



# READY TO LEAD

A 2019 Update of Principals'  
Perspectives on How Social  
and Emotional Learning  
Can Prepare Children and  
Transform Schools

A Report for CASEL

By Civic *with* Hart Research Associates

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# Executive Summary

**This report builds on and updates many of the findings from the original nationally representative survey of K to 12 principals in 2017.**

The central messages of this 2019 update are that (1) principals continue to see social and emotional learning (SEL) skills as highly teachable and a priority in their schools; (2) more schools are implementing specific SEL benchmarks by significant percentages; and (3) principals and teachers are assessing SEL skills at much higher rates than just two years ago. At the same time, the survey shows that more work is needed to ensure SEL is systemic across schools and districts and for principals to think existing assessments are useful.

The most significant findings in the report, compared to survey data in 2017, are: (1) the percent of principals that believe social and emotional skills should definitely be included in state education standards has nearly doubled since 2017, and all told 87 percent of principals believe state standards probably should explicitly include SEL; (2) the percent of principals that believe a formal curriculum is necessary for teachers to successfully develop students' social and emotional skills has jumped from 43 percent in 2017 to 70 percent; and (3) while schools have made a great deal of progress implementing social and emotional learning, small town and rural schools continue to lag significantly behind the rest of the country.

*Most of all, this report shows that the movement to embed social and emotional learning into every classroom and school in America has reached a tipping point. Principals stand ready to bring systemic, school-wide SEL to their schools, but they need greater support from leaders at the state and district levels to ensure every student has access to a high-quality education that nourishes their social and emotional skills along with academic learning. Now is the time for policymakers to heed the calls of educators and provide the necessary supports for a student-centric, whole child education that develops the leaders of tomorrow.*



## Survey Findings

Findings from this nationally representative survey of 710 K to 12 principals are presented in four major areas: (1) Attitudes about SEL, (2) SEL Implementation, (3) Growing SEL in Schools and Districts, and (4) Assessing SEL. This 2019 update combines these findings with SEL research from the past two decades to offer an understanding of how SEL is perceived by school and district leaders and where we stand in terms of systemic, school-wide implementation and assessment. The results are supported by findings from the 2013 teacher survey, as well as case studies from school districts implementing social and emotional learning district-wide and more recent surveys of teachers and principals (Hamilton, Doss, & Steiner, 2019). Together, these insights and key findings helped produce recommendations to bring forth greater evidence and assessments, and strategically advance systemic SEL in schools nationwide through policy changes, enhanced research, training, and evaluation.

### What is Social and Emotional Learning?

For this report and the survey that informed it, social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the process through which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional learning focuses on knowledge, attitudes, and skills in five competency areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

## Survey Finding 1: Attitudes about SEL

There is a strong and growing consensus among principals that social and emotional skills are important and should be developed in all students. Nearly all principals continue to see developing students' social and emotional skills as a critical aspect of students' in-school experience, and their commitment to teaching these skills has increased since 2017.

### Principals Continue to Believe SEL Skills are Teachable and should be a Priority in Schools

Principals remain strong proponents of SEL, with 83 percent believing it is very important for their schools to promote SEL skills—the same percent that did so in 2017—and nearly all principals (99 percent) still believe that social and emotional skills are probably or definitely teachable in a school setting. Moreover, 93 percent of principals believe their school should place a great deal or fair amount of emphasis on developing students' SEL skills, with 66 percent suggesting a great deal of emphasis should be placed on student's social

and emotional learning. Encouragingly, principals' level of commitment has increased over the past two years, with 74 percent saying they are very committed in 2019 compared to 69 in 2017.

### Principals Remain Convinced of SEL's Benefits for Students in School and Beyond

As the 2017 survey showed, most principals continue to believe that teaching SEL will foster a more positive school environment. This includes having major benefits to improving relationships between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, a decline in bullying in school, students' feelings of safety, and their engagement with school.

Principals believe SEL benefits students' academic achievement as well. Over two-thirds of principals say an

72%

of principals at low-performing schools believe a larger focus on SEL would have a very major benefit on students' ability to stay on track to graduate.

increased focus on SEL would have a very major benefit on students' ability to stay on track to graduate from high school, while 62 percent believe SEL would have a very major benefit to students' performance in academic coursework, and over half believe it would have a very major benefit on reducing chronic absenteeism. Principals at low-performing schools are even more likely to believe

a larger focus on SEL would have a very major benefit to student's academic achievement.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, principals believe that SEL will have long-lasting benefits that continue even after graduation, including a very major benefit to students becoming good citizens as adults (79 percent), preparing students for the workforce (68 percent), and preparing students to get to and through college (57 percent).

## Survey Finding 2: Implementing SEL

The findings in this section show that principals who are systemically implementing SEL in their schools are more likely to see the benefits of SEL. They report better development of students' social and emotional skills, knowledge in key content areas, critical thinking abilities, and ability to apply their knowledge and skills in the real world, as well as greater levels of teacher preparation. They also report greater level of support from their district, a key component for systemic, school-wide SEL implementation. These findings make clear the benefits of systemic, school-wide SEL, as well as the need for greater implementation in schools.

<sup>1</sup>Low-performing schools are those where principals "currently rated" their school as low-performing.



### Similar Proportions of Schools are Systematically Implementing SEL but Higher Percentages are Now Reaching Some Key Benchmarks

Establishing a school-wide SEL plan lays the groundwork for providing training and support for teachers and staff, SEL program adoption, creating SEL benchmarks and assessments to measure student progress, and creating partnerships that can help support SEL. Encouragingly, the percent of schools that have developed a long-term plan to support SEL has increased from 43 percent to 55 percent, while the percent of schools that have developed a clear vision statement that includes SEL has increased by 10 percentage points. Schools with high levels of low-income students were more likely to have a long-term plan in place to support SEL than more affluent schools.

Despite growth in principals' demand for SEL and implementation of specific SEL benchmarks, there has been little movement in the percent of principals saying their schools are systemically implementing SEL. Over seven in ten principals (71 percent) have at least developed and partially implemented a plan for teaching students SEL skills, consistent with the 73 percent of principals that reported doing the same in 2017.

### Growing Belief in Need for a Formal Curriculum to Teach SEL Skills

There is a growing belief in the importance of implementing a formal curriculum for teaching social and emotional skills across all school types and areas. Seventy percent of principals believe it is *not* true that teachers do *not* need a formal

**70%**  
of principals believe it is *not* true that teachers do *not* need a formal curriculum for teaching social and emotional skills.

a separate and specific curriculum for teaching social and emotional skills, from 51 percent in 2017 to 57 percent. This includes a five-percentage point increase in principals that say this fully applies to their school.

curriculum for teaching social and emotional skills, up from 43 percent in 2017. This implies a growing recognition that a curriculum is necessary to embed SEL into classrooms and intentionally develop students' social and emotional competencies. Encouragingly, as principals recognize the need for formal curricula, there has been an increase in the percent of schools implementing

### District-level Implementation Remains Far Behind School-level Implementation

Compared to the school level, principals report relatively low rates of district-level benchmarks and one in three principals say their district does not meet any of the benchmarks. While there has been a slight increase in focus, up seven percentage points from 2017, only one-third of principals believe their district places a great deal of emphasis on developing student's social and emotional skills. Given the benefits principals see in integrating social, emotional and academic learning, this is remarkably low.

Despite the relatively lower levels of district-level implementation, principals do report district leaders are providing more guidance and support for SEL at higher levels, increasing from 34 percent in 2017 to 53 percent. Moreover, principals in districts that place a high emphasis on SEL report greater levels of success in developing students' social and emotional skills, as well as greater implementation across a host of benchmarks, including SEL integrated into curricula, all teachers being expected to teach SEL, having a SEL planning team in place to support SEL, and having a separate curriculum for teaching students social and emotional skills. These findings point to the important role districts play in school-level SEL implementation, as well as the need for additional district-level resources and collaborations to support SEL implementation.

### Survey Finding 3: Growing SEL in Schools and Districts

Despite principals' enthusiasm for developing students' social and emotional skills, they need help expanding implementation. This will require reducing barriers to implementation, including time constraints, working with teachers to show that SEL integration is not an "add-on" activity, and providing teachers with additional professional development opportunities.

