implements SEL with support equity.

2. **Intentionally model SEL in your interactions with staff and other stakeholders.** After reflecting on your own competencies, identify a few easy practices that you can begin building into your leadership routines to model SEL with others.

   Here are some practices that you can use to model each of the five competencies:

   Self-awareness

   - Use check-in routines to begin meetings or begin by setting intentions for engagement and then return to them at the end to self-assess.
   - Inquire about the day's highlights and also about workload and stress level during one-on-one meetings.
   - Let staff know when they've done well; use recognition techniques such as shout-out boards and handwritten notes.
   - Divide work in ways that allow each person to apply and showcase their strengths.
   - Use problem-solving protocols to allow staff to share their challenges and benefit from a range of perspectives.
   - When preparing communication, professional learning materials, talking points, and resources, consider how personal identity and biases shape content and how it is delivered and received.

Self-management

- Establish meeting norms that reduce distractions and promote engagement and equity of voice.
- Use meeting protocols that share responsibility and lead to clear action steps and due dates.
- Encourage staff to manage stress throughout the day through self-care.
- Regularly set personal and professional goals and check in with accountability partners about progress.
- When reflecting on interactions or frustrating experiences, consider how personal preferences and biases impact emotions and understanding. Standardize the practice of a wait-time before hitting "send" on an emotional email, and use "I statements" to communicate emotions without blame.

Social awareness

- Form project/working groups that are intentionally diverse.
- Establish protocols that allow colleagues to give and receive feedback with one another, using shared agreements to ensure feedback is constructive and well-received.
- Track dynamics in staff meetings and reflect on root causes of inequitable participation.
- Reflect on participant receptivity and engagement at professional learning and solicit feedback for the facilitator.
- Visit local establishments and community gathering places near the schools you serve. All central office staff should visit schools at times when they can interact with students and families.

Relationship skills

- Build in regular opportunities for staff to get to know one another better, such as social events.
- Use sharing/listening protocols with pairs and small groups to promote meaningful interactions.
- Use restorative practices to build community and address conflict.

Responsible decision-making

- Analyze problems and data together; disaggregate data and have courageous conversations about disparities.
- When making any decision, consider the impact on students and school communities and consult stakeholder groups. Be transparent about your decision-making processes.
- Apologize and take responsibility for offending others or making a mistake.

3. **Infuse SEL into district meetings.** District staff spend much of their day in meetings, and the way these meetings are run often influence districtwide culture and climate. If district meetings are regularly dominated by the voices of only senior staff or drag on without clear purpose, staff may walk away feeling demoralized, confused, or overwhelmed. Conversely, well-run meetings that engage all participants in collaborative problem solving or sense making can foster productivity, commitment, and a strong sense of community.

By infusing SEL into meetings, you can begin to build a districtwide culture of reflection and effective collaboration. One way to do this is by adopting the structure of CASEL's SEL 3 Signature Practices:

WELCOMING INCLUSION ACTIVITIES • Setting the Tone
ENGAGING STRATEGIES • Sense Making, Transitions, Brain Breaks
OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE • Reflections and Looking Forward

Many districts structure SEL-related meetings and professional learning sessions around these practices, and some leaders have begun using them in every meeting they facilitate. After using the SEL 3 Signature Practices with adults for a month, Jennifer Guthals, Director of Student Success at Thompson School District in Loveland, Colorado, reflected, "The difference between meetings that we use the 3 Signature Practices and those that we don't is extraordinary."

SEL THREE SIGNATURE PRACTICES for **ADULTS**
Creating the Conditions for Adult Learning

Social and Emotional Learning for Facilitating Meetings and Professional Learning Engagements

Highly engaging, effective and purposeful meetings and professional learning experiences are created using three key social and emotional learning (SEL) practices:

WELCOMING INCLUSION ACTIVITIES • **Setting the Tone**
ENGAGING STRATEGIES • **Sense Making, Transitions, Brain Breaks**
OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE • **Reflections and Looking Forward**

Even if you are using these three SEL practices for the first time, they can be effective. When they are carefully chosen, effectively facilitated, and thoughtfully debriefed, they create a solid foundation of safety, consistency and joy in adult learning environments. These signature practices create conditions for growth and learning across all five SEL competencies while using culturally responsive teaching strategies. They also build upon and are aligned with the principles of adult learning, Restorative Justice (RJ), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and trauma-informed practices.

Establishing these three practices is beneficial for every adult participant, and is absolutely essential for some:

- Adults who walk into our meetings after a day, a week or a lifetime of difficult situations need calming, centering and focusing routines in order to participate fully.
- Humans are internally soothed by sameness – while paradoxically our brains need freshness too. It's balancing novelty within routines and rituals that allows us to move with confidence through our work days while navigating multiple competing demands on time, energy and attention. These routines provide a solid foundation for our most overextended participants to be engaged as learners and contributors.
- In order for the learning to be purposeful and applicable, adults need direct, concrete experiences to use what they have learned, and they need structures that promote selfdirection.
- Productivity and creative thinking result only when our basic human needs have been met and our neocortex is engaged and available.

