—Getty

Social Emotional Learning

EDITOR'S NOTE

As students and educators begin their summer months, social emotional needs remain. In this Spotlight, learn where things should start; evaluate what child-development experts are saying; get downloadable resources educators can apply directly to their environments; review the dos and the don'ts; and assess who not to forget.

OPINION

Published on October 23, 2020

The Secret to Improving Students' Social-Emotional Skills? Start With the Adults

By Arianna Prothero

To weather the stressors caused by the pandemic, students need strong social and emotional skills. But for schools looking to invest in students' social emotional learning, the place to start is not necessarily with the students, but with the adults.

Teachers, administrators, and support staff at schools must understand their own social-emotional abilities and attend to their own well-being before they can teach those competencies to their students. And professional development plans for implanting new social-emotional learning programs should include explicit efforts to build adults' SEL skills. Those are among several conclusions from an extensive report from the RAND Corporation and The Wallace Foundation on lessons learned during the early implementation of SEL programs in schools and before- and after-school programs in six cities.

While interest in social-emotional learning is surging, research on how best to implement SEL programs and practices has lagged behind the demand, says the report. The report examines two years of data from the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years from student surveys, staff interviews, and school observations in elementary schools and out-of-school time programs in Boston; Dallas; Denver; Palm Beach county, Fla.; Tacoma, Wash.; and Tulsa, Okla.

Problems With Train-the-Trainer

There is hunger among the teaching force for more professional development on social-emotional learning. A separate survey released by RAND earlier this month, but conducted before the pandemic, found that 80 percent of teachers want more professional development on several topics related to SEL.

But in interviews and surveys for this most recent report, RAND found that teachers want their professional development to be both more hands-on and to specifically address how to teach social-emotional skills to different populations, such as students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds or students with disabilities.

—Getty

> "School leaders reported that they ran into some misconceptions about, and resistance to, SEL among their teachers, such as beliefs that SEL is only for students with behavioral issues or young children."

Schools found that relying solely on train-the-trainer professional development models—where someone from the central office trains a few school-based staff who then train more people within their school—overburdened school-level trainers and created inconsistencies among schools, especially when it came to training on SEL curriculum. Several schools in the study responded to this challenge by recentralizing SEL curriculum training, although the report recommends reserving the train-the-trainer strategy for some instances, such as when a particular school may need more tailored training to address a specific issue or student population.

Several schools also used SEL coaches to work with teachers, which helped schools customize professional development to meet teachers' needs. However, because there was some confusion over the role and purpose of SEL coaches in some schools in the study, the report recommends clarifying, codifying, and communicating SEL coaches' responsibilities.

SEL training was often challenged by staff turnover, especially in before- and after-school programs. One way schools and out-of-school time programs in the trial dealt with this issue was by offering some professional development opportunities in smaller units and more frequently throughout the school year. For example, one school did this by offering 30-minute professional development units on SEL topics before the school day started.

Building SEL Skills and Dispelling Myths

Principals reported a variety of other ways they helped teachers develop their own SEL competencies and boost emotional well-being, such as setting aside time for SEL instruction, starting an SEL book club, encouraging deeper relationships among adults at their school, modeling at the administrator level strong social and emotional competencies for teachers, and developing a charter outlining what teachers and other school staff need to feel safe and supported at school.

Principals also borrowed some strategies used to teach students social-emotional skills, such as giving teachers more say in decision making and starting meetings with warm welcomes and optimistic closures.

Finally, school leaders reported that they ran into some misconceptions about, and resistance to, SEL among their teachers, such as beliefs that SEL is only for students with behavioral issues or young children. An Education Week Research Center Survey early last spring also found that while 81 percent of educators said their school placed "some" or "a lot" of focus on SEL for grades 1-3, only 66 percent said the same was true for grades 9-12, even though teenage years are a particularly important time for students to develop their social and emotional competencies. That survey was conducted before the pandemic forced mass school closures in the U.S.

Furthermore, while all teachers in the RAND study said in a survey they agreed SEL would

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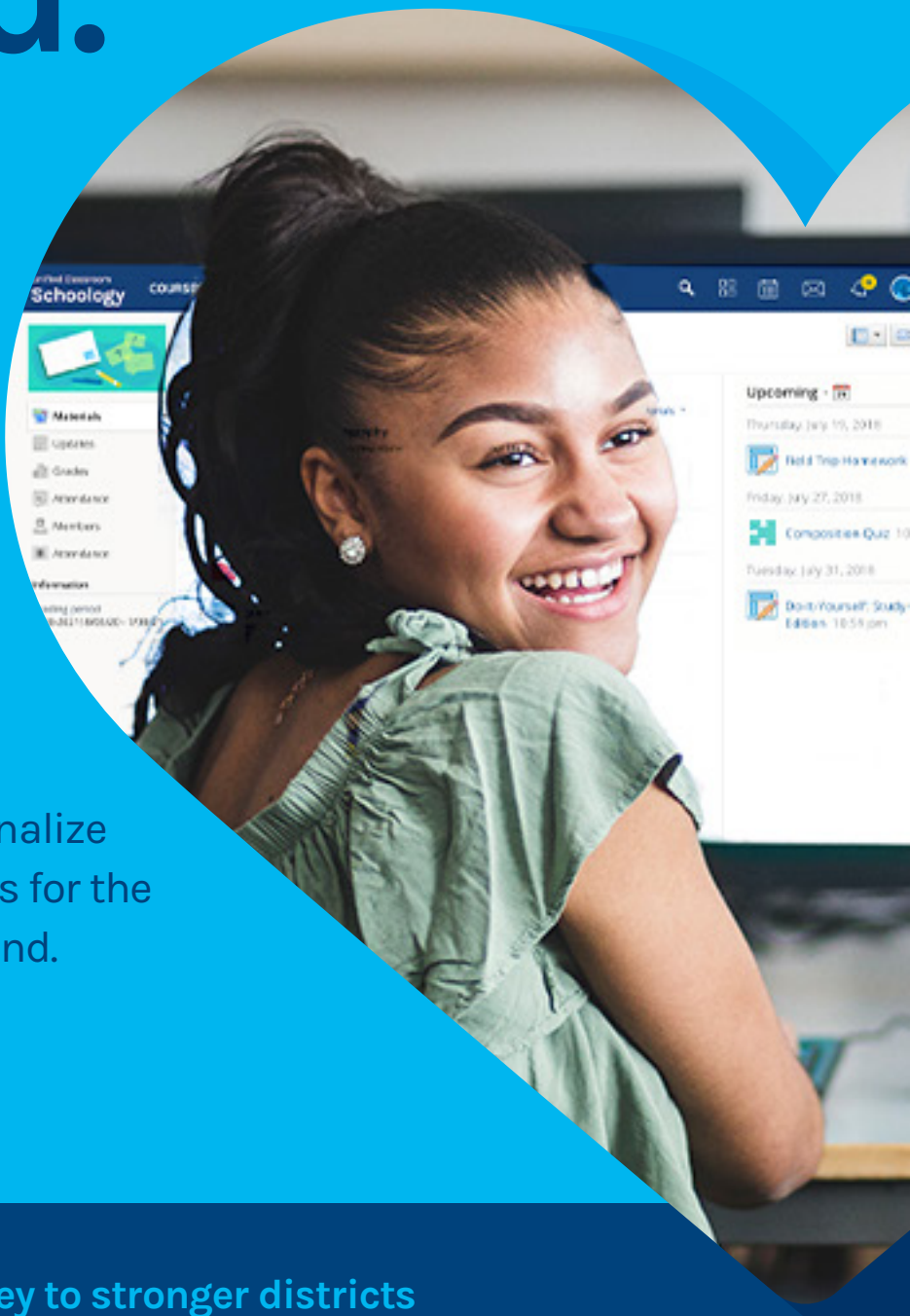