#### Principals Believe Teachers are More Prepared to Teach Students Social and Emotional Skills

More principals believe teachers are prepared to successfully develop the social and emotional skills of students now (53 percent) than in 2017 (45 percent). These gains may be driven by increases in the availability of coordinated professional development programs and the time teachers have to teach SEL. Since 2017, there has been a 14-percentage point gain in the percent of principals who say their school has a professional development program that addresses SEL, bringing the total to half of all principals. Similarly, the percent of principals reporting teachers saying that not having enough time to develop students' SEL skills is a very or fairly big challenge for them declined from 71 percent to 61 percent.

### Principals Report a Range of Barriers to Implementing SEL

Despite significant improvement in the landscape of SEL in schools, significant challenges persist. Principals cite lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school, teachers not having enough time, lack of dedicated SEL funding streams, and teachers needing more training to support students' SEL skills development as the largest challenges to implementation.

Schools with more low-income students are more likely to report significant challenges to implementing SEL.

**70%**  
or nearly 7 in 10 principals feel students' social and emotional skills should be assessed.

Significantly, schools with more than 80 percent of low-income students are more likely to cite a lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school by 27 percentage points, teachers needing additional SEL training, lack of prioritization at the district level, and teacher turnover to be significant challenges. These findings emphasize

the need to ensure low-income schools are receiving the most intensive supports to implement SEL programming.

### Survey Finding 4: Assessing SEL

As high proportions of principals continue to see the value of SEL, more principals are becoming supportive of SEL assessments, as well as calling for state leaders to explicitly incorporate social and emotional development into state learning standards. Yet, despite increased use, some principals question the effectiveness of current assessments, highlighting the need to improve current measures of SEL, as well as advance better training in how to use and collect SEL data.

#### More Principals Believe SEL Can—and Should—Be Assessed

Three-quarters of principals believe students' development and acquisition of social and emotional skills can be accurately measured and assessed, a slight increase from 2017 (71 percent). More strikingly, nearly 7 in 10 principals feel students' social and emotional skills should be assessed, up 11 percentage points from 58 percent. Still, only about a quarter of principals (28 percent) say social and emotional skills should definitely be part of student assessments and that SEL skills can be accurately assessed (22 percent).



### **Familiarity with Current SEL Assessments has Increased, but More Progress Needed**

Over one-third of principals (37 percent) report being familiar with current assessments that are available for measuring students' social and emotional skills, a significant increase from 17 percent in 2017. Principals similarly believe more teachers (33 percent) know at least a fair amount about how to use assessment data to improve instruction than they did previously (16 percent). While it is encouraging to see teachers' familiarity with assessments more than double, these numbers indicate the large majority of principals and teachers are still generally unfamiliar with current SEL assessments.

### **More Principals are Using Assessments but More Useful Assessments Still Needed**

Eighty-three percent of principals are currently using some type of assessment for students' social and emotional skills, up from 77 percent in 2017. This increase was seen in a variety of assessment types as well, including use of performance measures, student self-reports, and in administrative records. Importantly, more principals (40 percent) are using assessments of social and emotional skills with *all* students than in 2017 (24 percent), but most principals continue to only assess a subset of their students.

Encouragingly, more principals see current assessments for students' social and emotional skills as fairly or very useful, increasing 17 percentage points from 2017 up to 45 percent. Still, less than half believe these assessments to be useful despite SEL assessments becoming more widespread, emphasizing the need for more useful assessments. Yet, districts that place greater emphasis on social and emotional learning and high-implementation schools find assessments far more useful. Seventy percent of principals who say their district places a great deal of emphasis on SEL believe assessments are useful, compared to 44 percent of districts placing a fair amount of emphasis on SEL, and 12 percent placing some or less emphasis. Similarly, 64 percent of principals that have implemented a SEL program find current assessments useful.

### **Principals Increasingly Believe that Developing Social and Emotional Skills should be Included in State Education Standards**

Principals overwhelmingly believe that social and emotional skill development should probably or definitely be explicitly stated in state education standards (87 percent). This marks a sizable increase from 73 percent in 2017, including strong support nearly doubling from 25 percent to 49 percent.



## Policy Recommendations

Principals, teachers, and students have all articulated the demand for greater integration and implementation of SEL into their schools and classrooms, as well as a belief in its ability to be taught, assessed, and improve everything we already measure, including student achievement and engagement. Now it is time for leaders at the district, state, and federal levels to work together to create the enabling conditions needed for systemic, school-wide SEL in schools throughout the country.

### **Create and articulate a clear vision for students' comprehensive development, including SEL**

To create effective policy and practice, states, districts, and schools require a clear vision of what student success, and SEL look like, as well as how it will be measured. Many states and districts already have mission statements or visions. Now is the time to revisit these statements with greater knowledge of how learning happens. This vision should be informed by what students should be able to do at each age level and be aligned with the best evidence on social and emotional skill development. At the state level, the vision for SEL must be adaptable to allow school and district leaders the flexibility to address the local contexts of their communities, while still providing a strong framework for advancing and implementing systemic SEL and assessment.

### **Promote the development of adult capacity and strengthen SEL training among teachers and administrators**

State leaders should ensure educator preparation programs and licensure requirements reflect the knowledge and competencies necessary to successfully support students' social and emotional development. SEL training should also be embedded in continuing education requirements for faculty and educators. Districts should also hire and retain educators with proven background or training in SEL.

### **Foster and support continuous improvement of learning environments**

State leaders should enable districts and schools to create and continually improve supportive learning environments that promote strong relationships, provide personalized supports for students, and create engaging and relevant learning opportunities. To do this, state and district leaders must support the creation and adoption of data systems to continually improve learning environments for all students. It is also essential that policies and resources are aligned to provide equitable access to high-quality learning environments for each and every student. This will require closing SEL implementation gaps for low-income and rural schools.

### **Support state SEL learning standards and competency benchmarks backed by funding and resources for full implementation**

State SEL standards should be used as a high-impact lever to implement many of the policy recommendations included here. Specifically, they can include the vision for students' SEL development, and inform best practices and continuous learning on integrating SEL into academic curricula. They can also provide guidance for higher education institutions by laying the groundwork for integrating SEL into pre-service teacher training programs and guide professional development of teachers and administrators. Unlike academic standards, however, it is important SEL standards and benchmarks are only used to improve teaching and learning and are excluded from high-stakes accountability systems at this time. Standards should also be backed by the funding and state-level infrastructure necessary to successfully support schools and districts as they implement systemic SEL.

# Introduction

## **A wave of interest in social and emotional learning (SEL) has swept the nation.**

Over the last two years, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development at the Aspen Institute (National SEAD Commission) assembled scientists and researchers, practitioners and policymakers, and students, parents and educators to strengthen our educational systems in accordance with how children learn and develop as whole human beings. The Commission conducted site visits and hearings to listen to the perspectives of those on the front lines of schools and to see effective models in action in schools and districts across the country.

The Commission discovered that high-quality social and emotional learning is a booster rocket to what schools, districts, states, and the nation already measure to chart student success. Building from this momentum, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is working with more than 30 states in a Collaborating States Initiative and 20 school districts in a Collaborating Districts Initiative to support the implementation of the Commission's recommendation and create a learning lab among states and districts. The Learning Policy Institute is leading a collaborative among major institutions and associations representing policymakers to implement the Commission's policy recommendations and America's Promise Alliance is coordinating a communications effort to keep "How Learning Happens" at the forefront of our educational debate and progress.



At the center of all of this important work are principals, teachers, and students, who over the past six years, have all raised their voices to say that social and emotional skills are teachable, benefit students and school climate, and belong in the classroom just as much as science, math, and reading (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hanrihan, 2013; DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017).

