



Building  
Equitable  
Learning  
Environments  
Network



# USING STUDENT EXPERIENCE DATA TO CO-DESIGN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



**Measure What  
Matters**



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## ABOUT THE BELE LEARNING SERIES

The Building Equitable Learning Environments (BELE) Network is a diverse collaborative of organizations working to advance equity in education. We draw upon the National Equity Project's definition of equity, "Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential." These organizations range from academic institutions to fellow intermediary organizations. BELE partners share a bold vision of thriving youth, families, caregivers, and communities—and of education systems that are co-created with those they are intended to serve—to foster academic, social, emotional, and cognitive growth and well-being. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the National Equity Project (NEP), and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) are part of the BELE Network research and learning team, and are responsible for documenting the network learnings, which are grounded in seven "Essential Actions" and reflected in shared annual aims.

Within BELE, we are producing a series of briefs documenting insights from our efforts to understand how the implementation of equity initiatives in our BELE partner districts show evidence of social and emotional learning (SEL) in service of equity and excellence and equity leadership. These briefs highlight the conditions necessary to begin and sustain the work of systemic transformation.

In this series, we align each paper to one of seven BELE Essential Actions. These Essential Actions describe the changes and processes necessary to realize systemic transformation and are meant to give educators, caregivers, and practitioners concrete actions for centering student experience.

The goal of this learning series is two-fold:

1. To share our action research agenda, and the collaborative learnings of CASEL, NEP, and our partner districts<sup>1</sup> regarding the conditions necessary to create and cultivate transformative and equitable learning environments.
2. To provide education practitioner-facing recommendations for those looking to begin equivalent work in their district or school.

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<sup>1</sup>All learning partners and districts will be referred by pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

As part of the BELE Network, CASEL and NEP work alongside school districts to codesign models for equitable learning environments that are sustainable and adaptable to their local context. Coaching assistance, network resources and tools, and research capacity are aligned with district practitioners' expert knowledge of their learning communities, key stakeholder relationships, and access to learning environments to formulate, implement, and test student and adult-level frameworks that are both scalable and adaptive. Underpinned by a collaborative approach, these research-practice partnerships allow cultivated relationships with districts already committed to the work of equity to develop solutions to the ever-present challenge of equitable learning for all students. Technical assistance from CASEL or NEP combined with context expertise of learning partners actualize the following **BELE Essential Actions**:



**Make systems human-centered**



**Invest in staff**



**Transform teaching and learning**



**Measure what matters**



**Empower BIPOC<sup>2</sup> youth**



**Create equitable policies**



**Partner with caregivers and communities**

CASEL and NEP offer technical assistance models increasing the capacity of people to achieve thriving, self-determining, educated, and just communities. While CASEL's approach to this level of capacity-building is through evidence-based, systemic SEL implementation, NEP approaches systems improvement through coaching, facilitation, and training grounded in their Leading for Equity Framework. UChicago Consortium reinforces this work by conducting and translating academic research that best supports learning and positive development for students and adults in diverse learning settings. Despite the differences in approach, this partnership is predicated on the reality that all organizations use action-oriented principles that align with the BELE Essential Actions in guiding their coaching and technical assistance to districts.

As organizations committed to the testing of innovative strategies and actions that build equitable learning environments for young people and adults, BELE Network partners codesigned a set of design principles known as Essential Actions to guide districts in their programs and initiatives prioritizing equity efforts. The BELE Essential Actions describe the processes ("how") to make changes necessary ("what") to realize the systemic transformation needed to create resilient school systems that foster the academic, social, and emotional growth of all young people and their communities. This shared framing can help ensure that all students, and particularly those students who have been historically underserved, meet universal goals of whole child well-being and academic excellence (BELE Network, 2022). These actions are supported by extant literature and field-based evidence serving as a set of practices, processes, and conditions that the BELE Network has collectively identified as imperatives for transforming the education system and ensuring that all students are afforded high-quality educational experiences.

<sup>2</sup>BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and people of color



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS LEARNING BRIEF

This brief will share learnings from BELE district partnerships around the sixth [Essential Action: Measure What Matters](#). This Essential Action focuses on achieving equitable learning environments through the routine collection and review of relevant student feedback data to co-design new practices and policies to improve learning environments.

### ***Prioritizing Student-Centered Data Processes***

To create more equitable learning environments—where all young people feel seen, heard, and able to achieve at high levels—data can and should serve multiple purposes and yield important information for improving learning processes and impacts. This means setting up the necessary systems, structures, and opportunities for systematic data collection, review, and application of student and adult feedback on “learning experiences, needs, and interests” (BELE Network, 2022). This kind of data use guides meaningful refinements that support improvement in academic, social, and emotional learning outcomes for students and adults. This Essential Action includes the following guidance:

- Use measures and tools to better understand and respond to the experiences and well-being of students, caregivers, and school staff.
- Create safe spaces (outside of an accountability regimen) to use student experience data to normalize and encourage experimentation and reflection and deepen learning.
- Establish structures and processes (such as inquiry teams, student success teams, and care teams) that use data to cultivate a culture of collaborative inquiry and shared learning.
- Engage students in regular feedback cycles, including participatory data analysis, to inform instructional practice, school transformation, and policymaking.
- Engage in the systematic use of quantitative and qualitative data with teachers to improve teaching and learning, enhance equitable opportunity, transform experiences, and contribute to student success.
- Systematically use disaggregated data to identify and address barriers to equitable opportunity, experience, and success.

### ***Using Continuous Improvement and Professional Development to Understand and Improve Student Learning Experience and Well-Being***

Professional development (PD) serves a vital purpose for teachers, students, and the learning community by supporting effective and engaging instruction for students and, in turn, a more positive learning environment. When PD is developed with a focus on equity, culturally responsive practices, and diverse instruction, it provides teachers with the knowledge and practices to serve a diverse population (Garet et al., 2001). For instance, set aside time to review curricula with other teachers and leaders and ensure multiple student cultures, backgrounds, and identities are represented in lesson plans and teaching practices.



