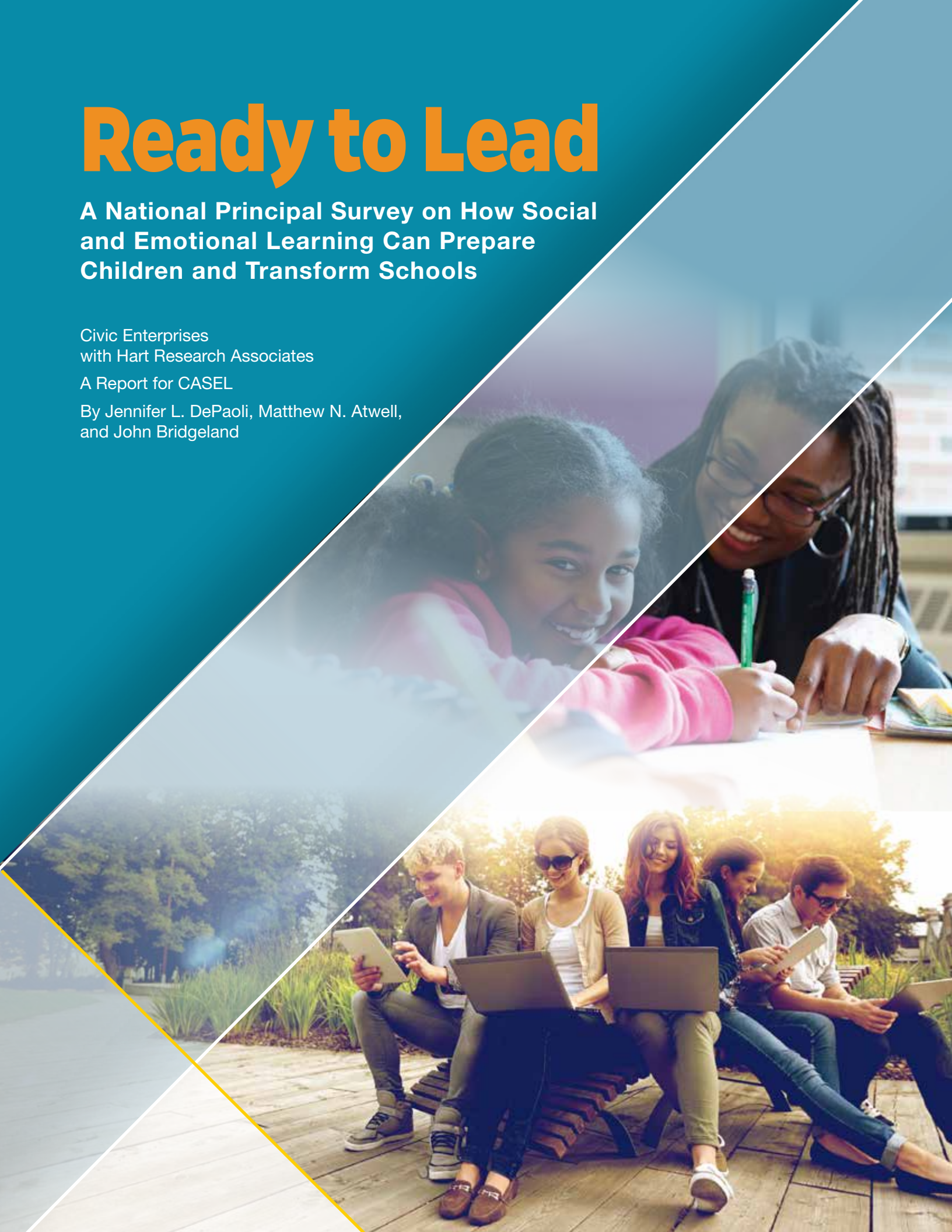
Ready to Lead

A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools

Civic Enterprises
with Hart Research Associates

A Report for CASEL

By Jennifer L. DePaoli, Matthew N. Atwell, and John Bridgeland



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Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the nation's leading organization advancing and promoting integrated Pre-K to 12 academic, social, and emotional learning for all students. Our mission is to make social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school. Through research, practice, and policy, CASEL collaborates to ensure all students become knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and contributing members of society. Learn more about our work at www.casel.org

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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, & ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

Open Letter to the American People

The idea of integrating the social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning – and the promise of improving our children's outcomes and unleashing the power of schools and communities as spaces that nurture their full development – has galvanized the educational community's interest with an enthusiasm rarely seen in the history of American education.

It is our hope, as the Co-Chairs of the Aspen Institute's *National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development*, that this report will help America better understand how social and emotional development serves as a foundation for student learning. We also hope to connect readers to the perspectives of principals and administrators who engage in the day-to-day rewarding and challenging work of educating our children.

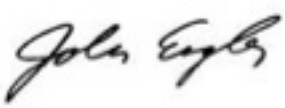
Building from the breakthrough report, *The Missing Piece*, which captured the voice of teachers across America, Civic Enterprises has now turned to principals and other administrators for their insights. In short, these pioneering school leaders of today are strongly focused on a missing piece of American education: how to support the social and emotional development of their students. Educators know that social and emotional development improves student behavior, classroom management, school climate, and even student health. They also know that social and emotional learning improves grades and standardized test scores, boosts graduation rates and postsecondary completion rates, and leads to better employment outcomes. Given these measurable benefits, there is great urgency to integrate social and emotional learning frameworks.

This report illustrates the motivation behind these school leaders' commitment: they realize that developing the whole student is the key to creating schools that are safe and challenging; is fundamental to shaping students who are supported and inspired; is critical to ensuring that teachers can be effective and fulfilled; and is the foundation of communities where citizenship, purpose, employment, and stability are possible for every child. This report tells another story, too: although interest in social and emotional learning is overwhelmingly high, principals and administrators are hungry for the expertise necessary to adopt new strategies. In some ways, there is a tension in the data: while the vast majority of leaders believe that social and emotional development is essential to education, the pathway to change is not always clear; moreover, the time and training to make the necessary changes are in short supply. These experts tell us that there is a lot of will, but not as much clarity and support, along the way.

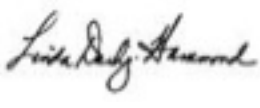
We believe, as our fellow Co-Chair Linda Darling-Hammond wrote, that "the survival of the human race depends at least as much on the cultivation of social and emotional intelligence as it does on the development of technical knowledge and skills." We can – and should – integrate academic learning with the social, emotional and cognitive dimensions of healthy human development, as well as retain high standards for all our children. As the following report so compellingly illustrates, our school leaders advise that we have no time to waste.



Dr. Timothy P. Shriver
Co-Chair



Governor John Engler
Co-Chair



Dr. Linda Darling Hammond
Co-Chair



Executive Summary

The central message of this report is that principals across the United States understand how fundamental social and emotional learning (SEL) is to the development of students and their success in and out of school, but they need more guidance, training, and support to make solid and effective school-wide implementation a reality. Principals understand that SEL competencies are teachable, believe they should be developed in all students, and know that young people equipped with SEL skills will become better students now and better adults in the future. In today's environment of increasingly demanding jobs and the fraying of American communities, nothing could be more important than to foster, teach, and promote the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Some call it empathy, discipline, character, collaborative problem solving, or other names – but regardless of the name, they are the attitudes and skills that provide the glue of a functioning society, robust economy, and vibrant democracy.

Most principals see how SEL boosts student academic achievement, but they want more evidence of those impacts to strengthen the case for action. Although support among principals for embedding SEL in the culture and classrooms of schools is high, implementation varies widely across schools with about one in three principals implementing it school-wide, and only one in four meeting benchmarks for high-quality implementation. Encouragingly, when principals and teachers attempting to implement SEL are well supported by their district leadership, they have better outcomes, and when state policymakers back district leaders, the results are even more pronounced.

These and other findings come from a nationally representative survey of 884 Pre-K to 12 public school principals and interviews with 16 superintendents and 10 district-level research and evaluation specialists representing diverse school districts and with varying levels of experience in implementing SEL programming. Despite representing different grade spans, student populations, and geographic areas, the administrators in this report see the potential in social and emotional learning and provide key insights into the factors that can either slow SEL implementation at the school and district levels or help it grow and flourish. This strong support for SEL among our nation's principals builds on similar levels of support from teachers across the United States, as reported in the 2013 report, *The Missing Piece*. While our educational leaders and practitioners see the value of SEL, they need support, resources, and tools to help them fully implement systemic SEL initiatives that can improve students' SEL knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as their college, career, and life readiness.

Survey Findings

Findings from the principal survey are presented in four major areas: (1) Attitudes about SEL, (2) SEL implementation, (3) The path to increased SEL, and (4) Assessing SEL. This report 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. 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 enhanced research, training, and evaluation.

Survey Findings 1
Attitudes about SEL

Among principals and district administrators, there is a high level of commitment to developing all students' social and emotional competencies and a belief in the potential benefits that will follow from doing so.

Principals Understand, Value, and Are Committed to Developing SEL Skills

Principals strongly endorse social and emotional learning (see definition below), and most (83 percent) consider it to be very important for schools to promote the development of these competencies in their students. Almost all principals believe that SEL is teachable in school (99 percent) and are committed to developing their students' social and emotional skills (95 percent).

Principals Believe SEL Should Be Taught to ALL Students

Nearly all principals (98 percent) believe students from all types of backgrounds – both affluent and poor – would benefit from learning social and emotional skills in schools, and this belief holds true for a large majority of principals, regardless of whether they lead high- or low-poverty schools.

Principals Believe in SEL's Benefits, but Are Less Convinced of Its Impact on Academic Achievement

Nearly all principals believe that an increased focus on social and emotional learning would have a somewhat major or very major benefit on promoting a positive school climate (99 percent), helping students become good citizens as adults (98 percent), improving relationships between students and their teachers (98 percent), and decreasing bullying (96 percent). Similarly, most principals say that an increased focus on developing SEL skills would help prepare students for the workforce (98 percent) and believe it would have a positive impact on students moving successfully through K-12 and graduating from high school (97 percent). Principals also believe SEL can have a major benefit on students' academic achievement in their coursework (97 percent) and preparing students to get to and through college (97 percent).

These results show that principals see clear benefits of placing a larger focus on SEL, but it should be noted that fewer are fully convinced of a large-scale benefit on academics. Most principals (83 percent) see the largest benefits of SEL as improving school climate, citizenship, and relationships; 78 percent believe a greater focus on SEL would have a very major benefit on students becoming good citizens

What is SEL?

For the purposes of this report, 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. SEL focuses on knowledge, attitudes, and skills in five competency areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

as adults, while approximately three in four say there would be a very major benefit on relationships between teachers and students (77 percent) and relationships among students (74 percent). However, while virtually all principals believe there would be at least a somewhat major benefit on students' academic achievement and preparation for college (both 97 percent as noted above), there is a clear drop off in those that believe these benefits will be very major (61 percent and 58 percent, respectively). Superintendents and research and evaluation specialists reinforced the need to better communicate research findings regarding SEL's benefits, especially on raising academic achievement.

Principals Believe SEL Can Positively Affect Students' In-School Experience

Nearly all principals believe it is definitely or probably true that teaching SEL skills in school will improve student behavior and reduce the need for discipline referrals (97 percent, including 56 percent definitely true) and help students take more responsibility for their own learning and development (97 percent, including 51 percent definitely true). They also feel it will either definitely or probably make learning more engaging and enjoyable for students (95 percent, including 46 percent definitely true). While most principals are inclined overall to believe SEL will improve students' academic achievement (93 percent say this is definitely or probably true), less than half are entirely convinced of its effects on academic performance (40 percent definitely true) and improving student attendance (40 percent definitely true).

Survey Findings 2
SEL Implementation

Many principals have the recognition and understanding of the importance of developing students' social and emotional competencies, but implementation of SEL programming – especially at a systemic level – has a long way to go.

Support for SEL is High, but Implementation Varies Greatly

A little more than one-third of principals (35 percent) reported having a plan for teaching SEL and were currently systematically implementing it school-wide, while just slightly more (38 percent) have a plan for SEL that has been partially implemented. School-wide implementation was more likely to be reported by elementary school principals (41 percent vs 31 percent in middle school and 25 percent in high school) and those in urban schools (41 percent vs 32 percent in suburban and 31 percent small town/rural). Almost 70 percent of principals said they expect all teachers in their school to teach students social and emotional skills, though the percentage of principals who reported that this is fully realized in their school, either through integration into the academic curriculum or a separate curriculum, is much lower (25 percent).

Few Schools Fully Meet SEL Implementation Benchmarks

CASEL has developed a set of benchmarks to help guide school-wide SEL implementation, from developing a clear vision statement to creating long-term plans for student support, professional development, program evaluation, and developmentally-appropriate learning standards. When principals were asked if their school was meeting those benchmarks, few were. Just 25 percent of principals could be considered high implementers of SEL based on the benchmarks, while 39 percent are moderate SEL implementers and 36 percent low SEL implementers. In school districts where district leaders place a high level of emphasis on SEL, principals are more likely to score high on SEL implementation.

District Leadership Plays a Large Role in Driving SEL

A large majority of principals (72 percent) said their school district places a fair amount or a great deal of emphasis on developing students' SEL skills, but only 40 percent reported that their district leadership requires all schools to have a clear plan for teaching social and emotional skills. Principals were far more likely to report having a plan for SEL and systematic implementation in school districts where central office leadership places a great deal of emphasis on teaching SEL than in those where emphasis from district leaders is less. Superintendents bolstered these findings, saying that when district leaders are invested in SEL, buy-in is greater and systemic implementation is more extensive.

Schools that are Systemically Implementing SEL Involve More People, See More Success

Most principals said they involve teachers in developing students' SEL skills, but those in schools reporting high implementation of SEL are more likely to involve a more diverse group of in- and out-of-school stakeholders. In a self-report of how their schools are faring at developing students' social and emotional competencies, 23 percent say they are very successful, while 48 percent say their efforts are fairly successful. High-implementing principals report greater overall success at developing students' SEL skills than either moderate- or low-implementing principals. Principals considered high SEL implementers also report greater academic success and are more likely to believe SEL can improve school climate and students' in-school experience.

Survey Findings 3
The Path to Increased SEL

School and district leaders are receptive to a greater emphasis on social and emotional learning, but they still see several barriers to full implementation. They also identify strategies, including increased training, that can enhance implementation of effective SEL programming.

Principals Want More SEL Training for Teachers, Access to Research-Based Strategies

Sixty percent of principals pointed to a lack of teacher training to support students' social and emotional development as a big challenge, and less than half (45 percent) feel that teachers in their schools are either very or fairly prepared to successfully teach SEL. When asked to choose from a list provided, what would help ensure schools are successful at developing students' social and emotional skills, more than half of principals (54 percent) chose additional professional development for teachers. Sharing research-based strategies about effective ways to promote students' social and emotional skills also scored high (44 percent of principals).

High Implementers of SEL are More Likely to Report Better Trained Teachers

A key takeaway is that in districts that emphasize SEL and score high on SEL implementation, higher numbers of principals report that their teachers are able to successfully teach SEL. Seventy-eight percent of principals who said their district places a great deal of emphasis on SEL said that their teachers are well prepared to teach social and emotional skills, compared to just 21 percent of principals where emphasis on SEL is minimal. Similarly, 80 percent of high-implementing principals – opposed to just 15 percent of low-implementing principals – report that their teachers are prepared to successfully teach SEL.

Lack of Time, Funding Also Seen as Barriers

Nearly three-quarters of principals (71 percent) say that teachers "not having enough time" is a big challenge in implementing the teaching of social and emotional skills. A majority of principals also cited a lack of funding dedicated to SEL as a barrier to implementation.

Survey Findings 4
Assessing SEL

Although school and district administrators are optimistic about measuring SEL skills and using the data that could come from it, many are unfamiliar with available measurement tools and how they and their staff can use them to guide planning and practice.

Most Principals Believe SEL Skills Can Be Accurately Measured and Assessed

Most principals (71 percent) believe it is definitely or probably true that students' development and acquisition of SEL skills can be accurately measured and assessed. More than half of principals (58 percent) believe social and emotional learning should be part of students' annual assessments.

