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Social and Emotional Learning



Developing SEL
Instructional Skills
and Strategies

SEL in Out-of-School
Settings



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November/December 2018

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Principal (ISSN 0271-6062) is published in September, November, January, March, and May by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Annual membership dues in the Association are \$235 (institutional subscription, \$150), of which \$35 are for a year's subscription to *Principal*. (Subscriptions available only as part of membership.) Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, VA, and at additional mailing offices. NAESP Executive and Editorial Offices, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314-3483, 703-684-3345. Copyright 2018, National Association of Elementary School Principals. All rights reserved. *Principal* is a registered trademark of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Opinions expressed in *Principal* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of NAESP.

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LEADING LESSONS

Social and Emotional Learning

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As you read this supplement, be on the lookout for the following:



Key considerations:

These are factors to keep in mind for any school looking to develop an SEL program.



Reflections: These are questions to ask yourself when looking to develop an SEL program for your particular school and circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

Social, Emotional, & Essential

Though programs vary widely,
SEL strategies teach skills that can
help children succeed in school and life

That rarest of things has emerged among experts on child development, education, and health: a consensus. They agree that social and emotional learning (SEL) skills matter to kids' growth and well-being.

Research shows the benefits of social and emotional learning in achieving positive academic, interpersonal, and mental health outcomes. Children empowered with these skills participate in classroom activities more, develop better friendships, and maintain positive relationships with teachers. SEL skills also support overall well-being and build resilience, ultimately helping those who master its concepts achieve success in school, career, and life.

But while the benefits are clear, the term is defined broadly. SEL may include concepts such as “noncognitive development” and “trauma-informed learning,” or promise to build hard-to-measure qualities such as “grit.” And the programs that exist concentrate on the development of various types of SEL skills, making it difficult to know which one to follow.

Educators need to know what’s “under the hood” of the SEL programs available—the strategies and features that drive positive outcomes. That’s why *Navigating SEL From the Inside Out*, a new report from Stephanie Jones and her colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is so useful in demystifying the specifics. Examining 25 evidence-based SEL programs for elementary-age children, the report, commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, shows what makes the programs different from one another to aid stakeholders in making informed decisions to suit their schools’ context and needs.

Implementing a program successfully requires administrators to identify key priorities, goals, and limitations, as well as make and satisfy a financial commitment. Whether you wish to integrate SEL concepts selectively or throughout your school’s curricula, you can now choose wisely—and help ensure children’s success in school and life. •



This special supplement is brought to you in partnership with The Wallace Foundation. For more school leadership resources, visit www.wallacefoundation.org.

The What and Why of SEL

Research linking SEL to student outcomes
List of 25 leading SEL programs

Decades of research suggest that preparing children to be caring, ethical, contributing adults requires supporting them in the development of social, emotional, and character skills that include focusing and deploying attention, understanding and managing emotions, empathizing with and respecting others, navigating social conflicts effectively, and standing up for principles of justice and fairness.

The Link Between SEL and Student Outcomes

A great deal of research over the last several decades has demonstrated the benefits of social and emotional skills.

Classrooms function more effectively and student learning increases when children have the skills to focus their attention, manage negative emotions, navigate relationships, and persist in the face of difficulty.

Children who can effectively manage their thinking, attention, and behavior are also more likely to have better grades and higher standardized test scores. Those with strong social skills are more likely to make and sustain friendships and engage in learning.

Social and emotional skills also serve as important protective factors in the face of negative life events or chronic stressors and support general well-being.

Key Features of Effective SEL Programs
Research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation shows that SEL efforts are most successful when they:

- **Occur within supportive contexts.** School and classroom contexts supportive of SEL feature adult and child practices and activities that build skills and establish prosocial norms.
- **Build adult competencies.** Promoting teachers' own social and emotional competence and pursuing the ongoing integration of that competence with pedagogical skills is key.
- **Acknowledge features of the broader community context.** Take into consideration the environments and contexts in which children are learning, living, and growing by building family/school/community partnerships.