Simultaneously, a growing body of research supports what we're hearing from schools, making clear that social and emotional learning is an integral part of a child's education and propels student success. A meta-analysis of over 200 studies on social and emotional learning illustrated that supporting students' social, emotional, and cognitive development relates positively to many of the things schools are already being held

**The success of young people in school and beyond is inextricably linked to healthy social and emotional development.**

who have stronger social, emotional, and cognitive skills are more likely to enter and graduate from college; succeed in their careers; have positive work and family relationships, better mental and physical health, and reduced criminal behavior; and be more engaged citizens (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017). As part of the National SEAD Commission's work, a Council of Distinguished

accountable for—attendance, grades, test scores, graduation rates, success in college and careers—as well as things that go beyond the classroom, like developing more engaged citizens and improved overall well-being (Durlak et al., 2011). Young people

Scientists—leaders in the fields of education, neuroscience, and psychology—identified areas of agreement. Among their findings is the consensus that “the success of young people in school and beyond is inextricably linked to healthy social and emotional development,” and that schools must play a central role in developing those skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

This report builds on and updates many of the findings from the original nationally representative survey of Pre-K to 12 principals in 2017. The central messages of this 2019 update are: (1) principals continue to see SEL skills as highly teachable and a priority in their schools; (2) more schools are implementing specific SEL benchmarks by significant percentages; and (3) principals and teachers are assessing SEL skills at much higher rates than just two years ago. At the same time, the survey shows that more work is needed to ensure SEL is systemic across schools and districts and for principals to think existing assessments are useful. The most significant findings in the report, compared to survey data in 2017, are: (1) the percent of principals that believe social and emotional skills should definitely be included in state education standards has nearly doubled since 2017 and, all told, 87 percent of principals believe state standards probably should explicitly include SEL; (2) the percent of principals that believe a formal curriculum is necessary for teachers to successfully develop students' social and emotional skills has jumped from 43 percent in 2017 to 70 percent; and (3) while schools have made a great deal of progress implementing social and emotional learning, small town and rural schools continue to lag significantly behind the rest of the country.

*Most of all, this report shows that the movement to embed social and emotional learning into every classroom in America has reached a tipping point. Principals stand ready to bring systemic, school-wide SEL to their schools, but they need greater support from leaders at the state and district levels to ensure every student has access to a high-quality education that nourishes their social and emotional skills along with their academic learning. Now is the time for policymakers to heed the calls of educators and provide the necessary supports for a student-centric, whole child education that develops the leaders of tomorrow.*

# Survey Findings

Findings from this nationally representative survey of 710 K to 12 principals are presented in four major areas:

- 1 Attitudes about SEL
- 2 SEL Implementation
- 3 Growing SEL in Schools and Districts
- 4 Assessing SEL

This 2019 update combines these findings with SEL research from the past two decades to offer an understanding of how SEL is perceived by school and district leaders and where we stand in terms of systemic, school-wide implementation and assessment. The results are supported by findings from the 2013 teacher survey, *The Missing Piece*, as well as case studies from school districts implementing social and emotional learning district-wide and more recent surveys of teachers and principals (Hamilton, Doss, & Steiner, 2019).

Together, these insights and key findings helped produce recommendations to bring forth greater evidence and assessments, and strategically advance systemic SEL in schools nationwide through policy changes, enhanced research, training, and evaluation.





## What is Social and Emotional Learning?

For this report and the survey that informed it, social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the process through which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Many of the benchmarks for SEL implementation in this study have been informed by the CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL (2019). Others have been informed by researchers and experts in the field to evaluate levels of SEL implementation.

**Social and emotional learning focuses on knowledge, attitudes, and skills in five competency areas:**

**1. Self-awareness,**  
such as knowing your strengths and weaknesses;

**2. Self-management,**  
such as being able to stay in control and persevere through challenges;

**3. Social awareness,**  
such as understanding and empathizing with others;

**4. Relationship skills,**  
such as being able to work in teams and resolves conflicts; and

**5. Responsible decision-making,**  
such as making ethical and safe choices.



# Survey Finding 1: Attitudes about SEL

**There is a strong and growing consensus among principals that social and emotional skills are important and should be developed in all students.**

Nearly all principals continue to see developing students' social and emotional skills as a critical aspect of students' in-school experience, and their commitment to teaching these skills has increased since 2017.

**Principals Continue to Believe SEL Skills are Teachable and should be a Priority in Schools**

Principals remain strong proponents of SEL, with 83

**Teaching students social and emotional skills helps to make them an all-around better student. They are able to cope with stress, be respectful and empathic to one another, and they are able to accept themselves more.**

percent believing it is very important for their schools to promote SEL skills—the same percent that did so in 2017— and nearly all principals (99 percent) still believe that social and emotional skills are probably or definitely teachable in a school setting. Moreover, 93 percent of principals believe their school should place a great deal or fair amount of emphasis on developing students' SEL skills, with 66 percent

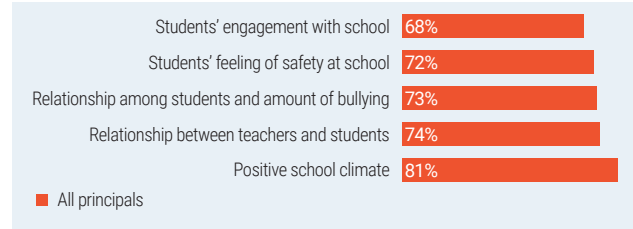
suggesting a great deal of emphasis should be placed on student's social and emotional learning.

Encouragingly, principals' level of commitment has increased over the past two years, with 74 percent saying they are very committed in 2019 compared to 69 percent in 2017.

**Principals Remain Convinced of SEL's Benefits for Students in School and Beyond**

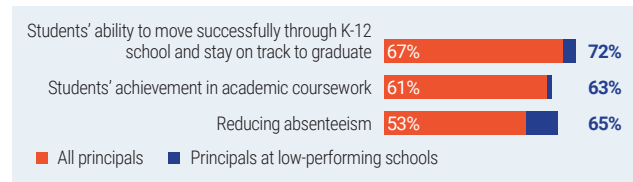
As the 2017 survey showed, most principals continue to believe that teaching SEL will foster a more positive school environment. This includes major benefits on relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves, bullying in school, students' feelings of safety, and their engagement with school. The percentages of principals reporting SEL has a very major or somewhat major benefit on each of these items ranged from 96 to 98.

**Figure 1.** Percent of principals that believe a larger focus on SEL would have a VERY MAJOR benefit on this:



Principals believe SEL benefits students' academic achievement as well. Over two-thirds of principals say an increased focus on SEL would have a very major benefit on students' ability to stay on track to graduate from high school, while 62 percent believe SEL would have a very major benefit on students' performance in academic coursework, and over half believe it would have a very major benefit on reducing chronic absenteeism. Principals at low-performing schools are even more likely to believe a larger focus on SEL would have a very major benefit on student's academic achievement. The percentages of principals reporting SEL has a very major or somewhat major benefit on each of these items ranged from 89 percent for reducing absenteeism to 97 percent for students' ability to move successfully through the K-12 school system and students' achievement in academic coursework.

**Figure 2.** Percent of all principals versus principals at low-performing schools that believe a larger focus on SEL would have a VERY MAJOR benefit on this:



Furthermore, principals believe that SEL will have long-lasting benefits that continue even after graduation. In particular, strong majorities of principals believe SEL would have a very major benefit on students becoming good citizens as adults (79 percent), preparing students for the workforce (68 percent), and preparing students to get to and through college (57 percent). These proportions are similarly high for principals in primary and secondary schools alike and are consistent with findings from 2017. Over 93 percent of principals believe SEL has at least a somewhat major benefit on all three of these items.

## Survey Finding 2: Implementing SEL

**The preceding section illustrates that principals understand the importance of SEL in the classroom.**

Unfortunately, implementing school-wide SEL continues to lag behind the understanding of its benefits. Like

**Like academic skills, social and emotional skills are best developed when students and teachers are given the opportunity to continuously hone these skills and build upon them through daily practice and support.**

academic skills, social and emotional skills are best developed when students and teachers are given the opportunity to continuously hone these skills and build upon them through daily practice and support. To ensure these skills are being adequately developed, schools must push for systemic, school-wide programming that allows students' social and emotional skills to grow alongside their academic abilities and creates a common culture for SEL

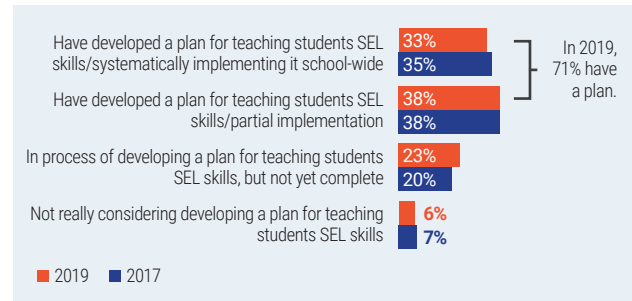
throughout the school (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019; Greenberg et al., 2003; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Meyers et al., 2015; Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016).

The findings in this section show that principals who are systemically implementing SEL in their schools are more likely to see the benefits of SEL. They report better development of students' social and emotional skills, knowledge in key content areas, critical thinking abilities, and ability to apply their knowledge and skills in the real world, as well as greater levels of teacher preparation. They also report a greater level of support from their district, a key component for systemic, school-wide SEL implementation. These findings make clear the benefits of systemic, school-wide SEL, as well as the need for greater implementation in schools.