Few Administrators are Familiar with Current SEL Assessments, Understand What Measures Count in Assessing SEL

Only 17 percent of principals are very or fairly familiar with current assessments for measuring students' SEL skills, but as with other aspects of SEL, high-implementing principals report greater familiarity with SEL assessments. Principals' knowledge of assessment is correlated with their level of implementation. When asked about current methods schools are using to assess students' SEL skills, most principals and superintendents pointed to

behavioral observations and analyzing disciplinary records. Variation in understanding what counts as a measure of SEL competencies also exists in research and evaluation specialists, who would presumably have the greatest understanding of assessing SEL.

Few Principals are Assessing All Students' SEL Development

Only a quarter of principals (24 percent) are currently assessing all students' development of social and emotional skills. In high-implementing schools, however, the percentage assessing all students jumps up to 48 percent, indicating that schools that are focused on systemic implementation are more likely to see value in measuring the development of all students' SEL competencies. Forty-two percent of principals report assessing only some students (based on criteria other than age or grade level), while 23 percent say they do not assess their students' social and emotional skills at all.

More Useful Assessments, Greater Training in Using SEL Data Needed

Of the 77 percent of principals who are currently using SEL assessments, less than 40 percent said the assessments are very or fairly useful. Principals who report assessing all students are more likely than those who are assessing only some students to find their current assessment tools useful. Principals also see a great need for increased teacher training in using SEL assessment data. Sixteen percent of principals think their teachers have either a great deal or fair amount of knowledge on using SEL assessment data to improve instruction, compared to 61 percent who say their teachers have little to no knowledge.

Principals See Many Uses for SEL Data; Hold Mixed Views on SEL Accountability

Given the assumption of access to valid and reliable SEL assessment data, principals see a number of important uses for it, including identifying students needing intervention (86 percent), evaluating SEL program effectiveness (79 percent), sharing the data with parents (73 percent), and improving teacher instruction (72 percent). When asked specifically about accountability purposes, less than half (49 percent) agreed that teachers should be held accountable for developing students' SEL skills, and only a small percentage were strongly in favor (13 percent). Even fewer principals (44 percent) believe schools should be held accountable for improving students' SEL skills.

Principals Support Inclusion of SEL in State Education Standards

School leaders feel much more positively about the inclusion of social and emotional competencies in their state standards. Nearly three-quarters of principals (73 percent) say they believe the development of SEL skills should be explicitly stated in state education standards.

Recommendations

Based on our survey findings and the SEL evidence base, we recommend the following to help advance SEL implementation:

Sustain Social, Emotional, and Academic Development through High-Impact Levers

Enhance the "will" – Prioritize policies and funding to support SEL

To help schools advance social and emotional learning and systemize SEL at all levels of practice and policy, federal and state policymakers, as well as grantmakers in education, will need to prioritize policies and funding for SEL training, implementation, and assessment. Funding considerations should include resources, technical assistance, evaluation, and the creation of learning networks between districts and states. Funding streams for increased research will also be critical for expanding knowledge and creating lines for SEL advocacy. Policy action should include advancing new federal policies to promote SEL and alloting resources toward its growth in both Pre-K to 12 and higher education, in addition to adopting state SEL standards.

Support state student learning standards

State SEL standards can provide a vision for what school and district social and emotional learning programs should accomplish and developmental benchmarks to inform teachers and principals of what students should be working toward in every grade. State SEL standards can also serve as guidance for institutes of higher education by providing

the groundwork for integrating SEL into pre-service teacher training programs. Unlike academic standards, which have served as a basis for high-stakes accountability systems, SEL standards should be used solely to improve teaching and learning and guide investments in SEL programming.

Advance an SEL research agenda and communicate findings to practitioners and policymakers

The SEL evidence base has been building for more than two decades, and current efforts, including the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development and the SEL Assessment Working Group, have created centralized platforms for studying and distributing knowledge on SEL. Based on this study, we recommend further research in the following areas: the value of implementing systemic, school-wide SEL; the link between improving SEL skills and academic achievement; the impact of improved training on SEL implementation; the benefits of integrated and stand-alone SEL approaches; the value of SEL for diverse learners; and how data on SEL can be used effectively by teachers to improve instruction, by principals to improve school climate, and by districts to better prepare all youth for success in school, postsecondary, careers, and life.

Strengthen SEL Training Among Teachers and Administrators

Communicate the knowledge base on evidence-based SEL programming and effective training, implementation, and assessment

It is critical that administrators and teachers have access to a knowledge base on effective SEL programming and training in how to effectively integrate SEL into academic instruction and school climate improvement initiatives. While this study makes clear that school and district leaders value the development of their students' social and emotional competencies, they need a better understanding of how best to improve these skills in students and create a systematic plan for SEL implementation. School leaders and teachers also need exposure to best practices in SEL implementation, as well as valid and reliable tools to assess SEL programming and students' development of social and emotional competencies.

Build teacher knowledge through pre-service education and in-school professional development

Both administrators and teachers agree that increased training in teaching SEL is necessary to achieve successful school-wide implementation. Integrating this training into pre-service teacher programs will help guarantee more teachers have the knowledge and skills to implement SEL from the start, while high-quality professional development can provide continuous training for both new and experienced teachers.

Strengthen Assessment

Continue to improve SEL assessment tools and training in how to use them

Though administrators see the importance of assessing students' SEL skills, they lack familiarity with the tools to do so. It is therefore critical that knowledge be shared on existing measures and that researchers, funders, and policymakers prioritize improving SEL assessments. This survey also makes it abundantly clear that one of the greatest areas of improvement in SEL lies in building understanding of how to appropriately use SEL assessments and the data they produce to increase all students' social and emotional competencies and evaluate implementation of SEL programming.



Introduction

American education is at a crossroads. On one hand, there are increasing levels of academic achievement, high school graduation, and postsecondary enrollment and attainment, while on the other, students are experiencing greater levels of stress, trauma, and instability. Children today live in a more complex, economically competitive, and globally connected world, and while academic skills have been appropriately emphasized, the social and emotional dimensions of human development have been left behind in both policy and practice. While it is imperative that students learn to read, write, and do math, it is equally important to master other skills, like self-control, empathy, teamwork, and problem solving to succeed in school and be prepared for life in a demanding 21st century world.

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

A significant and growing body of research makes it clear that a student's success is dependent on factors other than academic skills, including social and emotional competence. This underscores the importance for schools to look beyond typical classroom instruction. School-based SEL programs have the ability to (a) enhance students' social and emotional skills and classroom behavior; (b) improve attachment and attitudes toward school; (c) decrease rates of violence and aggression, disciplinary referrals, and substance use; and (d) improve academic performance. These positive findings appear to hold for children of diverse backgrounds from preschool through high school.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides an opportunity for a powerful, student-centric approach to education with proven benefits to help children overcome the challenges they face. Social and emotional skills – such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making – are critical to being a good student and citizen (see page 11 for more information on the definition of SEL).

Powerful evidence continues to emerge from adversity science, brain science, psychology, and social science that reinforce the importance of systemically embedding social and emotional development in schools (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Gullotta, 2015). A 2011 meta-analysis found that students who receive high-quality SEL instruction have

achievement scores on average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Several individual studies reviewed for a 2017 meta-analysis found even greater long-term impacts of SEL, including decreased likelihood of mental health issues and dropping out of high school, and increased probabilities of college attendance and degree attainment (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Surveys of employers found that they seek the very skills that social and emotional learning programs foster: problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and grit (Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012). Advances in neuroscience suggest that teaching social and emotional skills in kindergarten can have long-term academic benefits on students' reading and vocabulary, including in high poverty schools, suggesting that SEL may assist in closing achievement gaps (Blair & Raver, 2014). In 2015, researchers at Columbia University concluded that for every dollar a school spends on social-emotional learning programs, it sees an eleven dollar return on its investment (Belfield et al., 2015). The research points to one fact: when schools promote students' academic, social, and emotional learning, students will possess the basic competencies, work habits, and values for postsecondary education, meaningful careers, and engaged citizenship.

Other studies demonstrate that students who receive high-quality SEL in the classroom display better academic performance, improved attitudes and behaviors, greater motivation to learn, deeper connection to school, and improved relationships with peers, as well as fewer delinquent acts, conduct referrals, and reduced emotional distress, including fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal (Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteijn, 2012; Wigelsworth, Qualter, & Humphrey, 2017). These benefits are invaluable in a school setting where young students are navigating not only academic challenges but also the interpersonal relationship difficulties many face during adolescence. And according to the 2017 Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 8 in 10 Americans believe that how well schools do at developing students' interpersonal skills, including being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems, is extremely or very important in school quality – confirming that the American public already understands the need for schools to focus on developing students' social and emotional competencies in addition to academic knowledge and skills.

In addition to this compelling evidence, the release of *The Missing Piece: A National Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools* in 2013 showed that teachers across the country recognize the need to intentionally integrate SEL into classrooms and curriculums (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). Of the more than 600 educators surveyed, 93 percent responded that it was important for schools to promote the development of social and emotional skills, while 95 percent of respondents believe that these skills are teachable (for more on *The Missing Piece*, please see Appendix II).

About this Report

For this report, we wanted to hear from the school and district leaders that are instrumental in successful systemic implementation of SEL. Principals serve a central role in establishing a positive learning environment and creating the conditions to raise student achievement. While teachers have long been known to have the greatest in-school impact on student achievement, principals are right behind them as the second most important in-school factor associated with achievement (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Andseron, 2010). They also play a critical role in establishing a climate where SEL is valued and providing the support needed to successfully implement it school-wide. Elias et al. (2006) identified the "transformational leadership" that is essential to effective SEL integration, stating that "principals have special roles in setting the agenda for leadership and inspiring others to share and elaborate in their vision" (p. 13). Though research on the link between principal leadership and SEL program implementation is limited, Kam et al. (2003) did find that significant program effects were dependent on both high levels of principal support and high-quality classroom implementation, further underscoring the importance of their role.

The findings presented here were collected from a nationally representative online survey of 884

K-12 principals and individual interviews with 16 superintendents and 10 district-level research and evaluation specialists representing diverse school districts across the country (For a detailed summary of the principals, superintendents, and research and evaluation specialists that participated in this report, please see Appendix I: Methodology). The results of the principal survey are the primary focus of this report, while the responses from the superintendent and research and evaluation specialist interviews serve to provide context from district-level administrators.

The survey was informed by the prior instrument used in the 2013 survey of teachers for *The Missing Piece* report, allowing for cross-comparison of responses, as well as new questions to account for the differing roles administrators play in implementing SEL. The survey and interviews were aimed at answering the following key questions:

1. How is social and emotional learning viewed and understood by school- and district-level administrators?
2. To what extent is social and emotional learning being systemically implemented in schools?
3. What factors play the greatest role in systemic implementation of school-based social and emotional learning?
4. What is the current state of SEL assessment by educators?

As a follow-up to *The Missing Piece*, this report brings the valuable perspectives of principals, superintendents, and research and evaluation specialists to the foreground of the national conversation around the current status and future expansion of high-quality, evidence-based, systemic SEL in schools and districts nationwide. Their opinions reinforced what was heard from teachers in 2013 on the importance of developing social and emotional skills, while providing a picture of the current state of school-wide SEL programs across the United States. Educators need greater evidence, support, and guidance to successfully implement SEL, but the good news is that administrators from kindergarten to the 12th grade, in all areas of the county, are committed to developing students' social and emotional skills and understand the value it can have in school improvement efforts. In addition, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) encourages increased prioritization of educating the whole child and even requires states to include at least one nonacademic indicator in their accountability systems, providing an invaluable window for schools and districts to prioritize social and emotional learning and restore an educational focus on providing high-quality child development (Gayl, 2017; Melnick, Cook-Harvey, & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The time is ripe to bring social and emotional learning into more schools and bring more students the education they deserve.

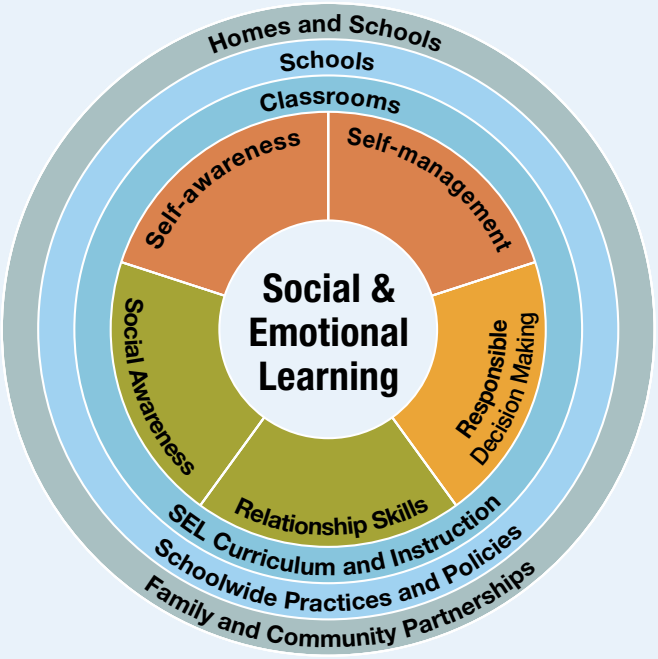
What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults 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 (CASEL, 2012). SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful. Social and emotional skills are critical to being good students, citizens, and workers. In addition, many different risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out) can be prevented or reduced when multiyear, integrated efforts are used to develop students' social and emotional skills. This is best done through (1) effective classroom instruction; (2) student engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom; (3) coordinated school-wide programming and policies, and (4) broad parent and community involvement in program planning, implementation, and evaluation (See Figure 1) (Bond & Carmola-Hauf, 2004; Nation et al., 2003; Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyer, & Weissberg, 2016; Weare & Nind, 2011; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovitch, & Gullotta, 2015). Effective SEL programming begins in preschool and continues through high school and beyond, and most importantly, it addresses the needs of both students and adults.

SEL enhances students' capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges. Like many similar frameworks, CASEL's integrated framework promotes intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence. CASEL has identified five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that can be taught in many ways across difference settings (CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015; Durlak, Domitrovitch, Weissberg, & Gullotta, 2015). The five-competency clusters for students are:

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

Figure 1. Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning



- **Responsible decision-making:** The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

The short-term goals of SEL programs are to promote these competencies, and in turn, build student agency, increase engagement, and create a stronger connection between students and their learning. SEL programming provides a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003).

Additional SEL Frameworks

While CASEL is one of the leaders in developing a framework for teaching and implementing systemic SEL, other organizations have also advanced alternative frameworks for developing students' social and emotional skills and competencies. A few prominent examples include models developed by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, Turnaround for Children, and P21.

- The Chicago Consortium's **Foundations for Young Adult Success** framework believes that children learn through developmental experiences that require action and reflection in response to their interactions with the world and the adults around them. The Foundations for Young Adult Success framework sees three key factors required for young adult success: the agency to make active decisions about one's life; the competencies to adapt to the demands of different contexts; and incorporating different aspects of oneself into an integrated identity. These factors for success are influenced by four foundational components: self-regulation, knowledge, mindsets, and values.
- Turnaround for Children's **Building Blocks for Learning** framework represents the skills and mindsets that students use to access, acquire, and apply the academic knowledge and skills they learn in the classroom. In selecting the Building Blocks for Learning, Turnaround for Children focused on three guiding principles: 1) alignment to the development of the child as a "learner" in an educational setting; 2) differentiating between personality/character traits and learner attributes by identifying measurable and malleable skills, behaviors, or mindsets; and 3) a research base demonstrating impact of skill, behavior, or mindset on academic achievement. These led to 16 different building blocks across 5 tiers (in ascending order) healthy development, school readiness, mindsets for self and school, perseverance, and independence and sustainability.
- P21's **Framework for 21st Century Learning** identifies both 21st century student outcomes, as well as the support systems required for student success. The P21 framework believes that there are four 21st century student outcomes that students need to reach for future success in career and beyond. These outcomes include mastering knowledge in key subjects and 21st century themes, like global awareness and environmental literacy; learning and innovation skills; information, media, and technology skills; and life and career skills. For students to achieve these skills, P21's Framework identifies critical support systems that can help students on their path, such as innovative standards, curriculums and instruction, skills assessments, and professional development.

The emergence of multiple frameworks to develop the social and emotional skills students will need for future life success is yet another example of the growing demand for SEL implementation. While researchers and scholars may offer variations on exactly how to cultivate these competencies, they agree that SEL is an integral part to each child's education and development.



Survey Findings 1

Attitudes About SEL

There is a strong consensus among school- and district-level administrators that social and emotional skills are important and should be developed in all students.

