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Contact:
Shannon Babcock, Vice President of External Affairs (sbabcock@casel.org)
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

NATIONAL SURVEY FINDS SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ARE MAKING PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

CHICAGO, ILL., October 15, 2019 — Principals are readier than ever to bring SEL to their schools.

That’s the key finding from a new survey of U.S. school principals, Ready to Lead: A 2019 Update of Principals’ Perspectives on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools. Produced by Civic and Hart Research Associates for CASEL, more than 700 K-12 principals were surveyed, following up on a 2017 report of this audience.

The report offers recommendations to bring forth greater evidence and assessments and strategically advance systemic SEL in schools nationwide through policy changes, enhanced research, training, and evaluation. Key findings show that principals stand ready to bring systemic, schoolwide SEL to their schools, but they need more support from state and district leaders.

- Principals continue to see SEL skills as highly teachable and a priority in their schools. Eighty three percent believe it’s “very important” to promote SEL and 99% believe SEL skills are teachable.
- Principals have made progress in implementing several SEL benchmarks, such as:
  - Having a long-term plan: 55%, up from 43% in 2017
  - Having a clear SEL vision statement: 55%, up from 45%
  - Using an evidence-based SEL program: 53%, up from 40%
- While urban and suburban schools have made notable progress implementing SEL, small town and rural schools continue to lag significantly behind the rest of the country.
- Principals and teachers are assessing SEL skills at much higher rates, but more work is needed to ensure SEL is systemic across schools and districts. For example, 83% of principals report using some kind of SEL assessment, but fewer than half believe the measures are useful.
• Although more school leaders report receiving guidance from their districts (53%, up from 34% in 2017), they generally give districts very low marks for the quality of support provided.
• Major perceived barriers to SEL implementation include lack of: reinforcement outside school, time for teachers, funding, and professional development.
• The percentage of principals who believe social and emotional skills should definitely be included in state education standards and guidelines has nearly doubled from 25% to 49%.

“These findings are especially important given that a recent Pew Research Center survey found that principals are the most trusted professionals in the country, ahead of police, the military, and religious leaders,” said Karen Niemi, President and CEO of CASEL. “These school leaders know what students need and we should honor their expertise.”

“The movement to embed social and emotional learning into every classroom and school in America has reached a tipping point. [...] Now is the time for policymakers to heed the calls of educators and provide the necessary supports for a student-centric, whole child education that develops the leaders of tomorrow,” the report urges.

The full report is available here and an executive summary is available here.

CASEL also provides extensive implementation guidance and resources for principals, teachers, and other school staff in an online CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL. A companion website, District Resource Center, provides similar support for school superintendents and district staff.

Previous CASEL surveys reported the views of teachers (2016), principals (2017), and young people (2018).

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CASEL, a Chicago-based nonprofit founded in 1994, is a trusted source for knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning. CASEL supports educators and policy leaders and enhances the experiences and outcomes for all PreK-12 students.