WELCOMING INCLUSION ACTIVITIES (1-9 minutes)	EXAMPLES
Adults bring their experience; allow them to use it. Rituals or routine openings establish safety and predictability , support contribution by all voices, set norms for respectful listening, and allow people to connect with one another creating a sense of belonging. To be successful these activities must be: carefully chosen, connected to the work of the day, engagingly facilitated, and thoughtfully debriefed.	• **Community Building:** Using an open-ended question (e.g., from SEL Reflection cards), build community in a quick and lively way. Each participant shares their response with a partner. After sharing, ask for 2-3 comments from the whole group. • **Check-In:** Begin with a sentence starter: – "A success I recently had … " – "One thing that's new … " – "One norm I will uphold today is … "
ENGAGING STRATEGIES (1-15 minutes) **Sense Making, Transitions, Brain Breaks** ***Adults want to make their own meaning, connect to work and colleagues, and have fun.*** Engaging practices are brain compatible strategies that can foster: relationships, cultural humility and responsiveness, empowerment, and collaboration. They intentionally build adult SEL skills. These practices can also be opportunities for brain breaks that provide a space for integrating new information into long-term memory. (Otherwise it is soon forgotten.)	**EXAMPLES** • **Think Time:** 30-90 seconds of silent think time before speaking, sharing. • **Turn To Your Partner:** Sharing and listening to make sense of new input, • **Think-Ink-Pair-Share:** Generating ideas and deepening understanding through reflection, writing, speaking and listening. • **Brain Break – Stand and Stretch:** Refresh and reset the brain. • **Opportunities for Interaction:** Cultivates variety of practices that involve interactions in partnerships, triads, small groups and as a whole group.
OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE (3-5 minutes) **Reflections and Looking Forward** ***Adult learning is connected to behavior changes.*** End each meeting or professional learning by having participants reflect on, then name, something that helps them leave on an optimistic note. This provides intentional closure, opens space for expressing disequilibrium, reinforces the topic, and creates momentum towards taking action.	**EXAMPLES OF REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS** • *"What are my next steps?"* • *"When is my next influencing conversation about this and with whom?"* • *"Who do I want to connect with about this topic?"* • *"A word or phrase that reflects how I feel about moving forward with this … "* • *"Offer an appreciation for someone in the room … "* • *"I'm eager to learn more about_ . "*

To learn more about the SEL 3 Signature practices in action, explore these resources:

- Written SEL overviews adapted for a range of audiences (including classroom teachers and all adults) developed by Oakland Unified School District and CASEL.
- Oakland Unified School District and CASEL also developed three videos:
  - The SEL 3 Signature Practices introductory video – Classroom version can be utilized for professional learning sessions with teachers.
  - The SEL 3 Signature Practices introductory video – Adult SEL can be used to help facilitators to incorporate SEL into meetings for adults and professional development.
  - The SEL 3 Signature Practices introductory video – Out of School Time version describes how the SEL 3 Signature Practices are used in before and after school settings.
- CASEL's SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook, which includes a library of example activities, videos, and templates for developing your district's own playbook.

4. **Prioritize opportunities for adults to reflect on and practice social, emotional, and cultural competencies.** Work with your SEL lead to create these opportunities, and ensure that you've provided staff with the time, space, and resources to engage effectively. One simple way to do this is through reading groups within teams or with cross-district groups. Here are some resources to get started:
   - The District Resource Center Reading List
   - Shorter articles and videos about implementation of SEL in elementary, middle and high school.
   - The Aspen Institute's Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: 5 Strategies for System Leaders to Take Action

5. **Regularly reflect on how your district office culture promotes adult SEL and community building.** Observe how employees' perceptions and attitudes change over time. This is a measure of a changing adult culture. Consider gathering staff climate and culture perceptions and developing a process to analyze and use this data as a team.

Partnering with School Boards to Promote SEL

Build and maintain positive relationships with board members and constituencies: Successful district leaders personalize their approach to enlisting individual members' support for SEL and responding to concerns. This process requires attention to constituency groups within the district, including open lines of communication and explanation of the district's definition of SEL and SEL practices.

Resources

- Strengthen Adult Social, Emotional, and Cultural Competence and Promote Trust, Community, and Collective Efficacy Among Staff in CASEL's District Resource Center provides processes, tools and resources for deepening adult SEL.
- The CASEL SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook includes a library of activities and ideas for promoting a strong adult SEL culture. You can also adapt the SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook and apply your district branding to it.

DISTRICT FOCUS AREA THREE:
PROMOTING SEL FOR STUDENTS FOR SEL

Promoting SEL for all students requires more than a single curriculum or one professional learning strategy. Students more deeply internalize SEL when there is systemic coordination of practices across schools, classrooms, homes, and communities. This focus area helps districts provide consistent and equitable SEL opportunities for students, integrate SEL into key priorities, and develop deep family and community partnerships.

As superintendent, you are instrumental in establishing the conditions for schools and classrooms to promote SEL, ensuring cohesion across districtwide policy, programming, and partnerships.

Actions in this focus area:

Superintendent Action #8: **Policy Alignment**

Superintendent Action #9: **Family and Community Engagement and Partnerships**

Key Superintendent Action #8: **Policy Alignment**

Adopt District Policies That Support SEL

Policies can create a foundation for developing high-quality classroom practices, supporting equitable educational experiences, and spreading universal SEL across a district. Conversely, misaligned policies can create barriers to SEL implementation and contribute to inequities in student access and outcomes.

