



CSI SPOTLIGHT

INNOVATION *in Action*



How States and School Districts are Collaborating to Promote Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

Collaborating States Initiative

SEPTEMBER 2018

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Introduction

Since CASEL launched the [Collaborating States Initiative \(CSI\)](#) to support social and emotional learning (SEL) in 2016, participation has grown dramatically. CASEL initially planned to work with five states. In the past two years, the CSI team and its partners have worked with 25, which collectively serve about 11,500 school districts, 58,000 schools, and 30 million students. The initiative is nonpartisan, with blue states, red states, and purple states working together and learning from one another. Leaders in these states all share CASEL’s commitment to help ensure that preschool to high school students are fully prepared—academically, socially, and emotionally—to succeed in school, at work, and in life.

The purpose of the CSI is to help state education agencies create statewide conditions that will encourage and equip educators at the district level to promote integrated, equity-focused, academic, social, and emotional learning.

The purpose of this report is to describe examples of the strategies states have used to connect with, support, and learn from districts, recognizing that many districts are leading the way.

As documented more fully in our June 2018 brief, [District Recommendations for How States Can Support SEL](#), districts want states to:

- Help communicate the importance of SEL.
- Show the clear alignment among SEL and other priorities, regulations, and requirements.
- Advance the work by providing frameworks that allow for flexibility.
- Learn from good work already happening in districts.
- Use districts’ requests for support of SEL to drive the state’s work.
- Facilitate bidirectional communication.
- Help connect districts.

This report begins to note the ways many states have been enacting those recommendations.

Critically important across all of the strategies we describe is that they clearly communicate, first and foremost, that SEL is a statewide priority.

Finally, this document highlights how state and district activities correspond with CASEL's recently revised District Theory of Action (TOA). That TOA, along with a synthesis of 25 participating states' SEL journeys, is informing the development of a CASEL *State* Theory of Action. The emerging State TOA will serve as a road map for other states across the country seeking to advance SEL in systemic ways by creating the conditions for success for local educators.

CASEL District Theory of Action

Focus Areas and Key Activities (2018)

Build foundational support and plan

- Develop a shared vision and plan for SEL
- Promote collaboration among school and district leaders around SEL, academics, and equity
- Communicate SEL as a district priority
- Align resources for SEL

Promote SEL for students

- Adopt and implement PreK-12 SEL competencies/standards or guidelines
- Adopt and implement evidence-based programs and practices
- Integrate SEL with academics, district priorities, and policies
- Develop and strengthen family and community partnerships

Strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity

- Develop central office expertise
- Design and implement a professional learning program for SEL
- Strengthen adult social-emotional competence
- Promote equitable learning environments

Use data for continuous improvement

- Plan for improvement (Plan)
- Document and assess (Do)
- Report and reflect (Study)
- Action plan and share (Act)



CSI Spotlight 2

A companion report, [*Deeper Insights: How Six States Are Collaborating with Local and Regional Educators to Implement Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*](#), provides a closer look at some innovative efforts currently underway to actively partner with and support districts:

- **Delaware:** Getting started on a grassroots, educator-led movement
- **Iowa:** Using existing processes to implement SEL for sustainability
- **Minnesota:** Piloting implementation once key policy resources are in place
- **North Dakota:** Leveraging existing systems to support implementation of SEL
- **Rhode Island:** Building educator capacity through professional learning communities
- **Wisconsin:** Using multiple channels to spread the word and build understanding

① Elevating Districts' SEL Work

In order to inform policy work or guidance at the state level, states are taking advantage of opportunities to learn from their districts.

For example, in developing their SEL competencies (which some states refer to as standards, benchmarks, or guidelines), **Nevada** leaders first asked local districts for examples of their work. Following that process, **Nevada** adopted verbatim the SEL competencies that **Washoe County** developed. Washoe County is among the 20 members of CASEL's [Collaborating Districts Initiative](#) (CDI), an effort to support a network of school districts across the country to implement systemic, districtwide SEL. The CDI served as the inspiration for the CSI. Noted throughout this report are examples of CDI districts partnering with their state education agency (SEA) leaders to help build state-level expertise.

The **Ohio** CSI team visited Cleveland and spent the day observing the district's pioneering Humanware SEL work (Cleveland, Warren, and Youngstown also are members of the CDI). Members of the **California** state team visited **Sacramento City Unified**, also a CDI district. That visit, and participation on the state team by district SEL leaders, influenced [California's SEL Guiding Principles](#).