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improve students' academic performance, one-third said they either agreed or strongly agreed that adults other than themselves, such as school counselors, psychologists, or parents, should be primarily responsible for meeting students' social-emotional learning needs.

The report recommends that principals and superintendents make it clear in their professional development efforts that supporting students' social emotional learning is a "foundational element" of each adult's role in the school, and that SEL benefits all students, not just students with behavioral issues.

The report examines several other aspects of implementing SEL programs, including creating strong school climates, developing partnerships between schools and before- and after-school programs, and the system-level steps district leaders must take to successfully coordinate SEL initiatives across multiple schools and programs.

This study comes two years into a six-year project launched by The Wallace Foundation called the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative. As part of the initiative, The Wallace Foundation awarded grants in 2016 to nine urban school districts and the out-of-school time programs they partnered with to support students' social and emotional skills. ■

—iStock/Getty Images Plus

Published on September 2, 2020

Why Students Need Social-Emotional Learning Now

By Arianna Prothero

School leaders and educators are facing pressures from all quarters when it comes to starting school—whether it's trying to make up for lost learning, navigating the logistical challenges of safely opening school buildings, or steering the political challenges of closing them. All of this is taking place against the backdrop of budget cuts brought on by the economic fallout from the pandemic.

With so many competing demands, some child-development experts are worried that students' social, emotional, and mental well-being will be put on the backburner.

This could be a recipe for disaster.

Plowing ahead on core academics with a singular focus on making up for lost learning without addressing what students—and staff—are bringing with them to school ignores a basic reality: Children can't process and retain new information if their brains are overwhelmed with anxiety.

And these are anxious times for students.

A survey of 3,300 teenagers in June 2020 found that they are much more concerned than usual about their health and the health and financial stability of their families. Thirty percent of teens reported in the survey by the America's Promise Alliance, a national nonprofit focused on youth, that they are more worried than normal about basic needs including food, medicine, and safety.

Over a quarter of teens said that they are losing more sleep, feeling more unhappy or depressed, feeling under constant strain, or losing confidence in themselves.

Forty percent said they have not been offered any social or emotional support by an adult from their school while their school buildings were closed spring of 2020.

In a July 2020 survey by YouthTruth, a national nonprofit that surveys students, 50 percent of teens reported that feeling depressed, stressed, or anxious made it hard for them to learn virtually.

Both surveys found that many of these challenges were more pronounced for students of color.

In order to make up for lost learning from the spring, schools must attend to students' social, emotional, and mental health needs, say experts. This may very well require a shift in thinking for some school leaders; social-emotional development is not in competition with academics, but rather a prerequisite for success.

Investing heavily in SEL early in the school year, will pay dividends later, experts say.

Downloadable Guide: **6 Exercises for Teaching SEL This School Year**

However, many districts are not be poised to do so. A nationally representative survey by the Education Week Research Center, conducted in April 2020, found that just over a quarter of teachers, principals, and district leaders said their schools don't normally teach social-emotional learning. Even among the districts that do, the approach may be far from comprehensive or in the early stages of development.

While adopting a comprehensive, evidence-based SEL curriculum is best, if a school

doesn't have one, that doesn't mean it's too late to introduce social-emotional learning.

There are ways to weave SEL into the school day, whatever form it takes, without overhauling established plans and adopting new SEL curricula. While it's hard to teach children social and emotional skills while they are working remotely or sitting in classrooms where everyone is wearing a mask or six feet apart, it's not impossible.

Simple routines of self-care and checking-in with students and colleagues can make a difference if educators invest in and stick with them.

Ensuring that students are connected to their peers and have strong supporting relationships with adults in school will go a long way toward helping them cope and get to a place mentally where they are ready to learn.

For students experiencing more severe trauma, using a tiered system of integrating social-emotional supports can help meet students' individual needs and leverage the personnel schools already have. Partnering with community organizations that provide mental health services can help fill in the gaps for districts short on school counselors, social workers, and psychologists.

Finally, it's important for educators and students to step back and acknowledge the important life lessons students are gaining as a result of the pandemic that aren't going to show up on a test or in a grade—such as time management, coping skills, and becoming more socially conscious of how their actions affect others. ■

“Ensuring that students are connected to their peers and have strong supporting relationships with adults in school will go a long way toward helping them cope and get to a place mentally where they are ready to learn.”