- **Target a key set of skills across multiple domains of development.** This includes targeting emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation or executive function skills.
- **Set reasonable goals.** This includes articulating a series of short- and long-term outcomes that are reasonable goals or expectations.

Common Implementation Challenges

Despite the impressive and expanding body of evidence in favor of programs and interventions focused on social and emotional skills, a number of important challenges remain:

- **Ensuring sufficient exposure and intensity.** SEL programs often take the form of brief lessons that are implemented during short sections in academic classes and are often skipped due to tight schedules.
- **Prioritizing and integrating SEL in daily practices.** SEL skills are often not seen as a core part of the educational mission, but instead as extracurricular, add-on, or secondary, resulting in little effort to apply the skills in daily life.
- **Extending SEL beyond classrooms.** Most SEL programs focus primarily on what goes on in the classroom, but SEL skills are also needed on playgrounds and in lunchrooms, hallways, and bathrooms, as well as out-of-school settings.
- **Ensuring sufficient staff support and training.** Teachers, school staff, and adults who staff out-of-school settings often receive little training in how to promote SEL skills, deal with peer conflict, or address other SEL-related issues.
- **Facilitating program ownership and buy-in.** School administrators and staff sometimes see programs sourced from outsiders adopted without local consensus as being too top-down, and lack ownership and trust.
- **Using data to inform decision-making.** Few schools employ data to guide decision-making about the selection, implementation, or ongoing assessment of the programs and strategies they use.
- **Applying and transferring skills.** Teachers and other school and out-of-school staff often fail to use the program strategies in real-time, “teachable moment” situations.

A Resource Guide to SEL Programs

Partnering with the right SEL program can be key to success with students. Here are the 25 leading SEL and character education programs profiled in *Navigating SEL From the Inside Out*:

1. **The 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution) Program** is a grade-specific Pre-K–5 curriculum that integrates the teaching of social and emotional skills and language arts through the use of diverse children’s literature. Primary focus: 43 percent interpersonal skills. www.morningside-center.org/node/36
2. **Caring School Community (CSC)** is a K–6 program that builds classroom and school community while teaching SEL skills. Primary focus: 78 percent interpersonal skills. www.collaborativeclassroom.org/caring-school-community
3. **Character First** is a K–12 character education curriculum designed to build positive social values and character by helping students develop a vocabulary of character traits and apply them to life. Primary focus: 71 percent character. www.characterfirsteducation.com
4. **Competent Kids, Caring Communities (CKCC)** is a Pre-K–5 program designed to build SEL competencies, increase compassion and connectedness, and strengthen home/school partnerships. Primary focus: 30 percent cognitive regulation. www.competentkids.org
5. **I Can Problem Solve (ICPS)** is a Pre-K–5 program designed to build interpersonal thinking and problem-solving skills. Primary focus: 65 percent emotional processes and cognitive regulation. www.icanproblemsolve.info
6. **Lions Quest** is a Pre-K–12 program that integrates SEL, character education, drug and bullying prevention, and service learning to promote school and life success. Primary focus: 60 percent interpersonal skills. www.lions-quest.org
7. **MindUP™** is a Pre-K–12 program that offers a framework and curriculum for SEL designed to be modeled by teachers in the classroom. Primary focus: 44 percent cognitive regulation. www.mindup.org
8. **The Mutt-i-grees Curriculum** is a Pre-K–12 program that combines SEL with humane education, building upon children’s love of animals to promote SEL competence, academic achievement, and awareness of the needs of shelter pets. Primary focus: 56 percent interpersonal skills. www.education.muttigrees.org
9. **Open Circle** is a K–5 program designed to develop SEL skills and build a school community in which students feel safe, cared for, and engaged in learning. Primary focus: 65 percent interpersonal skills. www.open-circle.org
10. **The PATHS** program is a Pre-K–6 curriculum designed to reduce aggression and behavioral problems by promoting the development of SEL competence. Primary focus: 75 percent emotional processes. www.channing-bete.com/paths
11. **Positive Action** is a Pre-K–12 program that emphasizes the link between thoughts, actions, and feelings to promote positive self-concept alongside character development and SEL. Primary focus: 57 percent emotional processes. www.positiveaction.net
12. **RULER (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotions)** is a Pre-K–12 approach to SEL that builds emotional intelligence in students and adults and prepares adults to model these skills and create a supportive and healthy climate for students. Primary focus: 94 percent emotional processes. ei.yale.edu/ruler