Even in states without CDI participants, states are elevating examples of district leadership and excellence. **Wisconsin's** [website](#) features short videos and case studies from districts to help make the case for SEL.

Relevant Theory of Action Focus Areas and Key Activities

Build foundational support and plan

- Develop a shared vision and plan for SEL
- Promote collaboration among school and district leaders
- Communicate SEL as a district priority
- Align resources for SEL

Strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity

- Develop central office expertise

“We’re responding to demand. This is coming from the grassroots.”

Ohio State Superintendent Paolo DeMaria

“We’re late on this issue. Districts are way ahead of us. We’re finding good practices from them and then sharing with others.”

Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers

② Listening to Multiple Stakeholders

To guide all their work on SEL, states are informed by broad stakeholder input from districts and their communities. For example, **Rhode Island** created an SEL advisory committee that meets three times a year. Participants include teachers, superintendents, principals, social workers, psychologists, parents, and higher education leaders.

Washington State's initial Benchmarks Work Group included similar sectors, along with nonprofit advocacy groups, the Rural Alliance, ombudsmen, the Washington Education Association, educational service districts, ESA organizations, and representatives from early learning and higher education. They spent two months gathering input on draft SEL standards and benchmarks. The newer Indicators Work Group adds leaders from commissions

representing the Asian, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American communities.

In addition to district representation, neighboring **Oregon** also has created a “big tent” with participation from those representing youth development, out-of-school time, early childhood, special education, and local districts. Continuing a West Coast focus, **California's** state team is comprised of more than 20 education, youth development, and SEL experts from across the state. Each participant represents a stakeholder group including county offices and districts, out-of-school-time partners, educator unions, social justice and youth voice advocates, teacher education and credentialing organizations, research partnerships, the philanthropic community, and parent-teacher groups.



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Promote SEL for students

- Develop and strengthen family and community partnership

Reflecting the state’s grassroots, teacher-led approach, **Delaware** conducted a broad [scan](#) of statewide SEL efforts and educator understanding, which included surveys and interviews of educators throughout the state. A collaborative group of stakeholders is overseeing the state’s application to join the CSI. Participants include representatives from local school districts, the Delaware Department of Education, the Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project, the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, Compassionate Schools Delaware, and the Delaware School Counselor Association. The collaborating partners are committed to developing a common language, framework, and competencies to guide SEL in the state.

Ohio and **Iowa** also used statewide educator surveys to help develop their plans for SEL. **Iowa** has a statewide SEL advisory group that includes higher education, regional area education agencies, local school district superintendents, leaders from organizations representing Iowa’s growing diversity, six stakeholder working groups, a classroom teacher work group starting in fall 2018, and a youth work group.

Massachusetts routinely consults with a broad group of stakeholders, including student, teacher, principal, and superintendent advisory bodies. To facilitate bidirectional information sharing, **Michigan** state department leaders have been conducting a series of “Lunch and Learn” meetings with principals throughout the state, organized by the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association, which is very active and committed to SEL.

Higher Education and SEL

Michigan is working with several state universities to develop a plan for higher education support of SEL. In **Nevada**, Washoe County and Clark County have been working with the state and state universities to explore the creation of an SEL teacher endorsement and a related research agenda to determine what outcomes are linked to specific SEL training for teachers.



③ Adopting Competencies/Standards

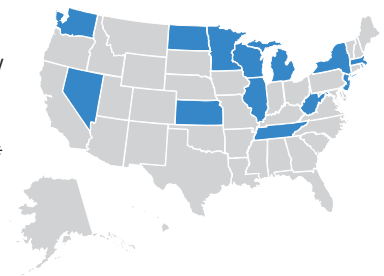
To help districts prioritize SEL, it's important that the state define what SEL means. They are doing so by describing competencies (sometimes called standards, learning goals, or benchmarks) that explicitly describe what students should know and be able to do at different developmental levels. Most of these competencies are based on [CASEL's five core competencies](#).

The number of states that have developed and/or adopted competencies/standards to advance SEL has increased steadily in the past several years. The growth reflects several trends: (1) increased awareness about the positive benefits of SEL; (2) the resulting increased demand from districts and schools for state clarity and support in this area; and (3) provisions in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which requires states to expand their accountability systems and therefore their definition of student success to include a ["non-academic indicator."](#)

In 2011, when CASEL launched the [State Scorecard Project](#), 48 states had articulated preschool standards or competencies for SEL. But only two states had articulated SEL competencies/standards that extended from preschool into the early elementary grades, and only one (Illinois) had articulated them through 12th grade.