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This PD prepares teachers to adequately meet the needs of all students, especially BIPOC and marginalized students who have been historically disenfranchised and underserved. This position toward ongoing learning and development can have compounded benefits when combined with continuous improvement, enabling teachers to use data-informed practices alongside deep reflection to adequately support students' learning environments.

Continuous improvement (CI) is a structured, ongoing process to collect, reflect on, and use implementation and outcome data to inform decisions and drive improvements. CI methods leverage formative assessments, allowing educators a better understanding of conditions, trends, and their underlying processes that impact lagging or summative outcomes (e.g., end-of-year grades). It also prioritizes focusing on and addressing the felt need(s) of key stakeholders, with the flexibility to be responsive and adaptive to changes in the environment. As such, it represents a more human-centered approach.

Informed by the evidence-supported benefits associated with well-implemented PD and CI, the BELE Network determined a tool incorporating both features to be an optimal approach for identifying ways to create equitable, human-centered learning environments. BELE learning partners, CASEL, NEP, and UChicago Consortium generated learnings from our experiences implementing the PD tool, Elevate, developed by the Project for Educational Research that Scales (PERTS). Elevate is used for job-embedded continuous improvement by teachers and learning partners who support teachers. This tool supports educators' improvement of the learning environment by creating opportunities to gather direct feedback from students on their classroom experience, share data with students, and work collaboratively to co-design approaches to improve learning conditions.

Distributed as a brief electronic feedback form, Elevate assesses six primary learning conditions and three additional conditions (detailed in Appendix A) identified as critical, evidence-based qualities necessary for promoting equitable and affirming learning spaces. Educator investment in improving these learning conditions (demonstrated through an increase in Elevate scores) has been linked to higher student engagement and academic outcomes (Gripshover & Paunesku, 2019).

Aggregated and disaggregated<sup>3</sup> Elevate data are available at the classroom-level, allowing greater fine-tuned adjustment of classroom practices. With Elevate, educators can engage in personal (or community-based) CI through short but frequent cycles (four to six weeks) of survey administration, practice modification, and then data observation and review. Leaders and educators can access Elevate data at various and increasing levels (e.g., a single classroom or several classrooms within a district) in a school, district, or learning community.

Although the following paper highlights a specific student feedback tool (Elevate), we believe these learnings are applicable to other student-centered data systems used by schools and districts alike to measure what matters. As a result of working directly with district and school partners, in addition to focus groups with BELE Network coaches and leaders, we surfaced five

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<sup>3</sup>Elevate data is disaggregated by gender and race-ethnicity groups. You can learn more [here](#).



key actions as necessary for supporting effective implementation of student-centered data systems to improve learning conditions and experiences at the classroom and school level:

1. Center and share power with students through student experience data.
2. Clearly and frequently communicate the purpose for student data systems.
3. Use data to cultivate and model a culture of learning and growth for adults and students.
4. Build on and nurture foundational trust and safety through practices that demonstrate respect and professional regard.
5. Demonstrate and facilitate effective implementation through district- and school-level support.

Each section of this paper will center on a key action highlighted above, interwoven with field examples (“In Action”) of the condition’s practical application in our partner districts. We hope these will serve as inspiration and (loose) guidance on applying these learnings in the reader’s learning context and community.



## ACTION

# 1

### Center and share power with students through student experience data.

**Student experience data provides an incredible opportunity for district and school leaders and teachers to partner with students to positively transform the learning environment.** For many districts and schools, COVID-19 highlighted the gaps in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students and accelerated both the urgency and demand for innovation to solve these issues (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Student data can be a robust tool for identifying and mitigating these gaps and challenges, especially when leaders demonstrate a willingness to develop processes centered in adult-student “(co)design partnerships,” which are modeled and supported to lead change.

These (co)design partnerships affect how leaders, teachers, and students interact with data throughout the design process. An adult-student (co)design partnership signifies a disruption in traditional adult-student power dynamics with data. In practice, before any data is gathered, there is an understanding that centering student voices and sharing power with students is a crucial shared priority. Students are included in every point of the decision-making process about how their data is used and understand why they are providing data and what will be done with it.

School-administered student assessments and climate surveys provide important information regarding annual (or quarterly) student academic progress or learning climate (i.e., discipline, attendance, etc.) but do not tell the whole story: How do daily classroom experiences, interactions, and learning add up to end-of-term results and outcomes? Traditional school data collection often reflects decontextualized or partial descriptions about student experience, without the necessary touchpoints or relationships required to obtain more detailed and salient information.

How surveys are typically administered also leaves students to fill the gaps in understanding. A youth organizer who supports work in NEP school districts and participated in Elevate as a high school student noted that he often had no context for why he was being surveyed and how it connected to larger institutional goals about centering student voice. Building relationships with students, honoring their voices, and keeping them informed of these processes in the learning environment facilitates better contextualized information and provides a much more meaningful interpretation of data points.

A (co)design partnership creates an environment that encourages collaboration toward deep change and protects students from harmful data practices. It is harmful to students to gather their data when there is no intention or means to implement change, or when it does not lead to a relevant or timely response. Simply accumulating student experience data does not guarantee that student thoughts, concerns, and needs are properly understood or met in the larger decision-making process. Regardless of intention, the use of student voice in this way is more aligned with manipulation or participation for show rather than authentic engagement and negatively impacts the community’s response to data (Hart et al., 1997; Mitra & Serriere, 2012).

Students observe and experience decisions made about them based on their feedback and are aware when there has been no meaningful integration into improvement efforts. This situation can result in students losing their faith in the data collection process and feeling like their voices and insights are not taken seriously by educators.

For instance, in one of NEP's partner districts, after numerous surveys without visible change, students lost interest in completing subsequent surveys, feeling as if they were just numbers or respondents on a page. After this discouraging experience, one student shared, "If they want to know us, they should talk to us." When students feel their voices are not authentically heard and considered, this can create a mismatch with their learning environment, leading to a more profound disconnect with school altogether. The same is true for the opposite case: When students know their voices are valued and centered in their learning, they are more likely to consider data as worthwhile and valuable and have a more pleasant learning experience.