Published on September 2, 2020

Teaching the 'New' COVID-19 Social-Emotional Skills

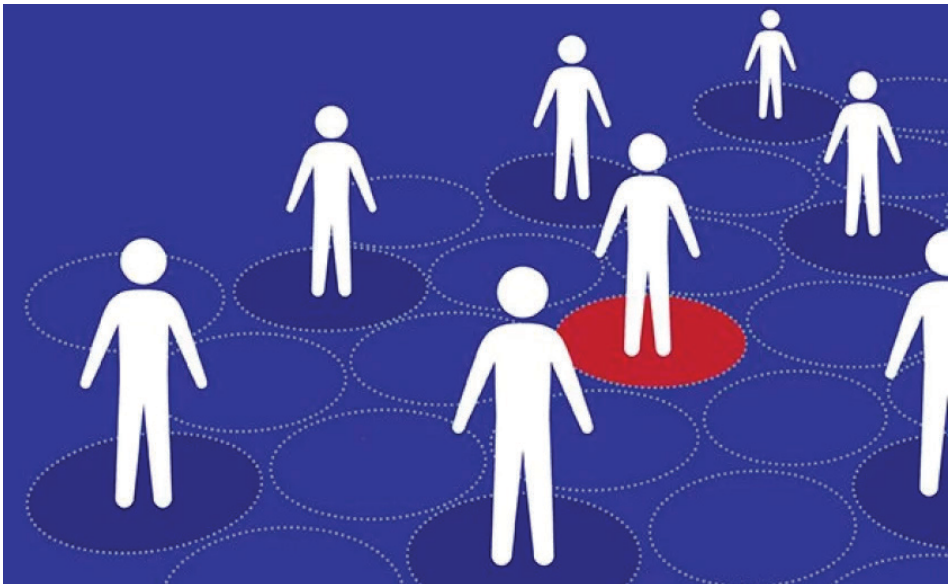
By Sarah Sparks

Learning is a social activity, but how can kids learn social skills when they can't fully engage in person?

Of the districts whose reopening plans Education Week has analyzed, less than a third plan to include at least some in-person classes. But their students and teachers will have to interact with one another while wearing facial masks and staying six feet apart to limit the spread of the COVID-19 respiratory disease.

Ensuring that students continue to develop critical social-emotional skills in a socially distanced world will require administrators and teachers to not just rethink existing approaches to social learning but also teach children to navigate the new social skills that are needed for life during the pandemic.

"So much of typical [social-emotional learning] programs and practices have included a lot of face-to-face interaction between students and between students and adults," said Justina Schlund, director of field learning for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL. "It's being able to work together closely to solve a problem or to talk about their emotions and their experiences. So I think it's going to require a lot of creativity on the part of our schools and educators to think about how they're communicating SEL during this time."



—DigitalVision Vectors/Getty

Here are some key recommendations for school and district leaders when planning in-person social learning during the pandemic.

1. Evaluate the risk of keeping (or changing) existing activities

Research on the coronavirus, which causes COVID-19, suggests it spreads easily both in the air and on surfaces. Studies of so-called "superspreader" events suggest loud speaking and singing in enclosed areas increases the risk of transmitting the virus, as well as close contact for 15 minutes or more.

Problematically, personal protective equipment such as facial masks can significantly interfere with students' ability to engage in social learning. One study found: "Covering the lower half of the face reduces the ability to communicate, interpret, and mimic the expressions of those with whom we interact. Positive emotions become less

recognizable, and negative emotions are amplified. Emotional mimicry, contagion, and emotionality in general are reduced and (thereby) bonding between teachers and learners, group cohesion, and learning–of which emotions are a major driver."

Teachers and administrators can balance the need for safety and social engagement by considering four things: the viral load associated with an activity, its duration, the educational and social value of the activity, and the maturity of the students doing it. For example, loud talking and singing tend to disperse more viral particles into the air, while small-group projects conducted outside can be lower risk. Some common social-emotional learning activities, such as filling a "kindness bucket," in which students write down good deeds they have done for others, would change little in a socially distanced classroom.

Similarly, older grades may have more flexibility in providing students with social activities.

"I think that the hardest part from being in an elementary school is everything is hands-on and everything is based off of social interactions," said Colleen Perry, a coordinator for the City Connects student support program at Pottenger Elementary in Springfield, Mass. The majority of students in the Springfield district are from low-income families. "I feel like in a high school, you're more aware of your own personal space; you can socially distance ... whereas in an elementary school, I get hugged probably 300 times a day ... and it's fine, I love that, but we can't do that right now."

Downloadable Guide: Evaluating Risk for Social Activities

Even so, high-risk activities can be tweaked to lower their likelihood of contagion without fundamentally changing their value. Studies have found, for example, that the risk from singing or talking goes down significantly if people do so at a lower volume. When in-person role-playing is not safe, virtual social simulation games—already used to support students with autism or other challenges with social interaction—can also be used to help students practice dealing with social interactions and resolving conflicts.

2. Identify ways to support students emotionally at a distance

Social distancing in and out of schools has removed traditional ways students and teachers alike relieve stress, so experts say educators and support staff should more actively check students' emotional health and teach alternative methods to cope with isolation and anxiety.

"With elementary school students, they can't always communicate how they feel verbally, but you can tell by how they interact with you physically. Sometimes a kid, if they're sad, they'll come up and hold your hand or they'll want to sit next to you, really close, or they'll want to hug you," Perry said. "So it's just trying to teach them, 'you can still do that with your family, but with us, we have to verbally say things to each other,' and just trying to teach kids the words to use."

> "With elementary school students, they can't always communicate how they feel verbally, but you can tell by how they interact with you physically."
>
> **COLLEEN PERRY**
> COORDINATOR, CITY CONNECTS STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAM, POTTENGER ELEMENTARY IN SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Many schools already use so-called "color checks" to take students' emotional temperature: green for alert and ready; yellow for anxious or excited; red for angry; blue for sad, sick, or tired. In a distanced classroom, teachers said students need more explicit language and cues to express how they feel.

Social-emotional learning doesn't necessarily have to be something that happens in close proximity to a student, said Nancy Duchesneau, a SEL researcher for the Education Trust. "It can be around expressing that you care about a student; allowing students to have opportunities to express themselves, verbally but also in writing assignments that allow them to show their voice," she said.

3. Help students adapt to new social norms

The pandemic has radically changed social norms in and out of school, and social-emotional learning should help students learn new skills to navigate interactions.

"It's still important in this context to think about how to establish consistency in routines and schedules, to develop supportive relationships with students and ... to plan opportunities that are built into the regular academic day to learn and practice social emotional competency," said Justina Schlund, the director of field learning for CASEL.