Principals understand, value, and are committed to developing students' SEL skills

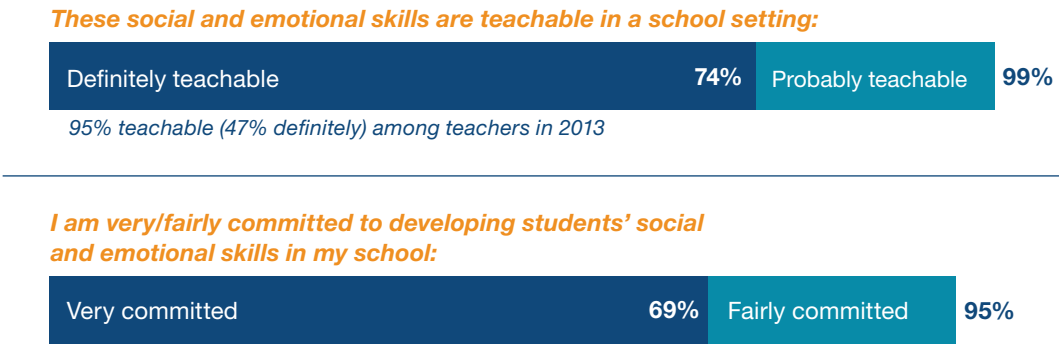
Social and emotional learning (SEL), as defined in CASEL's framework, is "the process through which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." SEL focuses on developing knowledge, attitudes, and skills in five competency areas:

- Self-awareness, like knowing your strengths and weaknesses;
- Self-management, like being able to stay in control and persevere through challenges;
- Social awareness, like understanding and empathizing with others;
- Relationship skills, like being able to work in teams and resolve conflicts; and
- Responsible decision making, like making safe and ethical choices.

Our nationally representative survey confirms that principals strongly endorse this framework. Eighty-three percent of principals – up from 76 percent of teachers in 2013 – consider it to be very important for schools to promote the development of the SEL skills set out by CASEL. This high-level endorsement comes from principals throughout the K-12 spectrum and from principals with both limited and advanced experience, and it is especially strong from urban and suburban principals (87 and 89 percent, respectively). In individual interviews, superintendents and district research and evaluation specialists also recognized the importance of developing students' SEL skills in school, though some variation exists in the top-of-mind types of skills these administrators see as critically important. Superintendents listed qualities such as resilience, self-efficacy, self-regulation, empathy, communication skills, ability to get along with others, and problem-solving skills. Research and evaluation specialists mentioned qualities including motivation, grit, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills. Both superintendents and research and evaluation specialists endorsed the CASEL framework as a comprehensive approach to social and emotional development.

One of the most promising findings from *The Missing Piece* report was that 95 percent of teachers believed that social and emotional skills are teachable in a

Principals are already on board with social and emotional learning.

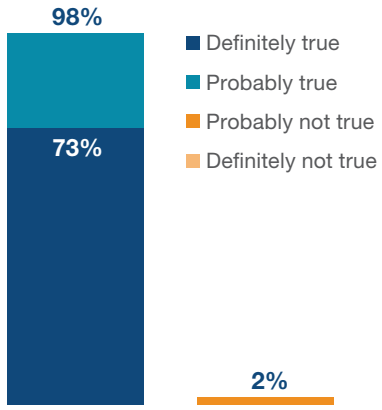


school setting, and for principals, that belief is even higher. Ninety-nine percent of principals surveyed believe that SEL skills are teachable in school, and of those principals, nearly three-quarters (74 percent) believe SEL skills are *definitely* teachable, compared to 47 percent of teachers just four years ago. Nearly all principals surveyed (95 percent) also report being committed to developing students' SEL skills in their schools, including 69 percent who said that they are very committed. Elementary school principals (79 percent vs 66 percent of middle school and 70 percent of high school principals) and those in urban (81 percent) and suburban (77 percent) schools (compared to 67 percent small town/rural) are more likely to believe SEL skills are teachable and report a strong commitment to developing their students' SEL skills.

Strong consensus among principals that SEL should be taught to all students

Nearly all principals – 98 percent – believe that it is probably or definitely true that students from all types of backgrounds, both high- and low-income, would benefit from learning social and emotional skills in school. The strong consensus among principals that SEL holds benefits for all students aligns with what teachers reported in 2013. In fact, a majority of principals reject the idea that it is less important to teach SEL skills in affluent schools than in high-poverty schools, as well as that SEL skills should only be taught to students with social and emotional problems. This belief holds true for a large majority of principals, regardless of whether they lead high- or low-poverty schools (73 percent in low-poverty schools, 74 percent in high-poverty schools).

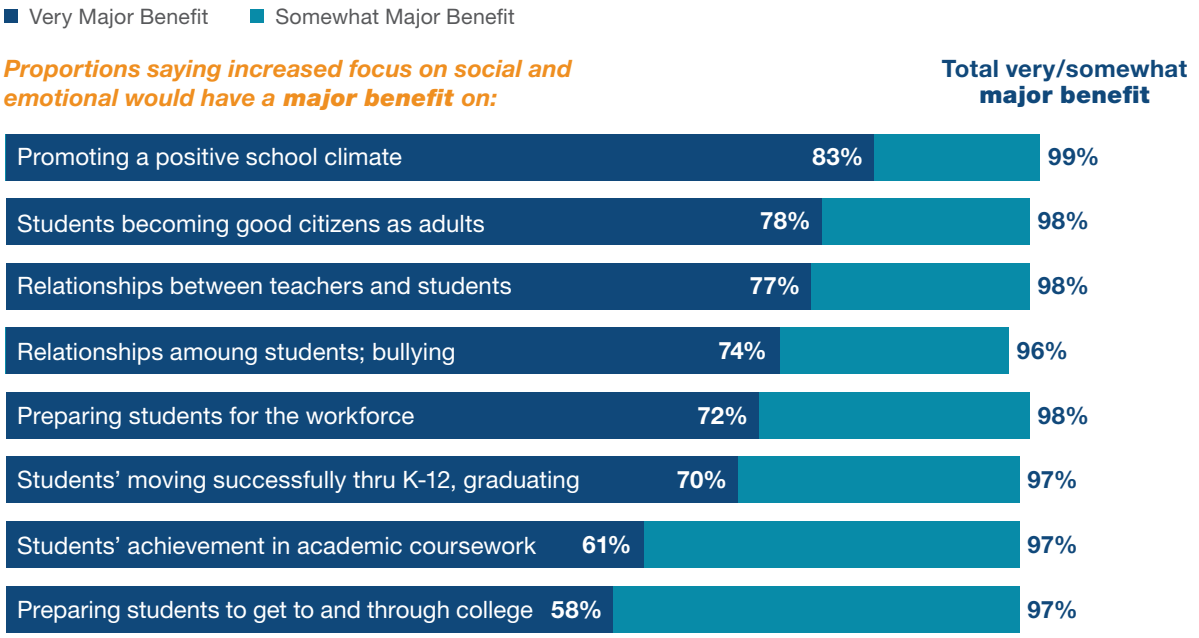
There is a strong consensus that SEL should be taught to all students



Principals believe in the benefits of SEL, but are less convinced of its impact on academic achievement

Most principals surveyed see high probability of SEL's positive benefits for students and their school. Virtually all principals believe that an increased focus on social and emotional learning would have at least a somewhat major benefit on promoting a positive school climate (99 percent), helping students become good citizens as adults (98 percent), improving relationships between students and their teachers (98 percent), and decreasing bullying (96 percent). Similarly, most principals say that an increased focus on developing SEL skills would help prepare students for the workforce (98 percent) and

Most principals are convinced that SEL improves school climate, citizenship, and relationships; a small majority expect academic gains.



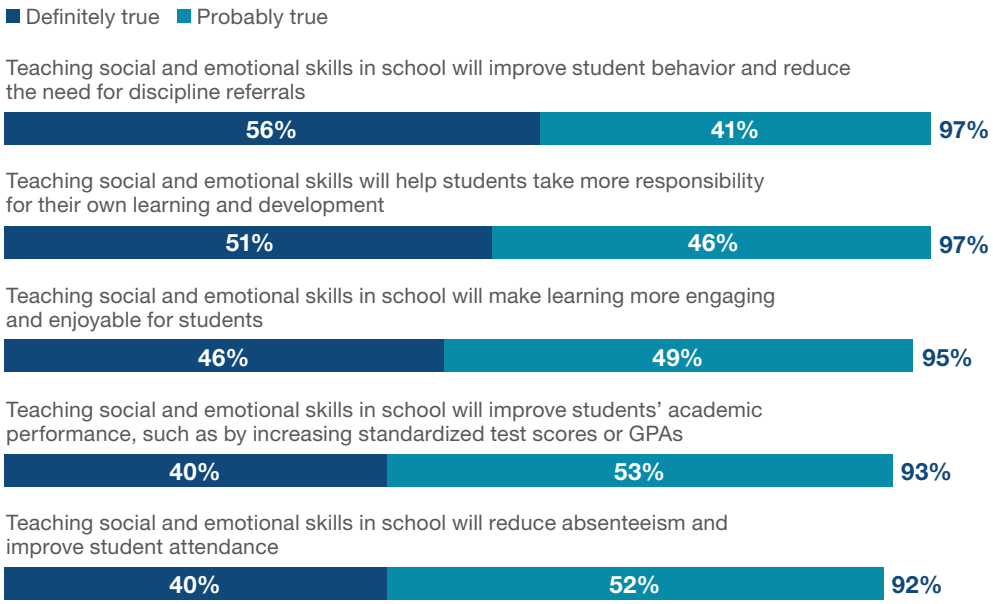
believe it would have a positive impact on students moving successfully through K-12 and graduating from high school (97 percent). Principals also believe SEL can have a very or somewhat major benefit on students' academic achievement in their coursework (97 percent) and preparing students to get to and through college (97 percent).

These results show that principals see the benefits of placing a larger focus on SEL, but fewer principals are fully convinced of a large-scale benefit on raising academic achievement and preparing students to get to and through college than they are of its benefits on improving school climate, citizenship, and relationships. For example, as the following graph shows, 83 percent of principals believe a larger focus on SEL would have a very major benefit on promoting a positive school climate and 78 percent believe it will have a very major benefit on students becoming good students as adults. By contrast, the proportion who believe an increased focus on SEL will have a very major benefit drops to 61 percent for students' academic achievement and 58 percent on college preparation. While these are solid majorities, this drop off indicates that some principals still need additional evidence of the sizeable impact of SEL on academic achievement.

> *"One thing is, you need to be able to show where it [SEL] is being done successfully, what the trade-off for that is. Whether it's a positive trade-off – so you gave up the time for this, however overall scores improved, attendance improved – if you can show models where that's occurred and the positive trade-off for the time and resources that need to be invested in it, that's what people need to see before they're willing to give up those other things."*
>
> **Superintendent**

In interviews with superintendents and research and evaluation specialists, there was greater recognition of the link between developing students' SEL skills and raising academic achievement. Most not only agreed that SEL skills are as high a priority as other skills students need to develop in K-12, but believe

Principals believe that SEL has a positive impact on students' in-school experience.



SEL skills are, in fact, a prerequisite to the academic piece and that it is impossible to learn without them. However, these district-level administrators understand that not everyone sees the clear link between SEL and academic gains, and they emphasize that in order to get others on board with developing more SEL programming, it is imperative to produce greater evidence. This will need to include data demonstrating that developing SEL skills and competencies can lead to real academic gains, especially in schools and districts that are heavily focused on standardized testing, as well as providing concrete case studies where a focus on SEL has led to greater academic achievement.

Principals believe SEL can positively affect students' in-school experience

When asked if social and emotional learning could improve students' in-school experience, principals responded in an overwhelmingly positive way.

Ninety-seven percent of principals believe it is definitely or probably true that teaching SEL skills in school will improve student behavior and reduce the need for disciplinary referrals, as well as help students take more responsibility for their own learning and development. Almost all principals also say it is definitely or probably true that teaching social and emotional skills in school will make learning more engaging and enjoyable for students (95 percent), improve students' academic performance (93 percent), and reduce absenteeism and improve student attendance (92 percent).

While most principals are inclined overall to believe in the positive impacts of SEL on students' in-school experience, less than half are entirely convinced of its effects on academic performance (40 percent say it is definitely true that SEL will improve this) and improving student attendance (40 percent say it is definitely true that SEL will improve this).

In 2011, CASEL embarked on an effort to put research into action and launched the first-of-its kind Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) — a partnership among CASEL, Novo Foundation, the American Institute for Research (AIR), and initially, eight large school districts across the country: Anchorage, AK; Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Nashville, TN; Oakland, CA; Sacramento, CA; and Washoe County, NV. With Atlanta, GA and El Paso, TX subsequently joining the collaborative, the CDI now includes 10 school districts representing more than one million students in some of the nation's most geographically, economically, and ethnically diverse communities. Though there are several other examples of high-quality, district-wide SEL implementation, including the CORE Districts in California, we focus here on SEL efforts within the CDI to help provide key insights on systemic SEL implementation, the challenges these districts have encountered, and how they envision their work moving forward. For more on the mission of the CDI, please see Appendix III and visit http://www.casel.org/cdi-results/.

Snapshot: Anchorage School District – Building on Grassroots SEL

Anchorage School District is the largest school district in Alaska, serving 47,834 students during the 2016-17 school year. The students that comprise Anchorage School District are 42 percent white, 6 percent Black, 12 percent Hispanic, and 17 percent Asian and/or Pacific Islander. A majority of students (54 percent) in Anchorage School District qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, while 15 percent of students in Anchorage were categorized as students with disabilities in 2016-17.[1] Anchorage School District posted a high school graduation rate of 80 percent in 2015, 4.4 percentage points higher than the graduation rate for the state of Alaska.

Anchorage was an original member of CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), joining in 2011, but developing the social and emotional skills of both students and adults across the district was happening well before becoming a part of the CDI. In the decade before joining the CDI, educators in Anchorage worked to create SEL standards, bring in an SEL coordinator, and establish SEL programs in its schools. This grassroots effort to prioritize SEL came from an inherent core value in Anchorage's teachers and leaders that their job was to go beyond teaching academic content and educate the whole child – a focus that still drives their work today. By joining CASEL's CDI, however, Anchorage has been able to hone their efforts and advance systemic implementation through common language and programming. Here are a few key takeaways from Anchorage on SEL implementation:

Why leadership matters: In Anchorage, what helped drive SEL at the district level is the belief that SEL should be at the heart of their mission to educate children. Those who are shaping SEL in the district have seen how critical it is to get the backing of administrators and principals, who are the key to change, and that these leaders successfully model the social and emotional competencies they want to instill in students and staff. The leadership in Anchorage has also played a crucial role in taking SEL implementation toward a more systematic implementation through its District Leadership Team, which brought together district-level administrators, principals, and teachers for three years to grapple with how to move the district in the right direction. The District Leadership Team used the pre-existing Response to Intervention (RTI) framework that was being used across the district to build out appropriate SEL programming for elementary, middle, and high schools and put all schools on the same page. Creating the District Leadership Team involved school and district leaders in the decision-making on SEL implementation, but more importantly,

1 School district data retrieved from Department of Demographics-GIS Services, "Ethnicity Report," Anchorage School District, retrieved from https://www.asdk12.org/demographics-gis/ethnicity/.

included teachers in the process and made transparency a key component, ensuring that nothing was happening *to* teachers, but rather with them at the helm.

Moving from a core value to data-driven SEL: Anchorage is seeing a shift from holding SEL and whole child development as a core value to using SEL data to learn more about outcomes and how to improve their instruction and implementation. Though SEL has long been a staple in the district, evaluating SEL programs and their outcomes has only become a priority more recently. The district uses a school climate and connectedness survey to measure where students stand on 17 SEL competencies, as well as how they perceive school culture. Anchorage also collects data from a SEL staff survey that draws on the perceptions of teachers and provides them with feedback on their implementation efforts and informs their practice. In addition to the student and staff surveys, Anchorage uses a family satisfaction survey that measures perceptions of climate and safety in their child's school. All of these survey results will now be available in the district's data dashboard to make SEL data more accessible to educators, families, and community organizations. Leaders are trying to be more intentional about collecting data to evaluate the impact of SEL programming and using that data to course correct where needed.