SEL Program Focus Areas

- Interpersonal Skills
- Character
- Cognitive Regulation
- Emotional Processes
- Mindset

13. **Second Step** is a Pre-K–8 program designed to help children understand and manage their emotions, control their reactions, be aware of others’ feelings, and develop problem-solving and responsible decision-making skills using games, stories, and songs. Primary focus: 52 percent emotional processes. www.cfchildren.org/second-step
14. **SECURe** is a Pre-K–3 program that develops the social-emotional and self-regulatory skills that students need to be effective learners. It includes strategies, routines, and lessons that work together to improve student learning and behavior and build a positive classroom and school climate. Primary focus: 50 percent cognitive regulation. easel.gse.harvard.edu/secure
15. **The Social Decision Making/Problem Solving (SDM/PS) Program** is a K–8 program designed to help students develop social awareness, self-control, and decision-making skills. Primary focus: 55 percent interpersonal skills. ubhc.rutgers.edu/sdm/index.html
16. **Too Good for Violence** is a K–12 violence prevention and character education program that teaches SEL skills, attitudes, and behaviors to help students manage bullying situations, resolve conflicts, and cope with frustration peacefully. Primary focus: 67 percent interpersonal skills. www.toogoodprograms.org
17. **We Have Skills** is a video-based social skills program for K–3 designed to facilitate positive behavior and learning in the classroom by teaching seven behavioral skills. Primary focus: 59 percent interpersonal skills. www.irised.com/products/we-have-skills
18. **Wise Skills** is a K–12 character education and SEL program designed to develop character, social and emotional skills, resilience, grit, and a positive school climate by using the words and lives of diverse historical figures. Primary focus: 52 percent character. www.wiseskills.com
19. **Conscious Discipline** is an early childhood SEL program that integrates with classroom management. Primary focus: 75 percent emotional processes. www.consciousdiscipline.com
20. **The Good Behavior Game** is a team-based classroom management strategy for early grades that uses positive social reinforcement to promote positive behaviors related to student success. Primary focus: 100 percent interpersonal skills. www.air.org/topic/p-12-education-and-social-development/good-behavior-game
21. **Playworks** is a national nonprofit that leverages the power of play to transform children’s social and emotional health. Primary focus: 49 percent interpersonal skills. www.playworks.org
22. **Responsive Classroom** is a research-based approach to elementary and middle school teaching that focuses on the strong link between academic success and SEL. Primary focus: 34 percent cognitive regulation. www.responsiveclassroom.org
23. **Before the Bullying** is a K–8 universal prevention program designed to prevent bullying and teach positive social skills through the use of music, videos, and the performing arts. Primary focus: 55 percent interpersonal skills. www.growing-sound.com/music-more-before-the-bullying
24. **Girls on the Run** is a physical activity-based positive youth development afterschool program for girls in grades 3–8. Primary focus: 49 percent mindset. www.girlsontherun.org
25. **WINGS for Kids** is a K–5 afterschool program that combines traditional elements of afterschool programming with a comprehensive SEL curriculum to promote positive behavior, responsible decision-making, and healthy relationships among students. Primary skill focus: 41 percent emotional processes. www.wingsforkids.org •

Developing SEL Instructional Skills and Strategies

Use this guide with your staff

Schools and community centers have long served an important context for building social and emotional learning (SEL) skills. One common approach has been school- and community-based prevention and intervention programs focused on SEL.

This guide is designed to step you through the process of thinking about and creating your own SEL strategies for building and/or choosing the most effective SEL program for your school or organization.

