

Washington SEL Implementation Brief: For Education Leaders

Social Emotional Learning: Part of the Fabric of School Life

Schools that focus on creating welcoming and inclusive environments that support all students' social emotional development by honoring students' histories and cultures, can set youth up for long-term success and well-being. The school environment and relationships with others directly affect how students learn and how they apply that learning. For example, learning happens:

- In safe and supporting environments. When students feel supported by and connected with their peers and educators, their brain functions more effectively, and the neurological network in their brain becomes stronger.
- In schools that are fair and welcoming. When education leaders use restorative practices and student discipline approaches that build community, students are more likely to attend school, stay enrolled, and graduate.¹
- When social emotional learning (SEL) is intentionally embedded into every aspect of daily school life (deliberate and consistent strategies, practices, and policies), and occurs in partnership with families, communities, and afterschool programs.

Education leaders lead the charge in creating this environment, including embedding systemic SEL throughout the school and during out-of-school time.

What Is Social Emotional Learning?

Social emotional learning (SEL) is broadly understood as a process through which people build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life. (See Washington state's SEL Implementation Guide)

SEL is **not** a way to "grade" or identify deficits, and it is not just a curriculum or add-on. Rather, SEL is an intentional approach to building student assets.

SEL supports **education equity**² in multiple ways: emphasizing whole-child development, drawing attention to the social nature of learning, advancing the belief that all children can learn, developing young people's skills to navigate social contexts, and improving relationships between students and educators—a key protective factor for **all** students.³

¹ Aspen Institute. (2019). *From a nation at risk to a nation at hope: Recommendations from the Commission of Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. A Nation at Hope (Executive Summary) - The Aspen Institute*

² Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential. Retrieved from the National Equity Project website: <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/education-equity-definition>

³ Jones, S. M., & Kahn, J. (2017). *The evidence base for how we learn: Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development. Consensus statements of evidence from the Council of Distinguished Scientists*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.



Washington State's SEL Standards⁴

Self-Awareness:	Individual has the ability to identify their emotions, personal assets, areas for growth, and potential external resources and supports.
Self-Management:	Individual has the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
Self-Efficacy:	Individual has the ability to motivate themselves, persevere, and see themselves as capable.
Social-Awareness:	Individual has the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
Social Management:	Individual has the ability to make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.
Social Engagement:	Individual has the ability to consider others and show a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community.

Washington State SEL Framework: Essential Elements and Guiding Principles

1. Create the conditions to support student SEL through climate and culture.
2. SEL requires collaboration among families, educators, community partners, and young people in its design and implementation.
3. Build adult capacity.

Equity: Each child receives what they need to develop their full potential.

Culturally sustaining: Culture is viewed as a resource for learning, not a barrier.

Universal design: Learning differences are planned for and accommodated.

Trauma-informed: Knowledge of the effects of trauma is integrated into policy and practice.

"The most effective social and emotional learning (SEL) requires a strategic, systemic approach that involves everyone, from district and school leaders to community partners [and] family members, working together to ensure students receive the support they need."⁵

⁴ Social and Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup. (2016). *Addressing social emotional learning in Washington's K-12 public schools*. Retrieved from <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2022-12/selbworkgroup2016report.pdf>

⁵ CASEL. (2019). *CASEL schoolwide SEL implementation: Indicators of schoolwide SEL*. <https://schoolguide.casel.org/what-is-sel/indicators-of-schoolwide-sel/>



Entry Points for Improving SEL in Community and Youth Development Programs Now

- 1. Relationships matter.** Build positive relationships with your students. Affirm the culture and background of the diverse students you serve. Draw from your students' cultural assets to enrich SEL in the classroom.
- 2. Context matters.** Students and adults use their social emotional skills depending on the context in which they find themselves. Start by building an infrastructure to support the long-term implementation of SEL. Build commitment and ownership with your school, families, and community, and embed SEL into all the contexts in which students find themselves.
- 3. Knowledge of self matters.** Begin with developing your own SEL competencies. Use a [self-assessment](#), such as this one from the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, to reflect on how your experiences and cultural background impact your teaching.
- 4. Awareness of current SEL work matters.** Learn about the current SEL work in Washington State by learning the SEL standards, benchmarks, indicators, essential elements, and guiding principles. Explore ways you can embed the standards in your school and into classroom practices. Utilize the SEL learning module by visiting the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI's) SEL online module, [Learning Segment 2: Embedding SEL Schoolwide](#), or Washington State's [Implementation Guide](#).
- 5. Using effective SEL strategies matters.** Use and assess instructional strategies and classroom management techniques that foster a supportive, caring classroom environment—such as these [Three Signature SEL Practices](#) from Oakland Unified School District. Teachers and staff need to understand SEL and its connection to equity, learning, and school climate before explaining it to students and families. See the Washington [SEL online module](#).
- 6. Collaboration with others matters.** There is a plethora of resources regarding school SEL implementation. Use step-by-step resources, such as the [CASEL school guide](#), and connect with other Washington districts that are already implementing SEL.

Key Considerations for Implementing SEL⁶

- ✓ Create an SEL leadership team comprised of multiple partnerships to build relationships.
- ✓ Engage stakeholders and develop authentic family-school-community partnerships.
- ✓ Create a vision that prioritizes SEL and the whole child.
- ✓ Conduct an SEL needs and readiness assessment.
- ✓ Align resources and policies to connect SEL with larger efforts to transform education in support of equity.

⁶ OSPI. (2023). *Social emotional learning*. <http://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/health-safety/mental-social-behavioral-health/social-and-emotional-learning-sel>



- ✓ Create an implementation plan that includes school climate and culture, culturally sustaining supports, and explicit classroom-based approaches that promote SEL.
- ✓ Provide continuous professional learning and support.
- ✓ Monitor your SEL progress with a focus on fidelity to make improvements.

Schoolwide SEL Resources

[CASEL School Guide](#)

CASEL has documented, field-tested, and refined a strategic, collaborative process for schoolwide SEL. CASEL has documented, field-tested, and refined a strategic, collaborative process for schoolwide SEL.

[Recommendations from the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#)

Recommendations on how to embed SEL into the fabric of schools and communities.

[The Collaborating Districts Initiative \(CDI\)](#)

A hub for knowledge, resources, and tools to promote high-quality systemic SEL implementation.

[Social Emotional Learning and Equity Pitfalls and Recommendations](#)

Check out resources for achieving educational equity in your school.

[SEL Coaching Toolkit](#)

This toolkit is for instructional coaches, administrators, and district leaders who support teachers/staff in integrating SEL into their daily instructional practices.

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