For example, children in early grades may not yet have learned to measure distances and will need more explicit instruction to maintain proper distance, such as sitting on pre-measured carpet pieces or holding a rope with knots marking safe space.

Incorporating social-emotional instruction into academic classes can help ground the lessons, according to Julie Donovan, a supervising social worker for the Springfield, Mass., public schools. English and language arts teachers there have adopted a curriculum during the closures that embeds social skills instruction into reading lessons.

"So, they're explicitly teaching, say, taking turns, how do you turn and talk to your partner, and modeling that throughout the lesson, but in the meantime you're also teaching that objective of the [English language arts]," she said.

Teachers and counselors have given students a crash course on the new social rules of life in a pandemic, from proper spacing and hand washing to how to adapt normal interactions with friends for the pandemic era.

"I usually do a lesson on proper touching; you know, not everybody wants a hug, so we can do a fist bump or we can do an elbow tap or we can do a high five," Perry said. "So now, when we go back to school ... we're just adapting our lessons so instead of a fist bump, we can do waving from a distance or an air hug." ■

Additional Resource
An Explainer from EdWeek:
Teaching Social-Emotional Skills Amid COVID-19

—E+/Getty

Published on April 7, 2020

Dos and Don'ts When Choosing Social-Emotional Learning Curricula

By Catherine Gewertz

Demand for curricula that teach social and emotional skills is soaring, as schools increasingly come to see those skills as something teachers should be teaching.

A survey by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, a leading advocacy group on the topic, found that 70 percent of principals think teachers need a formal curriculum to teach SEL. Two years earlier, 43 percent thought so.

In a February 2020 survey of district leaders, school leaders, and teachers, the EdWeek Research Center found similar consensus: 74 percent of respondents either partly agreed or completely agreed that a formal curricula is important.

The share of schools implementing a separate, specific SEL curriculum is slowly edging upward, to 57 percent in 2019, from 51 percent two years earlier, the CASEL survey found. But there isn't a broad consensus on which curricula to use. In the EdWeek survey, respondents revealed a splintered marketplace.

The most widely cited program was positive behaviorial interventions and supports, or PBIS, which isn't a curriculum, but a method that helps schools improve social behavior schoolwide. The next most popular program was Second Step at 20 percent. The third most popular was "no program"—at 18 percent.

Choosing a curriculum can be daunting. What information do district leaders and principals—the ones most often tapped to make this decision—use to help choose a curricula? Their sources often aren't based on research.

The research group MDR's study in 2018 found 53 percent of district leaders and principals relied on colleagues' recommendations. Nearly 3 in 10 said they used social media, followed by associations, trade shows and conferences, marketing emails, or publishers' websites.

There are resources available, however, that can help leaders choose an SEL program that well-designed studies have shown to be effective. Education Week interviewed experts and practitioners and distilled their advice into core takeaways to use as you consider your SEL curriculum choice.

Ground Your Choice in Good Research

Overwhelmingly, our experts and district leaders urged colleagues to use three key guides that evaluate the research on SEL curricula. They are the CASEL guide, a guide created by the RAND Corp., and the federal What Works Clearinghouse.

"These are the kinds of tools leaders should look to" as they're exploring SEL curricula, said Eric Gordon, the CEO of the Cleveland district, which has been through the process several times. In 2008, the district chose the PATHS curriculum for K-5, and in the past few years, it's added Second Step for middle school and Facing History and Ourselves for high school.

The CASEL guide was a key resource, Gordon said, helping him avoid getting "confused or misled by vendors," whose emails steadily stack up in his inbox.

As he spoke with EdWeek, he read a sampling of the week's emails aloud: "SEL sample units to help you plan for next year!" said one. "Looking for a unique SEL program? Vaping prevention, SEL, and more!" said another.

Take a Team Approach

District leaders said that a wide array of input was crucial to their decisions.

Patrick Farrell, the intervention and support coordinator in the Charlottesville, Va., schools, and Jodie Murphy, the district's mental-wellness facilitator, assembled a team that included administrators, counselors, psychologists, and—importantly—teachers when they evaluated SEL curricula in 2017.

"You want to have people on your team who are going to be the deliverers of that curriculum," Murphy said. "They're going to be looking at it through the lens of, 'How much time will this take? How easy will this be to deliver?' I'm a clinician, not a teacher, so having that [instructional] lens at the table was important."

Ally Skoog-Hoffman, the director of research-practice partnerships at CASEL, offers this checklist for inclusion on curriculum committees: chief academic officers; district directors of finance, student support, and professional development; school board members; teachers, parents, students, and—crucially—principals, whom she called a "key lever" in curriculum choice and implementation.

Take Inventory

Experts urge district and school leaders to revisit their vision and priorities and clearly identify what they need from a new SEL curriculum before embarking on the choice process.

"Say I'm a school leader and I've got a vision I've communicated around a sense of belonging and a climate that fosters academic learning," said Skoog-Hoffman.

"I want an SEL curriculum that emphasizes building that sense of community and belonging. I'd ask these programs: Show me. Show me how your curriculum speaks to this

idea of community building. And how does it integrate into my academic areas?"

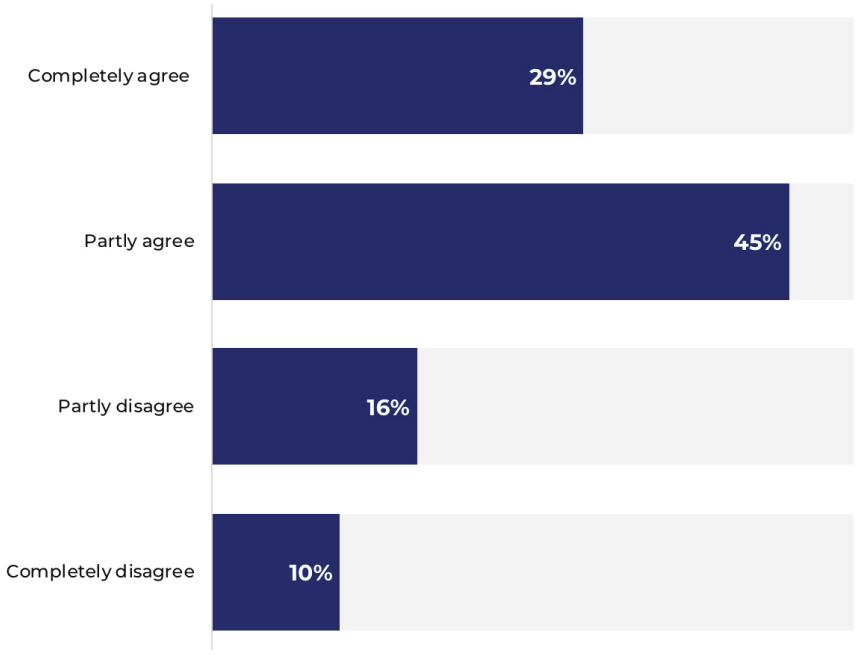
It's important to take inventory of what programs and practices are already in place and consider how they would dovetail with a new SEL curricula, she said. Practices like Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, a framework that blends academic and social-emotional support, should be part of that conversation.