Today, at least 14 states have articulated SEL competencies/standards from PreK through 12th grade:

- Illinois ([PreK-12](#))(2004)*
- Kansas ([PreK-12](#)) (2012/ updated 2018)
- Maine ([PreK-12](#)) (2012)*
- Michigan ([PreK-12](#)) (2017)
- Minnesota ([PreK-12](#)) (2018)
- Nevada ([PreK-12](#)) (2017)
- New Jersey ([PreK-12](#)) (2017)
- New York ([PreK-12](#)) (2018)
- North Dakota ([PreK-12](#)) (2018)
- Rhode Island ([PreK-12](#)) (2017)
- Tennessee ([PreK-12](#)) (2017)
- Washington ([PreK-12](#)) (2016)
- West Virginia ([PreK-12](#)) (2012)
- Wisconsin ([PreK-Adulthood](#)) (2018)*



**Indicates that the competencies/standards are aligned to the PreK competencies*

Relevant Theory of Action Focus Areas and Key Activities

Promote SEL for students

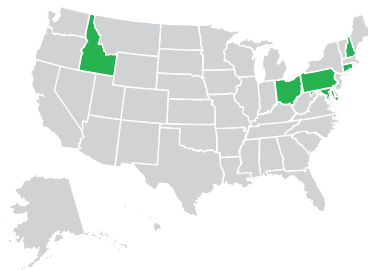
- Adopt and implement PreK-12 SEL competencies/standards or guidelines



Based on competencies/standards that are under development by CSI states, CASEL expects that, by the end of 2019, at least 18 states will have articulated SEL competencies/standards from PreK through 12th grade.

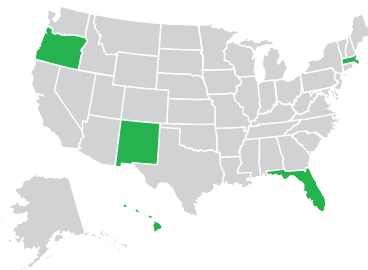
An additional six states now have PreK-early elementary competencies/standards for SEL, all aligned to the PreK competencies:

- Connecticut ([PreK-3rd grade](#)) (2018)
- Idaho ([birth-3rd grade](#)) (2011)
- Maryland ([birth-2nd grade](#)) (2016)
- Ohio ([PreK-3rd grade](#)) (2015)
- Pennsylvania ([PreK-2nd grade](#)) (2016)
- Vermont ([birth-3rd grade](#)) (2015)



An additional five states have preschool through kindergarten competencies/standards for SEL, all aligned to the PreK competencies.

- Florida ([birth-K](#)) (2017)
- Hawaii ([birth-K](#)) (2014)
- Massachusetts ([PreK-K](#)) (2015)
- Oregon ([age 3-K](#)) (2016)
- New Mexico ([birth-K](#)) (2014)



All of the remaining 25 states have preschool-only competencies for SEL.

Planning Tools

States have been using three planning tools created in collaboration with their peers through the CSI:

- [Key Features of High-Quality Policies and Guidelines to Support SEL](#) (now replaced by our expanded CSI Resources webpage)
- [Recommended Process for Developing State Policies and Guidelines to Support SEL](#)
- [A Process for Developing and Articulating Learning Goals or Competencies for SEL](#)

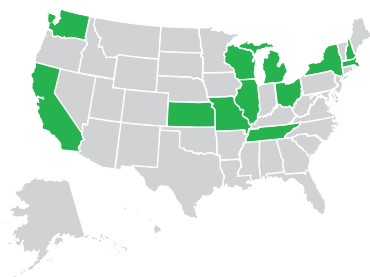


④ Supporting Districts Through Guidance and Communities of Practice

States also are providing increased levels of support for SEL to local districts and public charter schools. For example, in addition to adopting SEL competencies/standards, 21 states have posted guidance related to SEL implementation on their websites. In a growing number of cases, the guidance and examples refer back to the good work of local districts.