Design partnerships can also be modeled from the bottom up (i.e., teachers learning to do this in their classrooms, influencing school and district leaders). As educators center student voice, they are able to share findings, patterns, and trends from the Elevate data with students and elicit their feedback to contextualize and bring it to life. In fact, PERTS strongly encourages teachers to review the data with their students, viewing Elevate data as a "partnership with students" that provides inroads for ongoing collaboration and partnership instead of a climate survey (PERTS, 2022).

Rather than leaning into traditional data practices (e.g., adults make decisions about the data in isolation or only with other adults), teachers share the data with students, identify and discuss the patterns observed, and work collaboratively prioritizing changes to make. This repositions students from data providers to effective change agents in their learning. For one teacher, working with Elevate better informed their understanding of why centering student voices and their feedback was important:

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**“ Sometimes, as a teacher, you do similar things in each class and learn that each kid has different needs...and that we need to allow for each student to voice their needs instead of having them always just go where we are taking them. I need to give more of that power to them. It's much easier to get students on the same page with me when they actually enjoy what they're doing.”**

— BELE Network High School Teacher on using the Elevate tool

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Centering students and sharing power through data also involves district and school leadership demonstrating a willingness to develop processes to act on disaggregated student experience data. A unique feature of Elevate is the rapid documentation of disaggregated data (by race and gender), aiding a teacher to nimbly gain a picture of learning condition disparities in their classroom. Leaning into more participatory methods, in which educators trust student voices and encourage students to collaborate with them to solve issues seen in Elevate data, offers a valuable opportunity: to center the voices and experiences of BIPOC and marginalized students who are most likely to be overlooked or excluded from power-bearing processes and contexts. District and school leaders can endorse and incentivize processes steeped in trust, respect, and power-sharing that support teachers in promoting BIPOC and marginalized youth to be co-writers and co-strategists in their own educational journeys.

Collaborative learning environments that prioritize student voice and seek to increase student engagement reflect a recognition that learning is a reciprocal process between school leaders, educators, and students. All key stakeholders (not just students) have the capacity to be learners and to close the gap between what is known and what is possible when it comes to more robust and equitable learning environments.



Elevate facilitates shared ownership of the learning environment in two ways: (1) centering the voices of students and placing them as the focus of data-informed learning; and (2) highlighting the important role and responsibility teachers play in shaping the learning environment. District and school leaders seeking to prioritize student voice see the significance in not only gathering student data towards outcome goals, but in consulting with students about their feedback and its implementation at every stage of the process.



## IN ACTION

### Enhancing Student Engagement with Adult-Student (Co)Design Partnerships

During the pandemic, a large school district in Maryland created a Teacher Fellowship on Virtual Engagement. Following the shift to remote learning, nine teachers from six schools across the district and district personnel came together to develop plans to increase student engagement. This group included middle and high school general and special education teachers of every subject. They collected student experience data including the Elevate survey and student empathy interviews to determine which learning conditions they needed to address to increase student engagement.

From the data, the teachers saw that they needed to work on Meaningful Work, Classroom Community, and Student Voice<sup>4</sup>, and they used this information to plan and implement change ideas. Two teachers at different schools decided to focus on improving Classroom Community. To achieve this goal, they implemented “Student Celebrations,” where students learn about their peers through highlights they choose to share about themselves.

A second group of teachers across schools decided to work on Student Voice. Their change idea was to give students “choice in output.” They asked students their preferred mode of output and then allowed students to pick from three formats to demonstrate their learning on two assignments a week.

Subsequent administrations of Elevate showed that the changes teachers implemented greatly impacted students’ sense of belonging, Student Voice, and Meaningful Work, as well as increased assignment completion and mastery rates.

Importantly, the teachers recognized that several factors improved student engagement and experiences. First, one teacher noted that **leadership support** at her school was critical for her to do the work in her classroom. She said she was “lucky to have an administration that really values social and emotional learning and ... community-building throughout the year.” Second, the teachers felt that being **explicit with students about why new strategies were being implemented** allowed them to buy into the process more and feel like their opinions were heard and important.

The teachers also recognized that consistency was key—both for implementing the strategies themselves and collecting data about how students thought the teachers’ efforts were going. Finally, teachers felt it was important to be intentional about the implementation of new strategies and start small to ensure that the new strategies didn’t feel like more work for teachers and led to better outcomes for students.

<sup>4</sup>Elevate learning conditions. More details about the learning conditions are available in Appendix A.

## ACTION

# 2

**Clearly and frequently communicate the purpose for student data systems.**

**Once there is a shared understanding that student experience data is a pathway for adult-student partnership in which students are centered, their voices are honored, and power is shared, the purpose then must be expressed and made apparent to all stakeholders.**

Leadership commits to communicating with stakeholders about the purpose behind student data, making distinct and direct links to larger district and school initiatives and engaging in frequent communication.

For the BELE Network, these learnings meant district and school leaders needed to demonstrate with great clarity the purpose for implementing Elevate and effectively communicate this purpose to all stakeholders. More specifically, leaders highlighted the explicit connections between Elevate and the strategic goals/directions of the district and school. As leadership prioritizes frequent and clear communication, information typically limited to those at the top is dispersed, creating clarity from top to bottom. Movement toward this form of transparency and openness is embodied by student and teacher ability to effortlessly name the “why” behind Elevate and recognize their place in institutional plans and goals.

Among NEP districts, this was exemplified by district and site leadership emphasizing Elevate as an essential equity strategy that centers on listening to all students. Districts supported the messaging and purpose by placing a special emphasis on foregrounding Elevate as a PD tool—a way for teachers to deepen their culturally responsive practices. This supported leadership’s and educators’ goals to pay specific attention to student groups that may be overlooked and experience opportunity gaps, such as BIPOC and marginalized students.

In CASEL districts, Elevate was promoted as a tool for supporting educators in creating equitable and affirming learning spaces and was recognized as a PD tool with a heavy leaning towards CI. The CI framing facilitated messaging of Elevate as a rapid-learning tool that supported tracking incremental, observable changes in teaching practices towards the seamless integration of high-quality systemic SEL, which aligned with district goals on adult SEL. In both contexts, stakeholders (i.e., teachers, students, and administrators) were informed that there was an intention to improve the school culture and adult mindsets in partnership with students, undergirded by their lived experiences.