If you're a superintendent in a small- or medium-sized school district, you'll likely be deeply engaged in all aspects of SEL policy development and adoption, as well as ensuring that the policy is fully enacted. If your school district is large, you might work with the district leadership team to promote the development of policies and support policy adoption and implementation.

CASEL's CDI partner districts have implemented a variety of policies to promote and sustain systemic SEL. Social and Emotional Skills for Life and Career: Policy Levers That Focus on the Whole Child, published by the American Institutes for Research, identifies four policy categories that districts and superintendents can consider to drive and support changes in school and classroom SEL practice:

- SEL Standards
- Guidelines that Support SEL
- Accountability Systems
- Professional Learning

> "The decision to develop standards sooner rather than later had a significant impact on our ability to concretely connect SEL to what occurs in schools on a daily basis. It served as the primary planning document and is the foundation for all of our training. In addition, having multiple stakeholders engaged in the process left us with a strong product that educators own and utilize to improve practice."
>
> – Washoe County School District

SEL Standards

Similar to academic standards for mathematics, science, or language arts, SEL standards serve as a district's "blueprint" for instruction in SEL. They identify specific goals and benchmarks for student SEL development, grade by grade, and articulate what students should know and be able to do related to SEL. Several states and districts have developed standards. While most state-adopted SEL standards are guidelines, a few have SEL standards integrated into climate/culture, discipline, anti-bullying, and other state laws or regulations.

Nearly all CDI districts have adopted SEL standards, but the structure of the standards and the way they are implemented in policy differs greatly. SEL standards have been used by districts to inform classroom instructional practices and SEL professional development, as the basis for selecting and implementing SEL evidence-based programs, as criteria for assessing student social and emotional growth, and to evaluate SEL implementation. Some school districts have adopted these standards into board policy, while most apply these standards from an administrative level.

Here are some samples of approaches to SEL standards:

- Austin Independent School District SEL standards
- Washoe County School District SEL standards
- Anchorage Public Schools standards
- Sacramento City Unified School District standards
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District's K-12 SEL scope and sequence (based on their SEL standards)
- Naperville Community School District 203 (Illinois) grade level rubrics for structuring and assessing SEL instruction in the classrooms

Many school districts have built equity considerations into their SEL standards and policies. Boston Public Schools (BPS) has developed a coherent, research-based vision of instruction (including SEL) rooted in Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices (CLSP), as described in The Essentials for Instructional Equity. They have also found CASEL Equity Connections to SEL Competencies to be a valuable asset as they develop policies and strategies to promote both SEL and CSLP.

> "In Boston, we are focusing and aligning the equity and SEL work under Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices. The equity elaborations to the CASEL five SEL competencies are meaningful to and helpful in our work."
>
> —Dr. Charles Grandson
> Chief Equity and Strategy Officer, Boston Public Schools

District Policies and Guidelines That Support SEL

School districts utilize many strategies to unify the work of schools and teachers. Even if a district is just starting to plan SEL implementation, elements of SEL can be found in curriculum, instructional methodology, professional development, and policies throughout the district. Here are some sample policies and guidelines at the school and classroom levels:

- **District strategic plans** can be effectively used to drive SEL funding and implementation at a high level. The CASEL District Resource Center contains many strategic plans that incorporate SEL, for example the El Paso Independent School District Strategic Plan. (See K**ey Superintendent Action # 2: Vision** to go deeper into the integration of SEL into the district strategic plan.)
- **SEL board policies** such as the Oakland Unified School District SEL Board Policy codifies the district's commitment to SEL and drives implementation efforts.

- **Discipline policies and guidelines** have a large impact on the way students interact with peers and adults and on overall student success. When discipline policies and practices are centered around student learning, are developmentally appropriate, and are culturally responsive, they can reinforce SEL and support stronger relationships, student engagement, and equitable outcomes. According to a 2012 study prepared by researchers from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, being suspended just one time in the ninth grade is related to an increased risk of dropping out, increasing the chance of leaving school prior to graduation from 16 percent to 32 percent.

  To better align with SEL goals and create caring and equitable school communities, school districts have been modifying their codes of conduct and discipline and behavior management strategies, limiting offenses and behavior categories leading to exclusion, and implementing restorative practices and other strategies that promote problem-solving and relationship-building.

> "The pipeline to prison refers to school discipline policies (e.g., zero tolerance) and practices that remove students from learning opportunities (e.g., out-of-school suspension) and push students out of school (e.g., expulsion, school-based arrest) and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems increasingly for minor offenses and non-violent behavior, such as smoking cigarettes, coming to school out of uniform, or using a cell phone. Research and data have indicated that racial/ethnic minorities and students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by such policies and practices."
>
> — National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline

- **School site SEL expectations or commitments** are developed by school districts to drive school-level implementation. Here are some examples:
  - Chicago Public School's School Climate Standards set SEL-related expectations and guidance for every school.
  - Austin Independent School District's SEED Model Schools develop long-term and short-term goals around empowering campus leadership, coordination with family and community partners, coordination with climate and pedagogy, and explicit SEL instruction.
  - The out-of-school time (OST) programs Sprockets in St. Paul, Missouri, provides commitments that OST sites must follow to become one of 10 SEL Demonstration Sites recognized each year.