Asking big questions: Some of the greatest course corrections in Anchorage have come from asking critical questions in their surveys and questioning how best to move SEL implementation forward in the most beneficial way possible. One question on the grade 6-12 student school climate and connectedness survey asks students to respond to the statement: "At school, there is a teacher or some other adult who will miss me when I'm absent." When just 46 percent of students responded positively, they knew change was needed. This pushed the district to make relationships a priority by making sure adults in each school were equipped to build better relationships with their students and built upon long-standing efforts to ensure that adults in the district had developed their own SEL skills. Asking the right questions also shapes their use of SEL data. Instead of going full-steam ahead with increased data collection and reporting, educators in Anchorage asked themselves whether they truly needed more data or if they simply needed *better* data that could help them understand their current SEL programs and how to improve them. This has allowed for a focus on collecting the data that matters to teachers and can help them improve their instruction and kept the data collection transparent. Though Anchorage is still working toward a better SEL data system, asking big questions – and being sure to keep the well-being of students and teachers at the heart of it – is helping to move SEL in the district forward successfully.

For more information on SEL in Anchorage, please visit: http://www.casel.org/partner-districts/anchorage-school-district/



Survey Findings 2

SEL Implementation

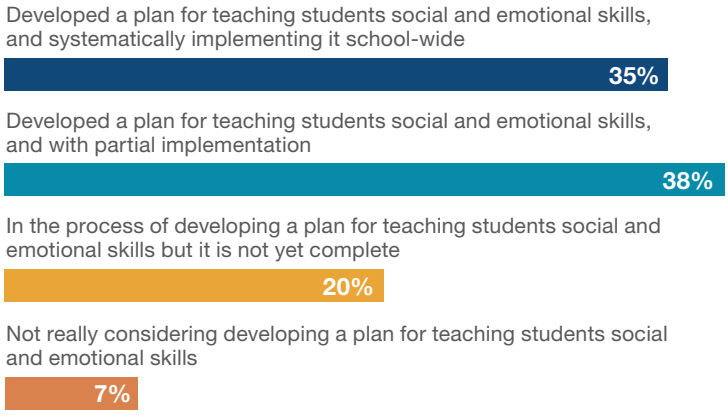
While the "will" to implement SEL is there, the "way" – understanding the key components to implementation, who needs to be involved, and having adequate support – is often not. But in schools that are systematically implementing SEL, a few things are very clear: support from district leaders is high, teachers are heavily involved, and more stakeholders are included in the process. And the more systemic SEL is, the greater the outcomes. Principals that have already moved toward school-wide SEL are seeing better academic results and an improved in-school experience all around.

The evidence shows that the benefits of SEL are greater when it is implemented effectively and seamlessly integrated into the learning environment, but in most places, even when high-quality programming is being used, SEL is often not embedded across classrooms in a meaningful way (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). Like academic skills, social and emotional competencies are best developed when students and teachers are given the opportunity to continuously hone these skills and build upon them through daily practice and reinforcement. This is why many SEL researchers advise a move away from fragmented approaches to SEL toward systemic, school-wide programming that allows students' social and emotional skills to be cultivated alongside their academic skills and creates a common climate and culture for SEL throughout the school (Greenberg et al., 2003; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Meyers et al., 2015; Oberle, Domitrovitch, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). Establishing a school-wide SEL plan lays the groundwork for providing training and support for teachers and staff, making shared decisions on SEL program adoption, creating SEL benchmarks and appropriate assessments to measure student progress, and creating family and community partnerships that can help support the development of social and emotional competencies outside of school. School-wide SEL implementation – with the support of district leaders – also allows for customized SEL programming based on the needs of the school, increasing the likelihood of buy-in and providing critical space for growth and readjustment.

Though the evidence for systemic SEL implementation is strong, it is clear from our survey that the majority of principals are not yet going this route – just one-quarter of principals score high on SEL implementation. The ones who are systematically implementing SEL school-wide have three key things in common: 1) They have strong support

While principals consistently support SEL, there is more variation in implementation.

Which of these best describes your school in having a school-wide program for teaching students social and emotional skills?



Impementing plan school-wide	
Elementary School	41%
Middle/junior high	31%
High school	25%
Urban	41%
Suburban	32%
Small town/rural	31%
Free/reduced lunch	
Less than 40%	37%
80%/more	37%
School size (students)	
Less than 500	34%
500 to 999	38%
1,000/more	31%

from district leaders, 2) they expect all teachers to develop students' SEL skills, and 3) they engage a wide range of both in- and out-of-school stakeholders to advance SEL. These principals are also reaping the greatest rewards. Principals who are systematically implementing SEL in their schools are more likely to report successfully developing students' knowledge in key content areas, their ability to apply knowledge and skills in real world situations, and their critical thinking and reasoning skills. Principals in schools where SEL implementation is high are also far more likely to believe that SEL will reduce discipline referrals, make learning more enjoyable for students, reduce absenteeism, and improve students' academic performance. These findings strongly support a school-wide approach to SEL implementation and add to a growing research base that systemic SEL can lead to big improvements throughout a school.

While support is high, SEL implementation varies significantly

Despite overwhelmingly positive support from administrators for developing students' SEL skills and competencies, implementation of SEL programming varies widely. Only about one-third of principals (35 percent) report that their school has developed a plan for teaching students social and emotional skills and is systematically implementing it school-wide. Nearly two in five principals (38 percent) said that their school has developed a plan for teaching SEL but has reached only partial implementation. Twenty percent of principals reported being in the process of developing a plan for teaching SEL, and just seven percent said they were not considering developing a plan for teaching SEL. School-wide implementation is more likely to be reported by elementary school principals (41 percent, compared to 31 percent of middle school and 25 percent of high school principals) and by those in urban settings (41 percent, compared to 32 percent in suburban and 31 percent in small town/rural areas).

Nearly 70 percent of principals said they expect all teachers in their school to teach students social and emotional skills. Sixty-four percent reported that the teaching of social and emotional skills is integrated throughout the academic curriculum – though only 25 percent said that this applies fully to their school. Elementary school principals (67 percent) were more likely than middle (58 percent) and high school (57 percent) principals to report integrating SEL into their academic curriculum. By contrast, about half of principals (51 percent) said they have a separate and specific curriculum, apart from academics, for teaching students social and emotional skills.

Superintendents and research and evaluation specialists agree that the teaching of social and

emotional skills is, for the most part, not universal in their districts. While most see SEL being addressed at least tangentially and believe that teachers are inherently building students' SEL skills, only some report having specific programs in place. In interviews, several mentioned PBIS, character education, Second Step, and restorative justice programming as ways students in their schools are getting these skills. Few superintendents reported having specific, explicit social and emotional goals stated in their learning standards, although several have incorporated social and emotional development into their district's broader mission statement or strategic plan. Many also said that while SEL teaching is happening in lower grades, it drops off by the time students reach middle or high school.

> *"Indirectly [SEL teaching is happening] quite a bit, but it is not formalized like it should be. We need to make the emphasis that every teacher is taking steps to deal with social and emotional needs of students, but I understand it's hard because they have to get through so much curriculum for tests: it turns into an assembly line of information, rather than caring about a kid with divorced parents or who is in foster care."*
>
> **Superintendent**

Few schools fully meet the benchmarks for implementing SEL

CASEL has developed a school-wide framework for SEL implementation, which lays out key areas of focus to help schools establish goals and reflect upon their implementation efforts.[2] For the purposes of our survey, the framework was narrowed down to seven key benchmarks:

- My school has developed a clear vision statement that prioritizes social and emotional learning for all students.
- My school has a long-term plan to support students' social and emotional learning.
- My school has implemented an evidence-based program for teaching students social and emotional skills.
- There is a coordinated professional development program that addresses social and emotional learning.
- My school regularly evaluates whether adequate resources are being devoted to social and emotional learning.
- The central office leaders of my school's district provide guidance and support for social and emotional learning.
- 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.

When principals were asked if their school was meeting those benchmarks, few were. Less than half said their school has a clear vision statement prioritizing SEL for all students or a long-term plan to support students' social and emotional learning. Forty percent reported implementing evidence-based programming for teaching SEL, and 36 percent said they have coordinated professional development addressing SEL or are regularly evaluating if the resources devoted to SEL are adequate. Only a third (34 percent) reported that district leaders provided guidance/support for SEL, and only 33 percent said that standards are in place describing SEL for each grade level.

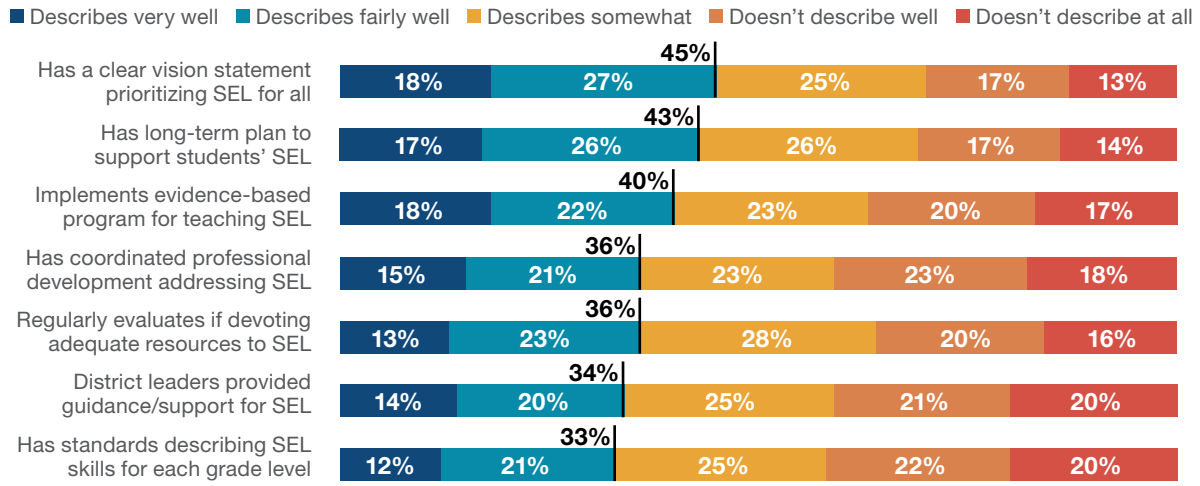
Of all principals surveyed, just one-quarter could be considered "high-implementers" of SEL.[3] Thirty-nine percent of principals are moderate implementers, and 36 percent are low implementers. The highest implementing principals can be

2 For more on the Theory of Action and to view resources for the systemic implementation of social and emotional learning, please visit CASEL's District Resource Center at https://drc.casel.org.

3 SEL implementation calculated by assigning schools points based on principals' reporting of how well each benchmark describes their school (on a 0- to 4-point scale on each of CASEL's seven benchmarks, maximum score 28 points): High = 21 or higher, moderate = 11 to 20, low = 0 to 10.

Few schools fully meet the benchmarks for implementing SEL.

How well does this describe your school?



found in urban school districts, while the lowest are in small town or rural districts. Implementation is fairly evenly split across grade levels and high- and low-poverty schools.

District leadership plays a large role in driving SEL

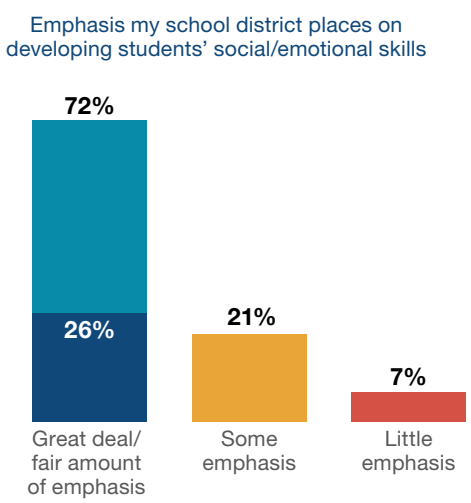
Though the support for SEL among administrators is high, part of the variance in implementation appears to come from a disconnect between school and district leadership. While a large majority of principals said their school district emphasizes developing students' social and emotional skills at least a fair amount, only 26 percent said there was a "great deal" of emphasis on SEL coming from above. In fact, only 40 percent of principals said their central district leadership requires all schools to have a plan for teaching social and emotional skills. Of principals who said their school district places a great deal of emphasis on teaching SEL, however, 65 percent reported their school has developed a plan for SEL and is systematically implementing it school-wide. In comparison, of principals who said their district places a fair amount of emphasis and those who claimed even less emphasis, just 30 percent and 16 percent, respectively, have a plan for SEL and are systematically implementing it.

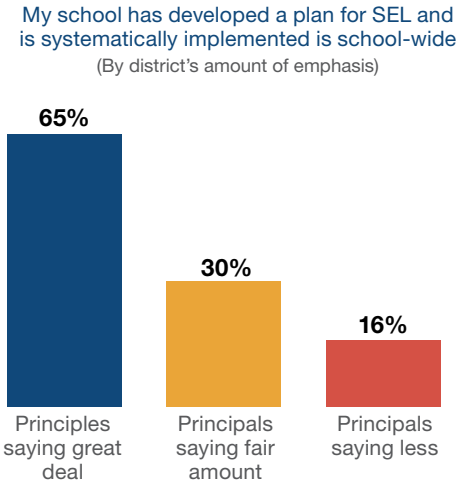
More than half of principals (54 percent) who said their district places a great deal of emphasis on SEL qualified as high implementers according to CASEL's benchmarks, and thirty-six percent were moderate implementers. On the other hand, of those who said their districts placed less emphasis on SEL, just 8 percent were high implementers and 28 percent moderate implementers, pointing again to the critical importance of having support for SEL at the highest levels of district leadership.

> *"I think it comes from the top: what we message, what we monitor, what we pay attention to, what we provide professional learning around, what type of experts we bring in for their learning."*
>
> **Superintendent**

Interviews with superintendents confirmed how important it is for central district leadership to be engaged in SEL, reporting that SEL is happening on a more programmatic basis where central office leadership is invested in SEL and has made building these skills a priority. They also believe when support for SEL implementation comes from the top, it carries with it the power to bring implementers (e.g., principals and teachers) and other

District leadership plays an important role in driving SEL.





stakeholders (e.g., parents and school boards) on board with expanding SEL. In the districts of the superintendents who described SEL as a personal passion of theirs, SEL is being implemented more extensively and there is a greater level of experimentation with creative and innovative approaches to implementing SEL that are tailored to the needs and goals of the district. Both school and district leaders agree: calls for SEL coming from the highest level of leadership are a critical piece to ensuring it takes hold on a systemic basis.

Schools that are systematically implementing SEL involve more people, are more successful at developing students' SEL skills, and see more academic success

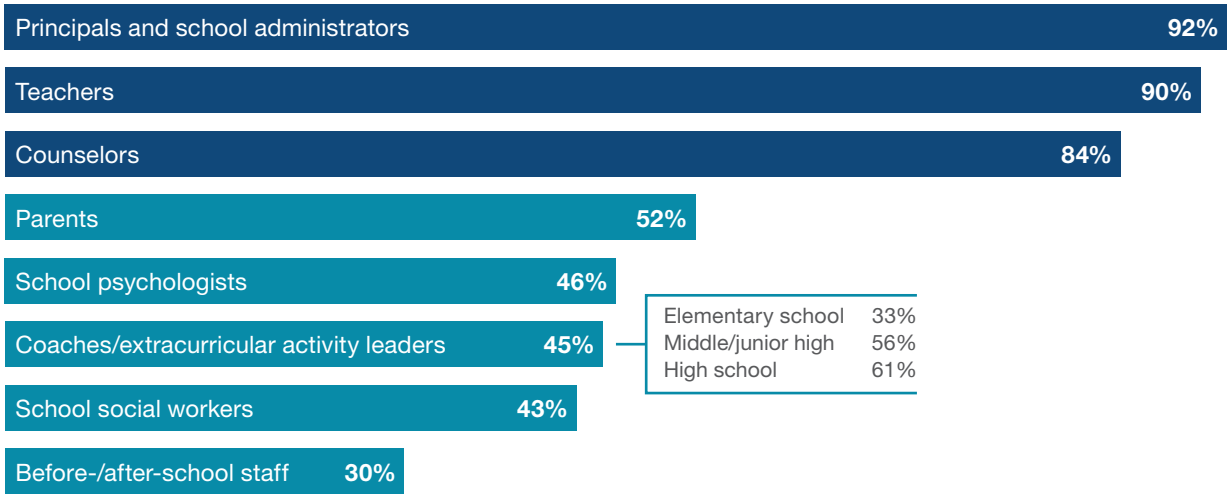
Principals most commonly report that school administrators (92 percent), teachers (90 percent), and counselors (84 percent) are actively engaged in developing students' social and emotional skills. Roughly half report involving parents (52 percent), and just less than half cite school psychologists (46 percent), coaches and extracurricular activity leaders (45 percent), and school social workers (43 percent) as being engaged in teaching SEL. Sixty-one percent of high school principals report coaches and extracurricular activity leaders as being engaged in developing students' social and emotional skills, compared to 56 percent of middle school principals and 33 percent of elementary school principals.