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## IN ACTION

### The Importance of Creating Meaningful Learning Opportunities

In each of CASEL's BELE districts, focus groups were held after the first cycle of Elevate to assess their understanding of the tool and explore their reactions to the data. Each focus group was composed of a mix of Elevate teachers, teachers not using the tool, and students. At one high school, a particularly vocal teacher stated that he believed the data was less than 50 percent accurate, noting that he "didn't get anything to help [him] explain the purpose except for begging them to do it and asking them to be honest." This admission cast the voices of students in the same room in doubt, and had implications for the subsequent cycles of Elevate. Would these students feel their teachers valued their opinions, feelings, and voices? This example also illustrates how vital the rollout process is to the successful uptake of the Elevate tool.

**If teachers do not understand the tool's purpose, students will not either, affecting the data's accuracy.**

As described in the account above, there are real and felt consequences when district and school leaders do not invest in or fully commit to clear and frequent communication. A focus on transparency and openness is bolstered by leadership buy-in and presence, which are invaluable components for moving the work forward. When leaders are present and consistently communicating the significance and value of student-centered data initiatives in meetings, training, or other gatherings, there is an implied and explicit message that the work is a priority for everyone involved in the learning environment, from the classroom to the central office. Frequent communication from leadership also equalizes the importance of student experience data, which is commonly deprioritized in comparison to academic data.

Communication touchpoints between leaders and educators serve as occasions for leaders to illustrate how Elevate data informs high-level school goals and priorities and their connectedness to academic achievement. As leaders communicate the vision and purpose of Elevate, teachers are provided a model for similar communication with their students. Teachers can then make clear connections between school priorities and their goals for their classroom and students, increasing their likelihood to wholeheartedly adopt Elevate and therefore meet the needs of their students.



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## ACTION

# 3

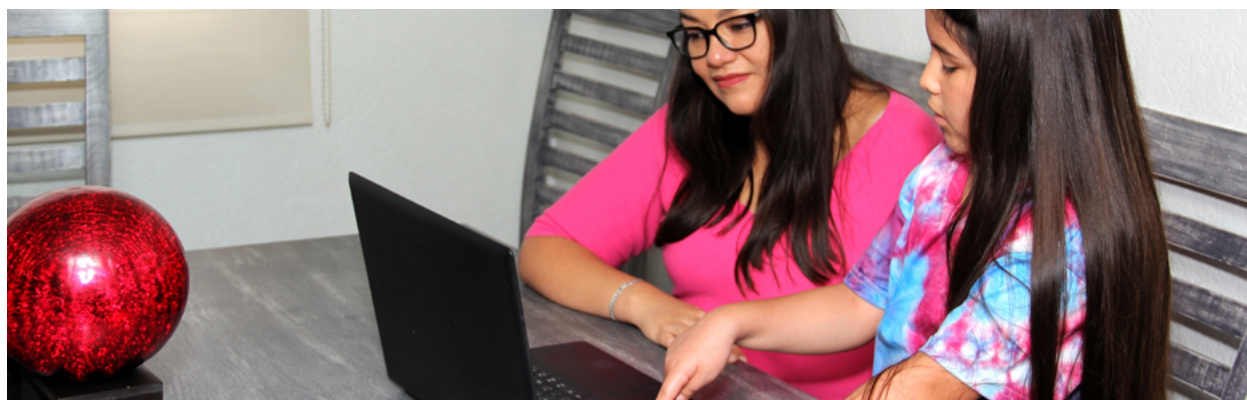
Use data to cultivate and model a culture of learning and growth for adults and students.

**When working with teachers to develop or enhance their stewardship of student experience data, we found the concepts of growth mindset and learner culture to be equally important for adults in the learning environment as they are for students.** The term growth mindset refers to the belief that one's knowledge, expertise, or skills are malleable (in contrast to fixed) and able to adapt and adjust to meet learning needs or goals (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). An individual or community that practices a growth mindset recognizes failure as temporary, reversible, and usable as a catalyst for success with sufficient effort or practice.

A growth mindset, however, is not always enough in isolation (Yeager et al., 2022). It requires a “supportive context,” an environment or space in which growth and its associated conditions are espoused, appreciated and cultivated—a learner's culture (Yeager et al., 2022, p. 5). **To the question, “Is there safety to fail for students and adults?,” a learner's culture says, “Yes.”** While a growth mindset is a psychological posture, if the environment does not provide a supportive context, even the potential of a growth mindset can be significantly hindered. Those who struggle with the misconception that failure indicates a lack of potential or ability may find themselves stuck in that cycle of thinking.

Similar to students, educators require a learner's culture to comfortably explore and reflect on student data in pursuit of deeper learning and understanding. However, the benefits of data reflection cannot be fully realized when adults lack a growth mindset. Educators interacting with student data without this mindset can significantly harm students because they are the key shapers of the learning environment. Naturally, it is difficult for educators to model or develop for their students' belief systems that they struggle with themselves. Therefore, if adults lack a growth mindset, it should be prioritized as a PD focus area for all adults.

Adult growth mindset requires personal investment by school leaders and teachers, such as self-reflection on personal biases and pedagogical practices and approaches. Supported by resources and tools that recognize educators as learners (see Appendices B and C), educators can facilitate the emergence of growth mindset and its diffusion to the greater learning community as a learner's culture.





“...be open-minded and prepared to do some self-reflection as well. You have to be humble.” — BELE Network High School Teacher



## IN ACTION

### Investing in Adult Growth Mindset to Facilitate Collaborative Learning Environments

As teachers in CASEL districts delved into Elevate data, it immediately became clear how necessary adult growth mindset and learner's culture were for gaining meaningful insights from student experience data. When these were missing from the environment, teachers found it difficult to receive student feedback. They misconstrued student feedback as critical instead of constructive. Some became skeptical when viewing lower-than-expected numbers, interpreting them as static evaluations rather than an opportunity for growth and improvement of the teacher-student relationship.

