Leading an SEL School

Steps to implement social and emotional learning for all students

Overview

Social and emotional learning (SEL) can play an important role in supporting the goals of the five core elements of Safe Schools, Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiatives. Realizing this potential calls for school leadership that both directs and publicly supports high-quality, schoolwide SEL programming.

This brief highlights the role that an SEL approach can play in accomplishing the five SS/HS elements; summarizes research on the importance of school leaders in successfully implementing schoolwide SEL; outlines 10 steps toward implementation of a sustainable, high-quality, schoolwide SEL program; and shares practical advice, lessons learned, and tools for implementing and sustaining SEL programming, with the goal of helping SS/HS project directors work with school leaders—superintendents, principals, and their steering committees—to implement a successful program and achieve their SS/HS goals.

Introduction to SEL

SS/HS Core Elements

1. **Safe school environments and violence prevention activities**

2. **Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) prevention activities**

3. **Student behavioral, social, and emotional supports**

4. **Mental health services**

5. **Early childhood social and emotional learning programs**

SEL is an approach to education that SS/HS project directors and school leaders can employ to enhance the outcomes of the SS/HS Initiative. SEL addresses the need to keep students safe, help them develop in healthy and contributing ways, and foster their academic success. A number of current movements in education—including character education, anti-bullying efforts, positive behavioral intervention and supports, prevention, health education, the assets framework, youth development, 21st century workplace skills, and community schools—work to

improve school conditions or student capacities in order to address these needs. *SEL* is the term for the discipline that synthesizes converging research in these areas and the broader fields of child development, education, and neuroscience. SEL research demonstrates that *systematically teaching social and emotional skills in school—the skills of "emotional intelligence"—results in greater caring, compassion, engagement, responsible behavior, and improved academic performance in students* (see sidebar).

SEL Improves Outcomes for Students

More than 300 research studies conducted by independent scientists and synthesized by CASEL show that SEL programming in school and after-school settings significantly improves the conduct and academic performance of both the highest-needs students (those already identified by schools as at risk for problems) and the general student population. The gain on standardized achievement tests for the general student population was 11 percentile points. SEL enjoys one of the strongest research bases and shows that well-implemented programming promotes meaningful student growth across many areas of importance to educators and parents.[i]

Research also demonstrates that SEL produces beneficial outcomes when it (1) helps students and adults become competent in the five core social and emotional areas (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) that enable students to make healthy decisions, resist inappropriate peer pressure, and succeed academically; and (2) creates caring and supportive school learning environments.[ii] These two components of SEL—student social-emotional skill development and safe learning environments—are important to the success of SS/HS Initiatives. In fact, many of the programs and strategies identified

in SS/HS logic models may be considered part of an SEL approach if they address one or both of the following components:

- *Explicitly teaching social and emotional skills to students*, which increases the school's ability to effectively address violence and ATOD prevention (Elements 1 and 2) and promote mental health (Element 4).

- *Providing behavioral, social, and emotional supports (Element 3) from an early age*, perhaps by partnering with preschool providers to begin SEL instruction in preschool (Element 5), and then continuing, in a sequentially and developmentally appropriate way, to provide these supports to all students in grades K–12.

(For more information on the relationship between SEL and the five core elements, see www. promoteprevent.org/resources/briefs/SSHS_SEL_TABLE.pdf.)

When the promotion of social and emotional competencies is central to a school's vision, mission, and practice, SEL becomes a strategy for school improvement and for supporting the SS/HS Initiative. As a common denominator across SS/HS core elements, SEL provides SS/HS sites with a framework for coordinating their activities while enhancing positive outcomes for students and the school community. As SEL becomes embedded in the culture of the school, it has the potential to sustain the goals of SS/HS long after funding ends. But to ensure that SEL is truly embedded in a school's culture, school leaders must actively commit to and engage in actions to bring an SEL perspective to all school activities, both in and outside the classroom.