> *"I can tell you anecdotally that children who get along, who are comfortable in their classrooms and are comfortable seeking help and advocating for themselves when they need it, I can tell you that those kinds of children tend to do better in school and that our programs are designed to help children develop in those ways."*
>
> **Superintendent**

Schools that report the highest levels of SEL implementation are more likely to involve more in- and out-of-school stakeholders, which can better ensure everyone is working together to successfully put SEL into practice. Principals in schools with both high and moderate SEL implementation are more likely to involve principals and school administrators, teachers, counselors and school psychologists, parents, coaches/extracurricular activity leaders, school social workers, and before- and after-school staff in engaging students' social and emotional competencies.

The primary actors involved in teaching SEL are school administrators, teachers, and school counselors.

Which of the following people are actively engaged in developing students' social and emotional skills in your school?



In high-implementing schools, 98 percent of principals report that all teachers (with some exceptions) are expected to teach social and emotional skills, compared to 80 percent in moderate-implementation schools and 39 percent in low-implementation schools. They are also far more likely to partner with parents (89 percent, compared to 58 percent in moderate-implementation schools and 25 percent in low-implementation schools) and work with out-of-school-time providers (67 percent, compared to 38 percent in moderate-implementation schools and 19 percent in low-implementation schools) to promote SEL. Schools with low implementation, on the other hand tend to leave more of the responsibility for developing students' SEL skills to counselors and school psychologists: in low-implementation schools, 51 percent report that counselors and psychologists are primarily responsible for developing these skills (compared to the 39 percent who say all teachers are expected to do so).

In a self-report of how their schools are faring at developing students' social and emotional skills, 71 percent of principals say they are either very or fairly successful, though just 23 percent report being very successful. Those numbers rise significantly for principals reporting high implementation – 93 percent report success at developing students' social and emotional skills, with 45 percent saying they are very successful. Moderate implementers report a 73 percent success rate (19 percent very successful), while just 55 percent of low-implementers say they are successfully developing students' SEL competencies (11 percent very successful).

Many principals in schools that are implementing SEL school-wide are seeing greater success in developing key academic skills. Ninety percent of high-implementing principals say their school is very (46 percent) or fairly (44 percent) successful at developing student knowledge in key content/subject areas, compared to 82 percent of moderate implementers (28 percent very, 54 fairly) and 76 percent of low implementers (20 percent very, 56 percent fairly). An overwhelming majority of high-implementing principals also report greater levels of success at developing student ability to apply knowledge/skills in real world situations (86 percent) and developing student critical thinking and reasoning (87 percent) – both skills deemed critical for success by leaders in higher education and employers. A majority of moderate- and low-implementing principals also report success at developing these skills in students, but at significantly lower rates.

The link reported by administrators between academic success and an emphasis on social and emotional learning is backed up by a growing

Low implementers leave SEL up to school counselors whereas high implementers involve all teachers and build community partnerships.

Portions saying each fully applies/applies with some exceptions in their school

	Schools with high implementation	Schools with moderate implementation	Schools with low implementation
All teachers are expected to teach students social and emotional skills	98%	80%	39%
We partner with parents to promote social and emotional learning	89%	58%	25%
We work with out-of-school-time providers to promote social and emotional learning	67%	38%	19%
Counselors and school psychologists are primary responsible for developing students social and emotional skills	59%	57%	51%

Schools that are systematically implementing SEL also see more academic success.

Evaluation of School's Success in Selected Areas, by Schools' Level of SEL Implementation



research base. Four large, comprehensive meta-analytic reviews conducted since 2011 show that students receiving SEL programming in addition to regular classroom curriculum had improved academic outcomes – including one that found an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement – compared to students who did not receive additional SEL programming (Durlak et al., 2011; January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017). The most recent of these meta-analyses, released in 2017, found a small number of individual studies that showed students participating in SEL programming had stronger SEL skills, improved attitudes, and higher academic performance, and also found greater success in graduating high school and completing college than students who did not receive SEL interventions.

Principals in high-implementation schools also believe that SEL has the power to improve the school environment and students' in-school experience. Moderate implementers also see the potential of SEL to positively impact their students and schools, but they are less certain of this. A majority of high-implementing principals believe it is *definitely* true that SEL will improve student behavior and reduce disciplinary referrals (69 percent, compared to 58

percent in moderate-implementation schools and 43 percent in low-implementation schools); make learning more enjoyable for students (59 percent, compared to 48 percent in moderate-implementation schools and 33 percent in low-implementation schools); reduce absenteeism and improve attendance (59 percent, compared to 38 percent in moderate-implementation schools and 29 percent in low-implementation schools); and improve students' academic performance, standardized test scores, and GPAs (57 percent, compared to 38 percent in moderate-implementation schools and 30 percent in low-implementation schools). High-implementing school leaders, therefore, are the best advocates for SEL and can serve as essential spokespersons for guiding and expanding SEL implementation.

> *"I see happy kids. I mean, you can tell when an adult culture focuses on relationships and focuses on community, and holds each other responsible for that. It plays out into, students are eager and engaged and happy. And you also see it in the data: less suspensions, less parent complaints. You see more stability in the teachers on those campuses, they stay longer. You see stability because they're happy."*
>
> **Superintendent**

Superintendents who have witnessed or overseen an expansion of SEL in their districts report similar satisfaction with the results. While few are measuring these skills in a concrete, systematic way (see Survey Findings 4: Assessing SEL), many expressed anecdotal evidence that developing students' social and emotional skills is having a positive impact on the school climate and on students' relationships with teachers and other students. Several pointed to a decrease in disciplinary actions and referrals, as well as an improved process for identifying students for special education classes. A handful of superintendents mentioned that their teachers have noticed improvements in students' mindsets and resiliency or that students are feeling more comfortable in the classroom asking for help instead of giving up. Altogether, the links high-implementing school and district leaders see between SEL and improved outcomes indicate that a focus on developing students' social and emotional competencies can be a powerful force for keeping students engaged in school and improving the school environment for both students and educators.

> *"The most compelling data [on SEL] is that seven years ago we had, I believe we had 55 to 56 percent of our students in poverty who went on to postsecondary education, went on to college, about 55 percent of them had to take remedial coursework upon entering college. Over seven years, that trend line has dropped like a rock. It hasn't gone up and down, it's gone straight down. We now have 16 percent that require remedial coursework in college. It's an incredible piece of data."*
>
> **Superintendent**

Snapshot: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools – Meeting Schools Where They Are to Advance SEL

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) serves the city of Nashville, Tennessee and surrounding Davidson County. During the 2015-16 school year, the most recent year for which data is available, the school district served a total of 85,123 students. The majority of students in MNPS were students of color, as 44 percent of students were Black, 30 percent white, and 22 percent Hispanic. Nearly 54 percent of students in the district qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, 13 percent were students with disabilities, and 18 percent were English Language Learners.[4]

MNPS joined CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative in 2012. The district was already using the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework and was working at the Tier 2 (Targeted Interventions) and Tier 3 (Intensive Interventions and Comprehensive Evaluation) levels to target students for individualized support and intervention. CASEL pushed educators in MNPS to focus on the Tier 1 level and focus their thinking around SEL for all students. To move toward a more expanded SEL implementation, MNPS started working with Responsive Classroom, rolling out training to two teachers at each of their 75 elementary schools plus the entire faculty and staff at two of the schools. Since then, MNPS has learned some valuable lessons and done some critical work in the area of SEL assessment. Here are some key insights from their journey:

Providing SEL options: Though MNPS started with Responsive Classroom, the expense forced them to move to a three-option model. Schools may choose from incorporating restorative approaches, PBIS, or an SEL foundations curriculum. To determine these options, SEL leaders worked with 12 different school clusters to discuss various possibilities before settling on the final three. Additionally, the district has created "I Can" statements for each grade level, describing the SEL skills students should attain during that year, that teachers integrate into their instruction. This provides guidance, structure, and flexibility to schools to ensure SEL fits their needs.

Assessing SEL: SEL leaders in MNPS began prioritizing SEL assessment about four years ago when they realized the data they were getting did not match what they were seeing in schools. They decided to develop an "SEL walkthrough," taking three years to create a high-quality rubric to measure how schools were faring in integrating SEL. The process to create the rubric was built upon figuring out what they were looking for in terms of assessing SEL, and making sure they were meeting schools where they were, instead of where they thought they should be, which has allowed it to become a useful tool for improvement – not one for punishment.

During the walkthrough, members of the SEL team perform school observations, assessing them on three criteria: school-wide environment, classroom instruction, and classroom environment, management, and discipline. The SEL team then compiles the results of the walkthrough and determines each school's strengths and areas of growth, and two weeks later, they return to the school to go over the results with the entire faculty. The findings from the walkthrough are used to improve SEL programming and share best practices across the district, as well as continually improve the rubric.

MNPS' work to assess schools and teacher performance on SEL is showing promising results and teaching SEL leaders what to look for in measuring SEL implementation and how to use those results for improvement. They are looking ahead at potentially assessing school culture through a student and teacher school climate survey, as well as students' mindsets, but are not looking to assess students' SEL skills or make it a part of an accountability system.

For more on SEL in MNPS, please visit: http://www.casel.org/partner-districts/metropolitan-nashville-public-schools/

4 School district data retrieved from Tennessee Department of Education, "Profile: 2015-2016 Davidson County," retrieved from https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/report-card.



Survey Findings 3

The Path to Increased SEL

While principals and district administrators are highly receptive to a greater emphasis on SEL, they need help moving forward with implementation. This, first and foremost, will be dependent on increased training for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Principals want more SEL training for teachers, access to research-based strategies

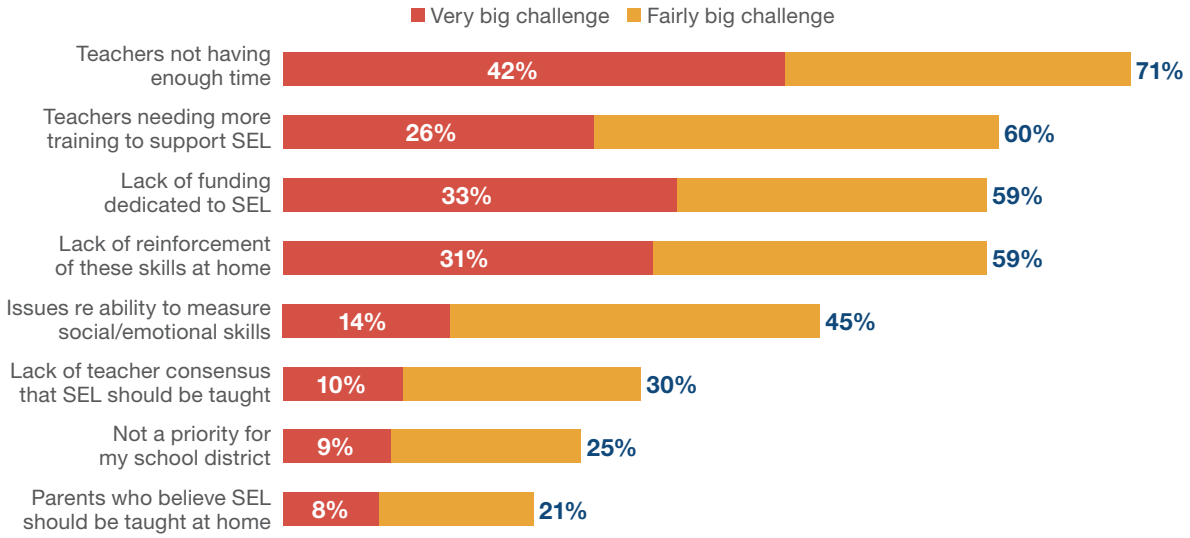
A majority of principals indicated a lack of teacher training poses a significant challenge to SEL implementation. Sixty percent of principals said the need for more teacher training to support SEL implementation is a big challenge. Less than half of principals feel as though the teachers in their building are very or fairly well prepared to teach social and emotional skills, including only 10 percent who believe their teachers are *very* prepared. Just under 40 percent say the teachers in their school are somewhat prepared, and 17 percent believe their teachers are not prepared to successfully teacher social and emotional skills. Principals throughout the K-12 spectrum and school income levels responded similarly. Principals from urban schools were more likely to respond positively about their teachers' SEL training than those in suburban and small town/rural schools. This matches findings from *The Missing Piece*, in which only about half of teachers (55 percent) said they had received some form of SEL training.

When asked to choose from a list provided what the most important elements to ensuring schools are successful in developing students' social and emotional skills, principals most commonly chose additional professional development for teachers (54 percent) as the most critical factor. Approximately one-third of principals (32 percent) chose dedicated planning time for teachers for SEL lessons.

Based on a recent national scan of SEL content in state teacher certification requirements and teacher preparation programs in colleges of education, it is not surprising that principals would feel as though many of their teachers lack the proper training to successfully develop students' social and emotional skills. The scan, conducted by researchers at the University of British Columbia, found that while many state requirements mentioned several of CASEL's SEL competencies, there was a disconnect between those requirements and the coursework being provided to pre-service teachers (Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017). So, though many states have established a need for teachers to be prepared to address their own social

Lack of teacher time is the biggest barrier to increasing SEL; teacher training and funding also need to be addressed.

How big a challenge is this in trying to implement teaching SEL in your school?



and emotional competencies, emphasis on understanding students' social and emotional well-being and coursework to prepare teachers to develop students SEL skills is still lacking.

An overwhelming majority of principals – 82 percent – believe their teachers would be receptive to their school placing a greater emphasis on teaching social and emotional skills. Positive responses were high among principals from all grade levels, geographic areas, and school socioeconomic status, as well as academic performance ratings. Principals in high-SEL-implementing schools (90 percent) were more likely to report their teachers being more receptive, but both moderate-implementing (87 percent) and low-implementing (70 percent) principals also stated positive beliefs about how teachers in their school would receive a greater emphasis on SEL. Principals' beliefs about teachers being open to receiving more SEL training align with what teachers reported in *The Missing Piece* in 2013. Four in five teachers (82 percent) said they would like more SEL training, including 61 percent who reported being very or fairly interested. Three in four teachers (73 percent) saw the lack of training in how to teach social and emotional skills as at least somewhat of a challenge to successfully implementing SEL in their classrooms (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013).

Beyond greater teaching training and preparation time, 44 percent of principals chose more research-based strategies on how to effectively promote SEL. Some principals also expressed interest in having assessment data on students' SEL skills to guide and improve practices (22 percent).

High implementers of SEL more likely to report better trained teachers

A key takeaway from principals is that once again, in districts that emphasize SEL and score high on SEL implementation, higher numbers report that their teachers are able to successfully teach SEL. Seventy-eight percent of principals who said their district places a great deal of emphasis on SEL said their teachers are well prepared to teach social and emotional skills, compared to just 21 percent of principals where emphasis on SEL is minimal. Similarly, 80 percent of high-implementing principals – opposed to just 15 percent of low-implementing principals – report that their teachers are prepared to successfully teach SEL. Superintendents agree with this assessment. Those who said they have incorporated SEL teaching into their regular professional development report that teachers are more prepared and more well-versed in the language of SEL, and that, in turn, social and emotional development is a higher priority in the classroom.