Policies to Ensure Accountability

As superintendent, you'll want to lead your team in considering accountability. That is:

What are the SEL-related requirements and expectations for all schools and classrooms, for all teachers, and all leaders?

Answering this question helps you ensure that all students have access to high-quality SEL while balancing the need for school-level decision-making. Here are some key areas in which your district can implement policies that promote SEL:

School improvement plan templates can be modified so that all schools describe SEL implementation goals, equitable access to SEL, activities designed to meet goals, and evaluation metrics. To ensure equitable student outcomes, CASEL and AASA encourage districts and schools to disaggregate outcome data.

Human resource policies, including hiring practices and employee performance evaluations, can promote SEL as an expected competency for all staff. You'll also want to explore how to reflect SEL in any frameworks or evaluations for quality school leadership and teaching. Consider crosswalking current forms with your district's SEL standards and implementation plans. Provide professional development for supervisors and evaluators to help them recognize SEL elements during observations or record reviews.

Collective bargaining agreements with unions are a powerful avenue for enacting policy that supports SEL. For example, the Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the Cleveland Teachers Union and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District specifies time allocations for SEL professional learning and the use of certain SEL practices, including morning meetings. Superintendent Eric Gordon calls the agreement one of "the most influential policies in the district."

Professional Learning Policies to Promote Equitable SEL Access for Students

Rigorous, ongoing SEL professional learning for all teachers is essential for ensuring high-quality SEL for all students. Superintendents can set expectations or promote policies around SEL professional learning that define how key staff, such as principals and teachers, are engaged in professional learning that supports them in SEL implementation.

Here are some examples from CASEL partner districts:

- In Austin Independent School District, 140 school teams received SEL professional learning in five cohorts over five years, followed by coaching from district SEL specialists.
- In Washoe County School District, teams from all 102 school attended three to four days of professional learning in six cohorts over two years. The district also defined commitments required for principals, SEL teams, and teachers to participate in district-supported professional learning and coaching for schoolwide SEL.
- The El Paso Independent School District SEL Implementation Plan's professional learning sequence involves site leadership teams in five cohorts over five years using the CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL. Along with the basics of SEL, explicit SEL instruction, and SEL integration strategies, professional learning in El Paso addresses family engagement, PBIS, equity and implicit bias, and restorative practices.

In some cases, these districts reported that leadership had to step in when principals resisted participating in site-based professional learning cohorts. This demonstrates the importance of enacting policies: by taking this stand, district leaders were able to reinforce equitable access to SEL for all students.

The Process

1. Scan for SEL guidelines and regulations at the state level.
In 2003, Illinois became the first state to adopt SEL standards. Since then, many states in the CASEL Collaborating States Initiative have developed policies and guidelines to support quality SEL implementation. For example, New York has published SEL guidance for districts and as well as voluntary SEL benchmarks. Washington State provides an SEL implementation guide, SEL standards and benchmarks, and an online SEL training module.

Use the interactive map on the CASEL State Scan to link to SEL guidance and support offered by your state.

2. Review existing district policies and guidelines for alignment to SEL.
If you review current policies, you may find that your district already has some policies and guidelines that relate to SEL. Likely areas include instruction, culture/climate, college and career preparation, counseling, discipline, behavior, health and wellness, teacher evaluations, mental health, safety, anti-bullying, human resources, and school planning.

Consider:

- In what ways do these existing policies help further your SEL goals?
- How might you need to realign policies to better support SEL?
- Would it be beneficial to reintroduce and communicate any policies that have not been addressed for many years?

3. Once your SEL implementation plan is drafted, consider which elements of your plan should be requirements or guidelines for all classrooms, schools, teachers, and principals. Using your review of current policies, determine which policies will need to be amended and what new policies would be beneficial. Work with your SEL lead and your SEL advisory committee to make a list of policies to be drafted.

Resources

- American Institutes for Research's Social and Emotional Skills for Life and Career: Policy Levers That Focus on the Whole Child has a framework and many policy ideas.
- Equity and SEL: What Educators Need to Know and Do is a webinar focused on building a physically and emotionally safe and positive school climate and growing strong social and emotional competencies for both teachers and students to promote educational equity.

Key Superintendent Action #9:
Family and Community Engagement and Partnerships

Develop Relationships with Families and Community Partners to Align Missions and Promote SEL

SEL is reinforced and sustained when districts, families, and community partners align and work together. As superintendent, you are uniquely positioned to forge impactful partnerships between the school district and parents, families, caregivers, community organizations and governmental agencies.

In part, your job will be to encourage district and school leaders to develop partnerships with community groups. But you may also need to step up to get partnerships started, to create space for families and communities in key conversations, or to help solve problems. In addition, you will often be the one to negotiate, agree to, and sign memoranda of understanding, contracts, and agreements.

How Family and Community Partnerships Support SEL

Has this happened in your district?: You implement a new initiative and then report to parents about what their students are experiencing. Afterward, you're disappointed by weak family involvement. Parent education events are sparsely attended.

This is a common occurrence. If you think about it, it's not surprising. How often, instead of inviting parents to co-create their children's experience at school, do we simply tell them about it after the fact? This approach confirms common parent perceptions of schools: that parents are not valued as full partners in educating their children.