"Never underestimate the power of getting an instructional team around a table and starting with a big piece of chart paper," Skoog-Hoffman said.

"Step 1: Let's write down all the initiatives we have in place. What's working and what isn't? How can SEL relate to these other elements? What would SEL look like in our math curriculum? I know that sounds cheesy, but it's a powerful experience."

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Schools need a formal program in order to adequately teach SEL to students.



SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center survey, 2020

Consider Your Population

Meria Carstarphen has led the SEL-choice process twice, as superintendent in Atlanta and when she led the Austin, Texas, schools a decade ago. A crucial part of the process, she said, was understanding the distinct needs of each district's population.

In Austin, she had a large population of children in poverty and English-learners. The district had just come through a rough time with a spike in youth suicide. The district needed a curriculum that would address the "emotional strain in the community," Carstarphen said.

Atlanta, by contrast, was reeling from a notorious cheating scandal when she arrived, with morale at an all-time low, she said.

Adults and children in the system needed help with self-regulation, respecting others, communication, and problem-solving. They needed an SEL curriculum that would help with a "massive reset" for everyone involved. David Yeager, who writes extensively about SEL as an associate professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, said district leaders should be prepared to use different approaches—or vendors—in upper-middle and high school than the ones they use for K-5.

"Research is clear that SEL programs that work in elementary show effects that decline as kids get older," he said. "The reasons for social-emotional problems in kids are different than the reasons for adolescents."

Opt for Integrated and Explicit

The experts were unanimous that SEL instruction be integrated into the school day, rather than handled in one subject or discrete sessions. Yeager said research backs that up.

Social-emotional curricula that are "manifest in everyday routines, pulled across all courses, are more likely to be effective," he said. "You don't want curriculum where kids practice having relationships."

Not only should SEL curricula be embedded in all subjects, it should be explicit, experts said. Carstarphen said she looks for curricula that help teachers be very clear on how to teach each skill.

"It's the difference between, 'We are going to have time in class for X,' and 'I'm going to teach you what empathy is. Here's what the word means, here's what it looks like and smells like, and here's what happens when you don't use it.' You have to teach it," she said.

Districts should carefully consider their capacity to provide the professional development a curriculum will require, not just at first, but perennially. Leaders should plan "not just for one-time training but for supporting teachers throughout the year," Yeager said.

Gordon, the Cleveland CEO, said he and his team overlooked that when they chose the PATHS curriculum.

The district provided initial training, but later realized it needed a longer-term plan to train new teachers and teachers who switch grades, as well as "refresh" training for all staff members after about five years.

Gordon advised leaders to consider how much training each curriculum they consider will require. "Some are more turnkey and some need more adult support," he said. "Make this explicit part of the questions you ask yourself."

Watch Out for False Claims

Plan for more than the cost of training, too, said BJ Weller, who led the SEL curriculum choice in 2018-19 in Utah's Canyons school district. Some programs require annual fees or include student manipulatives, which can

boost the cost. "You think you're getting a program for $1,000, but you might be spending $5,000 a year on the required student components," he said.

When demand for curricula rises, vendors' claims can sometimes exceed their products. Gordon said he worries that some vendors of social-emotional-skills curricula are repeating a dynamic that unfolded after the Common Core State Standards were widely adopted: falsely claiming their curricula were "aligned" to the new standards.

"There is a lot of stuff being rolled out as SEL," he said.

"I worry that they're stamping 'SEL' onto the package." It's particularly tricky in the case of SEL, too, because most states haven't adopted SEL standards, so there's no way to check how well the curriculum reflects standards.

"It gives publishers even more leeway to say, 'This is it!' Gordon said. ■

—Nathan Klima for Education Week

Teresa Kaufman, right, an art teacher at High Plain Elementary School in Andover, Mass., loses a round of "rock, paper, scissors" during an icebreaker at an SEL workshop held for teachers who work in the Andover school district.

Published on April 7, 2020

The Success of Social-Emotional Learning Hinges on Teachers

By Madeline Will

Schools are closed in much of the United States, leaving students to hunker down at home for months without their usual outlets for learning and socializing. Educators say trying to meet their social-emotional needs will be more important than ever. Even when schools reopen, students might still be grappling with fears, anxieties, or lingering trauma.

But too often, experts say, teachers are tasked with implementing new social-emotional learning practices in their classrooms without adequate, ongoing support, which can tank the effectiveness of the initiative.

"Everybody wants to do things quickly and efficiently, so there's been a move toward online training as a way for teachers to do this," said Mark Greenberg, a professor of human development and psychology at Pennsylvania State University and a founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, known as CASEL. "There's little or no evidence that online training is sufficient to have teachers implement these programs with quality."

He continued: "I think there are districts that feel they have to check SEL off as one thing they've done. They purchase curricula and they buy online training, and in most cases, if you go back two years later, you won't find anything [different in schools]."

Sustained implementation and change in classrooms, Greenberg said, "really requires leadership and ongoing support."

After all, actively supporting the social and emotional development of students is not an innate skill. Veteran teachers are not used to some of these practices, and many new teachers didn't learn these skills in their teacher-preparation programs.

But only 29 percent of teachers said they have received ongoing training in social-emotional learning that has continued throughout the school year, a new EdWeek Research Center survey found. A fifth of teachers say they never receive opportunities in their job to reflect upon and improve their own social-emotional skills.