**Similar Proportions of Schools are Systematically Implementing SEL, but Higher Percentages are Now Reaching Key Benchmarks**

Establishing a school-wide SEL plan lays the groundwork for providing training and support for teachers and staff, SEL program adoption, creating SEL benchmarks and assessments to measure student progress, and creating partnerships that can help support SEL.

**Figure 3.** Which of these best describe your school when it comes to having a school-wide program for teaching students social and emotional skills?



Yet, despite growth in principals' demand for SEL, there has been little movement in the percent of principals who say their schools are systemically implementing SEL. Over 7 in 10 principals (71 percent) have at least developed and partially implemented a plan for teaching students SEL skills, consistent with the 73 percent of principals that reported doing the same in 2017. Interestingly, high school principals are more likely to *not* have a plan for teaching students' social and emotional skills (12 percent) than middle school and junior high (4 percent), and elementary principals (4 percent).

While increased percentages of schools are not implementing a comprehensive plan for SEL, examining how schools are doing at specific SEL benchmarks

**Examining how schools are doing at specific SEL benchmarks provides more reason for optimism.**

provides more reason for optimism (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019). Perhaps most encouragingly, the percent of schools that have developed a long-term plan to support SEL has increased from 43 percent to 55 percent,

while the percent of schools that have developed a clear vision statement that includes SEL has increased by 10 percentage points. Schools with high levels of low-income students were more likely to have a long-term plan in place to support SEL than more affluent schools.



**Table 1. Increase in School Implementation of Specific, Systemic SEL Benchmarks**

<i>Proportions of principals saying each describes their school very/fairly well</i>	2019	2017
School-wide and classroom learning environments are supportive, culturally responsive, and focused on building relationships and community.	71%	N/A
Discipline practices in my school emphasize repairing harm and building relationships.	69%	N/A
Staff honor and elevate a broad range of student perspectives and experiences by engaging students as leaders, problem-solvers, and decision-makers.	63%	N/A
My school has a long-term plan to support students' social and emotional learning.	55%	43%
My school has developed a clear vision statement that prioritizes social and emotional learning for all students.	55%	45%
My school has implemented an evidence-based program for teaching students social and emotional skills.	53%	40%
Staff have regular opportunities, such as training, to examine and work on their own social, emotional, and cultural competencies.	52%	N/A
Teaching social and emotional skills is integrated across universal, early-intervention, and treatment programming.	51%	N/A
My school regularly evaluates whether adequate resources are being devoted to social and emotional learning.	51%	36%
There is a coordinated professional development program that addresses social and emotional learning.	50%	36%
My school has comprehensive, developmentally appropriate learning standards that describe what social and emotional skills students should know and be able to demonstrate at each grade level.	49%	33%

In addition, the percent of schools implementing an evidence-based SEL program increased by 13 percentage points (from 40 percent to 53 percent), and the percent of schools with comprehensive and developmentally appropriate learning standards increased 16 percentage points (33 percent to 49 percent). All told, the number of schools meeting six or seven benchmarks has increased from 24 percent to 38 percent over the past two years.

These improvements may in part stem from the fact that principals are more likely to report that they have a planning team in place devoted to SEL, as the percent of principals with

a fully dedicated planning team increased by 6 percentage points, bringing it to a total of 63 percent.

### **Growing Belief in the Need for a Formal Curriculum to Teach SEL Skills**

While principals remain convinced students' SEL skills are teachable, there is a growing belief in the importance of implementing a formal curriculum for teaching social and emotional skills across all school types and areas.

Seventy percent of principals believe it is *not* true that teachers do *not* need a formal curriculum for teaching social and emotional skills, up from 43 percent in 2017. This implies a growing recognition that a curriculum is necessary to embed SEL into classrooms and intentionally develop students' social and emotional competencies. The belief that a formal curriculum is not necessary has decreased substantially across principals and especially among those in elementary schools (30 percentage point decrease) and small town and rural areas (39 percentage point decrease).

Encouragingly, as principals recognize the need for formal curricula, there has been an increase in the percent of schools implementing a separate and specific curriculum for teaching social and emotional skills, from 51 percent in 2017 to 57 percent in 2019. This includes a 5 percentage point increase in principals that say this fully applies to their school.

### **Suburban Schools Displayed the Largest Growth in SEL Implementation, while Rural and Small Town Schools Lag Behind**

Across a host of SEL implementation benchmarks, schools in rural areas and small towns continually reported lower levels of SEL implementation than schools in suburban and urban America. Conversely, urban schools reported the highest levels, while suburban schools displayed the largest growth.

Suburban areas displayed the largest increases in developing a long-term plan and vision statement for SEL. Suburban principals who report that they have a long-term plan increased 18 percentage points (from 46 percent in 2017 to 64 percent in 2019). There was a 20 percentage point increase in having a vision statement for SEL (from 45 percent in 2017 to 65 percent in 2019). Suburban schools have also seen large increases in the use of evidence-based programs (up 20 percentage points to 59 percent) and developmentally appropriate learning standards for SEL (up 26 percentage points to 55 percent).

Meanwhile, small town and rural schools lag far behind their urban and suburban peers. Rather than substantial increases in the percent of schools with long-term plans

or vision statements for SEL, rural schools saw small gains and even backsliding, showing no substantial improvements from 2017 to 2019. This leaves just 33 percent of rural schools with a long-term plan and 32 percent with a vision statement prioritizing SEL, compared to rates of 71 percent and 70 percent in urban schools, and 64 percent and 65 percent in suburban schools, respectively. Similarly, as districts continue to devote more attention to ensuring SEL has sufficient support, small town and rural areas remain the exception. Just 31 percent of principals in small town or rural school districts report district leaders provide support for SEL, compared to 69 percent for urban principals and 62 percent for suburban principals. Furthermore, just 32 percent of small town and rural schools regularly evaluate whether adequate resources are being devoted to SEL, significantly behind schools in urban and suburban areas across the country.

**Table 2. Increase in Principals Believing Teachers are Prepared to Teach SEL**

<i>How well prepared do you think the teachers in your school are to successfully teach students' social and emotional skills?</i>			
	2017	2019	2-Year Change
<b>All Principals</b>	45%	53%	8 points
Urban	56%	67%	11 points
Suburban	48%	63%	15 points
Small Town/Rural	34%	31%	(-3) points

Finally, while 50 percent of principals report having a coordinated professional development program that addresses SEL at their school, just 27 percent of small town and rural schools report the same. Similarly, teacher preparedness for teaching SEL in small town and rural schools falls short of that in urban and suburban schools.

Despite the challenges in SEL implementation, principals in small towns and rural areas are nearly as likely to support SEL as their peers in suburban and urban schools. This points to the need for policymakers to redouble their efforts to understand the specific needs of rural and small town

schools and provide them with additional supports as they work to implement systemic, school-wide SEL.

### **District-Level Implementation Remains Far Behind School-Level Implementation**

Compared to the school level, principals report relatively low rates of district-level benchmarks and one in three principals say their district does not meet any of the benchmarks. While there has been a slight increase in focus, up seven percentage points from 2017, only one-third of principals believe their district places a great deal of emphasis on developing student's social and emotional skills. Given the benefits principals see in integrating social, emotional, and academic learning, this is remarkably low.

**Table 3. Districts Lag Behind Schools in Terms of Implementation**

<i>How well does this describe your school district?</i>	<b>Describes my district very/fairly well</b>	<b>Describes my district very well</b>
The central office leaders of my school's district provide guidance and support for social and emotional learning. <sup>2</sup>	<b>53%</b>	23%
Staff across my school district are supported in learning and developing their own social, emotional, and cultural competencies.	<b>44%</b>	18%
Social and emotional learning is explicitly identified by my school district as part of how we define success for students.	<b>41%</b>	17%
My district's senior leadership speak knowledgeably and regularly about social and emotional learning.	<b>39%</b>	17%
My district provides opportunities for principals and/or school social and emotional learning teams to review social and emotional assessment data collaboratively.	<b>38%</b>	18%
Schools in my district are provided support by a central office for embedding social and emotional learning language and practices into academic instruction and curriculum.	<b>38%</b>	17%
My school's central district leadership requires all schools to have a clear plan for teaching students social and emotional learning.	<b>37%</b>	18%
My school district collaborates with community partners who work with students outside of school hours to support their social and emotional competencies.	<b>37%</b>	17%
Staff, students, families, and community partners across my school district use a common language to describe social and emotional competencies.	<b>36%</b>	16%
My district creates reports of social and emotional learning data for schools.	<b>32%</b>	14%

<sup>2</sup>This response is from a different survey question than the rest of the table. The measurement for this question was "describes my school very/fairly well."