Fourteen states created *state-specific* guidance/tools to support implementation of SEL

- [California](#)
- [Illinois](#)
- [Kansas](#)
- [Massachusetts](#)
- [Michigan](#)
- [Minnesota](#)
- [Missouri](#)
- [New Hampshire](#)
- [New York](#)
- [Ohio](#)
- [Rhode Island](#)
- [Tennessee](#)
- [Washington](#)
- [Wisconsin](#)



Relevant Theory of Action Focus Areas and Key Activities

Build foundational support and plan

- Promote collaboration among school and district leaders around SEL, academics, and equity
- Communicate SEL as a district priority
- Align resources for SEL

Strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity

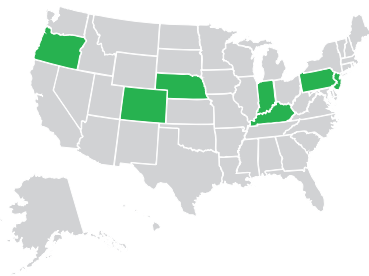
- Develop central office expertise
- Design and implement a professional learning program for SEL
- Strengthen adult social-emotional competence
- Promote equitable learning environments

Promote SEL for students

- Adopt and implement PreK-12 SEL competencies/standards or guidelines
- Adopt and implement evidence-based programs and practices
- Develop and strengthen family and community partnerships
- Integrate SEL with academics, district priorities, and policies

Seven states link to *external* resources and tools on their websites to support implementation of SEL

- [Colorado](#)
- [Indiana](#)
- [Kentucky](#)
- [Nebraska](#)
- [New Jersey](#)
- [Oregon](#)
- [Pennsylvania](#)



Notably, **Washington State's** [website](#) features a five-part professional development series that is being used by trainers and educators within the state of Washington and across the country and around the world. Segments include: introduction to SEL; embedding SEL schoolwide; creating a professional culture; integrating SEL into culturally responsive classrooms; and identifying and selecting evidence-based programs. Several states are adapting this series for use in their own contexts.

The **Massachusetts** [website](#) includes multiple resources, including information about SEL competencies, practical implementation guidelines, and encouragement and examples of how to integrate SEL with English language arts and mathematics as well as a guidance document about culturally responsive teaching. The **Kansas** [website](#) has extensive links to SEL resources in areas such as professional development, trauma-informed schools, and restorative practices. **Wisconsin's** [website](#) features voices from the field, infographics making the case for SEL, district case studies, and multiple practical tools for educators. Further, state leaders are using a variety of channels to share information and learn from the field—including conferences, webinars, and monthly call-ins that focus on peers sharing advice with peers.

Rhode Island's [website](#) and **California's** [website](#), among others, include a group email sign up so educators and others can receive updates on SEL planning, professional learning opportunities, and links to resources.

Facilitating Collaboration

In addition to virtual resources, **Minnesota, Nevada, Rhode Island,** and **Wisconsin** have begun to support communities of practice through which local educators regularly collaborate on problems of practice and share SEL resources. By virtue of these opportunities, SEL has grown stronger in smaller, rural districts as well as in larger urban systems.

Nevada's **Washoe County** has hosted neighboring school districts for training on SEL, to share materials and conduct organized visit days to show how its SEL programming, including restorative justice programs, work in its schools.

States such as **Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota,** and **Pennsylvania** are working closely with county offices of education and regional service centers to provide SEL support to districts. **California's** state-level efforts catalyzed a county office-led community of practice model, beginning with **Sacramento County**, which is leveraging CDI district **Sacramento City's** SEL expertise. The state also has facilitated a professional learning community for the past three years to align in-school and after-school SEL work; lessons are being embedded at the state department of education for sharing and replication.

Deeper Insights: How Six States Are Collaborating with Local and Regional Educators to Implement Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning has details about many of these deeper engagement efforts.

⑤ Aligning SEL with Other Key Initiatives Across the State

In addition to providing online resources and tools, many states are supporting districts by helping to make connections between and building coherence around SEL, academics, and related initiatives, in particular educational equity efforts. They regard integration of SEL in all state education priorities as a key objective.

Academics

A prominent priority across states is to integrate SEL more intentionally with all academic learning—to reframe “student learning” to mean “student academic, social, and emotional learning.” States are approaching this in a variety of ways. To support the work of all states in this area, **Pennsylvania** and **Massachusetts** collaborated with CASEL to help develop tools to identify where and how SEL teaching practices and instruction can be seamlessly integrated into academics.

- [Sample Teaching Activities to Support SEL Core Competencies](#)
- [SEL in Elementary English Language Arts](#)
- [SEL in High School English Language Arts](#)
- [SEL in Elementary Mathematics](#)
- [SEL in Middle School Social Studies](#)

Massachusetts created preschool and kindergarten competencies/standards for SEL (and Approaches to Play and Learning) in 2015 but has opted not to develop standalone K–12 SEL competencies/standards at this time. Instead, to promote more seamless integration during the school day, the state is infusing SEL into existing high-leverage policies and guidance, including English language arts and literacy, mathematics, and history



Relevant Theory of Action Focus Areas and Key Activities

Build foundational support and plan

- Promote collaboration among school and district leaders around SEL, academics, and equity

Strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity

- Develop central office expertise
- Promote equitable learning environments

Promote SEL for students

- Integrate SEL with academics, district priorities, and policies

and social sciences, as well as a comprehensive health framework.