To help, a growing number of districts have begun to hire SEL coaches to work with teachers. Others are training their principals alongside their teachers in order to boost the entire school's commitment to that work.

At first, many teachers "think of SEL as just gushy, feeling stuff, and it's not just that—we're really looking at embedding it into our practices and our academic content areas as well," said Julie Carter, a SEL behavior coach in the North East Independent school district in San Antonio.

The Texas district has eight SEL coaches who lead professional-development sessions and work directly with teachers who need support. The coaches conduct observations, model instructional strategies, and help the teachers collect and analyze student data.

Carter said the coaching model has made teachers more comfortable with implementing

new practices than a one-off training would.

"When you do it just that one time, it's hard to get it to stick," she said. "This is the way we're getting it from the bottom up—it's going to take more time for it to get to everyone, but it's going to be so deeply embedded. It's going to stay around longer because it will be part of the process, it's not just one more [initiative]."

Districtwide Changes

In the Andover public schools, a nearly 6,000-student district a half hour outside Boston, Superintendent Shelley Berman has made fostering "safe, caring, and culturally responsive" classrooms a priority.

Five years ago, the district created a sprint team—a group tasked with making significant changes quickly, freed from bureaucratic red tape—to incorporate social-emotional learning and culturally proficient practices into the district's 10 schools. The focus has been on: direct instruction in social skills; community service and service learning; creating a classroom climate that gives students a sense of community and mutual responsibility; and making sure all students feel welcome in school through culturally responsive curriculum and practices.

That starts with professional development, Berman said. Many teachers have gone through 10 days of training with Responsive Classroom, a SEL program that centers on generating a safe and engaging climate, in addition to in-house training. The district is now in the process of certifying some of its teachers to become Responsive Classroom trainers, too.

Also, Andover has sent teams of educators and administrators from four schools to participate in a yearlong certification program in social-emotional learning at William James College in Newton, Mass.

"We've tried to go very deep in this work with training leaders and providing teachers with leadership opportunity as well," Berman said.

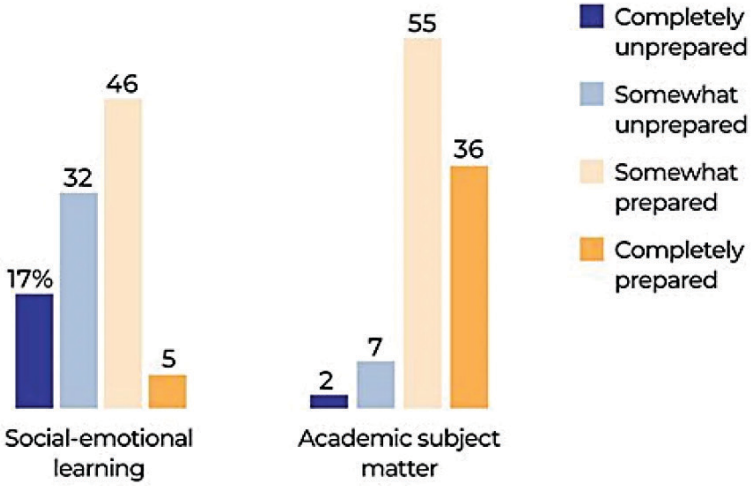
The district doesn't have SEL coaches yet, he said, but that's something it's working toward.

So far, the efforts seem to be working: The district has administered a student-climate survey for the past three years, and Berman said there's been "real growth" in students' sense of connection to their school community. (There hasn't been improvement in every area, however: Berman said that students' sense of safety has decreased since the district started doing active-shooter drills.)

At High Plain Elementary, the first year's survey results revealed that not all students felt welcome. The school has a diverse population—the first language of about 30 percent of

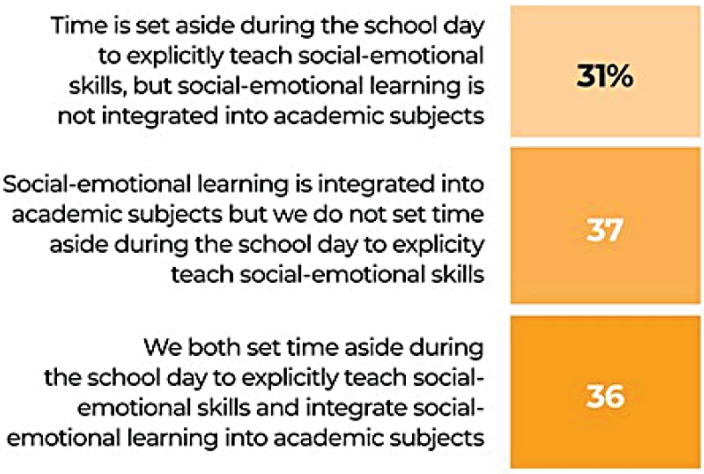
EXCLUSIVE SURVEY

How well-prepared are the novice teachers in your building to address the following areas?



Which of the following statements best describes your district or school's approach to social-emotional learning?

Select all that apply.



Note: Results are from a nationally representative survey of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center survey, 2020

Teachers in Andover, Mass., make a "quilt" with notecards as part of an exercise during an SEL professional-development workshop related to culture and climate. They shared positive practices in schools that contribute to a more welcoming learning environment for students.

—Nathan Klima for Education Week

students is not English, with the most common languages being Chinese, Hindi, and Spanish—and the results showed that educators were "maybe not putting the time into saying children's names correctly," said Principal Pamela Lathrop.

"What we found was that sometimes kids didn't think it was OK to correct a grown-up," said Lathrop, who is also the co-chair of the Andover district's SEL sprint team. "We have made an effort to spend time in letting children help us learn how to say their name correctly [and discussing] the importance of names."

To get to that point, she said, school leaders had to "guide the teachers through the work first." The school hosted a professional learning book club for which teachers read *Being the Change: Lessons and Strategies to Teach Social Comprehension*, which examines identity.

Then, teachers shared the stories of how they got their own names and, in a group discussion, made the connection to their students.

School Leaders' Role

After all, Lathrop said, "anytime you want teachers to have a change or have an effect on kids, you have to also recognize teachers need to have that experience within themselves."

Click here for more exclusive SEL survey results.

That means if school leaders want teachers to greet students in the morning and make personal connections to them outside of academics, administrators have to walk the walk with their staff, she said.