I. ESTABLISH GOALS & PRIORITIES

Identify your school or organization's key priorities, goals, limitations, or challenges. The following questions are meant to facilitate deeper thought and discussion about the strengths, opportunities, and needs of your specific context, setting the stage for selecting an SEL program that best suits the needs of your community.

Key consideration: Review school data on such areas as climate and disciplinary records, and/or qualitative data from focus groups or interviews with key stakeholders to guide your responses to Needs and Goals questions.

Reflection: What problems or issues do we want to address as a school community?

Needs and Goals

You will need to define the specific content focus or urgent need you hope to address by implementing a new program. Examples include bullying prevention, character education, etc. With your team, answer the following questions:

- Do you have a specific mission and/or existing requirements or initiatives with which you are trying to align SEL programming, such as school climate, community service, health and wellness, art, etc.?
- Are there specific skills or social-emotional or behavioral needs you are hoping to address? Examples include empathy, attention skills, conflict resolution, etc.
- Who will take part in the program? What cultural considerations or learning needs must be addressed?
- Will the program be implemented universally across your school/organization, or is it intended to be used with a specific population?

Research shows that urban, economically disadvantaged and minority populations especially benefit from SEL.

II. BREAK IT DOWN

A. A number of barriers undermine efforts to bring SEL programming to scale, and these barriers are likely exacerbated in low-income and low-resource contexts. With your team, explore your school or organization’s past and current implementation challenges.

Discuss and rate your school community’s status in implementing initiatives in each of the following areas:

- Fidelity and the ability to implement the program as designed;
- Local buy-in, relevance, and cultural match enabled by autonomy;
- Financial, personnel, and structural resources;
- Integration into educational practice rather than as an “extracurricular” or add-on; and
- Sustainability and continued, consistent use over time.

Key consideration: Rigid schedules and budget priorities, as well as a lack of training and/or structured approaches, often sink initiatives such as SEL.

Reflection: In which areas has your school or organization successfully overcome barriers in the past, and in which areas do challenges still remain?

B. Consider implementing low-cost, low-barrier SEL strategies. Research shows there is a pressing need to develop and test less-intensive strategies, particularly for children exposed to poverty-related stressors and adverse experiences.

These strategies can be designed to adapt to individual, classroom, and school-specific needs and easy to implement outside the context of a comprehensive program, while still achieving meaningful outcomes. Examples include:

- Children writing and reading aloud
- praise for peers to promote interpersonal skills.
- Students’ use of some kind of tool or material representing a conflict escalator to explore how certain choices can worsen or improve a conflict.
- Showing videos that depict children in challenging classroom or playground situations to prompt discussion around emotions, conflict resolution, and appropriate behaviors.

1. For more information on low-cost, low-barrier strategies, including instructional practices, how to create a pilot program, and crafting a teacher guide, visit www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/documents/kernels-of-practice-for-sel.pdf.

NOTES

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III. BUILD EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Whatever strategies or programs your school or organization chooses, make sure the curriculum is well-implemented. Use the following reflection guide to look at how your organization's implementations comply with current research on SEL recommendations.

Structure Implementation Time

Often competing for time with academic content, SEL programs can be given short shrift. How will you:

- Integrate SEL into academic areas such as history, language arts, and social studies?
- Ensure SEL integration is done in a way that builds cultural sensitivity, respect for diversity, and social/ethical awareness?
- Align the program with the structures and routines already in place in your setting?
- Structure time to implement the program with fidelity?

Extend SEL Beyond the Classroom

SEL programs should include unstructured zones as well as classrooms. Student surveys and "hot spot mapping," in which students draw maps of the areas in school where they feel unsafe, show that students feel most unsafe in these unmonitored, and sometimes unstructured, zones. How will you:

- Support students in navigating these spaces?
- Ensure you are intentional about providing continuous, consistent opportunities to build and practice these skills across settings?
- Extend these opportunities through connections at home and in the community?

