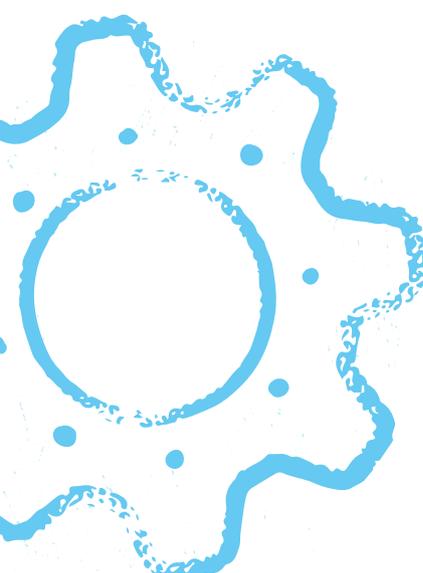


BUILDING ADULT Competencies



Bewilderment isn't exclusive to children during trying times. Every day that COVID-19 rages, teachers face unprecedented challenges for which few were trained. Findings from The Wallace Foundation's "Early Lessons from Schools and Out-of-School-Time Programs Implementing Social and Emotional Learning" and from CASEL's "Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: SEL Roadmap for Reopening School" show that attending to teachers' own social-emotional learning (SEL) practices is often a starting place for integrating them into pedagogical practices—or as one principal says, "You put on your own oxygen mask first."

Instill confidence

Teachers shouldn't have to feel that they are the sole problem solvers for children and their SEL needs. Lifelines and fully stocked SEL toolbelts equip them to contribute to solutions without having to take on problems by themselves.

- Don't assume that students understand why their learning experience is constantly changing. Have teachers explain the circumstances and share a predictable agenda. Extract student perspectives by leading children in discussions about what a pandemic—or any other crisis at hand—means to them.
- Crisis acts in blanket form, touching



the lives of all children. Apply training in trauma-informed care to classroom practices, giving each student reason to feel safe, connected, and hopeful.

- Build capabilities in teachers to recognize warning signs from students who are especially vulnerable to the consequences of upheaval. Children with preexisting conditions such as anxiety and attention deficit disorder can have a heightened sensitivity to external stressors, while those whose family members are frontline caregivers or at high risk of contracting COVID-19 can harbor justifiable fears for the health of loved ones. Equip teachers to offer available supports to families

and to partner with school mental health professionals on appropriate ways to reach out.

- Develop a simple rating system allowing teachers to gauge student needs and risks in snapshot form.
- Invest in premium versions of online meeting platforms, creating breakout rooms and small-group discussions that allow staff to conduct in-depth examinations of changes demanded by COVID-19 and the racial justice movement.
- Encourage teachers to mine the full potential of online meeting platforms by letting them know that it's OK to try new things and make mistakes.



Key Considerations:

Give teachers the freedom to prioritize student well-being over compliance with academic assignments and behavioral expectations. Devise professional development plans that stock their SEL toolbelts with all the practices needed to engage students, assess their needs, and find resources that contribute to solutions.



Reflection Questions:

- Is my school's SEL program preparing teachers for the hard task of encouraging students to share their feelings about the pandemic and social justice?
- Am I utilizing all available tools to empower staff to talk honestly with children and find the resources to address any problems that surface?

Enlighten and empower

As the CASEL SEL Roadmap for Reopening School states, adults need opportunities to connect, heal, and build their capacity to support students.

- Devote time during in-service training to reflection around adult SEL. Lead staff in exploring how much of their self-worth is defined by routine classroom wins when visible signs of daily success are no longer guaranteed.
- Remind teachers that shared trauma doesn't impact students only. Guide them in looking inward for its impact on their own bodies and well-being,

and encourage them to seek help when they need it.

- Start all staff meetings, from leadership teams to professional learning communities, with moments to check in on each other's well-being.
- When scattered classrooms prevent principals from reading the pulse of the school and its classes for student SEL needs, rely on teachers and support staff for frank assessments. Supply them with resources such as journal articles and books to build their sensitivities to the signs that impending problems need attention.
- Partnerships with out-of-school-time (OST) programs can create continuity and consistency that reinforce SEL principles throughout the child's day. Time constraints can make scheduling meetings with OST staff difficult, but face-to-face meetings—adapted to remote channels in pandemic circumstances—help build trust and understanding.



Key Considerations:

Remind teachers that their priority is teaching people, not content. As you develop OST partnerships, include protected time for SEL in the master schedule, realistically allocating according to transition times and arrivals, plus student energy levels as the day progresses.



Reflection Question:

- Am I remaining fluid and open to suggestions for effective practices to promote the safety of my school community and its physical and social-emotional health?

Foster communications

Assure teachers you're doing your best to keep them and their families safe, and back up those assurances with facts and action.

- Assign distinct purposes to different types of meetings. Consider keeping full staff meetings light and fun—one principal used her kids' karaoke mic to lead a game of "Family Feud"—or for shared contemplation over things that have been lost because of the pandemic. Open small-group meetings to discussions about the well-being of students and colleagues, plus possible solutions.
- Build the kind of trust with your leadership team that empowers members to tell you when you've missed a step in the safety-precaution checklist or when teachers need a better explanation of school protocols.
- Create buy-in by sharing the research and science behind your decisions.
- Turnover happens. Document and formalize SEL procedures—perhaps a short list of desired, observable

behaviors and “do-now” activities—to memorialize them as school and OST staff change.



Key Considerations:

Even in normal times, you will never please everyone, and crises can divide stakeholders even more. Seek the guidance of team members who can share thoughts on how to present plans, including those handed down by district administration or public authorities, in a digestible form that gives staff a say in implementation.

Assure self-care

A culture of self-care gives staff permission to take time for themselves and their colleagues, recognizing that their health lays the foundation for the educational and social-emotional progress of their students.

- When reopening and adapting to changing safety precautions, schedule ample time for teachers to set up their rooms and absorb the meaning and logistics behind the physical changes demanded by COVID-19 protocols.
- Apply the school’s SEL practices to gauging and improving staff social-emotional health. If teachers use the RULER scale of emotional

intelligence, ask them what color they’re in and craft responses that address the mood of the moment, helping teachers reach a better color state through meditative practices or walks around the block.

- Use survey tools that allow teachers to privately submit updates on their well-being and requests for help.
- Train staff in appropriately handling stress through breathing, yoga, and mindfulness strategies. The training can also model practices that teachers can transfer to their students.
- Include teachers and support staff in school programs that recognize members of the community who personify school values. ⚙️



Key Considerations:

Make self-care intentional. Build times into the day and week for self-care breaks, breathing exercises, and walks. One school created “Wellness Wednesdays,” stocking the day with student-friendly tips—which are also suitable for adults—on feeling better with each passing day.



Reflection Questions:

- Am I modeling the wellness behavior I expect from my staff? If I’m projecting a false front that internalizes negative emotions, they will do the same—to the detriment of both themselves and their students.
- Am I giving teachers permission to stop beating themselves up about perceived failures in the face of enormous challenges? Do they know that they will be supported if they admit to feeling overwhelmed or falling short of expectations that were probably outsized to begin with?