> *"It's not only a time issue, but it's a personnel issue and a funding issue. I wouldn't be able to hire a separate staff to be able to just focus on this. You've got to do it within your existing staff and then you've got to get them trained to be able to fully implement it."*
>
> **Superintendent**

Lack of time, funding also seen as barriers

One of the larger issues schools face in implementing SEL is the "how" – how to teach social and emotional skills without adding one more thing into an already crowded school day. Teachers especially feel the strain of having to do more than they are already asked, and are less likely to buy in to an initiative that amounts to "one more thing." In fact, in *The Missing Piece* survey, 81 percent of teachers said that not enough time in the school day to take on something new is a big challenge for schools trying to take on SEL implementation. The principals we surveyed understand this, citing a lack of time for teachers as the biggest challenge schools face in trying to implement SEL (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). More than 40 percent of principals agreed that teacher time is a very big challenge, while roughly 30 percent said it was a fairly big challenge in trying to bring about SEL implementation. Superintendents also see a lack of time as being a constant challenge and say it is the number one complaint they hear from their teachers. In many districts, teachers already have their plates full trying to meet stringent state-level academic standards and the perception is that SEL instruction is "just another mandate." One review reported, however, that when SEL is effectively implemented, teachers end up needing to spend less time on classroom management – providing an initial proof point that bringing SEL into the classroom may provide teachers with more time to spend on academics (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

A majority of principals also cited a lack of funding dedicated to SEL as a challenge in trying to implement SEL, as well as a lack of reinforcement of social and emotional skills at home. Most importantly, fewer than one in three of principals cite a lack of teacher consensus that SEL should be taught as being a challenge in bringing about SEL implementation, and only one in four principals reported it not being a priority for their school district.

> *"I would say we [provide professional development] limitedly… I think we provide most of the support to our school counselors and our social workers and we should probably expand it to more of our staff because they could benefit from it as well."*
>
> **Superintendent**

Snapshot: Austin Independent School District – Providing Proof to Get Results

Austin Independent School District (ISD) serves a total of 82,766 students from Austin, the city of Sunset Valley, the village of San Leanna, and other unincorporated areas of Travis County. Boasting an ethnically diverse student population, Austin ISD's students are 58 percent Hispanic, 27 percent white, and 8 percent Black. More than a quarter of students in Austin ISD are English Language Learners (ELL). Fifty-three percent of students in Austin ISD qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, while 10 percent are students with disabilities.[5] Austin ISD's 2015 graduation rate was 90 percent, slightly above Texas' 89 percent graduation rate.

In Austin, systemic social and emotional learning is entering its second phase, and its first five years are paving the way for improved and deepened implementation for both students and adults. Austin was chosen as one of the first three sites in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative, starting with a team of four to bring SEL to scale in a small number of schools in 2011-12 before slowly expanding out to all schools in 2015-16. Each school has its own SEL facilitator, and in the 2017-18 school year, there will be two SEL facilitators at every school. The slow and steady approach to taking SEL district-wide has been key to its success in Austin. Here are a few of the key insights from Austin on SEL implementation:

On implementing successfully: Going to scale immediately does not work. SEL leaders in the district were very strategic in learning what schools were doing and figuring out how to meet them where they were, and they credit strong site-based management within schools as being a critical component to getting SEL off the ground. They also took steps to make sure that SEL implementation was treated as a learning process, and that administrators, teachers, and staff in each school felt supported, not shamed, when things went wrong.

On providing proof for implementing SEL: Though there has been widespread acceptance of SEL in Austin, pockets of resistance remain, mainly from those who do not see the link between developing students' social and emotional skills and improving their academic performance. They are tackling this by getting administrators and teachers to understand that even implementing small pieces of SEL will have benefits, and by showing them ways to integrate SEL into all types of lessons to reinforce competencies within academics. SEL leaders have also started turning to the brain science supporting the development of students' social and emotional skills to help principals and teachers understand its value. This has been particularly important in getting school staff to see the impacts of trauma on many of their students, and moving them toward more restorative – not punitive – practices.

On the challenges that remain: Austin has done well with fostering the social and emotional learning of students, but as they have moved through the implementation process, a realization grew that they needed to develop the SEL competencies of the adults in the district as well. As one SEL leader put it, "How can we expect adults to teach SEL when their SEL needs are not being met?" Getting adults into a healthy social and emotional place is a crucial piece of getting the school culture and climate into the right place and an essential part of enabling mutually respectful relationships throughout the building. It is also important in getting buy-in for SEL and for fostering an environment where teachers can feel supported in taking calculated risks in their classrooms.

For more on SEL in Austin, please visit: http://www.casel.org/partner-districts/austin-independent-school-district/

5 School district data retrieved from Department of Campus and District Accountability, "Fact Sheet, 2016-2017 School Year," Austin Independent School District, retrieved from https://www.austinisd.org/.



Survey Findings 4

Assessing SEL

Although administrators are optimistic that SEL skills can be accurately measured and believe SEL data would be useful, they are often unfamiliar with available measurement tools and are not using them school- or district-wide. To advance SEL assessment, improved understanding of what qualifies as a measure of SEL and better training in how to collect and use SEL data is needed.

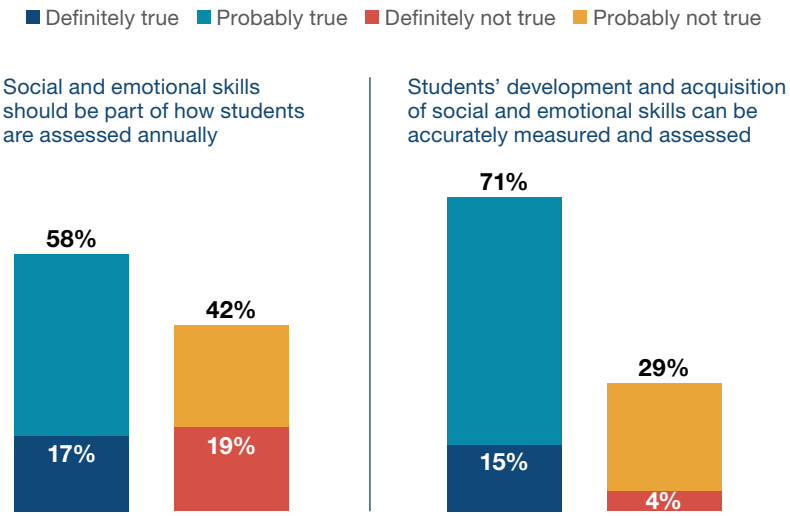
Most principals believe SEL skills can be accurately measured and assessed

Most principals believe that social and emotional skills can be accurately measured and assessed. In all, 71 percent of principals believe it is definitely or probably true that students' development and acquisition of social and emotional skills can be accurately measured and assessed, though just 15 percent believe it is definitely true. More than half of principals (58 percent) believe social and emotional skills should be part of how students are assessed annually, but there is still some reservation about placing a larger emphasis on SEL assessment.

Few administrators are familiar with current SEL assessments, understand what measures count in assessing SEL

Fewer than one in five principals (17 percent) are very or fairly familiar with current assessments for measuring students' social and emotional skills, while more than three in five (63 percent) say they are either not that familiar or not at all familiar with current SEL assessments. Principals in urban schools tend to be more familiar with current assessments than those in suburban and rural school districts—although, even in urban schools, only 27 percent of principals are very or fairly familiar (compared to 16 percent in suburban and 8 percent in small town rural districts). Principals who reported higher levels of familiarity with current SEL assessments are more likely to be convinced of the ability to accurately assess students' acquisition

Principals are optimistic that social and emotional skills can be assessed, but are not entirely convinced.



of social and emotional skills. (Forty-two percent of those who are at least fairly familiar with SEL assessment believe it is definitely true that these skills can be assessed, compared to only 9 percent of those who are unfamiliar.) Principals' knowledge of assessments is also correlated with their level of SEL implementation. Nearly half of principals who report being in high-implementing schools say they are familiar with current SEL assessments, while just eight and five percent of principals in moderate- and low-implementation schools, respectively, report the same.

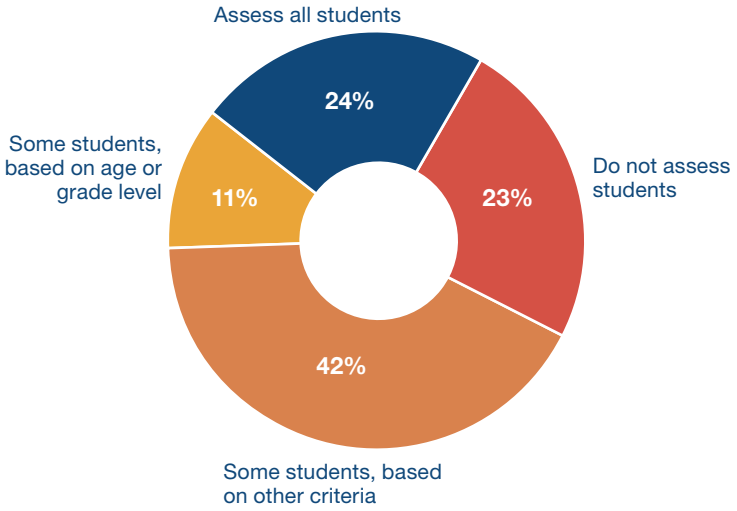
Superintendents also largely expressed a lack of familiarity with assessments of SEL competencies. Besides attempts to measure school climate, most superintendents said they are not really doing much to collect data on SEL skills in any formalized way, and describe themselves as unfamiliar with the existing measures for doing so. More district research and evaluation specialists reported being familiar with SEL assessments, though a number said their familiarity was low.

When asked what methods schools are currently using to assess students' social and emotional skills, most principals (62 percent) pointed to behavioral observation in a normal classroom setting. More than half (55 percent) said they use administrative records on disciplinary actions. To a lesser extent, principals reported using teacher rating scales of students (38 percent), student self-report (26 percent), and performance assessment on a specific task or problem (15 percent). Just over 60 percent of principals use at least two of these methods to assess SEL. Nearly a quarter of principals (23 percent) said their school does not assess social and emotional skills. Schools that do not assess students' social and emotional skills are far more likely to be low-implementers of SEL: among low implementers, 43 percent do not assess SEL – compared to only 7 percent of high implementers.

Superintendents report regularly analyzing disciplinary records or using routine classroom observation; however, most do not immediately identify these activities as measures of social and emotional learning. Some superintendents also described self-report surveys their schools administer, while others mentioned that younger students in their districts receive some kind of evaluation of their behavior or interpersonal skills on their report cards. Most superintendents, like principals, said that any SEL assessment data they are collecting is currently being used to figure out which students may need extra support or to improve programming and instruction, but not for accountability.

A plurality of schools use their own discretionary criteria to determine which students to assess.

We currently use assessments to assess social and emotional skills with the following students:



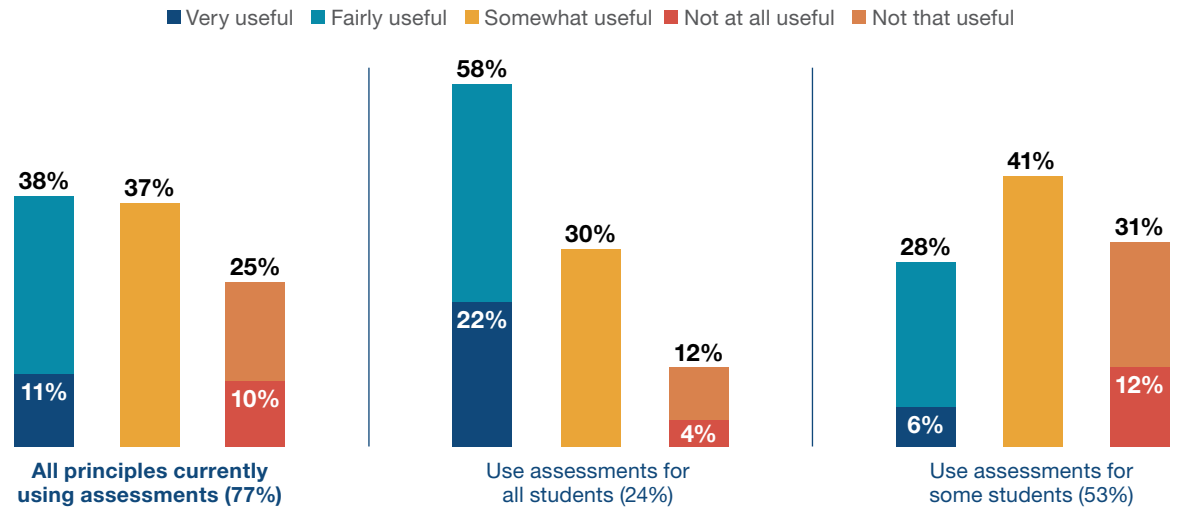
	Assess all students	Assess based on age/grade	Assess based on other
Elementary School	24%	13%	42%
Middle/junior high	22%	9%	46%
High school	21%	9%	41%
SEL implementation			
High	48%	19%	26%
Moderate	22%	13%	50%
Low	9%	4%	43%

Even among research and evaluation specialists, who would presumably have the greatest knowledge on assessing SEL, there is variation in understanding what measures count as assessing social and emotional competencies. Some said they were involved in tracking students' disciplinary referrals, or that certain teachers in their district are required to record behavioral observations. Others, however, tend to be doing more to create ways to better understand how their schools are doing at developing students' social and emotional competencies. Research and evaluation specialists, particularly those who are trained psychometricians, report that they have either developed or are in the beginning stages of developing their own in-house measures, such as student surveys or performance assessments on specific tasks. A few described crafting longitudinal studies built on surveys that are administered to students, staff, and/or parents on topics such as school climate and culture, as well as social and emotional health. The creation of in-house measures may be due to the customization factor it provides research and evaluation specialists, though some also expressed being unsatisfied, skeptical of, or unfamiliar with commercially available assessment tools.

> *"We worked on, for the past couple years, a perception survey. They measure four constructs…one being climate and culture. That's where some of your traditional safety stuff is going to be, and the multicultural aspects is going to be, but it also goes on to measure student motivation, student thinking, student engagement, and also perceptions about assessment construction… We have a student version – an elementary and a secondary student version. We have a parent/guardian version, and an instructional staff version. And we develop the forms to be parallel and we believe we are measuring the same constructs so we can make a comparison."*
>
> **Research & Evaluation Specialist**

There is room to improve the usefulness of current assessments.

How useful are the assessments that you are currently using for evaluating students social and emotional skills?



Few principals are assessing all students' SEL development

Only a quarter of principals (24 percent) are currently assessing all students' development of social and emotional skills. Eleven percent report assessing some students, based on age or grade level, while 42 percent said they assess some students based on other criteria. Schools rating high on SEL implementation are far more likely to be assessing all students than moderate- and low-implementing schools. Part of the discrepancy in who is receiving SEL assessment can be attributed to the fact that more principals report using assessments to identify students needing intervention than for any other reason. Nearly 40 percent of principals said they use SEL assessments to determine students needing intervention, while just 18 percent said their teachers use it to improve instruction and 17 percent said they use SEL assessments to help evaluate the effectiveness of the SEL programs they have adopted. Less than 10 percent of principals are using assessments for either teacher (6 percent) or school (7 percent) accountability.

More useful assessments, greater training in using SEL data needed

Like research and evaluation specialists, many principals expressed skepticism over the usefulness of current SEL assessment tools. Of the 77 percent of school leaders who are currently using assessments, less than 40 percent said the assessments are very or fairly useful, while one in four see little to no usefulness in their current assessment measures. Breaking out the principals who are assessing all students versus those who only assess some students, however, shows a clear differentiation in how SEL assessments are viewed. Nearly 60 percent of principals in schools that assess all students' SEL competencies find current assessments to be useful,

> *"We talk about the importance of triangulation of data, so the more different ways we can come at some of these really difficult constructs, the better. It's like a photograph: you can take a single photograph to try to tell a story, but a photo album with multiple photographs often will do a much better job telling a story. So, multiple sources of information are typically better than a single source."*
>
> **Research & Evaluation Specialist**

Measuring SEL: The Assessment Work Group

In a collaborative effort, CASEL has joined with leading researchers, educators, and policymakers from universities, school districts, and national organizations to establish an Assessment Work Group (AWG) to address and advance effective and practical assessment of social and emotional competencies from preschool to high school. With the support of seven funders, the AWG will be tackling critical issues educators face in using data to improve social and emotional learning over the next few years, and will specifically focus on four key areas:

- **Enhancing Collaboration:** Encouraging effective collaboration, communication, and networking in a rapidly growing field to optimize sharing of progress and reduce duplication of efforts.
- **Clarifying Frameworks:** Documenting similarities, differences, and potential alignments among the growing number of SEL-related frameworks that can guide both assessment and improvement efforts.
- **Advancing Practical Assessment:** Developing a guide to help educators select quality assessment tools and use data on students' social and emotional competencies in practical ways and for appropriate purposes.
- **Designing Direct Assessments:** Identifying new ways to directly measure students' social and emotional competencies through performance tasks in addition to self-reports or teacher ratings.