Apply SEL Strategies and Skills in Real Time

Even with comprehensive curricula, teachers and other school and out-of-school-time staff often struggle to use program strategies in real-time "teachable moment" situations or help students



transfer and apply these skills more broadly to their daily interactions in the classroom and other settings. How will you:

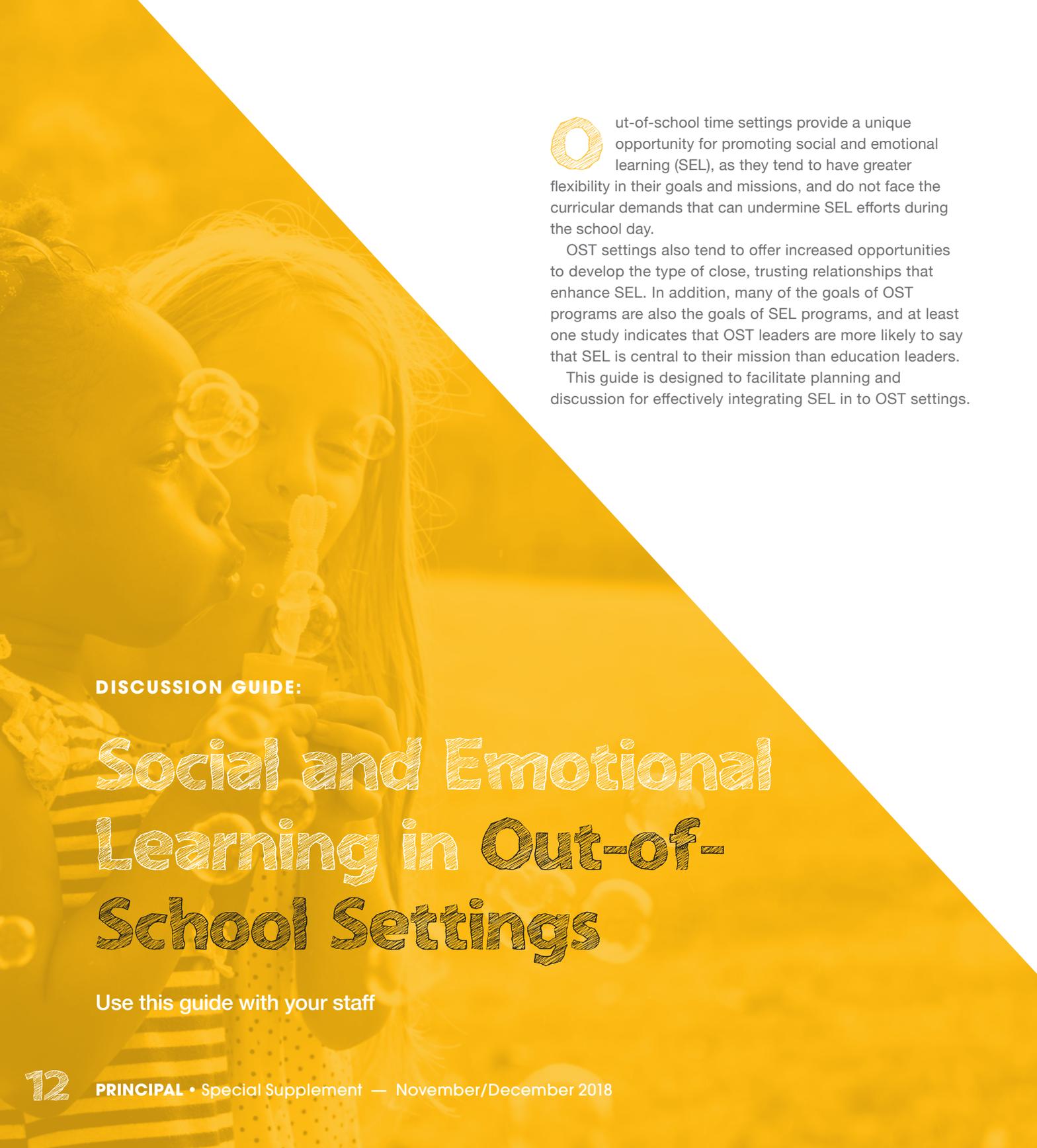
- Prepare students to deal with real-time conflict resolution skills during a disagreement on the playground?
- Integrate SEL into regular classroom practice and programs?
- Integrate these SEL skills into the larger school culture?