Principals in urban schools are the most likely to rate their districts highly on each benchmark, with 57 percent of urban principals reporting high district implementation, defined as meeting eight or nine benchmarks. Conversely, 40 percent of small town and rural principals say their district does not meet any of the benchmarks. Meanwhile, principals with more low-income students are more likely to report that SEL is not a priority for their district than schools with lower levels of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. This is troubling, as these types of schools tend to have lower levels of student achievement and graduation rates, making them the schools that especially need SEL to improve student outcomes (Atwell, Balfanz, Bridgeland, & DePaoli, 2019).

Despite the relatively lower levels of district-level implementation, principals do report district leaders are providing more guidance and support for SEL at higher levels, increasing from 34 percent in 2017 to 53 percent. Moreover, principals in districts that place a high emphasis on SEL report greater levels of success in developing students' social and emotional skills, as well as greater implementation across a host of benchmarks, including SEL integrated into curricula, all teachers being expected to teach SEL, having a SEL planning team in place to support SEL, and having a separate curriculum for teaching students social

and emotional skills. These findings point to the important role districts play in school-level SEL implementation, as well as the need for additional district-level resources and collaborations to support SEL implementation.

### **High SEL Implementers More Likely to Perceive Benefits**

Schools that have implemented their long-term SEL plan are much more likely to see the benefits of social and emotional learning. Ninety-three percent of schools that have implemented their long-term SEL plan (high-implementation) say their school is very or fairly successful at developing students' social and emotional skills, compared to 79 percent of partial-implementation schools and 47 percent of schools that are still in the process of developing a long-term SEL plan (low-implementation). High-implementation schools are also more likely to believe SEL skills have a very major benefit on students' achievement in coursework (71 percent), compared to 57 percent of low-implementers. High-implementers are also much more likely to believe teachers in their school are prepared to successfully teach students' social and emotional skills, with 81 percent of high-implementers believing their teachers are prepared compared to just 25 percent of low-implementers.

## Survey Finding 3: Growing SEL in Schools and Districts

**The previous two sections show that despite principals' enthusiasm for developing students' social and emotional skills, they need help expanding implementation.**

This will require reducing barriers to implementation, including time constraints, working with teachers to show that SEL integration is not an "add-on" activity, and providing teachers with additional professional development opportunities.

### Principals Believe Teachers are More Prepared to Teach Students Social and Emotional Skills

More principals believe teachers are prepared to successfully develop the social and emotional skills of students now (53 percent) than in 2017 (45 percent). These gains may be driven by increases in the availability of coordinated professional development programs and the time teachers have to teach SEL. Since 2017, there has been a 14-percentage point gain in the percent of principals who say their school has a professional development program that addresses SEL, bringing the total to half of all principals. Similarly, the percent of principals reporting teachers not having enough time to develop students' SEL skills declined from 71 percent to 61 percent.

### Principals Report a Range of Barriers to Implementing SEL

Despite significant improvement in the landscape of SEL in schools, significant challenges persist. Principals cite lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school, teachers not having enough time, lack of dedicated SEL funding streams, and teachers needing more training to support students' SEL skills development as the largest challenges to implementation.

Despite progress on teacher preparedness, principals continue to cite the need for additional professional development for teachers as the most significant factor to ensure schools' successful development of students' SEL skills, and 6 in 10 principals still point to teachers not having enough time as a big challenge. The National SEAD Commission also signaled that teacher education, licensure, and professional development were critical and often missing components of the effort to integrate SEL in schools and classrooms.

Schools with more low-income students are more likely to report significant challenges to implementing SEL. Significantly, schools with more than 80 percent of low-income students are more likely to cite a lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school by 27 percentage points in addition to teachers needing additional SEL training, lack of prioritization at the district level, and teacher turnover as significant challenges. These findings emphasize the need to ensure low-income schools are receiving the most intensive supports to implement SEL programming.

**Figure 4.** Despite improvements, significant challenges persist in implementing SEL

*For these potential challenges schools might face in trying to implement teaching SEL skills, how much of a challenge is each for your school?*

	Very Big Challenge	Fairly Big Challenge	Very/Fairly	very/fairly 2017
Lack of reinforcement of these skills outside school	33%	31%	64%	59%
Teachers not having enough time	33%	28%	61%	71%
Lack of funding dedicated to support social and emotional learning	33%	26%	59%	59%
Teachers needing more training to support students' social and emotional skills development	26%	31%	57%	60%

**Figure 5.** Higher poverty schools face certain challenges at higher rates

*Proportions saying each aspect of students' SEL skills development is a very/fairly big challenge for their school:*

	Schools with more than 80% free/reduced price lunch	Schools with less than 40% free/reduced price lunch	Gap
Lack of reinforcement outside of school	78%	51%	27 points
Teachers needing more training to support students' SEL skills development	64%	55%	9 points
Not a priority for my school district	40%	28%	12 points
Teacher turnover leads to inconsistent delivery of SEL	39%	23%	16 points

## Similar Findings and Support from Other Surveys of Principals

In 2019, RAND released *“Teacher and Principal Perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning in America’s Schools,”* a nationally representative survey of more than 15,000 K-12 teachers and 3,500 principals in the United States. The survey analyzed teachers’ and principals’ attitudes toward social and emotional learning, types of programming and assessment, and school needs. Relevant responses from principals are included below.

### Attitudes

- Seventy-two percent of principals see SEL as one of their top priorities, with nine percent saying it is their top priority.
- Principals consistently rate specific SEL skills as fairly or very important.
- Nearly all principals believe that SEL contributes to improved student behavior (99 percent), school climate (99 percent), student engagement (98 percent), and student achievement (98 percent).

### Programming and Assessment

- SEL strategies are more formal at the primary level (71 percent elementary versus 52 percent secondary) and more informal at the secondary level (66 percent secondary versus 54 percent elementary).
- Only 14 percent of principals said they did not measure SEL at all. The most common assessment approach was teacher, peer educator, or administration observations of classroom and student behavior.

### Needs

- Thirty percent of principals report preservice SEL training, 66 percent report in-service training, though principals with fewer years of experience report preservice at a higher rate than their more experienced peers.
- The most common requests by principals was additional time (42 percent), followed by strategies for multi-tiered support systems (37 percent), and strategies for engaging students in their own SEL (35 percent).
- The comparison also found that principals in high-poverty schools were more likely to see SEL as their top priority, implement any SEL program, use SEL for behavior management and restorative practices, and select parent and student engagement as a desired support.

In 2018, McGraw-Hill created the *“2018 Social and Emotional Learning Report,”* surveying 1,100+ educators, administrators, and parents about the professional development, resources, and support for SEL in PreK-12 classrooms. Relevant findings include:

- Nearly two-thirds of educators surveyed said their school is in the process of implementing a school-wide strategic SEL plan;
- Nearly two-thirds of teachers surveyed said they need more time to teach SEL skills;
- Only 64 percent of teachers currently teaching SEL felt they were “somewhat prepared” to teach SEL, and only 22 percent felt they were “very prepared;” and
- Over half of the teachers (51 percent) said that the level of professional development offered on SEL at their school is not sufficient.

## Survey Finding 4: Assessing SEL

**As high proportions of principals continue to see the value of SEL, more principals are becoming supportive of SEL assessments, as well as calling for state leaders to explicitly incorporate social and emotional development into state learning standards.**

Yet, despite increased use, some principals question the effectiveness of current assessments, highlighting the need to improve current measures of SEL, as well as advance better training on how to use and collect SEL data. The *Establishing Practical Social-Emotional Competence Assessments of Preschool to High School Students Project* provides resources and supports for the beneficial use of SEL measurement and use (see <http://measuringSEL.casel.org/>; Assessment Work Group, 2019).

### **More Principals Believe SEL Can—and Should—Be Assessed**

Three-quarters of principals believe students' development and acquisition of social and emotional skills can be accurately measured and assessed, a slight increase from 2017 (71 percent). More strikingly, nearly 7 in 10 principals feel students' social and emotional skills should be assessed, up 11 percentage points from 58 percent. Still, only about a quarter of principals (28 percent) say social and emotional skills should definitely be part of student assessments and that SEL skills can be accurately assessed (22 percent).