Similarly, community leaders and community organizations are often not engaged in co-planning initiatives and have to fight their way into schools to provide services.

By welcoming and including parents, students, and community groups in planning SEL and executing the plan, you will create more SEL champions, ensure buy-in from many more stakeholders, develop a higher-quality SEL implementation, and build a base of support for SEL that will last for years.

What Are Family Partnerships That Support SEL?

Family partnerships consist of far more than public relations messages or sharing articles about practices to try at home. A genuine district-family partnership prioritizes a two-way flow of information and perspectives, and engages parents and caregivers to guide a district's decision-making and drive sustainability of SEL. A strong district-family partnership leverages families' expertise and diversity to ensure that SEL is taught in culturally relevant ways that celebrate the assets, identity, and diversity all students bring to school.

Districts develop strong family partnerships when they:

- Prioritize positive staff-family relationships and develop strategies for two-way communication with families at the district and school levels.
- Offer meaningful opportunities for families to participate and collaborate in SEL activities, so that families understand, experience, inform, and support the SEL development of students.
- Gather input from families about their preferences and needs.
- Regularly collect feedback about families' experiences and changing needs to improve family partnership strategies.

How Do Community Partnerships Support SEL?

Partnerships with external organizations have the potential to reinforce social and emotional skill development during the school day, before or after school, or out in the community.

For some community partners, SEL may be part of their mission, while for others it may be a fortunate byproduct. Either way, districts can provide guidelines, training, and technical support to ensure common goals, aligned frameworks and common language for SEL, and foster adult behaviors that model and reinforce SEL.

Districts develop strong community partnerships when they work with partners to:

- Intentionally align the language and practices they use to describe and promote SEL.
- Ensure that SEL is a priority during the school day and during out-of-school time.
- Ensure that students and families have access to a broad range of SEL-related services in the community.
- Collaborate on developing funding streams to support SEL in schools and across settings where children and youth spend time.
- Collaborate and coordinate SEL-related tasks, including professional learning/training and communications about culturally relevant practices, taking into account organizational strengths and contexts.

The Process

While you may delegate much of the SEL planning related to engaging families and communities, there are tasks that require your leadership. These process steps are built around your unique leadership role: your personal and professional connections to families and community leaders, your 30,000-foot view of the district, and the power of your position to enact change.

Several of these steps can be integrated into your district's strategy for developing the SEL implementation plan. You can include a variety of district and community leaders and stakeholders to participate in these steps.

1. Perform a SWOT analysis related to family and community partnerships. SWOT stands for:

- **Strengths:** Compile a list of existing parent, family, and community partnerships within your community that could support SEL implementation, such as:
  - Structures, programs, and roles within your district that engage parents and families
  - Parent groups and parent leaders (including grandparents and other family members who are engaged in raising your students)
  - Out-of-school time (OST) programs and structures (including before and after school, weekends, and vacation times)
  - Existing formal and informal community partnerships that support education and the mission of the district, including organizations and individuals who provide support at schools or directly to students; service providers; governmental partners; and those organizations that partner at a district level
- **Weaknesses:** After you make your list of strengths, jot down notes about these questions:
  - Are there district structures related to parent, family, and community partnerships that need improvement?
  - Are there parent, family, and community partnerships that were missing from your list?
  - Are any existing formal or informal partnerships that are not functioning well or could be optimized?
- **Opportunities:** Brainstorm at least five opportunities for your district to engage and collaborate with parents and community partners. You may see an opportunity to create or strengthen a district program, discover an opening to collaborate with one of your business partners, or find potential for co-funding an SEL approach in school and out in the community.
- **Threats:** Are there parents, community leaders, or organizations that might take issue with any or all elements of SEL, work at cross purposes, or cause outright harm? Create a chart:

Issue/Concern (SEL-related or not)	Group(s) or individual(s) that would raise concern	What is the threat, exactly?	Plan and process to eliminate threat

Use your SWOT analysis to inform your SEL implementation plan.

2. **Actively engage families and community organizations up front in the development of your SEL implementation plan.** Rather than making decisions and then informing parents or community organizations later on, involving them from the start will engender more sustained support for SEL. A plan that reflects the unique culture and characteristics of your community will have greater school and staff member buy-in and will be more likely to be sustained over time.

3. **Lead your district in a movement from parent education to parent engagement.**

   - True parent engagement starts with listening, so you'll want to hone this important SEL skill.
   - During SEL implementation, districts should play a role in facilitating school-based processes to strengthen family and community partnerships. Set a clear vision for school-level partnerships incorporating SEL, provide resources so that schools can meet expectations, and create a structure to provide technical assistance and accountability.
   - In any district, there are strong parent advocates who readily volunteer for a leadership role. Remind your school leaders to include diverse parents and caregivers who may feel left out of traditional school district engagements due to language, immigration status, education level, historical experiences with schools and other factors. This requires district staff to do outreach in culturally responsive ways.
   - When seeking representation on the district SEL advisory committee or a school site SEL leadership team or setting guidelines for school-level partnerships, prioritize equitable family representation and non-traditional parent leadership.