The Importance of the School Leader for SEL Success

Involved and committed school leadership is the most important ingredient in a successful schoolwide approach to SEL. Ten years of research on factors related to successful whole-school change and improvement identifies **the school leader's engagement and active support** as the single biggest predictor of whether school change efforts take hold and yield benefits to students.[iii] Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom's (2004) review of multiple studies found that leadership accounts for one-fourth of all school-related variation in student

learning, second only to the quality of curriculum and instruction.[iv] This review also found that the chief means by which leaders exercise this impact is to create for their school community a coherent understanding and vision for a school's efforts—a "Big Idea." SEL is just such a Big Idea—one that can inspire and inform change while facilitating the fulfillment of goals related to all five SS/HS core elements.[v] Thus, SEL can also be a framework that enhances SS/HS Initiatives by helping staff see the coherence among the components.

Although effective leadership is an essential ingredient in any successful school change effort, it is particularly important to schoolwide SEL SS/HS programming. When a school makes it a priority to help students develop the personal and social skills necessary to establish a safe school environment, a new staff approach to learning and leadership may be required—one that models these skills for both colleagues and students.[vi] School administrators in particular are the stakeholders most responsible for creating a school culture that supports change. To be successful in this effort, they must work with staff to establish a shared vision and concrete goals for children's healthy social and emotional development,[vii,viii] allocate resources (e.g., for professional development and staff time) that reflect these priorities, and model the behaviors they seek to develop among the students.

Research on prevention programs, including those promoting SEL, consistently points to the important role of implementation quality in achieving positive student outcomes—and leadership is an important factor in ensuring such quality. New research also attests to the importance of visible administrator support for realizing program benefits, even when implementation quality is already high. For example, in a study of six inner-city schools that all had a high level of SEL implementation quality, the schools with the highest levels of publicly demonstrated principal support were twice as likely to see significant improvements in students' social and emotional development.[ix]

In another study, researchers observed 15 schools seven years after they first implemented an SEL program to identify the factors associated with thriving versus failing programs.[x] The top two factors associated with successful programs involved leadership. In order for the program to thrive, key school administrators had to clearly support and be

committed to the program, and a core leadership group (in addition to the administrator) had to support the program and be actively involved in its planning and implementation. In short, high levels of leadership support (from the principal and a core group of committed others) determine both program impact and program sustainability. (For more background information on leadership and school change, see http://casel.org/publications/guide-ch7.)

Developing Leadership Support for Schoolwide SEL

SS/HS project directors know that schools are inundated with mandates and a growing list of local priorities. Helping school administrators understand the value of SEL will require getting to know the school community's most pressing goals and concerns and then using well-honed communication skills to illustrate how SEL can address them. Additionally, SS/HS project directors will want to communicate how SEL is a primary strategy for addressing the five SS/HH core elements.

Begin by engaging the principal and superintendent in a conversation about their goals and concerns and the most pressing needs in their school, and listen carefully to what they say. While well-planned schoolwide SEL programming can yield a wide range of positive benefits and is therefore likely to be relevant to many of their key concerns,[xi] you will have more success if you talk about its benefits in terms of the school's specific issues.

Stress the link between SEL instruction and students' academic gains. This is one of SEL's most compelling features, and many resources exist to help you explain this connection. (See, for example, http://casel.org/why-it-matters/benefits-of-sel/.)

Make sure that the school leaders are aware of the central role they'll need to play in order for SEL programming to be implemented and sustained.

Share a road map of the SEL implementation process (described later in this brief) with school leaders so they will appreciate how the work will unfold over the next three to five years. It is important for key decision-makers to have a vision of the entire change process. Emphasize that the roll-out will be thoughtful and systematic. School leaders and other staff are less likely to get discouraged by slow progress if they are clear on the multi-year roll-out from the beginning.[xii] Similarly, the school community is less likely to feel overwhelmed by the SEL implementation process when they realize they will not be expected to do something very different in their school and classrooms overnight.

Make sure that you uncover and address any concerns the school leaders may have. (**Appendix A: Addressing Common Concerns About Schoolwide SEL** includes some of the most common concerns and offers sample responses.)

