



Leveraging Teachers' Perspectives and School-Level Resources to Support Students Socially and Emotionally

School has always been about much more for our students than solely academic learning—it is a safe space that provides children, particularly our most vulnerable, with consistent and critical adult interaction and socialization with their peers, day-to-day stability and continuity, and the preparation needed to be citizens and problem-solvers in an increasingly complex world.

After nearly two years of pandemic learning, Educators for Excellence asked teachers a variety of questions in *Voices from the Classroom 2022* about the impact the loss of these things had on their students' mental health and what policy-makers can do to better support teachers in meeting their needs.¹ In partnership with CASEL, a leader in the national conversation around the research, resources, and policies to support the social-emotional development and learning of students and teachers, we outline the relevant findings from *Voices from the Classroom 2022* pertaining to teachers' perspectives on this issue and highlight ways leaders at all levels of the system can support students and teachers socially and emotionally.

The Social-Emotional Impact of the Pandemic

By preventing children from physically attending school, the pandemic changed every facet of their lives—overnight. *Students struggled to stay motivated from afar*; lack of technology access exacerbated this for low-income students and students of color.² *They experienced* increased screen time, decreased physical activity, and a loss of socialization.³ A lack of in-person interaction with caring adults outside of the home meant signs of neglect or abuse were more likely to be missed; *child protection referrals from schools dropped significantly*, leaving children to struggle through these challenges at home, alone.⁴

Some students were not accounted for at school at all. Researchers estimate that as many as *3 million K-12 students had little to no access to school* between the closure of physical school buildings in the spring of 2020 and the fall 2020 semester—many simply never logged on.⁵ *This heightened chronic absenteeism persisted* even as students returned to physical school buildings.⁶

The result? In addition to the interrupted learning from the COVID pandemic, the loss of school as a physical space for American students has had a deep and lasting impact on their mental health. From *President Biden*,⁷ to the *CDC*,⁸ to the *surgeon general*,⁹ the nation's top leadership is in agreement that the mental health of students is now in crisis. Our country's teachers agree: 79% of teachers in *Voices from the Classroom 2022* report that the mental health of their students is worse than before the pandemic.



"This year was supposed to be 'post-pandemic,' but it was the hardest one yet on teachers. We need to be thinking not just about how we're supporting students socially and emotionally, but how we're doing the same for teachers."

Leona Fowler, special education instructional support teacher/site coordinator, Queens, NY



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Q.60 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

In addition to the social-emotional impacts on students, the chaos of the last few years *took a toll on teachers across the country*.¹⁰ Educators, many of whom were navigating multiple stressors related to the pandemic—increased isolation, sick loved ones, or catching up after being sick themselves—showed up daily to understaffed schools where they were supporting children who were navigating similar pandemic-related challenges. In *Voices from the Classroom 2022*, teachers overwhelmingly reported that staffing shortages were a serious problem, and some teachers—particularly BIPOC teachers—reported considering leaving the classroom, perhaps because of the burnout they were experiencing. As we grapple with the best ways to support our students, we also must consider what our teachers need in terms of their own social-emotional health.

The Role of Schools

The good news is that schools, now fully back in operation physically nationwide, can play a powerful role in supporting the mental health of young people. By implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) practices and programming in classrooms, *teachers can develop the positive relationships, welcoming climates, and focus on the social and emotional skill building that buoy the mental health and academic development of students*.¹¹ And by hiring counselors and other mental health support staff, schools can provide the additional, comprehensive support students need to thrive socially and emotionally. *Increasing SEL in schools supports the holistic wellness of students and accelerates academic growth*.¹²

Voices from the Classroom 2022 asked teachers for their perspective on the importance of social-emotional learning in their schools and classrooms and what’s needed to improve it. They believe that schools should be teaching and embedding social and emotional learning in the classroom at all grade levels.



“I know what SEL is, but I need more support in implementation. What does it mean

to teach kindergarteners about empathy? How do I gradually build and gradually release? I need the time in my schedule to allow for more depth on these concepts.”

Susan Providence, third-grade teacher, St. Paul, MN

Please indicate at which grade levels, if any, you think students in K-12 schools should be taught about social-emotional learning.

79% Elementary

71% Middle

69% High

6% Should not be taught in any grade

Q.40 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022



“Schools need to preserve more time for follow-through on the implementation of SEL. We teach the lessons, but don’t collect data on what’s actually effective. Everyone’s rushing and checking a box.”