Ensure Sufficient Staff Support and Training

An adult's own SEL skills play an important role in their ability to model skills, develop positive relationships with students, and foster positive classroom environments. How will you:

- Provide in-service support for SEL, particularly through effective approaches like coaching and mentoring? Find SEL programs or other opportunities that provide training or professional development for staff to build knowledge and develop their own social-emotional competence?
- Facilitate program ownership and buy-in?

Programs developed by outside organizations and adopted without complete transparency are sometimes viewed



Out-of-school time settings provide a unique opportunity for promoting social and emotional learning (SEL), as they tend to have greater flexibility in their goals and missions, and do not face the curricular demands that can undermine SEL efforts during the school day.

OST settings also tend to offer increased opportunities to develop the type of close, trusting relationships that enhance SEL. In addition, many of the goals of OST programs are also the goals of SEL programs, and at least one study indicates that OST leaders are more likely to say that SEL is central to their mission than education leaders.

This guide is designed to facilitate planning and discussion for effectively integrating SEL in to OST settings.

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Settings

Use this guide with your staff

I. GOALS & PRIORITIES

Determine how OST program components and strategies can be adapted to fit the specific needs of your population and context. The more intentional OST programs are about addressing SEL skills, the easier it will be to align efforts and expectations across settings. To determine goals and priorities, answer the following questions with your team.

Needs and Goals

- What is the specific mission or goal of your OST organization or program? Do you have a specific content focus or set of activities and requirements you must accommodate when adopting SEL programs or strategies? Examples include physical activity, service learning, the arts, etc.
- Is there a specific focus or urgent need you hope to address by adopting or adapting SEL strategies? Examples include bullying prevention, character education, behavior management, etc.
- Are there specific skills or social-emotional or behavioral needs you are hoping to address? For example, empathy, growth mindset, conflict resolution, etc.

Time and Structure

Determine whether there are scheduling or timing constraints that will influence SEL programming.

- Is there dedicated time available during your program for SEL programming?
- Does the use of SEL programming or strategies need to be integrated with other program activities?

Leadership and Training

Decide which stakeholders should be involved in both selecting and implementing new SEL programming.

- What process will you use to discuss SEL priorities and review options for SEL programming?

The more intentional OST programs are about addressing SEL skills, the easier it will be to align efforts and expectations across settings.

- Who will be involved in each stage, and how will you ultimately decide which program to implement?
- Who will implement the program? What kind of training will this require?

Alignment and Adaptation

- If you are collaborating with a school or other organization, are they already using any SEL initiatives, strategies, or programs that might be extended to your program? Do they align with your program mission or goal? What steps will you take to align programming while also limiting redundancy?
- How can program components and strategies be differentiated for your specific population and context? Consider timing, structure, instructional methods, etc.

Key considerations:

- In order for schools and OST programs to work together to effectively promote SEL, it is important for OST practitioners to understand different approaches to SEL, to be clear about how they are supporting SEL skills, and to be proactive about connecting and coordinating with school partners.
- Use data to guide decision-making. This may include student and staff school climate data, disciplinary records, qualitative data from focus groups, or interviews with key stakeholders (program participants, OST coordinators, parents, schools/community centers, etc.).

With your team, reflect on how you will:

1. Determine which SEL programs appear to share similar goals and/or use similar pedagogical strategies to those already in place.
2. Decide if there are elements of different programs that might be used in tandem to best match the existing structure.
3. Narrow the program's scope by zooming in on the specific components and content areas that are most relevant for your student population.

Model 3: Partnerships organized around a specific challenge.