Key Leadership Actions for SEL Success

From a vision and mission statement that reflects

Social & Emotional Learning
Implementation & Sustainability Process

a belief in educating the "whole child," to changes in curriculum and instruction, to a deeper focus on creating safe, caring learning environments where all students and adults feel welcome, supported, and held to high expectations, high-quality SEL programming affects practices throughout the school. Successful schoolwide SEL programming requires committed school leaders who understand the central role that emotions and relationships play in effective educational practice, and who are willing to transform a school's culture and infrastructure to support an integrated schoolwide approach to SEL. Student social-emotional skill development is not just about implementing another program; it's about approaching education in a way that is systematic, planful, and consistent (i.e., schoolwide).

Drawing on school improvement, prevention implementation, and SEL research literatures, CASEL has summarized what is known about maximizing the likelihood of high-quality, prevention program implementation and sustainability. The CASEL model, shown in Figure A, depicts a sequence of 10 steps and an additional set of variables (called *sustainability factors*) that foster highly sustainable and high-impact schoolwide SEL programming. CASEL's model was informed by and maps on to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework, Wandersman's Getting to Outcomes Model, and Adelman and Taylor's work on enabling learning for all students. This model also aligns well with the five-year curriculum review cycle employed in many schools. As a result, the CASEL model of sustainable schoolwide SEL implementation can be effectively used for SS/HS Initiatives and can also be applied to other areas of system change in schools (e.g., mental health services, academic programming).[xiii]

As embodied in the CASEL model, planning for, launching, and developing deep and skilled practice; building community support for an SEL initiative; and reaping the benefits in improved student health, behavior, and learning typically requires three to five years from its inception. The model proceeds from a "readiness" phase through a "planning" phase to an "implementation" phase.

It is important to note that the model presented here is just that: a model. These are CASEL's recommendations of the ideal way to proceed for a school that is just beginning its SS/HS work. But if your school is one of the many that have implemented some steps but not others—say, begun an evidence-based program (Step 8) without developing a schoolwide vision (Step 3), or addressed the steps in a different sequence, or didn't address the sustainability factors—this does not mean that your program has no chance of success. Nonetheless, it is relevant for schools at any point in the SEL-based prevention programming process to reflect on the steps presented in this brief and ask whether the impact and success of your program will be more likely if you consider all of these steps.

Before implementation planning begins, school leaders should be given CASEL's Practice Rubric (http://casel.org/publications/practice-rubric-for-schoolwide-implementation/), a tool for assessing a school's current state of SEL implementation practices. The rubric serves as both an orientation to the framework and a reflection tool. School leaders

may choose to "score" their school on the rubric; this initial assessment then serves as a baseline to measure progress and inform school leaders about key actions essential to schoolwide implementation.

CASEL's 10-Step Implementation Plan

Below is a summary of the implementation plan, including resources to support each step, and factors shown to promote SEL programming sustainability and impact. (For specific actions related to each step, see **Appendix B: Sustainable Schoolwide SEL Implementation Calendar and Planning Tool**. Additional background information and tools for each step are available in CASEL's *Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Implementation Guide and Toolkit*[xiv] and on CASEL's website [http://casel.org/in-schools/implementation/].)

Phase 1: Readiness

The Readiness Phase, which consists of two steps, is a time to assess the interest and commitment of the principal and key school stakeholders in adopting SEL as a framework or "Big Idea" for reaching the school's goals. Research suggests that leader buy-in and support is necessary for long-term sustainability, as is support from the broader school community. It usually takes several months in the first year to cultivate adequate buy-in and commitment from school leadership. Prevention and programming efforts that do not last are likely to have shortchanged or overlooked this phase.

Even after fully addressing the Readiness Phase, we recommend that school leaders revisit these initial steps on a periodic basis to ensure adequate buy-in and support over the long term.

Step 1: School leaders commit to schoolwide SEL

Successful schoolwide implementation starts with school leaders taking the time to understand SEL and reflect on the role it might play in the school's educational mission and practice and its SS/HS goals. In Step 1, school leaders reflect on, understand, and accept the value of SEL as a framework for school improvement and as a foundational strategy for the SS/HS Initiative, and make a personal commitment to its implementation. School leaders (1) craft and share their personal vision of SEL with the school community, (2) become SEL instructional leaders for

the school community, (3) commit resources to SEL professional development and implementation, and (4) reflect on, strengthen, and model their own SEL skills.