"You have to recognize that a teacher's day is a long day, and you have to recognize that the demands on the teacher are high, and that sometimes you have to take a break and take care of a teacher's social-emotional growth," she said.

For example, she has offered mindfulness activities for teachers and found nontraditional ways to celebrate teachers' work. The school's faculty went together to see the movie "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," which tells the story of Fred Rogers of TV's "Mister Rogers" fame.

For Jill McCarthy, a 2nd grade teacher at High Plain, the movie outing was a "breath of fresh air."

Activities like that, she said, show that school leaders "have faith in us ... [and] offer up so many opportunities to come together and celebrate our work." That positive environment is reflected in "our results and even the kids, the demeanor amongst each other, and the adults [with] the respect we carry within the building."

That's why it's important for principals to be considered social-emotional leaders, as well as instructional ones, Penn State's Greenberg said. Too often, he said, "principals get almost no training in SEL or in how to lead a school in a way that is caring, healthy, and respectful."

"When principals are involved in a sustained way in the intervention, the teachers teach more effectively," Greenberg said.

In Education Week's survey, 87 percent of respondents said administrators had gotten training in SEL. But when school leaders were asked about the type of professional development they received, just 42 percent said they received ongoing training throughout the year.

It Takes Time

Even with a supportive school culture, it takes time for teachers to learn how to implement social-emotional learning in their classrooms, educators say.

Berman, the superintendent in Andover, said that's especially true for high school teachers, who already have a lot of standards and content to cover. And older students tend to have more significant issues and conflicts than their younger classmates, Berman said, leaving some high school teachers to feel like they're "not trained as a guidance counselor."

Click here for more exclusive SEL survey results.

The district is planning to do more professional development around classroom culture at the high school level, he said.

Teachers don't know what they don't know, which makes ongoing support so important, said Lindsey Frank, a climate and social-emotional learning coach for Community Consolidated School District 59 in Elk Grove Village, Ill. The coaching is optional, but Frank, who is the sole SEL coach in the district, said more and more teachers have begun reaching out for support.

"Now that it's a part of our culture as a district, we've seen that shift where a lot of people do find a lot more confidence in being able to support students," she said. ■

Video Resource

Education Week staff writer Evie Blad explains some of the core ideas behind an SEL approach that focuses on essential nonacademic skills such as responsible decision making and relating well to others.

Watch Video: Social-Emotional Learning, Explained

PowerSchool

3 Levels of SEL
to Support Students & Teachers for the Future

In a post-COVID K-12 landscape, it's important to focus on social emotional learning efforts in multiple areas

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, students were already dealing with issues that Social Emotional Learning (SEL) tactics can address. These include challenges like unmanaged emotions, difficulty showing empathy and maintaining positive relationships. In the U.S., over 20 percent of children and adolescents experienced a mental health condition, based on a 2010 survey,[1] and 70 percent of students had no access to appropriate services outside the school system, based on 2019 data.[2]

Now, after a year of pandemic-related school closures, remote and hybrid learning challenges, and constant uncertainty, it's more important than ever to have an SEL program in place that truly supports educators and students for the future. In a recent Education Week Research Center survey, "social emotional learning/supports" was the number-one priority for spending federal stimulus funds—to help students rebuild crucial skills that will allow them to re-enter a now-foreign school environment, quickly adapt, and make up for any potential learning loss.

For an SEL program to be effective long-term, it requires focus on three levels of support: students, teachers, and administrators.

1 Addressing SEL at the Student Level

Today's schools serve diverse communities. Students come to school with wide-ranging abilities for a variety of reasons. Some are academically and socially successful, while others struggle. A student's cognitive development and academic performance are dependent upon the psychological side of learning.[3]

"While there are many factors that have a positive effect on student achievement, instructional quality[4] followed closely by access to the curriculum[5] appear near the top," says **Tony Davis, Ph.D., a 28-year veteran of public education and current Independent Strategic Advisor at PowerSchool**. "However, the research is clear that there are other factors that substantially contribute to student success and achievement—including a culture of learning, a feeling of connectedness, and a positive relationship with school staff. It's clear that SEL skills are linked to school and life success and are relevant for both students and teachers.[6] When students feel socially and emotionally confident, they are more likely to positively adapt to adverse circumstances, persist in the face of challenges, and build meaningful relationships, and less likely to disrupt the learning experiences of others."

Incorporating early warning and SEL indicators into your edtech system can help track flagged behaviors like discipline referrals, suspensions, and attendance issues.

"Strengthening your social and emotional learning program and monitoring it with sophisticated analytics can help accelerate the much-needed services that support the needs of the whole child and their family," says Davis.

As an example of using technology to address SEL issues, Ohio's Hilliard City Schools uses a comprehensive assessment solution to track how students are feeling and determine intervention plans.[7] The district monitors and flags at-risk behavior across multiple factors—including SEL, academic performance, intervention participation, student mindset, and other student interests—giving equal value to each data set.

"We've started to survey our students on how they feel," says **Molly Walker, Director of SEL and Measurement at Hilliard City Schools**. "For SEL, we track six attributes: hope, sense of belonging, growth mindset, grit, compassion, and emotional regulation. We're starting to track students who are in certain interventions through this system, which makes it super easy when people ask, 'Is this working?'."

Westfield Public Schools in Massachusetts is using an assessment solution to direct more meaningful interventions.[8] "You can really isolate and juxtapose data," says **Mark Vocca, Data and Assessment Specialist at Westfield Public Schools**, "so we're able to know which data we'll use in the RTI. We're able to contextualize the data through that visual process, and then set up that intervention system with those indicators."

2 Focusing on Teacher SEL Is Critical

Student success depends on teacher effectiveness—which includes teachers' health and well-being. A Yale/CASEL survey of 5,000 U.S. teachers in March 2020 revealed the five most-mentioned descriptions of their feelings: anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad.[9] They connected these feelings with medical concerns due to the pandemic, managing family needs, and adapting to new teaching technology.

The result of these concerns is burnout, with an alarming number of teachers leaving the profession even before the pandemic. That burnout has continued with the abrupt shift to virtual learning, a bumpy transition into the 2020/21 school year, and dealing with student learning loss. Many find the profession simply isn't offering what they signed up for, and they're resigning.