Furthermore, some teachers saw the survey as a way to shift responsibility from teachers to students, attributing low scores to students' attitudes (e.g., bad mood, poor attitude, etc.), instead of a reflection of student experience of the learning environment cultivated by teachers. An environment that does not prioritize learning for both teachers and students hinders the effectiveness of utilizing student data and shuts the door to collaborative dialogue, exploration, or investigation. Consequently, teachers may underestimate or disregard their influence and power over the learning environment, leading them to inappropriately blame themselves, their students, or the environment at large.

Two of CASEL's BELE schools provide particularly salient evidence of the power of teacher growth mindset when engaging with Elevate cycle data. Teachers at both sites described their team as familial even before Elevate administration, indicating a willingness to communicate openly and help each other when needed. One teacher spoke directly about the benefits of a growth mindset. "As an educator," she noted, "I think having uncomfortable conversations and providing teachers with exposure and resources is a great stepping stone for SEL generally." This attitude toward learning and growth was representative of the team of teachers at her school administering Elevate.

As a result of exploring the student data, teachers at that school made immediate changes to their curriculum, behaviors, and language, leading to improved Elevate scores. Teachers who chose to share their data with students experienced even greater impact, as their students voiced their happiness that their teachers had "actually looked at the data and their responses were purposeful."

One teacher at the other school spoke of her concern upon seeing the data for the first cycle. She recalled, "When I saw the feedback, I was a bit concerned that students did not feel the care like I believe they should based on my approach. To me, as a teacher, that is what I do and is my focus. We build the community, we empathize, we connect." Other teachers agreed with her, noting that while the data may not have been expected, it "was eye-opening and helped us to pinpoint what need[ed] support." One teacher, in particular, urged other colleagues who may be thinking about using Elevate to "be open-minded and prepared to do some self-reflection as well. You have to be humble."



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Similar to how teachers greatly impact the learning environment for students, school leaders play a prominent role in cultivating conducive environments for teachers' learning and development. District and school leaders are best positioned to create an environment and set the example that ***failure is a normal and expected part of growth and learning***. Without leadership support, teachers are more likely to disengage from the process to avoid failure or costly mistakes. This may look like avoiding implementing Elevate in the classroom, or doing so without thoughtful modifications to practice. Leaders can support teachers and administrators to understand that the data is not about evaluation, but rather about the learning and growth of the teacher. Culture shifts lead to an accurate understanding of Elevate as a CI and PD tool for promoting an equitable and supportive learning environment.

One of CASEL's district partners took this learning to heart by reframing the Elevate data for teachers. With leadership from the SEL director, the SEL team actively sought to help school leaders package and discuss Elevate data using a growth-oriented interpretation. Leadership encouraged teachers to avoid blaming behavior (e.g., blaming themselves or their students for unsatisfactory results) and focus on experimenting with new strategies that changed their students' classroom experience.

This learning overlaps with the previous action. Clear and consistent communication from leadership to teachers can also allay fears and pave a pathway for greater transparency about data processes and intended impact, consequently increasing a learner's orientation. During training sessions with teachers, BELE coaches specified who had access to their data and to what data (e.g., student-level data for teachers and project leads vs. school-level data for district leaders). Instead of fearing repercussions or consequences for their Elevate scores, teachers were able to focus on their classroom and how the learnings could be implemented to enhance the overall learning experience for students.

**When educators and leaders invest in personal and community development of growth mindset and a learner's culture, these become infused in the approach and insights gathered from student data.** Consequently, teachers are able to use student data to evoke meaningful change that benefits their students and makes for a more inclusive and generative learning environment.



## ACTION

# 4

**Build on and nurture foundational trust and safety through practices that demonstrate respect and professional regard.**

**When school leaders commit to cultivating conditions that support effective adult buy-in and adoption, they promote a healthy (student) data culture.** Leaders foster a respectful and collaborative working environment when they engage in practices and actions that encourage foundational trust and safety, regarding teachers as partners who are working together towards common goals for their students.

Trust and safety are critical elements between leaders and teachers with widespread effects on both adults and students in the learning environment. When teachers and leaders trust each other and feel a strong sense of safety, they are more likely to have open and honest communication, a shared sense of responsibility towards goals, and more robust teamwork, which leads to greater student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The spillover effect, similar to learner's culture and growth mindset, is that as teachers experience an environment characterized by trust and safety, they are afforded the capacity to reproduce similar conditions for their students, transforming the learning experience for all stakeholders.

While working with partner districts, we observed several ways that leadership can actively engender trust with teachers, positively impacting the way they relate to student experience data and data systems. Primary was the practice of affirming teacher expertise by involving teachers early on in the “why”—the deeper meaning behind the use of Elevate and the constructs underpinning the target learning conditions. Teachers are an extensive source of knowledge that leaders can draw from when developing strategies on systems and processes. They, alongside their students, are experts of the day-to-day contexts that shape academic, social, and emotional learning. When teachers are brought to the table early, leadership has the opportunity to gather their insights and perspective of the landscape in real time, ensuring cohesion and functionality across the board. Teachers can share their knowledge, expertise, and, more importantly, gaps and concerns that leadership might not be aware of. This also gives district and school leaders an insider perspective that could aid in more effective implementation.

Inviting teachers as co-designers sets up leaders to be intentional about cultivating safe spaces where teachers can be more direct about their needs and how they can be met. For instance, in one of CASEL's partner districts, teachers struggled with explaining the “why” to students. Although teachers initially reported the tool as intuitive and easy to implement, the hurdle around clarity of purpose began to shape the entire experience for teachers, making it feel frustrating and meaningless. CASEL coaches discussed the situation with district leaders, who took teacher's concerns and frustrations seriously, and in response restructured the trainings with teacher needs at the center, attending not only to the logistical components (e.g., administering the tool, accessing data, etc.), but focusing on cognitive components that make or break the experience (e.g., simplified survey construct descriptions, the purpose of Elevate, models for explaining Elevate to students), which reduced frustrations and facilitated increased buy-in from teachers and students.

Leaders can also foster trust by inviting teachers to co-design how Elevate will be implemented. Leadership can model partnership with teachers by calendaring survey dates, determining when and how analysis meetings occur, reducing obligations so teachers can focus on the Elevate cycles, and determining focus measures and target groups. Although these strategies may not be applicable in every learning community, they illustrate the ideal posture for leadership. Moreover, the work of building trust is continuous and most effective when aligned with the needs and allowances of the community and context.