4. **Leverage, align, and support partnerships to deepen districtwide SEL implementation.** Identify community partners who provide direct support for a significant percentage of students and have the potential to incorporate social and emotional skill building into their program or support model. Consider the wide array of potential powerful partners:

   - OST providers
   - Recess support
   - Summer programs
   - Academic enrichment or arts programs
   - Tutoring or mentorship services
   - Parks department, athletic leagues, YMCA, and YWCA
   - Social service organizations
   - Organizations that employ many high school-aged youth
   - Governmental agencies
   - Counseling, social skill-building, or mental health services
   - Restorative justice organizations
   - LGBTQI support organizations
   - Churches
   - Shelters
   - Organizations that host students for service projects
   - Juvenile justice
   - Potential funders and donors
   - Large employers who can support SEL

Here are some examples of how districts can leverage community partnerships:

- Include key partners in district-level advisory committees with authentic voice and roles.
- Offer districtwide or targeted training led or co-led by a community partner. Several school districts have partnered with community organizations to implement restorative practice circles and restorative justice.
- Organize resource fairs for school leaders to learn about available partners and how their work has been successful.
- Contract with strong partners to support SEL within districtwide programming such as summer school, re-engagement centers, or alternative schools.
- Develop a robust menu of SEL-related community services that can be shared with schools, students, and families.
- Collaborate on print resources or a website to share successful SEL practices.
- Have community partners do outreach and help facilitate SEL-related parent leadership groups (e.g., organize a family discussion series, train parent volunteers to use restorative practices during recess).

Resources

There are many online resources in the CASEL District Resource Center and the CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL focused on partnering with parents, families, and community organizations to promote and support SEL, including:

Resources to help develop district guidelines for school-family partnerships:

- School-Family Partnership Strategies to Enhance Children's Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth
- Ideas and Tools for Working with Parents and Families
- Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships
- CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL Tool: Strategies for Establishing School-Family Partnerships

Resources to empower parents as SEL partners and leaders:

- Essential Connections Between Parenting and SEL
- SEL for Parents (video in English/in Spanish)
- Raising Caring, Confident, Capable Children (brochure)
- SEL Discussion Series for Parents and Caregivers (English/Spanish)
- Parent Toolkit: Social & Emotional Development (from NBC)

Resources for linking SEL in school and out of school

- AIR's Beyond the Bell project with resources for assessing and integrating SEL in OST programs
- The Partnership for Children & Youth's Finding Common Ground: Connecting Social-Emotional Learning During and Beyond the School Day
- The Wallace Foundation's Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time Settings

DISTRICT FOCUS AREA FOUR:
PRACTICING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FOR SEL

High-quality SEL implementation is an ongoing process that calls on districts to continuously iterate and improve. Continuous improvement refers to a deliberate and structured process to address problems of practice and improve student outcomes. This focus area helps districts collect and reflect on data, address challenges, and build upon successes to continuously improve SEL implementation.

As superintendent, you can foster a culture of continuous improvement and send clear messages about what outcomes are important and how the district goals drive toward educational equity.

Actions in this focus area:

Superintendent Action #10: **Equitable Outcomes**

Key Superintendent Action #10: **Equitable Outcomes**

Ensure the District's SEL Implementation Supports the Goals of Achieving Equitable Outcomes for All Students

The potential of SEL to support districts in closing opportunity gaps and creating more equitable learning environments relies on high-quality systemic implementation backed by research and sound policies. Rather than a "quick fix" approach to SEL and equity driven by the loudest voices in the room, this requires rigorous commitment to ongoing continuous improvement.

Your leadership is essential to ensuring that district SEL efforts translate into intended outcomes that benefit all students. This is complex work that requires careful implementation, high-quality data and deeply reflective processes.

As superintendent, your role is to:

- Model and promote a district culture of continuous improvement
- Ensure continuous improvement processes are culturally-responsive and drive toward equitable outcomes
- Support staff in developing the skill and will to engage consistently and effectively in continuous improvement processes
- Ensure access to high-quality data and robust systems to fully assess the influences and impact of SEL efforts
- Create alignment and coherence across formative and summative assessments, district frameworks, programs, practices, and professional learning

The Process

If your district is medium or large, you will likely delegate the management of the continuous improvement process to your SEL lead in collaboration with a leader skilled in research, assessment, accountability, and/or evaluation. If your district is small, you may need to set up the continuous improvement process and ensure that there is a skilled facilitator to manage this ongoing work.

Regardless of what role you play, you'll be central to ensuring that the full continuous cycle is implemented and results in equitable outcomes for all students.

1. **Lead a districtwide culture of continuous improvement.** One of the biggest barriers to continuous improvement is a districtwide culture that creates fear or shame around data. When accountability systems are aimed at highlighting shortfalls and blaming individuals, staff will likely feel nervous to reflect and act on data.

   As the leader of the district, you set a tone for how staff understand and engage in continuous improvement:

   - Communicate clearly the purpose of continuous improvement.
   - Model your own continuous improvement, by gathering and using data to reflect on your own leadership. Make this process transparent so that staff can see how leadership is engaged in their own continuous improvement.
   - Establish clear expectations, timelines, roles, and responsibilities for regular cycles of continuous improvement. Learn more about the process to help Plan for Improvement in the CASEL District Resource Center.
   - Establish data reflection norms and protocols that help ensure a safe, supportive environment for data reflection. Here is a tool from Learning Forward on creating norms.
   - Make data transparent. We encourage districts to report at least annually on SEL implementation by documenting an analysis of formative measures and resulting improvement plans. Share the top notes of these plans with the school board, leadership team, and other stakeholders as appropriate.
   - Along with a district continuous improvement process, you will want to be sure that schools include SEL continuous improvement in their annual school planning process. The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL provides a school-level continuous improvement process, along with school-level strategies for measuring indicators of classroom and schoolwide SEL, including walkthrough tools and staff, family, and community partner surveys.