### **Familiarity with Current SEL Assessments has Increased, but More Progress Needed**

Over one-third of principals (37 percent) report being familiar with current assessments that are available for measuring students' social and emotional skills, a significant increase from 17 percent in 2017. Principals similarly believe more teachers (33 percent) know at least a great deal or fair amount about how to use assessment data to improve instruction than they did previously (16 percent in 2017). While it is encouraging to see teachers' familiarity with assessments more than double, these numbers indicate the large majority of principals and teachers are still generally unfamiliar with current SEL assessments.

Encouragingly, familiarity with SEL assessments has grown more with younger principals, as 49 percent of principals under age 45 say they are very or fairly familiar with SEL assessments, compared to 23 percent in 2017. What's more, this is substantially higher than principals age 45 to 54 (29 percent), and those age 55 or older (32 percent).

### **More Principals are Using Assessments but More Useful Assessments Still Needed**

Eighty-three percent of principals are currently using some type of assessment for students' social and emotional skills, up from 77 percent in 2017. This increase was seen in a variety of assessment types as well, including use of performance measures, student

self-reports, and in administrative records. Importantly, more principals (40 percent) are using assessments of social and emotional skills with *all* students than in 2017 (24 percent), but most principals continue to only assess a subset of their students.

In addition, increasing percentages of principals are using assessments in a variety of specific ways. There are increased uses of assessment for the following purposes: improving instruction (18 percent in 2017 to 32 percent in 2019), program evaluation (17 percent to 32 percent), and sharing data with parents on their child's social and emotional skills (19 percent to 31 percent). This marks significant growth from 2017 when less than one in five principals were using assessments for any of these purposes. Principals also reported being more likely to report SEL data to district offices now (23 percent) than in 2017 (15 percent).

Interestingly, while principals are using assessments in more diverse ways and are assessing more students, the most common types of assessments principals use remain classroom behavioral observations and administrative records on disciplinary actions. Student self-report and performance assessments on specific tasks, however, have seen the greatest increases in usage, with jumps of 10 and 17 percentage points, respectively. Still, just about one-third of principals are using student self-reports (36 percent) and performance assessments (32 percent), compared to more than 6 in 10 principals using behavioral observations (65 percent) and administrative records (61 percent).

Principals also believe that if reliable assessments were available to them, they would be important for many uses. Nearly 9 in 10 principals (89 percent) say reliable SEL assessments would be fairly or very important to identify students in need of intervention, while more than 8 in 10 believe assessment data is important for evaluating SEL programs (86 percent), sharing data with parents (83 percent), and improving teacher instruction (82 percent). What's more, these proportions have all increased over the past two years, up from 79 percent, 73 percent, and 72 percent, respectively. In addition, more principals are starting to believe reliable SEL assessment data would be important for reporting data to districts (from 50 percent in 2017 to 64 percent in 2019), holding schools accountable (from 34 percent to 47 percent), and evaluating teacher performance (from 28 percent to 45 percent).

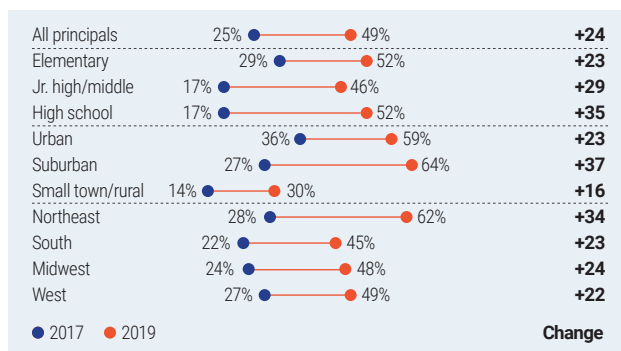
Encouragingly, more principals see current assessments for students' social and emotional skills as fairly or very useful, increasing 17 percentage points from 2017 up to 45 percent. Still, less than half believe these assessments to be useful despite SEL assessments becoming more widespread, emphasizing the need for more useful assessments. Yet, districts that place greater emphasis on social

and emotional learning and high-implementation schools find assessments far more useful. Seventy percent of principals who say their district places a great deal of emphasis on SEL believe assessments are useful, compared to 44 percent of districts placing a fair amount of emphasis on SEL, and 12 percent placing some or less emphasis. Similarly, 64 percent of principals who have implemented a SEL program find current assessments useful.

### Principals Increasingly Believe that Developing Social and Emotional Skills should be Included in State Education Standards

Principals overwhelmingly believe that social and emotional skill development should probably or definitely be explicitly stated in state education standards (87 percent). This marks a sizable increase from 73 percent in 2017, including strong support nearly doubling from 25 percent to 49 percent.

**Figure 6.** SEL skills DEFINITELY SHOULD be explicitly stated in state’s education standards:



Support has also grown substantially in all corners of the country, particularly the northeast where the percent of principals that definitely believe SEL skills should be explicitly stated in standards has grown 34 percentage points, from 28 percent in 2017 to 62 percent. Yet, support lags in small town and rural areas relative to urban and suburban schools. Strong support for state SEL standards increased in urban and suburban areas by 23 and 37 percentage points, respectively, compared to just 16 percentage points for rural and small town schools, bringing overall support to 59 percent, 64 percent, and 30 percent, respectively.

### Principals Use School-Level Data to Address Student Behavior, Ensure Equity

When asked about how school-level data is used to continuously improve SEL-related systems, principals most often mention it as a means to address students’ behavioral issues. Seventy-two percent of principals use school-level data for student attendance and absenteeism data and the number of disciplinary referrals. Principals in high-poverty schools are also more likely to report using school-level data in this manner. In addition, nearly two in three principals (65 percent) report that they use school-level data to ensure equity in SEL a great deal or fair amount.

## Resources for School Leaders

For schools to successfully implement systemic, school-wide SEL, principals and teachers will need additional support. The following section provides a list and description of resources that can be used in implementing SEL. These resources provide guidance for school leaders at any stage of SEL implementation.

### The Assessment Work Group and Measuring SEL Resources

A diverse group of multi-disciplinary researchers and practitioners, the Assessment Work Group (AWG), have been working for three years on SEL assessment issues and creating a number of helpful resources available at *Measuring SEL* and designed to support using data to inspire practice. Two of the resources developed by AWG and anchor partner RAND can help one find an appropriate assessment tool from the growing number of high-quality social and emotional competence assessments available to support teaching and learning—the interactive *Assessment Guide* and *RAND Education Assessment Finder*. There are also several series of *free briefs* about SEL frameworks—what they are, why they are important, criteria for reviewing and selecting one to drive your SEL efforts as well as descriptions of nine common frameworks, several useful comparison tools, and ways of using equity and developmental lenses. There is also an excellent *report* (AWG, 2019) on the current state of SEL assessment and a vision for its role in the future. There is growing consensus on what it means for a social and emotional competence assessment to be suitable for a variety of uses. According to the report, social and emotional competence assessments will be in the best position to support teaching and learning when the social and emotional competencies described in state standards and guidelines are aligned with the competencies that are the target of instruction and the same competencies that assessments are designed to assess. When this happens, assessment can be used to help educators decide what competencies to teach to which students at what time, and to monitor the acquisition of the competencies that matter most. For ongoing updates about SEL assessment, consider joining the Collaborator Network to receive weekly logs and keep up on the latest news. Currently, members come from 86 countries and all 50 states.

### The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

The Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (NC-SEAD) brought together educators, students, parents, policymakers, researchers, and other leaders to “engage and energize communities in re-envisioning learning to encompass its social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions,” with the goal of equipping students for success in school, careers, and life. The commission spent two years reviewing research and conducting site visits around the country to gauge the science basis and current situation regarding SEAD and make recommendations for the future of learning.

The commission published preliminary documents outlining the evidence-base for SEAD, including *“The Evidence Base For How We Learn,”* written by a 28-member Council of Distinguished Scientists, *“A Policy Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens,”* and *“The Practice Base For How We Learn,”* written by a Council of Distinguished Educators. All three documents demonstrate a consensus of the imperative and positive nature of SEAD in all components of education. In 2019, NC-SEAD published its full report, *“From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope”* and three supplementary agendas on Policy, Practice, and Research.