More likely than not, there are teachers who demonstrate a high willingness and excitement to engage with student experience data. This collective of motivated individuals is an invaluable resource that can be positioned as leaders/champions of the work. This was aptly illustrated in one of NEP's partner districts where leadership promoted trust in their learning community by identifying and honoring (e.g., compensating) teachers who already centered student experience data. The school leader leveraged the learnings of teachers who already implemented Elevate, expanding their knowledge base of conditions and supports that enable or hinder the intended outcomes of Elevate. Teachers are also empowered by initiatives staked in the value and respect of both parties, as noted by an NEP district middle school teacher: "This was the first time in my career that I was able to see data and personalization actually go together, and use [data] to push back against the encroachment of standardization."

The reward of leaning into teacher experience and knowledge was the extension of these documented learnings to other data systems planned by the district, which creates greater net positives for the district overall. By leadership identifying and leveraging early adopters of Elevate, they fostered broader engagement and developed a repository of learnings beneficial far beyond their initial reach.







## IN ACTION

### Finding Solutions Through Teacher Collaboration

In one school district in New York that has used the Elevate student experience survey for several years, there is a culture of innovation, learning, and growth that is pervasive throughout the staff and the leadership. The district is committed to a growth mindset not just for students but for adults as well. To that end, the district has a PD model that gives teachers the agency to choose between several types of PD learning strands. Each of these strands has four cycles throughout the year.

Three years ago, the PERTS Engagement Project that facilitated the Elevate survey was one of the options offered in this structure. Because the work was taken on as part of an already existing structure in the district, teachers who used Elevate were enabled and supported to do the necessary work around its implementation.

As a group participating in the PD strand, the teachers were able to pick the Elevate learning condition they wanted to focus on in their classrooms and the intervention they would try. They chose Feedback for Growth, and they all implemented a feedback strategy called Stars and Steps. All the teachers took this strategy into their own classrooms and let their students know they were testing a new protocol. The teachers also wanted to demonstrate helpful feedback to their students, so they videotaped themselves teaching each other a task (e.g., tying a tie, braiding hair) and giving feedback. While watching these videos, they asked students to identify the helpful feedback and what would have been more useful.

After the intervention, teachers reported improvements in **student confidence**, students' newfound **ownership in their learning**, and improved levels of **Teacher Caring** on the Elevate survey. Because there was a structure in which the group met regularly, they were able to compare their data, their strategies, their challenges, and their progress with one another and ultimately improve the learning conditions in their classrooms.



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## ACTION 5

### Demonstrate and facilitate effective implementation through district- and school-level support.

The previous learnings speak to key actions that encourage and promote effective implementation. However, these actions are nearly impossible to execute and/or sustain without tangible investment by district and school leaders' support and resources. These are necessary for capacity-building, allowing allocation of teacher reserves and energy toward the goals and outcomes that truly matter. Authentic leadership buy-in is exemplified by developing institution-backed structural supports and resources that are meaningful and relevant to stakeholder needs. **Investments by leadership demonstrate both buy-in and commitment to initiatives and indicate to all stakeholders that the work is a collective effort and responsibility shared by all.**

Structural support and resources can take many forms. It may look like establishing protected time and a safe space (e.g., distinct from prep time and accountability systems) for teachers to implement Elevate, review data with colleagues and students, and co-design and implement change efforts. As detailed in the various field examples, supports can vary across multiple factors (e.g., duration, location, application level, distributor, etc.) but are most effective when they are tailored to the needs of recipients, afford a degree of autonomy, and maintain students at the center.

In our partner districts, district and school investment conveyed to stakeholders that this was deep change work. By partnering with the BELE Network and investing in Elevate implementation support and resources, the resonating message was that this is not “just a survey” but an engagement tool to uplift student experience and improve teacher capacity to effectively address student needs. Embedding these supports and resources reinforced the expectation that the school was committed to and engaged in a change process that would involve ongoing cycles of inquiry to become more student centered and equitable.



“ *[I]f you change the content but don't change how you are in relationship with students, you aren't really changing anything.*—BELE Network High School Teacher ”



## IN ACTION

### A Learner-Centered Culture

In one of NEP's BELE middle schools, a teacher took a learner's stance and collaborated with his students to create a new social studies curriculum. The teacher opted in to examining student experience data by using the Elevate survey with the hope of increasing student engagement. His commitment to this mission allowed him to be vulnerable and respond meaningfully to student data. This was the case even after he saw the results, which were both eye-opening and in conflict with how he viewed himself as a teacher. He believed he was "doing everything right" and was "floored" to find that many of his students thought the work he assigned was not meaningful and did not affirm their cultural identities. He reflected on what this meant and how he could learn and grow from the feedback. After winter break, he entered the classroom with a two-pronged plan to learn more about his students' perspectives and instead of taking the usual "trust me, I know what I'm doing" stance, deciding, "I am going to trust you [students], and let's redesign this [curriculum]."

First, he used the Elevate survey questions as the basis for individual conferencing with students. In doing this, he was able to learn what meaningful work [an Elevate learning condition, see Appendix A] would look like for a variety of students and what they hoped to get out of their work. The principal at his school supported the use of Elevate by co-designing the schedule with him and his colleagues, ensuring it was accommodating and accessible for everyone.

Second, he designed a reflection and discussion protocol for his African American studies class, provided them with the Elevate data, and asked them to analyze the data and provide recommendations for potential changes. To facilitate their recommendations, he shared the Elevate Practice Guides with the students. Students were able to select practice options they felt would be a good fit based on their experiences and what they were seeing in the survey data.

The teacher used the new insights from student analysis, conferences, and discussions to make significant changes to his curriculum, the work he assigned, and— perhaps his most meaningful learning—the way he interacted with students.

The teacher represented in this story is a model of how the described actions can lead to purposeful, impactful, and targeted implementation of student experience data. When he witnessed scores that differed from his perspective of his classroom, he leaned into a posture that viewed his students' voices and experiences as valid and worth examining.