Recommended resource:

- *Leading an SEL School: The Principal's Role:* http://casel.org/publications/guide-ch6

Developing School Leader Competencies

Acquiring social and emotional skills is a lifelong process, and SEL transformation begins with the adults. School leaders show their commitment to SEL by continuing to develop and demonstrate the SEL skills they expect students and staff to learn and teach. This personal commitment not only leads to better outcomes in terms of student learning but also creates a caring, trusting, collegial, and collaborative working environment. According to a principal from an urban high school, "It takes COURAGE—the name of our SEL campaign—to look inside ourselves and to connect with others. We ask staff and students to join with us and have the courage to change, to become aware, to practice new positive behaviors, and to bring those behaviors to the community."

Step 2: School leaders engage stakeholders and form a steering committee

School leaders share information about SEL with school and community stakeholders and recruit an SEL steering committee. SS/HS project directors should consider the most efficient organizational strategy for forming this committee, i.e., whether SEL is added to the agenda of an existing SS/HS committee, becomes the focus of a sub-committee,

or warrants the formation of a new committee. The steering committee—comprising key stakeholders, such as teachers, families, student support personnel, support staff, and community members—will provide shared leadership for the initiative and assist school leaders in planning for, coordinating, and communicating about the implementation of schoolwide SEL. In all cases, the work of the SEL committee will overlap with key strategies associated with the SS/HS core elements.

Recommended resource:

- *Safe, Supportive, and Successful Schools: Step by Step* by David Osher, Kevin Dwyer, and Stephanie Jackson (Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services, 2004)

Creating Shared Leadership

Successful schoolwide SEL requires the input and energies of many committed individuals. Engaging school staff on an SEL steering committee distributes ownership for the initiative and ensures that knowledge of the change process and commitment to the initiative does not reside with any one individual (or a select few). SEL thrives only with schoolwide commitment. For one Chicago Public School, the metaphor for this shared commitment was a bus, with all staff sitting on the same bus and moving in the same direction. Principals gave staff bus key chains, made up songs about the bus, created bulletin boards with a bus theme, and even created a bus logo.

Phase 2: Planning

The Planning Phase, which can typically take the better part of the first year, consists of four steps that provide an opportunity for administrators to

systematically think about and plan for schoolwide SEL. Although the tendency is to want to move directly into program implementation, the sequenced steps of this phase build a foundation for effective schoolwide integration, impact, and sustainability.

Step 3: The school community develops, articulates, and effectively communicates a shared vision of student social, emotional, and academic development

A shared vision is crucial to the initial launch and long-term sustainability of schoolwide SEL. The process of creating a vision enables the school community to come together around a shared set of hopes, dreams, and expectations for students, which in turn brings energy and a positive focus to the work. This vision is then woven into the school's mission, school improvement plans, and district and school strategic plans to ensure that resources are aligned with the vision. All members of the school community are invited to create and uphold the vision through ongoing dialogue and action.

Recommended resource:

- *Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares About Education* by Peter Senge, Nelda Cambron-McCabe, Timothy Lucas, Bryan Smith, Janis Dutton, and Art Kleiner (New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency Division of Random House, Inc., 2000)

Step 4: The steering committee conducts a needs and resources assessment

Although SS/HS schools will have identified many of their needs in preparing their funding application, they should now address questions such as the following:

- How socially and emotionally competent are our students?

- What problems are our students experiencing?

- Are all students receiving explicit SEL skills instruction?

- What is the quality of the learning environment?

- What are the needs of school staff, families, and community partners?

- What is the readiness of the school community to implement SEL as a schoolwide priority?

The steering committee will also want to assess existing resources that can help fulfill the shared vision by asking additional questions:

- In what ways do our existing policies, programs, and practices promote social and emotional development?

- Do our programs use consistent language and strategies for teaching the core SEL skills?

- Are our efforts coordinated and systematic, creating a synergy that enhances desired outcomes and effectively uses our resources?