   > Continuous improvement refers to a deliberate and structured process to address problems of practice and improve outcomes. It is a way of collectively increasing your impact, ensuring you're staying on track toward your goals, and adjusting course when necessary.

2. **Establish continuous improvement processes that use an "equity lens" to allow for issues of inequity to be studied and acted upon.**

   While data can provide many insights, they may not easily show the full reality and lived experience of those represented. Without an equity lens, conversations about data can lead to "one-size-fits-all" solutions or inaccurate conclusions that obscure biases and ignore differences in environment, identity, and culture. For example, staff examining data on family night attendance might draw conclusions that families who don't attend care less about their students' education, while a deeper examination with an equity lens may uncover exclusionary practices - for example, meetings held at times that are not conducive to parents working the night shift, communication sent out too late for parents who have to arrange childcare for younger children, or meetings not held in families' home languages.

An equity lens also requires access to high-quality and actionable data. This includes data related to school climate, academics, and discipline. Disaggregate the data to analyze any areas of disproportionality along lines of race, gender, special education, socioeconomic background, etc. In particular, discipline data often demonstrates whether policies and practices are applied equitably across all student racial-ethnic and social identity groups. Use this analysis to address the root causes of those disparities and inform SEL-related policies and practices that promote greater equity.

CASEL's SEL Data Reflection Protocol emphasizes the importance of examining data with an equity lens and elevating a range of perspectives when interpreting data.

3. **Regularly review SEL implementation to examine how it contributes to equitable learning environments, opportunities, and outcomes for all students.**

Use the CASEL Districtwide SEL Rubric once or twice per year to analyze your district's current level of implementation. You'll also want to reflect on how your efforts support equity, considering for example:

- Do we provide equitable resources to support SEL in all schools and for all students?
- Does our district guide educators to use SEL to promote the cultural assets that all students bring to their classrooms?
- Do we have a strategy for strengthening adult social, emotional and cultural competence and developing practices that affirm the cultures, values, and identities of students from diverse backgrounds?
- Do we support educators in using SEL to more effectively interact with and facilitate the growth of students from diverse backgrounds?
- Are our SEL programs culturally responsive to the needs of our community?

4. **Develop an evaluation plan that aligns to your SEL and equity goals.** It's critically important to ensure you have an aligned evaluation plan for tracking whether your implementation is driving toward intended and equitable outcomes. In larger districts, you may be working your district's research and evaluation staff, or if district capacity is limited, identifying an external evaluation partner who has expertise in measuring SEL outcomes. In smaller districts, you might play a larger role in guiding the SEL team throughout the entire process.

The evaluation plan will articulate how to measure your short- and long-term SEL goals, including the timeline for collecting, analyzing and reporting data. It will also help you to collect and document data that demonstrates SEL's role in district priorities and goals. Below are considerations to keep in mind for two potential outcomes you may be measuring:

Classroom and school climate: As you're developing your evaluation plan, pay careful attention to classroom and school contexts. Data on how students, staff and families perceive the climate will help to drive thoughtful conversations around how to create more equitable learning environments. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) – from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) – maintains a School Climate Survey Compendia of valid and reliable surveys, assessments, and scales of school climate that can assist educators in their efforts to identify and assess their conditions for learning.

Social and emotional competency assessments: Assessments of students' social and emotional competence can be used appropriately as a formative measure to guide and improve equitable practices. However, we also urge caution: social and emotional competencies are not stable over time or across contexts, and ratings can be influenced by implicit or explicit bias. You'll also want to avoid narrow assessments that focus only on student competencies such as emotional regulation or self-management, and ensure you've paid attention to issues of identity (self- and social awareness) that are pivotal to healthy development of students and adults.

If you use an SEL competency assessment, ensure a strengths-based approach to SEL assessments and use additional measures to focus on equitable learning environments. CASEL does not recommend SEL measures be used to screen students for services. Before you begin assessing social and emotional competencies, read Ready to Assess, a framework from the American Institutes for Research which will provide you with methodology to get the most impact from social and emotional competency assessment. For more information, read more at CASEL's MeasuringSEL website.

5. **Engage students, families, and community partners in SEL continuous improvement.** Pay careful attention to the cultural responsiveness of data strategies, including how data is captured and used, who it's shared with, and whose stories it represents. For example, concerns around how disparities in academic performance data may be used to blame or shame families or students rather than address inequities in resources or district practices.