All of **Pennsylvania's** SEL work is aligned to the state's major focus on career-ready skills. Major current efforts include developing an SEL certificate endorsement and creating a toolkit with SEL performance indicators, formative assessment guidance, and a report documenting career-ready skills that seniors can use with colleges and employers.

Equity and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and Washington are among the many states that have explicitly tied SEL to related efforts to promote equity and culturally responsive learning environments and instruction. **Massachusetts'** guidance, titled [SEL for All: Access, Cultural Proficiency, and Cultural Responsiveness](#), notes the importance of SEL as one strategy for reducing discipline disparities among African-American and Latino students and whites. **Michigan's** SEL competencies and indicators offers a [simple equity checklist \(page 9\)](#). **Minnesota** worked with the Great Lakes Science Center to highlight ways SEL implementation must [promote](#)

[equity and be culturally responsive](#). **Washington State's** [online professional development module](#) instructs on *Integrating SEL into Culturally Responsive Classrooms*.

Trauma, Mental Health, and Related Efforts

North Dakota has benefited significantly from the state's existing Trauma-Informed Learning Community, which has participants from about half the state's 174 school districts as well as more than 200 trainers. **Washington** is also creating a trauma-informed SEL framework. **Wisconsin** is aligning SEL with its mental health framework, character education, out-of-school-time programs, trauma-sensitive schools, and resiliency programs.

The working group in **Connecticut** is collaborating closely with districts and other stakeholders to align SEL with their school climate, prevention, trauma-informed practice, chronic stress reduction, and positive behavior frameworks. It also is working to expand entry points for integrating SEL into other existing priorities including civics and leadership, parent engagement, drug use prevention, and the arts.



⑥ Working Together to Build Relationships and Address Common Challenges

As the collaborations evolve, states and districts are increasingly willing to have honest conversations about the common tensions that often get in the way of district-state partnerships:

- **The tension some districts feel when state staff are in the room and their reluctance to include them in meetings.** This is likely a holdover from the many years under the federal NCLB law, when state agencies were focused more on compliance and accountability than on support. Effective and equitable partnerships between districts and states will be critical to the success of SEL in states. States have an important opportunity to learn from districts that

have begun the work. The partnerships will be more effective when everyone comes to the table as equals and is intentional about promoting positive relationships built on trust and focused on children.

- **The anxiety state leaders sometimes express when they feel district SEL knowledge exceeds their own (“shouldn’t we be leading the way?”).** Many districts are ahead of states in advancing SEL, a strength states are building on. Indeed, districts are often in the best position to lead, and are the most natural and compelling leaders for their peers. Ideally, state leaders will be listening carefully to what districts say they need to support successful implementation



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(often simply a clear indication at the state level in the form of standards or guidance that gives districts “permission” to embrace SEL). It is optimal for states to also “be at the table” of any SEL community of practice to understand and scale the good work in the districts.

- **States’ concerns that districts are not aware of or are not using their resources.** States’ communication and dissemination of resources and tools are important. Just as every state is different and will need customized planning to advance SEL, so is every district unique. Districts are at different points in their own SEL journey. Some may already have standards for SEL or be implementing evidence-based programs. Others may not. Planning and prioritizing for SEL requires flexibility. Ideally states approach the work of SEL with openness and a willingness to support local innovation and provide multiple entry points, while adhering to what research says about effective SEL implementation.

Building trust takes time and a shared commitment. The work described in this report offers a snapshot of the kinds of relationships the CSI was created to nurture. The CSI is driven by the belief that districts and states must be equal partners working together to advance SEL. In the district-state collaborations CASEL is observing, we are encouraged to see district and state teams approaching the work with great flexibility and mutual respect. They are learning from and supporting each other as they customize plans for advancing SEL statewide and supporting the social, emotional, and academic success of every student.



The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the world's leading organization advancing one of the most important fields in education in decades: the practice of promoting integrated academic, social, and emotional learning for all children. The nonprofit, founded in 1994, provides a combination of research, practice, and policy to support high-quality social and emotional learning in districts and schools nationwide.

Thank you to CASEL's many critical collaborators — *our partner educators, researchers, policymakers, civic leaders, program providers, funders, and others* — for contributing to and supporting efforts to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education, preschool through high school.



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