- What's missing?

- Where is there unnecessary duplication or ineffective efforts?

An analysis of these findings will help the committee set clear goals and create an action plan for systematic schoolwide SEL programming.

SS/HS project directors should look closely at the programs, strategies, and activities defined in their logic model as well as their other school programs and activities. Project directors should ask themselves three key questions:

- Do we have a universal, multi-year evidence-based program or approach that provides explicit SEL skills instruction for *all* students across all grade levels?

- Are our programs, practices, and policies coordinated to provide a sequenced and systematic approach to enhancing positive outcomes for students?

- What additional strategies might we further include to integrate SEL into the culture of the school?

A focus on social and emotional competency promotion can be a lens to coordinate and expand these efforts.

Recommended resource:

- *CASEL's assessment resources:* http://casel.org/assessment/index.php

Step 5: The steering committee develops an action plan

Based on the shared school vision (Step 3) and an analysis of the needs and resources assessment data (Step 4), the action plan helps to ensure a systematic

and sustainable effort by identifying goals, key actions, and a timeline for the implementation of schoolwide SEL programming. CASEL's Sustainable Schoolwide SEL Implementation Planning Tool and Calendar (see Appendix B) provides an action plan template and recommends key actions associated with each implementation step described in this brief. SS/HS project directors may want to look for natural opportunities to build on and/or integrate SEL into their existing efforts. Project directors should also decide whether they will recommend that school leaders create a separate SEL action plan or integrate SEL key actions into existing SS/HS planning documents. Either way, SEL planning should be systematic and should follow the 10 steps outlined in the model.

Recommended resource:

- *Appendix B: Sustainable Schoolwide SEL Implementation Planning Tool and Calendar*

Step 6: The school community selects an evidence-based SEL program

The SEL steering committee, with input from the school community, reviews and selects a universal evidence-based SEL program aligned with the school's SEL vision and goals as defined in Steps 3–5. The use of a universal program ensures that all students at all grade levels are receiving sequenced, active, focused, and explicit SEL skills instruction, and creates a shared framework, language, and strategies that provide consistency for students and adults as they make SEL an integral part of the school's mission and practice. The program also serves as a foundation for the larger schoolwide SEL programming effort, which includes SEL policies, strategies, and activities that integrate SEL more broadly and deeply throughout the school day (discussed more fully in Step 9 and the sustainability factor related to infrastructure and schoolwide integration).

Grantees who want to adopt an SEL framework don't necessarily need to select another evidence-based SEL program as long as their existing interventions can effectively teach social and emotional skills to all students, adequately address the questions posed by the program assessment (see Step 4), and serve the functions described above. SS/HS grantees can use CASEL's "consumer report" about evidence-based SEL programs, *Safe and Sound: An Educator's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning*

Programs, to rate their programs and/or select a new program. *Safe and Sound* is the only national resource that specifically rates programs not only on their evidence of effectiveness and quality of professional development, but also on their effectiveness in teaching social and emotional skills.

If their program is not reviewed in *Safe and Sound*, grantees may use the "S.A.F.E." framework (see sidebar) to assess the extent to which their current program(s) provides explicit, sequenced, evidence-based, and systematic social and emotional skills instruction for all students.[xv]

Are Your Evidence-Based Programs S.A.F.E.?

According to a recent meta-analysis of evidence-based SEL programs, SEL programming that is S.A.F.E. yields the greatest benefits.[xvi] To assess how well your current programs promote social and emotional competency, ask yourself: Does our program . . .

- use a **Sequenced** set of activities to develop SEL skills in a step-by-step fashion?

- use **Active** forms of learning (e.g., role-plays and behavioral rehearsal) that provide students with opportunities to practice SEL skills?

- **focus** attention on SEL, with at least eight sessions devoted to SEL skill development with consistent, ongoing, follow up reinforcement throughout the day.

- **explicitly** target SEL skills development by including it in the learning objectives for each lesson?