The AWG, through its *Measuring SEL* website (https://measuringsel.casel.org) will host a series of weekly blogs, produce a number of briefs, engage a wide network of collaborators, publish an interactive Practical Guide for assessment of social and emotional competencies, and issue State of the Field reports. The AWG has already launched its first Design Challenge, with over 20 innovative and emerging direct measures of SEL competing for awards and helping to frame critical design principals for SEL assessment.

compared to less than 30 percent of principals in schools only assessing some students.

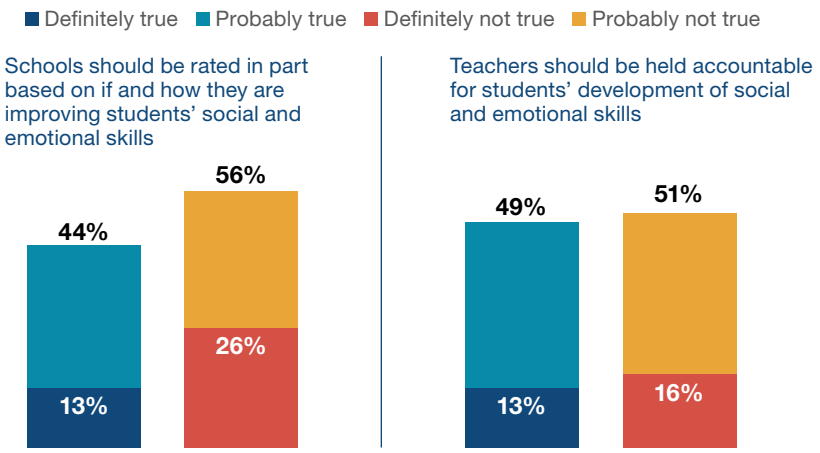
Research and evaluation specialists express some caveats around the usefulness and applicability of currently available SEL measures. Many stated that student self-report is useful to an extent – since perception is reality in many ways – but that it is important to minimize social desirability bias as much as possible. Regarding teacher ratings of students, there is also some fear that teachers may exhibit bias, thus making incorrect inferences about their students. There is also concern teachers may lack the larger context needed to truly assess students on these measures. For this reason, it is critical that schools consider marrying multiple measures together instead of relying on one source for assessment.

Principals also see a great need for better teacher training in using SEL assessment data. Three out of five (61 percent) believe teachers in their school have *little to no knowledge* of how to use SEL assessment data to improve their instruction. Conversely, fewer than one in five (16 percent) said that they think their teachers have either a great deal or fair amount of knowledge of using SEL assessment data to improve their instruction. Urban school principals and those in high-SEL-implementing schools were far more likely to report that their teachers knew how to use assessment data to improve their instruction—although still only 24 percent of urban principals and 44 percent of high implementers believe their teachers have at least a fair amount of knowledge on how to use assessment data

Principals see many uses for SEL assessment data; hold mixed views on SEL accountability

Given the assumption that they had access to valid and reliable assessments for measuring students' social and emotional skills, principals believe

Principals hold mixed views on SEL accountability.



there are a number of important uses for the data it would produce. An overwhelming majority of principals said they would use SEL assessments to identify students needing intervention (86 percent) or evaluate the effectiveness of SEL skills programs (79 percent). More than 70 percent said they could share the data with parents (73 percent) or use the assessments to improve teacher instruction (72 percent). In the eyes of principals, SEL assessment data is far less important for accountability purposes. Half of school leaders said they think it would be important to report data from the assessments to the district, and even fewer would use the data to hold schools accountable for developing students' social and emotional competencies (34 percent) or evaluate teachers based on the assessments (28 percent).

The accountability piece is where principals tend to express wariness of SEL assessment data and how it should be used. About half of school leaders (49 percent) believe that teachers should be held accountable for students' development of social and emotional skills, but the other half disagree. And just a small portion of all principals – 13 percent – are strongly in favor. The response was similar on the question of whether schools should be rated on their development of students' social and emotional skills, though even fewer principals responded in agreement (44 percent). Support for holding teachers accountable and rating students on SEL skills was stronger from urban school principals, high-implementers, and those who believe that SEL

> *"A bigger concern is that teacher ratings seem like they could be subjective per teacher, and not as objective as they could be. You'd like to say no teacher thinks a kid is worse than they are, or recommends medication for a kid who doesn't need it, but it does happen. Teachers are people and sometimes their professional opinion may be skewed. Things that have checks and balances…I don't think it's necessarily invaluable, there just has to be a counterbalance to it, like self-reports."*
>
> **Research & Evaluation Specialist**

can be measured (see Appendix IV for complete details).

In an ideal world – one in which they have confidence in the reliability of their measurement instruments – research and evaluation specialists would like to see SEL assessment data used first and foremost for formative assessment and program evaluation. Like principals, research and evaluation specialists have mixed views on assessing teach-

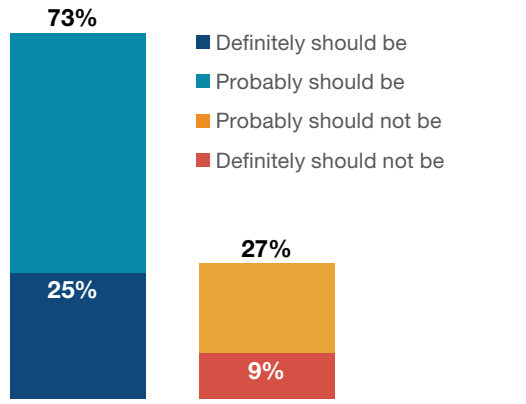
ers on developing students' social and emotional development. Some said they would love to see the day when measures are strong enough to be used to determine which teachers are not serving their students' SEL skills development, while others see this as a step too far and worry that SEL measurement is too subjective to be used as a punitive tool.

Principals support inclusion of SEL in state education standards

School leaders feel more positively about the inclusion of social and emotional skills in their state standards. Seventy-three percent of principals believe the development of social and emotional competencies should definitely or probably be explicitly stated in their state education standards – more than the 62 percent of teachers that said the same in the 2013 survey. There is support for state SEL standards from principals at all grade levels, though elementary school principals (76 percent) are more strongly in favor than middle (66 percent) and high (69 percent) school leaders. Urban and suburban school principals are more in favor of state SEL standards than principals in small town and rural schools (see Appendix IV for complete details). Principals in schools that score high on SEL implementation (85 percent) are more likely to support state SEL standards, though a large majority of moderate (76 percent) and low implementers (62 percent) of SEL are also in favor. The greatest discrepancy of support for state SEL standards comes between principals who believe SEL can be measured and those who do not. Seventy-nine percent of school leaders who trust in SEL measurement believe the development of students' social and emotional skills should be included in state standards, compared to 58 percent of those who do not believe SEL can be measured.

Those who have more experience with SEL are more likely to believe it should be part of state standards

Do you believe that the development of social and emotional skills should be explicitly stated in your state's education standards?



Snapshot: Washoe County School District – Factoring SEL into Student Success

Washoe County School District is the 2nd largest school district in the state of Nevada, serving 63,919 students in the cities of Reno and Sparks, as well as the communities of Verdi, Incline Village, and Gerlach. Students at Washoe County SD are 45 percent white, 2 percent Black, and 40 percent Hispanic. Forty-seven percent of students in Washoe County School District qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, while 14 percent are students with disabilities and 15 percent are English Language Learners.[6] While Washoe's graduation rate was just 77 percent in 2016, this is 6 percentage points higher than Nevada's graduation rate.

Washoe County School District joined CASEL's CDI in 2012, becoming one of the initiative's original eight districts. In Washoe, there has been a philosophical agreement since the start that emphasizing social and emotional learning is good for students, but to ensure continued buy-in, the district has turned to improved data collection on SEL and connecting it to key student outcomes. A big part of what has made Washoe County SD a leader in SEL data and assessment among CDI districts is that it is already a data-rich district, but getting the system right for using SEL data is still an ongoing process.

Connecting SEL data to student outcomes: Washoe, like other districts, has been collecting data on early warning indicators, including attendance, credit attainment, and transiency. In one recent school year, the early warning indicator data showed that 90 percent of students that had no risk factors in the 9th grade graduated high school on time, while only 30 percent of students who exhibited risk factors in the 9th grade did. To better understand why this was happening and connect it to what was known about students' social and emotional skills, research and evaluation specialists in the district decided to administer a student survey to understand if SEL factors were at play in why students did or did not graduate on time. It took the district three years to refine the survey, but the journey has been an enlightening one. Washoe has been able to link certain SEL factors, including student resiliency, to graduating high school on time, and at the same time, opened up a new avenue for communicating about SEL with both students and teachers. During the survey refining process, it was learned that students wanted time to reflect on the survey results, so structures were built in to include students in the conversation to understand how they approached the survey. Student focus groups also helped write survey items. The effort to create a high-quality survey and create usable data has also lead to better teacher conversations on SEL and more school teams wanting to build SEL into their instruction. Though the SEL survey is not yet ready to be part of an accountability system, it is bringing teachers, students, and administrators together around SEL and providing critical information to help understand what can be done to keep kids in school and on track to graduation.

Challenges in using SEL data: Though Washoe is leading the way in developing strong SEL assessments and linking it to academic outcomes, the path has not been without its challenges. The district has developed an SEL data website and student profile pages, but leaders have wrestled with how to present the data so it does not become a site showing students how they are failing. At the classroom level, they are still trying to figure out how to assess SEL instruction in a meaningful way. Data specialists have also had to confront the data fatigue many educators have experienced in recent years and questions over whether SEL competencies can actually be measured or changed. The data on SEL, however, has also helped gain buy-in and given leaders in the district guidance on how to thoughtfully use it to continue to carefully figure out next steps in SEL assessment that will benefit students and teachers.

Making parents a partner in SEL: Washoe County SD has made parents a key partner in their SEL implementation to reinforce at home what is happening in schools. The SEL team offers one-hour SEL parent university classes to help parents better understand SEL, and, at the request of individual schools, has provided about 50 of these classes each year. The district has also opened up their SEL mini-conferences for teachers to parents. The mini-conferences take place once a quarter in the evening and provide SEL instruction and materials to teachers, and as of this year, parents as well. To better meet the needs of those attending, the district provides free day care and dinner to participants. Including parents in SEL implementation is just one more step to ensuring SEL remains a large part of the fabric of what Washoe County SD is trying to achieve.

For more on SEL in Washoe County, please visit: http://www.casel.org/partner-districts/washoe-county-school-district/

6 School District data retrieved from Washoe County School District, "2016-2017 Characteristics & Performance," retrieved from http://www.washoeschools.net/washoeschools.

CASEL's Collaborating States Initiative

In 2016, CASEL launched the Collaborating States Initiative (CSI) to actively partner with states that wish to develop policies or guidelines that support implementation of quality SEL. The CSI is a collaborative learning community comprised of state SEL teams and an advisory group of leaders and experts in the field who want to learn from each other as each state works to advance SEL implementation. Since each state has their own unique priorities and needs, CASEL encourages states to develop a plan that will create the conditions to meet the distinct needs of its students. CASEL then supports states by sharing findings from research and best practices on SEL implementation, as well as technical assistance to any states that request it.

The CSI confirmed that there is a powerful demand for SEL at the state level. Forty states expressed interest in the CSI and for guidance on promoting evidence-based SEL practices. This enthusiasm led CASEL to initially team with 17 states through the CSI.

Nevada is one of the states CASEL has teamed with through the CSI. While the state has made significant progress in recent years, one education leader in the state was clear that Nevada still has a great deal of work to do and that they're behind several states in terms of SEL implementation.

Nevada presents an interesting case study for systematic SEL implementation. The state has just 17 different school districts, yet they are incredibly diverse. Districts range from large, multi-high school districts like Washoe County and Clark County School District (Las Vegas), one of the largest districts in the nation, to districts as small as Esmeralda School District that educates fewer than 100 students across 3 elementary schools.

Nevada's pursuit of statewide SEL began during the 2013 legislative session when the state was asked to work on statewide bullying prevention. This focused on promoting social skills and improving school climate to prevent bullying and cyber-bullying. The legislature provided funding for training to begin this work, and a federal Safe Schools Grant provided further resources. In the 2015 legislative session, Nevada created the Office of Safe and Respectful Learning Environment. The state also received Project Aware and School Climate Transformation Grants, and intentionally wrote SEL into each. These grants were partially used to create a statewide SEL climate survey using the framework established in Washoe County. They also used the grants to fund mental health support workers, including social workers, counselors, and community health workers.

More recently, Nevada wrote SEL into their strategic plan and ESSA plan. The state has also laid out two strategic goals: to develop multi-tiered layers of SEL supports in each district and to build SEL competencies for students and adults. The state is currently in the process of writing SEL state standards with the intention to adopt them by November, with technical assistance training ready by that time as well. The state plans to train school social workers and state management teams, as well as partner with state health organizations and workers.

Education leaders in Nevada report that being in the CSI has been helpful as they work to implement SEL throughout the state. The CSI initiative has provided critical guidance and resources and helped continue to build traction at the state and district level.

For more on CASEL's CSI, please visit: http://www.casel.org/collaborative-state-initiative/



Key Findings and Recommendations

In 2013, teachers reported their belief that schools should focus on developing all students' social and emotional skills, and that doing so will have a positive impact on students, adults, and the overall culture and climate of the school. This study shows that these beliefs are mutually held by principals, superintendents, and research and evaluation specialists, who overwhelmingly understand that SEL has a vital role to play in K-12 education today. In spite of the widespread support for SEL, however, there is a disconnect between the way administrators view SEL in theory and how it is being integrated in practice. It is within this disconnect that the most significant findings exist and a path forward emerges.

Key Findings

1 Principals value SEL, but need greater knowledge and support to effectively implement school-wide, evidence-based SEL programming.

Principals are on board with SEL, and they strongly believe that developing students' social and emotional skills will promote a positive school climate, improve relationships, decrease bullying, and raise academic achievement. Interviews with superintendents and research and evaluation specialists revealed the same recognition of the link between SEL and improved outcomes. What school leaders need, however, is a better understanding of how to effectively implement school-wide SEL programming, access to training for themselves and their teachers on how to develop implementation plans and use SEL assessments and data, and support from district leaders, state policymakers, researchers, and many others. Filling in that missing link will be essential to taking SEL from theory to action.

2 When superintendents and other district leaders are driving SEL and implementation is high, successful outcomes are much more likely.

Support for SEL from the highest levels of district leadership results in widespread systemic implementation, engages more stakeholders, and is perceived as being much more successful. However, just one-quarter of principals said their district leadership places a great deal of emphasis on SEL, and less than half said their district requires all schools to have a plan for implementing SEL. In total, only one-quarter of principals are in schools that could be considered high-implementers of SEL, but in districts where central office leaders place a

high level of emphasis on SEL, that number jumps to more than half. In schools where implementation is high (based on CASEL's benchmarks), principals report greater academic success, an increased ability by students to apply knowledge to real world situations and to think and reason critically, in addition to an improved school environment, and superintendents see the same. Having support from district leadership is a significant piece in getting the ball rolling and providing a strong foundation for SEL implementation. Given the tendency for superintendent and principal turnover, especially in lower-performing school districts, it is also important that superintendents eager to implement SEL make it a priority to engage in- and out-of-school stakeholders and build a stable base to ensure it is carried forward regardless of a change in leadership.

3 A lack of time and teacher training – in both pre-service education and in-school professional development – are critical barriers to implementing SEL.

Teachers in 2013 and principals today know that time is in limited supply during the school day, and adding more to an already full schedule can lead to initiative fatigue. On top of this, more often than not, teachers come into schools with little to no training in developing students' social and emotional skills, and a lack of resources adds to the challenge of implementing SEL. These are significant barriers leaders of any school or district must face, but not ones that cannot be overcome. Administrators that are already implementing SEL feel far more confident in their teachers' ability to teach SEL and are successfully incorporating SEL training into their professional development. In addition, an overwhelming majority of principals believe teachers in their schools would be open to greater emphasis on SEL, opening the door to the foundational support successful implementation efforts are built upon.

4 School and district leaders are open to having better data on students' social and emotional competencies to improve school-wide SEL programming and student outcomes, but need better training to do so.