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Anchored by a growth mindset that was modeled for his students, the teacher used the scores as an alert and opportunity to redesign curriculum, especially attending to BIPOC students who could not see themselves in the work. In personalized consultations, students were transformed into collaborating change agents and partnered with the teacher in developing a new course of study. Throughout the process, he demonstrated a strong clarity of purpose and commitment. His creation of the first African American studies course thoughtfully aligned with the districts' strategic priorities to better serve African American children. The curriculum lead, who sits at the district level, then systematized his efforts and launched a districtwide social studies curriculum redesign effort.

Support may also emerge in designating resources and funds toward a role focused solely on optimizing and bringing to fruition the goals aligned with student experience data. Effectively implementing learning tools for a school or district community can be a large undertaking requiring coordination across various roles, responsibilities, and spaces. In the prior story, a single motivated teacher was able to accomplish a significant goal that reflected specific concerns for his set of students. In some cases, a school or district may want to replicate similar conditions and results for a more widespread impact. However, without the designation of a separate role and entity, this type of endeavor may unjustly fall on the shoulders of teachers or school leaders who are already pressed for time and energy, sabotaging the effort before it has truly begun.

For district and school leaders seeking more extensive and comprehensive engagement of student experience data, a data coordinator can serve as a viable resource. Data coordinators sustain the work by drawing throughlines among school priorities, ongoing activities, and initiatives, preventing a disconnect from other district and school transformation efforts. They also support the cultivation of key actions described throughout this paper, such as clarity of communication (making clear connections between student data processes and district/school initiatives), creating a sense of safety and trust (developing relationships with educators and creating emotionally/psychologically safe spaces for critical data reflection) and cultivating educational contexts characterized by growth mindset and learning orientations (non-punitive, institutionally supported spaces for teachers to ask questions and push back when data systems are not meeting their or their students' needs).

The data coordinator does not necessarily have to be an expert in data content or a full-time position, but is someone who can be a source of streamlined and centralized supports between diverse entities (e.g., districts to schools) or organizational bodies (e.g., counselors to teachers or language arts to math department). Additionally, the capability and responsibilities are more important than the name itself. In our partner districts, the role of "coach" (NEP) and "SEL specialists" (CASEL) imply the same set of duties we describe for a data coordinator in this brief. What is most important is that this role contributes to creating trusting, safe learning spaces for teachers to be vulnerable, deeply reflective, and action-oriented as they engage with student experience data.



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## IN ACTION

### Making Data Matter With Data Coordinators

In BELE partner districts, the role of data coordinator was pivotal to moving the work forward and supporting meaningful teacher impact from student experience data. The data coordinators in this district were located at different organizational levels—the district level and the school level—but both were marked by the ability to:

1. support a conducive environment for data reflection; and
2. maintain accountability toward the data process without a sense of fear or penalization.

The district data coordinator cultivated a special relationship with teachers and leaders (e.g., directors, principals, administrators) characterized by trust and openness, which motivated teachers to be self-directed and consistent in collecting student experience data. Due to his position, he could clearly illustrate the connection between the district's priorities on strengthening adult SEL and PD opportunities and the Elevate tool, which engendered a greater sense of self-motivation for participating teachers.

Drawing closer to the classroom level, the school data coordinator leveraged her connection with school staff to galvanize school leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, administrators, etc.) and teachers to work through each Elevate implementation cycle. As a facilitator, she enabled a safe space for conversations and collaborations on data review and interpretation, engendering deep exploration of the classroom experience insights provided by students. The space facilitated the introspection teachers needed to modify their practices to generate optimal student learning environments.

As illustrated in the example provided, data coordinators can play a critical role cultivating relationships with and among teachers and school leadership. These relationships directly impact teachers' preparedness for conversations about student data and contribute to creating a safe place for such conversations while centering student voices and feedback in classroom practices.



## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Student data is an invaluable resource for schools and districts, especially in the pursuit of fostering learning environments that are generative, salient, and inclusive for every student. The impact and influence of data, however, is highly informed by the conditions and processes in place within the learning context. Not surprisingly, the highlighted actions resemble human-centered approaches, encouraging a view of the users and their experiences as the focal point and valuing the process as much as the outcome.

When the learning environment centers student voice and agency, it creates room for students' ideas, experiences, and input to be taken seriously and create meaningful change. The establishment and sustaining of growth mindset and a learner's culture allows adults (educators, staff, and leaders) to become the model of open and earnest curiosity for students, and data becomes a tool for learning by all individuals in the space rather than a punitive accountability instrument. Moreover, teachers can deeply engage with this information as school leaders prioritize setting the conditions for active and deep reflection and practice. These conditions can be fully realized by a role that serves as a point of connection and clarity, a bridge from plans to action. With this human-centered approach around data practices and systems, educational environments can transform student and adult relationships with data and bring forth a dynamic where data works for them, and not the other way around.



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**APPENDIX A**

**LEARNING CONDITIONS IN ELEVATE**



## ELEVATE MEASURES

Elevate supports educator understanding of several critical learning conditions. Detailed information about each learning condition, its significance for student learning, and associated literature can be found at [perts.net/elevate/measures](https://perts.net/elevate/measures).

### Primary Learning Conditions:

- Affirming Identities
- Classroom Community
- Feedback for Growth
- Meaningful Work
- Student Voice
- Teacher Caring

### Additional Learning Conditions:

- Learning Goals
- Supportive Teaching
- Well-Organized Class



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**APPENDIX B**

**TEACHER REFLECTION PROTOCOLS (ELEVATE)**

# ELEVATE: PART I AND II: TEACHER INDEPENDENT REFLECTION

The following resources can be directly accessed in the BELE Library–[Part I](#) and [Part II](#)



COLLABORATIVE FOR  
ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND  
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## ELEVATE: Part I: Teacher Independent Reflection

*"If improving outcomes for students were simply about training teachers to implement a set of programs, we would be much farther along in our improvement efforts. But learning is more complex than this. Teacher learning that leads to improved opportunities for students across a system requires more than curricular training, program implementation, and dashboard monitoring. It requires a collaborative, disciplined curiosity about what is happening for learners inside classrooms. It requires honest conversations grounded in empathy, relevant data, and shared responsibility that allow us to confront our implicit biases and build awareness of our effectiveness."* [Lead by Learning Playbook](#)

**WELCOME** to this two-part reflective process based on your own curiosity and desire to have "honest conversations grounded in empathy, relevant data, and shared responsibility that allow us to confront our implicit biases and build awareness of our effectiveness." We start with two questions that the Elevate data helps us to answer:

- What is happening for the learners inside your classroom from their perspectives?
- Based on what you learn from them, what are the small adjustments in your practice that you believe can improve their learning experience?