NC-SEAD’s Practice Agenda serves as a useful addendum that specifically tailors the full report’s recommendations to educators and administrators working at the school level. This agenda builds on the initial report, but with a school-level focus. The *Practice Agenda* defines and explains five key recommendations and details specific strategies educators and administrators can take to implement them, including “in practice” exemplars and specific action-oriented directives.

**The recommendations include:**

1. Set a clear vision;
2. Create safe and supportive learning environments in school and community settings;
3. Teach students social, emotional, and cognitive skills explicitly and embed them in all curriculum;
4. Build adult capacity; and
5. Work together as advocates and partners for student learning.

Principals play a unique role in fostering educational progress since they can change a school culture and model their success for other schools to affect the broader district culture. NC-SEAD’s report and practice agenda acknowledge the capacity of this position, serving as a useful tool for principals as they continue to implement SEAD priorities and foster support for the initiative.

**The Aspen Institute’s Action Guide for School Leadership Teams**

In March 2019, the Aspen Institute Education and Society Program created *“Integrating Social, Emotional and Economic Development: An Action Guide for School Leadership Teams,”* a comprehensive recommendation plan for school leaders to evaluate their current practices and effectively incorporate SEL into all aspects of students’ daily lives. The guide outlines the “three-legged-stool” for implementing SEL in the whole school, including explicit SEL instruction, embedded SEL practices, and an inclusive environment based on positive relationships. The guide clearly breaks down implementation into five broad focus areas, providing foundational research, equity implications, guiding questions, high-impact actions, and curated resources for each topic, as well as three case studies to show implementation in practice.

The five focus areas together encompass all aspects of SEL implementation and provide useful details on how school leaders can accomplish each piece in their school.

**The areas include:**

1. *A Vision of Student Success* that is representative of the aspirations of the whole school community and that guides the rest of the focus areas;
2. *Focus on the Student Learning Experience* encompassing regular class time, curriculum, pedagogy, and even lunchtime or outside school-related events;
3. *Adult Learning in Support of Student Success*, acknowledging a need for constant teacher improvement and professional development in order to foster positive relationships with students and other adults;
4. Intentional building of an inclusive *Learning Environment and Climate* that reflects all populations in the school community and cultivates character, honor, and trust; and
5. Complete understanding of *Asset Mapping and Resource Allocation* in order to organize or reorganize all available resources to most efficiently promote methods to reach the vision of student success.

Much like NC-SEAD’s practice agenda, this action guide brings together additional resources, except the Education and Society Program targets school leadership teams’ roles in particular.





## CASEL School Guide for SEL

*CASEL's Guide to Schoolwide SEL* is a free, online resource to support school leaders in starting or continuing SEL implementation at the school level. The website was launched in January 2019 after 13 years of testing and evaluating the system and is based on nearly 25 years of evidence-based SEL research.

**The guide contains four basic focus areas under the broad categories of organizing, implementing and improving:**

1. Get Started 1A: Build Awareness, Commitment, and Ownership and 1B: Create a Plan;
2. Strengthen Adult SEL;
3. Promote SEL for Students; and
4. Practice Continuous Improvement.

School administrators or SEL implementation personnel can begin by taking an interactive questionnaire that quickly determines which focus area to begin with, and then gain access to over 90 searchable documents sorted by area. Ten specific indicators demonstrate the progress the school has made, and checklists are available, complete with detailed descriptions of all criteria. An implementation timeline details

the first year of work and suggests what to target in year two and beyond, and extra resource pages outline common questions such as how to implement SEL through a lens of equity, or how to incorporate SEL with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. By creating an account, school leaders can return to the guide to track progress in the future as well.

This complete and detailed guide is a powerful resource for all administrators looking for implementation support, especially on a budget. School leaders have the flexibility to use just some parts of the site, or all of the programming and supports, regardless of whether they have already begun implementation or are just getting started.

# Policy Recommendations

**Principals, teachers, and students have all articulated the demand for greater integration and implementation of SEL into their schools and classrooms, as well as a belief in its ability to be taught, assessed, and improve everything we already measure, including student achievement and engagement.**

Now it is time for leaders at the district, state, and federal levels to work together to create the enabling conditions needed for systemic, school-wide SEL in schools throughout the country.

For policies to be successful, it is essential they prioritize equity and be informed by local context. By doing so, SEL can be a powerful level in combatting cultural or racial inequalities in schools and communities, as well as equip students to tackle local challenges.

The following policies are informed by the work of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, CASEL's Collaborating States Initiative and Collaborating Districts Initiative, and decades of advances in SEL research, practice, and policy.

## **Create and articulate a clear vision for students' comprehensive development, including SEL**

To create effective policy and practice, states, districts, and schools require a clear vision of what student success, and SEL look like, as well as how it will be measured. Many states and districts already have mission statements or visions. Now is the time to revisit these statements with greater knowledge of how learning happens. This vision should be informed by what students should be able to do at each age level and be aligned with the best evidence on social and emotional skill development. At the state level, the vision for SEL must be adaptable to allow school and district leaders the flexibility to address the local contexts of their communities, while still providing a strong framework for advancing and implementing systemic SEL and assessment.

## **Promote the development of adult capacity and strengthen SEL training among teachers and administrators**

The findings of this survey make it clear that principals believe additional professional development is needed for teachers to successfully develop students' SEL skills. This should come as no surprise. In *The Missing Piece*, only 55 percent of teachers said they had received SEL training of any kind (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hanriharan, 2013). A recent scan of SEL content in state teachers' certification requirements by the University of British Columbia found that while state requirements incorporate several of CASEL's SEL competencies, a disconnect persists between requirements and coursework being provided

to preservice teachers (Schonert-Reichl, Kital, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017). Moreover, a recent RAND survey found that only 16 percent of teachers reported receiving any preservice training related to SEL (Hamilton, Doss, & Steiner, 2019).

Although it is clear that principals and teachers value the development of their students' social and emotional competencies, they need greater support and a better understanding of the vast knowledge-base on effective SEL programming. Less than 4 in 10 principals report being familiar with current SEL assessments, while principals believe just over one in three teachers are familiar with how to use data from assessments. As the knowledge base continues to grow, schools and districts should make research-based teaching practices more readily available to teachers.

State leaders should ensure educator preparation programs and licensure requirements reflect the knowledge and competencies necessary to successfully support students' social and emotional development. SEL training should also be embedded in continuing education requirements for faculty and educators, and districts should hire and retain educators with proven background or training in SEL.

## **Foster and support continuous improvement of learning environments**

Evidence shows the importance of creating safe learning environments that generate a strong sense of community among both students and educators that allow students to feel known, respected, and supported (Reyes et al., 2012). A positive learning environment is related to higher academic achievement; better emotional, mental, and physical health; better behavioral outcomes; and increased teacher retention (Durlak et al., 2011). The survey results presented in this report also make clear that principals believe SEL can have powerful positive impacts on classroom culture and learning environments.

State leaders should enable districts and schools to create and continually improve supportive learning environments that promote strong relationships, provide personalized supports for students, and create engaging and relevant learning opportunities. To do this, state and district leaders must support the creation and adoption of data systems to continually improve learning environments for all students. It is also essential that policies and resources are aligned to provide equitable access to high-quality learning environments for each and every student. This will require closing SEL implementation gaps for low-income and rural schools.

### **Support state SEL learning standards and competency benchmarks backed by funding and resources for full implementation**

Increasingly, educators are calling for states to explicitly include the development of students' social and emotional skills into state learning standards (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). It is past time for state leaders to heed these calls and create state social and emotional competency benchmarks.

State SEL standards should be used as a high-impact lever to implement many of the policy recommendations included here. Specifically, they can include the vision for students' SEL development, and inform best practices and continuous learning on integrating SEL into academic curricula. They can also provide guidance for higher education institutions by laying the groundwork for integrating SEL into pre-service teacher training programs and guide professional development of teachers and administrators. Unlike academic standards, however, it is important SEL standards and benchmarks are only used to improve teaching and learning and are excluded from high-stakes accountability systems at this time. Standards should also be backed by the funding and state level infrastructure necessary to successfully support schools and districts as they implement systemic SEL.