Recommended resource:

- *CASEL's Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Social and Emotional Learning Programs (2003), available at http://casel.org/publications/safe-and-sound-an-educational-leaders-guide-to-evidence-based-sel-programs-illinois-edition/*

Phase 3: Implementation

This phase often occurs in the second and third years of the schoolwide SEL planning cycle, although many schools have moved forward with quality planning and implementation at a faster pace. During the second year, schools arrange for professional development for their selected evidence-based SEL programs and pilot-test the programs in select classrooms or grade levels. Many schools choose to pilot or launch their SEL programs in a limited number of classrooms, since this allows them to address implementation challenges and to work with program developers to make adaptations before going schoolwide. During the third year, schools then implement the programs schoolwide by expanding instruction to all classrooms at all grade levels. As schools are ready, teachers and staff are also encouraged to build on the programmatic foundation provided by the evidence-based programs and to integrate SEL concepts and instructional practices into the core academic curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school-family practices.

Step 7: Program developers provide initial staff development for those launching the program

Trainers from the selected SEL evidence-based program (or programs) provide initial staff development for those who will launch the program. Initial training ensures that the teaching staff is grounded in the theory, principles, and strategies that make the program effective. At the same time, the broader school community should be introduced to the core components of the SEL curriculum and details about how it will be introduced. This helps build a foundation for buy-in among those who will be asked to implement the program in the future. (Some schools may choose to introduce their SEL program in all classrooms at once, which can work for schools whose staff members are well-informed about SEL and are ready and eager to start in with their students.)

Recommended resource:

- *The developer of your evidence-based SEL program*

Step 8: Teachers piloting the program launch SEL in select classrooms

Teachers begin to implement the selected program in their classrooms and meet regularly with school leaders and each other to receive additional coaching and support, and to reflect on and strategize about schoolwide implementation. This initial pilot period provides an opportunity for staff to become familiar with the program. It is essential that school leaders provide adequate support, including staff time for planning and reflection with peers, throughout the implementation process. Staff also need adequate time to explore adaptations that might be necessary to meet their students' unique needs.

Recommended resource:

- *The developer of your evidence-based SEL program*

Step 9: All school staff engage in instruction and integrate SEL schoolwide

After reflecting on the initial pilot and making necessary adaptations, all teachers receive in-depth professional development on the selected evidence-based program and begin to implement it in their classrooms. Once staff become proficient in implementing the evidence-based SEL program, ongoing professional development should be provided to enhance staff's capacity to integrate SEL concepts and instructional strategies into core academics and extra-curricular activities. This continual and evolving process of integration and expansion creates a consistent environment of support for students' social and emotional development.

Recommended resource:

- *CASEL's list of professional development opportunities: http://casel.org/in-schools/professional-development*

Step 10: The school community revisits activities and adjusts for improvement

Step 10 directs school leaders and the steering committee, with input from the school community, to revisit all the steps at regular intervals to determine what (if any) adaptations are needed to improve, adjust, and/or expand SEL programming. This focus on continual assessment also provides an opportunity to celebrate successes along the way.

Recommended resource:

- *CASEL's Practice Rubric, which can help school leaders monitor their school's progress:* http://casel.org/publications/sustainable-schoolwide-social-and-emotional-learning-sel-implementation-guide-and-toolkit/

Sustainability Factors

Research into a wide range of organizational change efforts has identified several common actions that organizations can take to improve the effectiveness of the change process and increase the likelihood that the change will last. While CASEL's 10-step model can be considered a major element in ensuring the sustainability of SS/HS SEL programming, the research literature has identified an additional interrelated set of activities that are key to a program's sustainability:

- Ongoing professional development
- Ongoing assessment and evaluation
- Infrastructure and schoolwide integration
- Family-school-community partnerships
- Ongoing communication

These "sustainability factors" are similar to components of The National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Violence Prevention's Legacy Wheel (see http://sshs.promoteprevent. org/implementing/sustainability/legacy-wheel). In **Appendix B: Sustainable Schoolwide SEL Implementation Calendar and Planning Tool**, examples of key sustainability actions have been integrated into the actions associated with each of the 10 implementation steps.

The five sustainability factors are described in more detail below.