**Part I (5 minutes)** helps us to shift to an adaptive mindset before we look at the data.

**Part II (25 minutes)** guides us through a series of reflections that lead to changes in our classrooms.

### PART I

#### TAKE FIVE: 5 minutes

We begin by opening our heads and hearts to having an honest conversation first with ourselves before we engage with the data. **Reflect on the one topic that matters to you today.**

- ☐ **TEAMWORK:** This work is not possible to do on your own. Think about your closest colleagues. How have you built the relational trust needed to talk honestly about your work?
- ☐ **SENSE OF URGENCY:** This can hijack our ability to think critically. How will you resist the urge to jump right to an emotional reaction to student responses without thinking through the root causes? What strategies will help you to slow down to read and think critically?
- ☐ **TIME:** This is our most valuable resource, and where we invest it is a good indicator of our values. How will you prioritize the time needed to read, think, discuss and plan for change?
- ☐ **COMPLEXITY:** This year is full of complex problems and uncertainty, and we won't be able to fall back on standard practices and procedures. How will you keep your core values at the center while the landscape constantly shifts around you?
- ☐ **FEELING OVERWHELMED:** If it feels like too much, it's too much. Trust your feelings. There will be many moments in this process when you may feel overwhelmed. How can you plan ahead for what happens when those feelings come up for you? What can you do to still take action when something is too heavy, too much, too many?



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## ELEVATE: Part II: Teacher Independent Reflection

The following tool will provide you with guidance to independently reflect on your student responses from the Elevate Tool and potentially have a brief conversation with your students on next steps. The reflection prompts below are aligned with CASEL's 5 evidence-based SEL competencies. For reference, they make up the [CASEL Framework](#) and can be referenced [HERE](#). The directions below will assist you with using this tool to guide your reflection, connect with students, and consider potential next steps. Be sure to bring your completed self-reflection to your next Community of Practice meeting.

### **Directions:**

- Login to your PERTS account and pull up the available reports.
- Use the provided questions below that align with each SEL competency as an opportunity to guide your review of the data and reflect.
- Use the "notes" space to record the answers that come up for you.
- Refer to the strategies section of the Elevate report to get ideas on how you can improve on the learning conditions and bring these suggestions to your group reflection meeting next week.
- If you have questions about your report, click on the "?" icon in the report, visit [peris.net/elevate/support](https://peris.net/elevate/support) and/or reach out to your project lead or GCS SEL Specialist.

### **Project Leads & AISD SEL Specialist:**

#### **Reflection Questions: Self-Awareness**

- What do I notice in the data about how my students responded to the Learning Questions and Equity Gap sections?
- What feeling or thoughts come up as I review and reflect on the student feedback data?

#### **Notes:**

#### **Reflection Questions: Self-Management**

- Which 1-2 learning conditions highlight equity gaps and stand out as opportunities for growth based on the student feedback?
- What would be a personal goal that motivates me to improve in the 1-2 selected learning conditions and/or equity gaps?

#### **Notes:**

#### **Reflection Questions: Social Awareness**

- Using a strengths based approach, what strategies might I use to get feedback on the written goals to create/cultivate a better sense/environment of belonging for my students?
- How do I think students will respond to/experience these goals based on the data?

#### **Notes:**

#### **Reflection Questions: Relationships Skills**

- What do the survey data say about students' perception of their relationship with me and with their peers in the current learning environment?

PERTS - [www.perts.net](https://www.perts.net) - [support@perts.net](mailto:support@perts.net) - [twitter.com/pertslab](https://twitter.com/pertslab)



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**APPENDIX C**

**GROUP COACHING TEMPLATE (ELEVATE)**



# ELEVATE GROUP COACHING TEMPLATE RESOURCE FOR SESSION FACILITATORS

The following resource can be directly accessed in the BELE Library [here](#).



COLLABORATIVE FOR  
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## Elevate Group Coaching Template Resource for Session Facilitators

**Points to remember and share from PERTS: Elevate data are for improvement, not evaluation. Improvement efforts become more manageable the more targeted they are.**

**Step #1:** Present your district/community's PoP & BELE Essential Action of focus: **(5 minutes)**

Your PoP/Research Questions	BELE Essential Actions
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Redesign Teaching &amp; Learning to Transform Students' Daily Experience</li> <li>2. Redesign Systems &amp; Structures to Create Conditions for Thriving</li> <li>3. Center &amp; Share Power with BIPOC Youth</li> <li>4. Center &amp; Share Power with BIPOC Families/Caregivers &amp; Community Organizations</li> <li>5. Invest in &amp; Collaborate with Educators &amp; Staff</li> <li>6. Review &amp; Respond to Data on Experience, Learning, &amp; Well-being</li> <li>7. Leverage Policy &amp; Allocate Resources for Equity &amp; Well-being</li> </ol>
<b>Ask: Are there any immediate connections seen from Elevate to our PoP/Research Questions?</b>	

**Step #2: (5 minutes)** Discuss the opportunity for reflection based on student feedback and remaining within our [Spheres of Influence](#). Draw connections to adult SEL and opportunities for self-awareness and self-management.

**Step#3: (40 minutes)** Collaborative Strategic Planning

Resources:

- [SEL Data Reflection Protocol](#)
- [PERTS: Elevate Practice Guide: Learning Conditions](#)
- Elevate Community Report

**Activity:** Either a [Chalk Talk](#) (with Jamboard if Virtual) or timed discussion to review the report and respond to the following possible questions. The participant handout of the [SEL Data Reflection Protocol](#) can serve as a guide to your questions as well. As you review the report:



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