The verdict on current SEL assessments is mixed, and for most administrators, figuring out the "why" of assessment is as important as determining the "how." It is clear that most administrators are hesitant about using SEL assessments as a means for student or teacher accountability, but as a teaching and learning tool, most administrators do not have a concrete plan of action for assessing students' social and emotional competencies. Though most principals report optimism around the ability to assess SEL, most are not assessing all students, choosing instead to target specific students to determine further interventions. And less than one in five principals say their teachers use it to improve instruction – missing out on a valuable learning tool to guide teachers on how to teach all their students better.

In answering the "how" of SEL assessment, most administrators express a great deal of uncertainty on what measures count as SEL measures and whether the tools that currently exist are providing meaningful data. Many describe using behavioral observations and tracking discipline records – tools that schools have long used to identify students for interventions – and others are developing school culture and climate surveys. Few, however, have created or adopted SEL assessments that could provide a deeper understanding of how their school is faring at developing students' social and emotional skills or the larger impacts of emphasizing SEL. Administrators also express concern over whether teachers have the knowledge to properly assess SEL and if their biases may cloud the accuracy of some assessments, though those concerns diminish in those who are already implementing SEL at a high level. The good news on assessments is that most administrators already understand the value that SEL data can hold, and there are research and evaluation specialists out there developing customized in-house measures that can really get at the data administrators and teachers can use to improve teaching and learning. The future of SEL assessments largely lies in developing better understanding of what SEL systemic implementation looks like across schools and districts and providing the training and support principals and teachers need to fully carry it out.

Recommendations

Sustain Social, Emotional, and Academic Development through High-Impact Levers

Enhance the "will" – Prioritize policies and funding to support SEL

To help schools advance social and emotional learning and systemize SEL at all levels of practice and policy, federal and state policymakers, as well as grantmakers in education, will need to prioritize policies and funding for SEL implementation, assessment, and training. Funding considerations should include resources, technical assistance, evaluation, and the creation of learning networks between districts and states. Funding streams for increased research will also be critical for expanding knowledge and creating lines for SEL advocacy. Policy action should include advancing new federal policies to promote SEL and alloting resources toward its growth in both PreK-12 and higher education, in addition to adopting state SEL standards.

Support state student learning standards

State leaders should heed the calls of the nearly three-quarters of principals who believe the development of social and emotional competencies should be explicitly stated in their state education standards. State SEL standards can provide a vision for what social and emotional learning programs should accomplish and developmental benchmarks to inform teachers and principals of what students should be working toward in every grade. State SEL standards can also serve as guidance for institutes of higher education by providing the groundwork for integrating SEL into pre-service teacher training programs. Unlike academic standards, which have served as a basis for accountability systems, SEL standards should be used solely to improve teaching and learning and guide investments in SEL programming. State leaders looking to adopt SEL standards can look to states like Illinois, Kansas, and West Virginia, which have each established comprehensive SEL goals with developmental benchmarks.

Advance an SEL research agenda and communicate findings to practitioners and policymakers

For years, CASEL and others have established a broad group of collaborators to advance SEL research, and leading experts from around the world have contributed to the evidence base on high-quality SEL programming and its outcomes. The launch of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development in late 2016 has provided an additional, centralized platform to move forward various research streams in the field, and the Assessment Work Group, a collaborative of researchers and practitioners, is working to improve approaches to SEL assessment. These efforts are critical to providing school and district leaders with the knowledge and resources they need to choose high-quality programming, integrating SEL into the academic curriculum, and evaluating its impacts, but more must be done to inform best practices, guide teacher training and professional development, and establish valid and reliable metrics for SEL assessment. Based on this study, we recommend further research in the following areas: the link between improving SEL skills and academic achievement; the impact of improved training on SEL implementation; the benefits of integrated and stand-alone SEL approaches; and how data on SEL can be used effectively by teachers to improve instruction, by principals to improve school climate, and by districts to better prepare all youth for success in school, postsecondary, careers, and life.

Strengthen SEL Training among Teachers and Administrators

Build the knowledge base on evidence-based SEL programming and effective training, implementation, and assessment.

While this study makes clear that school and district leaders value the development of their students' social and emotional competencies, they need a better understanding of how best to improve these skills in students and create a systemic plan for SEL implementation. It is critical that administrators and teachers have access to a knowledge base on effective SEL programming and training in how to effectively integrate SEL into academic instruction and school climate improvement initiatives. Even in districts where SEL is already being implemented, there is still a need to provide evidence of its effects and link to raising academic outcomes.

There is also a clear lack of training in effective SEL implementation and using SEL assessments and data for improvement and program evaluation. It is essential that researchers and program leaders in

the SEL field develop common guidance to schools on evidence-based classroom and school-wide programs, training, and assessment tools that are widely available to administrators to better ensure they are aware of all available high-quality options and can avoid those that are of lesser quality. Administrators and teachers could also benefit from exposure to SEL in practice, so to better spread best practices, schools and districts that are already implementing with success should serve as SEL learning hubs.

Build teacher knowledge through pre-service education and in-school professional development and support adult SEL.

There is mutual agreement between teachers and administrators that greater training in teaching and assessing SEL is a critical component to ensuring successful implementation, but not enough teachers have been provided with that training. On one side of this issue is that there is currently not enough SEL training within teacher education programs. Though there is a child development component to any high-quality teacher preparation program, few, if any, aim to develop teachers' knowledge of their own social and emotional skills or how to develop and assess students' social and emotional competencies. Integrating SEL into pre-service teacher training will go a long way to guaranteeing more teachers come into the classroom with the knowledge they need to successfully promote SEL. In the absence of SEL training for pre-service teachers, schools will still need to deliver high-quality professional development, and even in the event of expanded SEL instruction in teacher preparation programs, ongoing training for teachers will remain a critical component of any systemic plan for SEL implementation. High-quality training should include exposure to evidence-based research and best practices, instruction in how to integrate SEL into the core academic curriculum and how to measure and assess SEL, and coaching on how to develop their own SEL competencies.

Strengthen Assessment

Continue to improve SEL assessment tools and training in how to use them.

It is clear that educators lack both a familiarity with available measures of SEL and access to high-quality assessments, particularly those that can be customized to meet their needs, as well as training in how to use SEL assessment data. While principals see the value in collecting and reporting SEL data, some hesitation around assessing SEL may be due to a fear of holding teachers and schools accountable for developing students' SEL skills. However, those that are already assessing SEL, whether through culture and climate surveys or building upon currently existing measures to help students develop the SEL skills they lack, can provide models for assessment that do not make students and teachers targets of punitive accountability. These districts can show others how to create valid assessments and use the data to improve teaching and learning. In addition, researchers in the field should continue to study assessment measures to provide knowledge and guidance on available tools, and funders and policymakers should prioritize improving SEL measurements.

Conclusion

Social and emotional learning is, in many ways, not a new concept. Developmental theory has been at the core of American education for more than a century, and educators have long supported the social and emotional development of their students through informal means. Despite this, social and emotional learning has far too often been relegated to the sidelines in favor of a relentless focus on academics. In recent years, however, researchers and educators have made a push to restore emphasis on SEL and realign social and emotional development alongside academic learning. This effort has been backed by a growing body of evidence that shows effective implementation of SEL leads to more positive outcomes for young people and can greatly improve the culture and climate of a school.

On the ground, administrators and teachers implementing SEL are seeing its effects, but there is still much work to be done to ensure educators have access to high-quality SEL programming, guidance on how to implement SEL school- and district-wide, and tools for assessing SEL to achieve the greatest outcomes. Schools of education need to prioritize social and emotional learning in teacher education and ensure future teachers understand the social and emotional needs of their students and themselves. SEL researchers need to build on the current evidence base, get proof of impact into the hands of policymakers and leaders from the state down to the school, and work with schools to establish best practices in implementation and assessment. School and district leaders need to create an environment where social and emotional learning is valued, work with teachers and staff to create a plan and shared vision for SEL that meets the needs of both students and adults, and devote time and resources to support effective implementation. And schools, districts, and states that have invested in social and emotional learning should serve as learning models for others starting out on the path to SEL and help build the practical understanding of what it takes to effectively implement social and emotional learning and make it a priority for in- and out-of-school stakeholders.

Advancing social and emotional learning will require a significant shift in our approach to raising academic achievement and improving schools, and it will take a concerted effort from educators, researchers, policymakers, families, community providers, and others to make the effective promotion of SEL a lasting reality. But as this report and others have shown, the will to advance SEL exists among administrators and teachers, who understand its value and are already seeing its benefits. Social and emotional learning is not a fad; it has always been at the heart of education, and now is the time to make sure it is treated as such.

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Appendix I Methodology

In February and March 2017, principals, superintendents, and research and evaluation specialists were asked to participate in surveys and individual interviews to assess the role and value of developing students' social and emotional skills in America's schools. The nationwide web survey was conducted from February 21 to March 14, 2017 among 884 kindergarten through 12th grade public school principals. The margin of error is +/- 3.4 percentage points in the full survey sample and higher among subgroups. Slight weights were applied to ensure that the sample matched principal and school characteristics of public school principals, according to NCES data. We are confident that the survey sample, once weighted, represents a true national sample of public school principals in America.

The survey was informed by the prior instrument created in 2013 to assess teachers' perceptions of the role and value of social and emotional learning. This allowed for cross-comparison on several questions. The survey was appropriately adjusted to meet the role of administrators in SEL implementation, as well as to gauge their beliefs and understanding of SEL assessment, which was not a part of the original survey. Survey development was also shaped by discussions with and feedback from researchers in the social and emotional learning field.

For the study, we also interviewed a total of 16 superintendents, four from each of the National Center for Education Statistics school geographic locales (large city, suburban, small city/town, and rural areas), and 10 research and evaluation specialists from small and large city school districts. The superintendents and research and evaluation specialists represented the Northeast, South, Midwest, and West. Six superintendents lead districts with student populations that are at least 25 percent Hispanic, and six lead districts that are at least 10 percent Black. Eleven superintendents are from districts that are more than 50 percent free/reduced lunch. The research and evaluation specialists have job titles including: Director of Research and Evaluation; Director of Assessment and Evaluation; Director of Data, Research, and Accountability; Chief of Research and Accountability Officer. Three come from districts that are at least 25 percent Hispanic, and seven are from districts that are at least 10 percent Black. Nine of the ten research and evaluation specialists have 10+ years of experience in the field. One superintendent and one research and evaluation specialist interviewed are in a CASEL CDI school district.

Characteristics of the Survey Sample

The following profile of the 884 principals interviewed for this survey reveals a sample that is representative of America's public school principals in terms of their own demographic characteristics and the diverse schools in which they lead.

School Characteristics

GRADE RANGE	
Elementary School	55%
Middle/Junior High School	16%
High School	20%
K-8 or K-12	9%

LOCALE CODE	
Urban	36%
Suburban	22%
Small town/Rural	42%

FREE/REDUCED LUNCH	
Less than 40%	29%
40-79%	46%
80% or more	25%

SCHOOL TYPE	
Regular Public School	91%
Public Magnet or Charter	9%

GEOGRAPHIC REGION	
Northeast	18%
South	34%
Midwest	23%
West	25%

STUDENT ENROLLMENT	
Less than 250	17%
250-499	36%
500-749	25%
750 or more	22%

LOW-PERFORMING	
Currently rated	20%
Recently rated	14%
Not rated	66%

Principal Characteristics

GENDER	
Women	53%
Men	47%

AGE	
Under age 45	36%
Age 45 to 54	36%
Age 55 or older	28%

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	
5 or fewer	37%
6-15	46%
16 or more	17%

RACE/ETHNICITY	
White	84%
Black	7%
Hispanic	7%
Other	2%

Appendix II

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 six 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.

Appendix III
CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative

In 2011, CASEL embarked on an effort to put research into action and launched the first-of-its kind Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) — a partnership between CASEL, the American Institute for Research (AIR), and initially eight large school districts across the country: Anchorage, AK; Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Nashville, TN; Oakland, CA; Sacramento, CA; and Washoe County, NV. Today, with Atlanta and El Paso subsequently joining the collaborative, the CDI now includes 10 school districts representing more than one million students in some of the nation's most geographically, economically, and ethnically diverse communities.

The CDI was built on the belief that positive student outcomes rely on improving classrooms and schools, which in turn depend on improving district-wide capacities to bring SEL to all students. The CDI attempts to shift the focus of SEL implementation from schools to entire districts to align SEL with district priorities, integrate it with academic instruction, make it an essential piece of a child's education, and achieve two complimentary goals:

1. To develop districts' capacities to plan, implement, and monitor systemic changes that will impact schools and classrooms in ways that enhance students' social-emotional development and academic performance; and
2. To document lessons learned that can inform future efforts to support systemic SEL implementation in districts across the country.

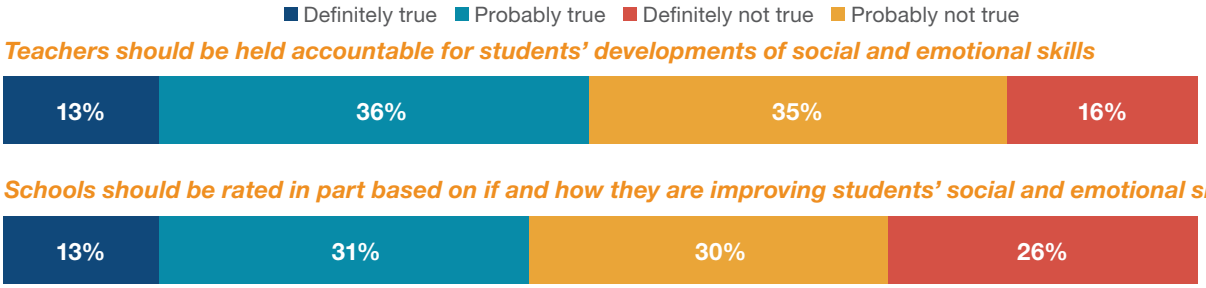
To aid districts' attempting to implement system-wide SEL, CASEL created the following comprehensive district framework:

- Communicate SEL as a priority to stakeholders;
- Develop a district-wide vision and plan;
- Align financial and human resources;
- Build expertise and capacity;
- Conduct SEL-related resources and needs assessment;
- Design and implement professional development programs;
- Integrate SEL with district initiatives, such as academic curriculum and equity efforts;
- Adopt and implement evidence-based programming;
- Develop K–12 SEL standards; and
- Establish systems of continuous improvement.

Every district in the CDI has faced their own unique challenges to implementing system-wide SEL and is at different points of the process. This report will highlight stories from four districts on their experience as part of CASEL's Collaborating District Initiative to share how some of these districts have approached SEL implementation and provide insight on their successes and remaining challenges. For more on the Collaborating Districts Initiative, please visit www.casel.org/cdi-results

Appendix IV
Additional Graphs and Tables

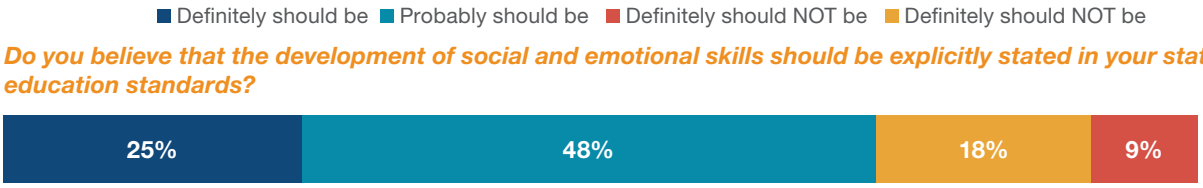
Principals hold mixed views on SEL accountability.



	Hold teachers accountable	Schools should be rated on SEL skills
Elementary School	51%	42%
Middle/junior high	49%	47%
High school	45%	44%
Urban	60%	56%
Suburban	50%	43%
Small town/rural	40%	35%

	Hold teachers accountable	Schools should be rated on SEL skills
High implementation	73%	70%
Moderate implementation	47%	42%
Low implementation	36%	30%
Believe SEL can be measured	60%	54%
Don't believe SEL can be measured	25%	21%

Those who have more experience with SEL are more likely to believe it should be part of state standards.



	Definitely should be	Probably should be	Should NOT be
Elementary School	29%	47%	24%
Middle/junior high	17%	49%	34%
High school	17%	52%	31%
Urban	36%	43%	21%
Suburban	27%	57%	16%
Small town/rural	14%	48%	38%

	Definitely should be	Probably should be	Should NOT be
High implementation	43%	42%	15%
Moderate implementation	24%	52%	24%
Low implementation	13%	49%	38%
Believe SEL can be measured	30%	49%	21%
Don't believe SEL can be measured	12%	46%	42%

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