Ongoing Professional Development

Effective professional development comprises many essential elements, including formal professional development on the selected evidence-based SEL program or programs, more in-depth professional development on specific topics (e.g., SEL instructional strategies), and opportunities for ongoing reflection, feedback, and discussion by all members of the school (e.g., at regular grade-level meetings). Schools should also consider the training needs of families, caregivers, and community

partners. Professional development relates to Implementation on the National Center's Legacy Wheel.

Ongoing Assessment and Evaluation

The steering committee should regularly monitor the school's SEL practices and outcomes and make appropriate adaptations and improvements. This includes assessing readiness for change, implementation quality, adult SEL competencies, and SEL-related instructional strategies. The National Center's Legacy Wheel also underscores the importance of evaluation.

Infrastructure and Schoolwide Integration

Integration relates to Leadership on the National Center's Legacy Wheel. A school's administration creates the supportive context in which SEL can thrive. Such an infrastructure includes prioritizing SEL through policies, and allocating resources, time, and personnel to support SEL programming. Integrating SEL into the school's vision, mission, policies, procedures, and programming is central to its long-term sustainability. Integration may include opportunities to teach, extend, practice, and reinforce skills in a variety of contexts. To promote schoolwide integration of SEL, school leaders should work with faculty and staff to review core academic classes, student support services, and co-curriculars and to identify natural opportunities for expanding SEL instruction and opportunities in a variety of settings. For more ideas, go to http://casel.org/research/publications/?t=sel-in-action.

Family-School-Community Partnerships

SEL programming is most powerful when schools, families, and communities work together to promote children's social and emotional development. School leaders and their steering committees should establish school-family-community partnerships that support students' academic, social, and emotional development, and should work to include families, caregivers, and community partners in schoolwide efforts and events. See http://casel.org/in-schools/tools-for-families for resources on working with families.

Ongoing Communication

Ongoing, interactive communication between school leaders, staff, families, students, and community members is essential to launching, implementing, and sustaining schoolwide SEL. To be successful, school leaders should regularly share information and celebrate SEL successes. Communications is a key component of the National Center's Legacy Wheel.

Making the Case for SEL

In making your case to school leaders, it is important to stress that SEL is an evidence-based approach to improving academic and behavioral outcomes for all students by promoting social and emotional competency. Emphasize that schoolwide SEL focuses on *all* students, not just a select few with identified needs. Beyond the prevention and emotional well-being benefits for students, SEL improves the overall learning and teaching climate and is associated with significant improvements in students' academic success, classroom behavior, attitudes toward school, attendance, grades, and even test scores.[xvii,xviii]

SEL is also efficient. Comprehensive schoolwide SEL programming reduces the typically piecemeal and fragmented prevention programs and strategies found in most schools and can therefore help SS/HS grantees better integrate the goals and strategies associated with the five core elements.

Summary

Schoolwide SEL is a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that lays a strong foundation for supporting and sustaining the five SS/HS core elements while creating additional outcomes that lead to students' academic success. The implementation steps and sustainability factors outlined in this brief can help school leaders embed SEL into their school's culture. School leaders are responsible for establishing SEL as a "Big Idea," for making it a priority, and for leading the school community through a systematic planning and implementation process that establishes SEL as foundational to the educational mission and practice of their schools.

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Suggested citation:

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Appendix A: Addressing Common Concerns About Schoolwide SEL

- *Lack of funds*: Schools that make SEL a priority find ways to fund it. The school may need to reorganize priorities, consider replacing less effective programs, and tap into additional community resources. SEL prevention efforts can end up saving money in the long run, because schoolwide SEL decreases the need for more expensive treatment and intervention services for some students. In addition, a comprehensive schoolwide SEL program may reduce the need and costs associated with implementing several more narrowly focused prevention programs.

- *Time constraints*: In the end, SEL saves time. Teachers and administrators have to deal with fewer behavioral distractions and disciplinary issues. Students are more engaged in their learning and are better able to participate effectively in the classroom. In addition, while explicit social-emotional skill instruction does require some allocation of time each week, research shows that it does not distract from learning but rather enhances students' academic performance.