Pamela Femrite, former special education teacher, current professor of elementary and literacy education, Minnesota State University, MN

The survey also asked what schools could do to support their students’ social-emotional health. Seventy-two percent believe that schools should hire more counselors and/or mental health providers. However, they also believe that teachers should play an active role in this work, and believe it is important to provide teachers with the best mental health practices for students (66%) and professional development in promoting better school and classroom cultures (54%). As schools and districts consider how to provide this support, they must ensure that it is comprehensive, thorough, and thoughtful about what teachers really need.

Which of the following do you believe schools should do in order to support students social-emotionally?



Hire more counselors and/or mental health providers



Provide teachers with best mental-health practices for students



Provide PD to teachers to promote better school and classroom cultures



Reduce exclusionary discipline

Q.48 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

36% of teachers report they are encouraged to incorporate SEL lessons into their curricula.

Q.24 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

Unfortunately, teachers do not believe their schools are currently equipped for this work. Only 36 percent of teachers reported that they are encouraged to incorporate SEL lessons into their curricula. Additionally, teachers reported large shortages of social-emotional support staff (e.g., counselors, social workers, and therapists), with 70 percent saying that shortages of this staff were a serious problem in their school. When asked about federal funding and how it should be used to support schools in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, 83 percent of teachers believe it is important to use this funding for increasing the number of school psychologists, counselors, nurses, social workers, and other health professionals.

70% of all teachers report that shortages of social-emotional support staff (e.g., counselors, social workers, therapists) are a serious problem.

Q.19 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022



“Schools are providing the curricular materials needed for SEL

but aren’t making the space or time to implement them well, because the priorities are the core subjects. But we know that social-emotional learning ultimately accelerates academic growth, so it should be prioritized in the schedule.”

Mark Morrison, fourth-grade teacher, Stratford, CT

Moving Forward

Addressing students’ social-emotional needs requires a comprehensive approach that both provides a baseline of proactive support for all students—through the development of positive learning environments, explicit instruction on social-emotional competencies, integration of social and emotional learning into core instruction, and other classroom techniques—as well as provides additional layers of support for those who need it through interventions from student support staff. Teachers need both the resources, support, and time to address their students’ social-emotional needs—and their own—in their classrooms, as well as additional support from outside the classroom for those students who most need it.

School-level Resources

Implementing SEL school-wide is the responsibility of all school staff, and CASEL’s resources can help you and your entire school team to support students socially and emotionally.

1. [The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#) provides a free guide and resources that school leaders can use to promote SEL throughout a school, in partnership with families and communities.¹³
2. CASEL’s [ten indicators of schoolwide SEL](#) can be used with your school community to reflect together on strengths and areas for growth.¹⁴
3. CASEL’s [examples and tools for focusing on SEL in classrooms](#)¹⁵ and [rubric](#)¹⁶ for assessing ways social and emotional development is already being supported in classrooms are great tools for teachers to reflect on their own practice.
4. CASEL’s [resources for advocating for SEL](#) can help teachers or other school staff to share the facts about SEL with their school communities and advocate for its implementation.¹⁷

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Federal Opportunities for Change

Additionally, federal leaders can take action to heed the clear request from teachers for additional counselors and mental health providers by providing funding to recruit, hire, and train qualified staff for these positions in high-need districts. [The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#), passed by Congress in June 2022, provides \$500 million to a competitive grants program over the next five years to hire additional mental health staff in schools, plus an additional \$740 million for related mental health programs.¹⁸

This funding is an important investment that must be sustained in future fiscal years. Additionally, the federal government must ensure it is distributed in a way that prioritizes the districts with the highest needs. In [President Biden’s FY23 budget request](#), he asked Congress for \$1 billion to create a new School-Based Health Professionals program to support districts in recruiting

and hiring counselors, social workers, and other health professionals, with the funds distributed to districts based on need.¹⁹ By creating and consistently funding this program, federal leaders can provide schools with the additional layers of support needed to fully meet the social-emotional needs of all students.

Advocacy Opportunity

Teachers, school staff, and school and district leaders can click [HERE](#) to ask their federal legislators to appropriate funding for the School-Based Health Professionals program.²⁰



Endnotes

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VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

A SURVEY OF AMERICA'S EDUCATORS

Designed by teachers for teachers, Voices from the Classroom 2022 was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 full-time public school teachers, plus an oversample of 300 BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) teachers. The sample reflects the nation's district and charter public school teachers and aligns with key demographic variables of gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years of teaching experience. The poll was taken in January 2022 during the height of the Omicron variant outbreak of COVID-19. While teachers designed this survey, Gotham Research Group helped ensure it was valid and reliable.




[CASEL.ORG](https://casel.org)


CASEL envisions all children and adults as self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and create a more inclusive, just, and equitable world.



Educators for Excellence envisions an equitable and excellent education system that provides all students with the opportunity to succeed and elevates the teaching profession.

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