   These concerns can also arise from a lack of trust in the district's commitment to serving marginalized communities, or when youth and families from those communities do not feel their community, cultures or needs are reflected in the district staff or priorities. By engaging students, families, and community partners in the continuous improvement process, you help ensure diverse perspectives and more robust data is included. Consider ways to:

   - Engage students, families, and community partners in regularly informing problems of practice that shape a districtwide data agenda. For example, *Minneapolis Public Schools*' Youth Participatory Evaluation teams research topics related to school climate or student engagement and make recommendations to their schools, district, and city council. The district also partners with parents to better capture parent and family voice around issues of school climate and culture using a Parent Participatory Evaluation process.
   - Capturing data on whether students feel like their needs are met and that they have opportunities for success in your schools and district. For example, Cleveland Metropolitan School District surveys students on Conditions for Learning and a Student Advisory Committee reviews the data to make suggestions for improvement.
   - Capturing data on whether students, family members, and community partners believe that your schools and district value their voices and perspectives, embrace their languages and cultures, treat them respectfully and fairly, and reflect their personal and cultural values. For example, Washoe County School District engages a broad range of stakeholders in debriefing school and district climate.

Partnering with School Boards to Promote SEL

Collaborate with board members to analyze and address SEL gap areas: It's important to update board members about any patterns of underachievement that are revealed through disaggregated student achievement data, disciplinary referral data, and school climate survey data. Successful leaders ensure that board members understand these gap areas and have a forum for providing suggestions and input.

First Steps

If you or your school district are in the beginning stages of aligning SEL implementation to equitable outcomes, you can start the conversation with the SEL and Equity: Beliefs and Actions worksheet with your district leadership team. This worksheet is intended to promote reflection on beliefs and actions that shape how your district leverages SEL to advance educational equity.

Resources

CASEL Resources for Learning How to Leverage SEL in the Service of Equity

- **District Resource Center:** SEL as a Lever for Equity. CASEL has developed a rationale, guidance, and resources for school districts to utilize SEL to advance equity, including equity connections to SEL competencies, equity considerations for SEL implementation, and equity resources.
- **Brief:** Equity & Social and Emotional Learning: A Cultural Analysis. This brief examines how CASEL's core SEL competencies reflect issues of equity, including programs and practices that support the development of the competencies to promote educational equity.
- **Blog post:** Why We Can't Have Social and Emotional Learning Without Equity. A blog post by CASEL Vice President of Research Robert J. Jagers about the importance of equity and the intersection of equity in CASEL's five core competencies.
- **Infographic:** Guiding Questions for Educators: Promote Equity Using SEL. This reflection tool helps educators explore the CASEL core competencies through an equity lens.
- **Reflection Tool:** SEL and Equity: Beliefs and Actions. This conversation starter is intended to promote reflection on beliefs and actions that shape how your district leverages SEL to advance educational equity.
- **Webinar Recording:** Leveraging SEL to Promote Equity—What Educators Need to Know and Do. Equity in education requires a physically and emotionally safe and positive school climate for all students. Building strong social and emotional competencies, for both teachers and students, can play a key role in ensuring educational equity. CASEL's 2018 February webinar shared some of the ways in which CASEL is advancing work on equity and SEL.

Relevant Equity Resources from Other Organizations

- **National Equity Project:** Social & Emotional Learning and Equity. This webpage provides additional resources for using SEL as a lever for equity.
- **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:** Applying an Equity Lens to Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. This paper describes barriers that prevent equitable access to SEL and identifies opportunities to increase access.
- **Education Week:** Social Emotional Learning Won't Happen Without a Culturally Relevant Start. In *Education Week*, Daryl C. Howard explains why educators must understand students culturally before helping them learn new social skills and behaviors.
- **U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences:** Integrating a Focus on Equity into Social and Emotional Learning. This brief offers strategies for grounding SEL programming in equity.
- **ASCD Education Update:** Why We Can't Afford Whitewashed Social-Emotional Learning by Dena Simmons.

Resources for Superintendents to Learn about SEL Assessment and Continuous Improvement:

- CASEL District Resource Center: Practice Continuous Improvement contains four key activities to build into the SEL implementation plan, each with an overview, a detailed process, and resources and tools to support your work.
- Data Sources to Analyze SEL Implementation and Outcomes will provide you with ideas for what can be measured and tools for collecting data, in order to analyze the quality and equitability of SEL implementation and outcomes.
- CASEL Data Reflection Protocol provides a facilitator guide, participant materials, and prompts for equity-minded data reflection.
- Considerations for SEL Competency Assessment is a thorough yet brief set of recommendations from the CASEL Assessment Work Group, along with resources for follow-up. Start here before your district considers assessing the SEL competencies of individual students.
- Ready to Assess is a framework from the American Institutes for Research for determining if your district is ready to assess student development and social and emotional competencies.

The Districtwide SEL Essentials for Superintendents is a product of collaboration between CASEL and AASA, and is based on CASEL's District Resource Center (drc.casel.org).

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This toolkit is part of a suite of CASEL SEL Essentials, which also includes toolkits curated for school teams, principals, and district teams. The Essentials series -- along with additional content, resources, and tools to support SEL implementation -- can be found at CASEL's District Resource Center(drc.casel.org) and Guide to Schoolwide SEL (schoolguide.casel.org). For more information about CASEL and additional resources, please visit casel.org

To learn more about AASA's Leading Social and Emotional Learning Initiative visit aasa.org/czi.aspx or contact: Bernadine Futrell, Ph.D. at bfutrell@aasa.org and Lois Maiden-McCray at lmaiden-mccray@aasa.org