- *Test score concerns*: Teaching to the test or focusing on test scores may improve test scores in the short run but is unlikely to produce long-term results. You can't separate students' emotions and intellect, and by engaging students' emotions and improving their social and emotional skills, you will ultimately improve their academic performance, including test scores.[xix]

- *Lack of perceived need for schoolwide SEL*: This response generally takes two forms:

  ◊ *"We do this already."* It's true that all teachers deal with social and emotional issues and promote social-emotional competencies on a daily basis, but it's also true that many teachers are not given the "permission" to allocate the time and resources necessary to do this effectively. Schoolwide programming helps teachers promote SEL in a more systematic, sequential, and developmentally appropriate way, and to do so consistently across classrooms and grade levels.

  ◊ *"We only need a program targeted to a handful of highly disruptive students."* All students benefit from SEL, not just those displaying the most obvious social and emotional difficulties or causing the greatest disruption. Social and emotional factors influence the learning of every student in the class, whether in obvious or more subtle ways, and these factors collectively affect the overall learning climate and emotional tenor of a classroom. In addition, one of the best ways to help students who struggle socially and emotionally is to have them surrounded by socially and emotionally competent peers. SEL can also be a very effective classroom management strategy.

- *Lack of teaching expertise for SEL*: Most teachers have not received extensive professional development in SEL during their preservice and inservice education. Providing professional development opportunities, conducted at least in part by the selected SEL program developer, should be a high priority. The largest study ever conducted on SEL programs found that programs yield significantly more benefits for students when they are implemented by teachers as opposed to outside researchers.[xx] Moreover, because a schoolwide program effectively distributes social-emotional skill development across the entire staff, and the whole staff is working as a team, the burden on any one teacher to handle social and emotional issues, and to devise effective strategies for doing so, is significantly reduced.

Appendix B: Sustainable Schoolwide SEL Implementation Calendar and Planning Tool

CASEL's Sustainable Schoolwide SEL Implementation Calendar and Planning Tool

(Revised: 12.31.08)

Purpose: Planning is one of the most important components of high-quality, sustainable, schoolwide SEL programming. Schools that skip critical planning steps may get an initial jump on implementation, but often run into challenges down the road that are detrimental to creating positive outcomes for a sustainable period. The purpose of this tool is to help schools engage in a well-thought out planning and implementation process. School teams should use this tool throughout the planning and implementation process.

Description of Planning Process: Numerous SEL programs have documented their positive impacts on students in well-designed research studies. But simply selecting an evidence-based program will not ensure a school's success with SEL. Ample research demonstrates that the quality of implementation will determine whether a program or group of practices will succeed or fail in benefiting students in any particular setting. A program that is not well implemented (e.g., only a portion of the developer's recommended training is given to staff) or not implemented with fidelity (e.g., key components or lessons are omitted) is unlikely to succeed.

We know the following elements must be in place for implementation to be successful: the school community must be enthusiastic about the initiative, have the confidence and skills to carry it off, and have the support and encouragement of school leadership, policies, and structures to sustain their SEL work. Adopting and sustaining a successful schoolwide SEL initiative, as with other major school change efforts, involves a series of steps and ongoing commitment. It generally takes at least three to five years for any major organizational change to become fully implemented schoolwide. SEL programming is no exception.

Based on an extensive research review, expert interviews, and our own experience working closely with schools, CASEL has identified two key sets of activities, in combination with the essential element of effective leadership, that are essential for successful SEL implementation and sustainability. One set is a series of 10 steps that constitute a full SEL implementation cycle. The other is a set of six sustainability factors that are essential to high-quality, sustainable implementation. These steps and factors are represented in the schematic below.

For more on the implementation process, see Devaney, E., O'Brien, M.U., Resnik, H., Keister, S., and Weissberg, R.P. (2006). *Sustainable schoolwide social and emotional learning: Implementation guide and toolkit*. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. For more information, go to http://casel.org/publications/sustainable-schoolwide-social-and-emotional-learning-sel-implementation-guide-and-toolkit/.

Social & Emotional Learning Implementation & Sustainability Process

Leading an SEL School

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