Imagine an OST program whose desire to engage in SEL work is driven by a particular challenge that its staff/student body faces.

For example, an OST program where staff struggle with stress management/emotional regulation or where students struggle with positive communication skills. In this instance, the starting point might be a consideration of the target population, including data collection around the strengths and struggles of students and staff in the program.

With your team, reflect on how you will:

1. Identify which programs are most saturated with activities related to the SEL skills and/or domains of interest.
2. Determine which programs focus on emotional regulation.
3. Determine which programs also target teachers.
4. Determine which programs focus on building positive communication skills.

Key considerations:

- Is there an existing program already in use at the school site? If so, how might it be adapted?
- OST programs should prioritize programmatic elements that match the desired content type (e.g., skill focus) and pedagogical strategy (e.g., instructional method).

Four common principles underlying high-quality OST and SEL programming include providing:

- Safe and positive environments;
- Support for the development of high-quality relationships between adults and children;
- Developmentally appropriate, relevant, and engaging content; and
- Opportunities for direct skill building.

B. Use key considerations for adapting SEL programs for OST settings. Here are five considerations for organizations to grapple with in their plan for adapting SEL programming for OST settings:

1. Expansion is difficult when forcing standardization. While most SEL programs are packaged as standardized units, programs vary widely in their content, approach, and skill focus.
2. The benefits of consistency should be balanced with the need for programming to be additive. Consistency across contexts improves outcomes for children and youth, but simply repeating more of the same often leads to student disengagement.
3. SEL programs should authentically support the mission of the OST organization. Prior work in the fields of family and community engagement suggests that adaptations are most effective when they are fully integrated into the mission and practices of an organization.
4. In addition to the mission, the pedagogical approach of SEL and OST programs should be both aligned and additive. SEL programs, like OST programs, vary in their goals and pedagogical approaches.
5. Organizations should consider the specific SEL needs and learning styles of their students.

Engaging your school's leadership team in leveraging SEL in OST settings will prove to benefit both school settings. •

◆ Reflection:

- How can components be differentiated to meet the specific needs of your context and student population?
- Consider how to maintain consistency without being redundant.
- What SEL programs can be easily integrated with, but also add to, what an OST program already offers?

NOTES

A large rectangular area with a dotted border, containing 20 horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.

Resources

This discussion guide is based on research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation and is available at the Wallace Knowledge Center, www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/social-and-emotional-learning/pages/default.aspx. The content contains direct excerpts and summarized and paraphrased information from the following studies and reports.

- *Social and Emotional Learning*. The Wallace Foundation. www.wallacefoundation.org/how-we-work/our-work/pages/social-emotional-learning.aspx
- *Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time Settings* by Stephanie Jones, Rebecca Bailey, Katharine Brush, and Jennifer Kahn.
- *Navigating Social and Emotional Learning From the Inside Out* by Stephanie Jones, Katharine Brush, Rebecca Bailey, Gretchen Brion-Meisels, Joseph McIntyre, Jennifer Kahn, Bryan Nelson, and Laura Stickle.
- *Strengthening Out-of-School Time Nonprofits: The Role of Foundations in Building Organizational Capacity* by Heather B. Weiss and Priscilla M. D. Little.
- *Kernels of Practice for SEL: Low-Cost, Low-Burden Strategies* by Stephanie Jones, Jennifer Kahn, Katharine Brush, and Rebecca Bailey.
- *Preparing for Effective SEL Implementation* by Stephanie Jones, Jennifer Kahn, Katharine Brush, and Rebecca Bailey.
- *Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework*. The Wallace Foundation. www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/foundations-for-young-adult-success.aspx
- *How the Every Student Succeeds Act Can Support Social and Emotional Learning: Evidence Review*. Rand Corp. www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9988.html

Additional Resources

- *Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework*. The Wallace Foundation. www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/foundations-for-young-adult-success.aspx
- *How the Every Student Succeeds Act Can Support Social and Emotional Learning: Evidence Review*. Rand Corp. www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9988.html



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