## Conclusion

*Over the past decade, a consensus has emerged that embedding social and emotional learning into the classroom and school culture and climate has powerful benefits for student achievement, the classroom environment, and success out of school. At the same time, school leaders, teachers, and students have demanded SEL be implemented in their classrooms and schools. Now, it is time to heed these calls and make schools reflect the overwhelming evidence based on how learning happens. For this integration to occur, it will take collaboration from policymakers, educators, researchers, families, students, and community providers to ensure the effective implementation of SEL for every student across the nation.*

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Methodology

**In May and June of 2019, principals were asked to participate in surveys to assess the role and value of developing students' social and emotional skills in America's schools.**

The online survey was conducted from May 8 to June 28, 2019 among 710 kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade public school principals nationwide. The sample was drawn from a comprehensive list of more than 60,000 principals nationwide. The margin of error was 3.67. Slight weights were applied to ensure the sample is representativeness of principals nationwide using a raking methodology; weighting targets for demographic and school-based were based on benchmark data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), including school type, gender of principals, race/ethnicity of principals, size of school, and region of country. The 2019 sample is consistent with the 2017 survey of public school principals conducted by Hart Research from February 21 to March 14, 2017.

The survey was informed by the prior instrument created in 2017 to assess principals' perspectives on the role and value of social and emotional learning. This allowed for cross-comparison on many questions. Survey development was also shaped by discussions with and feedback from researchers in the social and emotional learning field, as well as a prior survey instrument created in 2013 to assess teachers' perceptions of the role and value of social and emotional learning.

### Characteristics of the Survey Sample

The following profile of the 710 public school principals interviewed for this survey reveals a sample that is representative of America's public school principals in terms of their demographic characteristics and the diverse schools they represent.



School Characteristics	
<b>Grade Range</b>	
Elementary School	54%
Middle/Junior High School	16%
High School	21%
K-8 or K-12	9%
<b>Locale Code</b>	
Urban	39%
Suburban	24%
Small town/Rural	37%
<b>Free/Reduced Lunch</b>	
Less than 40%	30%
40% to 79%	45%
80% or More	25%
<b>Geographic Region</b>	
Northeast	18%
South	34%
Midwest	23%
West	25%
<b>School Size</b>	
Less than 250 Students	14%
250 to 499 Students	37%
500 to 749 Students	25%
750 or More Students	24%
<b>Low-Performing</b>	
Currently Low-Performing	19%
Recently Low-Performing	18%
Not currently or recently	63%

Principal Characteristic	
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	53%
Male	47%
<b>Age</b>	
Under 45	37%
45 to 54	36%
55 and older	27%
<b>Years of Experience</b>	
5 or Fewer	39%
6 to 15	46%
16 or More	15%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White	80%
Black	10%
Hispanic	7%
Asian	1%
Other	2%

## Appendix II: Findings from Other SEL Surveys by Hart, Civic, and CASEL

### Findings from *Ready to Lead: A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools*

Civic and Hart Research Associates’ 2017 report *Ready to Lead* gauged school and district leadership’s perspectives and practices surrounding social and emotional learning. The report focused on findings from a nationally representative survey of 884 Pre-K to 12 principals, plus interviews with 16 superintendents and 10 district-level research and evaluation SEL experts. The survey found a high commitment among principals to SEL practices and outcomes but major areas for growth in implementation strategies and assessment of on-the-ground practices. This 2019 update was informed by results from the 2017 survey, and methodology and demographics are consistent between the two, allowing for comparisons integrated throughout this report.

### Findings from *Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning*

Civic’s 2018 collaboration with Hart Research Associates and CASEL entitled *Respected* was a survey of student perspectives on school environment and social and emotional learning in both SEL and non-SEL schools. The survey included 800 high school youth and 500 recent high school graduates, as well as interviews with 11 middle schoolers, 10 current high schoolers, 10 high school graduates, and 17 high schoolers in SEL-focused schools. Broadly, the results matched findings from other SEL surveys: students believe in the power of SEL and see its far-reaching benefits in strong-SEL schools, and students with less SEL exposure also want it in their schools, demonstrating the need for further SEL integration and growth for SEL to reach the students and schools in most need of support.

Students attending a SEL school reported a more positive climate, stronger relationships, and greater preparation for life than those attending a weaker SEL school, and the gaps between responses from weaker and stronger SEL schools on these topics were pronounced. When asked to give their high school a letter grade, 90 percent of recent students from a strong SEL school responded with an A or a B, compared to 42 percent in weak SEL schools. A 50 percentage point difference existed between recent students from strong SEL and weak SEL schools who said students at their schools got along well with each other, and there was a 30 percentage point difference in whether students felt safe at high- and low-SEL schools.

This climate translates directly into academics and students’ futures. Almost all students from strong SEL schools reported that their schools do a pretty good or great job supporting them

academically compared to one-third to half of students from weak SEL schools. Eighty-three percent of students from strong SEL schools reported their school did a great or pretty good job of preparing them for future success after high school, compared to just 13 percent of students from weak SEL schools. Even regarding engagement with the community and civic-mindedness, 57 percent of students from strong SEL schools say they regularly volunteer, compared to 26 percent of graduates from weak SEL schools, and there is a 17 percentage point difference in students who say they would participate in full-time military, national, or public service for their community or country.

Out of the entire student population surveyed, 76 percent wanted to attend a strong SEL school, but many of those students did not have the opportunity to experience it. Fewer than half of recent graduates reported that their school did at least a pretty good job of supporting SEL, and although SEL implementation appeared to be expanding since many current high school students felt their high school did a pretty good job of supporting some SEL skills, only a few students reported support for all seven benchmark skills. Overall, only 36 percent of students considered their schools to be strong SEL schools, and four percent rated their school as doing a great job of supporting all seven SEL benchmarks.

Broken down by demographics, while overall responses were promising, certain student groups still did not report feeling adequately safe, respected, supported, or engaged. Although about 70 to 80 percent of students feel physically safe in school, Hispanic students and lower-income students reported feeling less safe in their high school, and students who felt less safe also reported receiving lower grades. Students from below average income backgrounds were more likely to feel negatively towards their high school experience, including lower comfort in participating, less engagement and motivation, and feeling bored, lonely, and bullied in school. Students who reported having lower grades were also more likely to feel bored, lonely, bullied, and less comfortable participating, and additionally were less excited about learning, felt less comfortable being themselves, and took fewer risks in learning.

Respected provided the essential perspectives of youth on what students in America's schools need. The results were clear: SEL works, students want it, and far too many students are missing it in their education.

### **Findings from *The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools***

In 2013, with the support of CASEL, Civic Enterprises teamed with Hart Research Associates to ask teachers on the front lines of schools their opinions on social and emotional learning. The resulting report, *The Missing Piece*, shared the findings from a nationally representative sample of 605 educators from preschool through

12th-grade. The responses were resounding: teachers understood and endorsed social and emotional learning for all students, and believed in its ability to help students achieve in school and in life.

Nearly all teachers (93 percent) surveyed believed SEL is "very" or "fairly" important for the in-school student experience. Even more teachers (95 percent) believed that social and emotional skills can be taught, and 97 percent reported that SEL would benefit students from all backgrounds, rich or poor.

### **Importantly, three in every four teachers believed a large focus on SEL would be a major benefit to students for a variety of reasons, including:**

- Workforce readiness (87 percent);
- Students becoming good citizens (87 percent);
- Students' staying on track to graduate (80 percent);
- College preparation (78 percent); and
- Academic success (75 percent).

While 88 percent of teachers reported SEL occurring in their schools on some level, less than half (44 percent) said social and emotional skills were being taught on a school-wide, programmatic basis. When asked about barriers to teaching SEL in their schools, 81 percent ranked time as the biggest challenge to implementing SEL, while 36 percent of teachers noted a lack of training and knowledge of how to teach social and emotional skills as a big challenge. Another 30 percent of teachers believed their schools place too little emphasis on developing students' social and emotional skills.

Encouragingly, however, four in five teachers reported interest in receiving further training and nearly 6 in every 10 teachers believed schools should place a great deal of emphasis on developing students' social and emotional skills. The *Missing Piece* also found that teachers were calling for their states to prioritize SEL, as more than three in five teachers (62 percent) thought the development of social and emotional skills should explicitly be stated in their state education standards.

### **Teachers also identified three other key accelerators for social and emotional learning:**

- Connecting social and emotional skills with the Common Core State Standards;
- Providing additional professional development for teachers; and
- Sharing research-based strategies about effective ways to promote students' social and emotional skills.

In *The Missing Piece*, teachers confirmed what the evidence was already saying: that social and emotional skills can be taught and SEL is a powerful tool, capable of boosting students' academic performance and future life success.

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