The bottom line is that teachers need SEL support. For both students and teachers, SEL helps learners develop skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to identify and regulate emotions, cultivate positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

According to **Lisa Andrejko, Ed.D., former K-12 superintendent and current Independent Strategic Advisor at PowerSchool**, "We need to create a teacher environment where they feel valued, supported, and appreciated. When teachers aren't present and don't feel comfortable in the classroom, it has an impact on how students perform."

To create that environment, Dr. Andrejko says we need to:

- Ensure supervisors provide feedback, support, and coaching with a focus on student learning
- Implement a strong mentoring and induction program
- Ensure that evaluation systems allow for differentiation between effective and less effective teachers
- Provide opportunities for meaningful, targeted professional development

For teachers, SEL professional learning courses may focus on one or more of the five social and emotional competencies described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

"Professional learning should include training on technology tools for multiple teaching models, including remote, hybrid, and in-classroom instruction. Training should also be included for student engagement in the virtual classroom, with courses on strengthening SEL competencies," says Dr. Andrejko.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) should also be utilized to promote collaboration and peer-level support.

3 School and District Administrators' Role in Addressing SEL for Teachers and Students

"SEL should be explicit and sufficiently linked to the overall mission of schools. High-performing school systems adopt, contextualize, and implement evidence-based programs that align with an SEL framework as one component of their educational program," says Davis.

Schools and districts should integrate and model SEL throughout the organization and get active support

from the superintendent, board of education, and school-level leaders. **This can be accomplished by:**

- Evaluating expectations, especially of teachers, to determine if they are realistic or unrealistic
- Building in more flexibility and methods of feedback
- Creating a culture of transparency and communication

Checking in with educators about their concerns, needs, and stressors is a great place to start. SEL helps teachers develop a general resilience in difficult times, but routine check-ins may reveal opportunities to quickly address specific issues.

Administrators should support teachers with the professional development they need, provide scheduled SEL surveys that gauge teachers' mental health, and give them a voice when self-assessing their social and emotional development. You can also develop individual learning and growth plans using professional development and learning management system tools.

Planning To Address SEL Holistically

In addressing SEL at the student, teacher, and administrator level, planning is critical. There will never be a shortage of challenges facing schools and districts, but you can make it through any situation by having a solid plan of action that ensures all stakeholders are prepared to meet those challenges.

Districts already focusing on holistic SEL strategies see the effects throughout their schools. **Kristin Hendricks, Learning and Organizational Development Specialist at Wake County Public School System**,[10] says, "As we strengthen our personal SEL competencies, we become better teachers and models for those around us."

She points out that this leads to "more trusting relationships, reduced instances of burnout, and more productive collaboration. Essentially, SEL helps teachers and staff support each other outside the classroom so that teachers can be at their best in front of their students."

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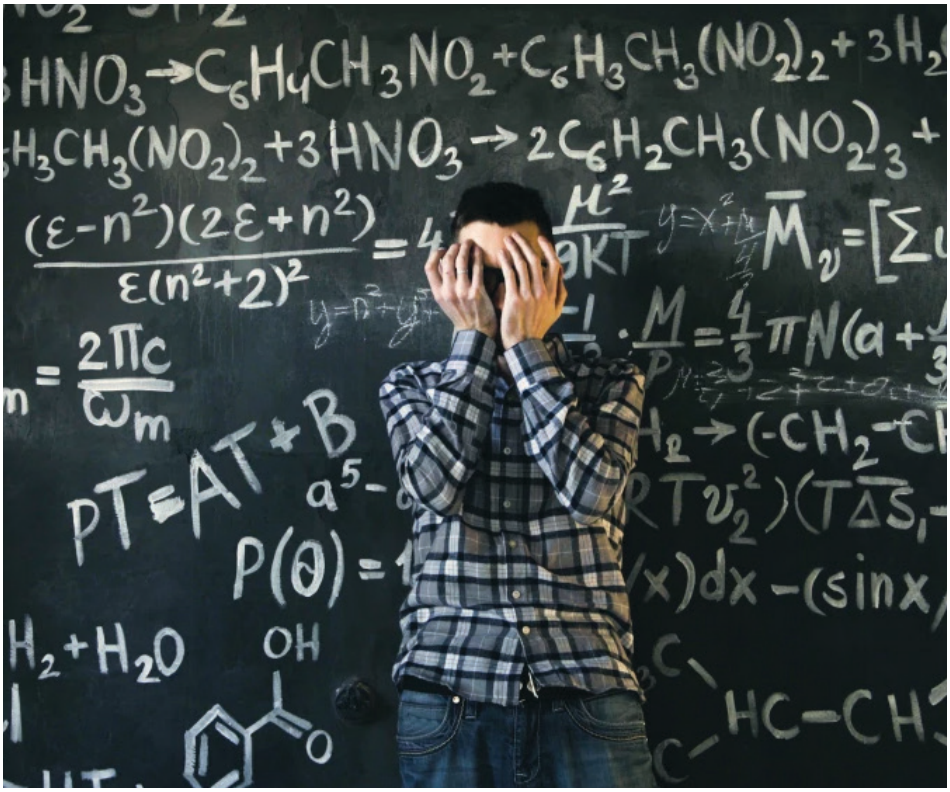
OPINION

Published on May 23, 2021

Let's Not Forget the Effect the Pandemic Has Had On Our Teachers and School Leaders

By Sean Slade & Alyssa Gallagher



— Shutterstock

As we focus our attention on coming out of this turbulent year—the social distancing, the learning loss, and especially the mental health and well-being of our students—let's not forget the effect that the pandemic has had on our teachers and school leaders.

In 2020, schools pivoted dramatically to adjust to the COVID-19 reality, closing their physical presence and reopening within days online. The education profession turned an aircraft carrier of a sector on a proverbial dime and maintained a needed educational presence in all our lives. In 2020, schools upgraded, up-skilled, and adjusted, to start the year online, hybrid, accommodating wavering or ambiguous direction from officials, to ensure continuity for their students and our children and youth. Terms like "synchronous" and "asynchronous" have become the norm, as learning and adjustments continued. Over time, it's become apparent, even via the blogosphere, that the last year has also had a big impact on our teachers and school leaders.

Peter highlighted the impact 2020 is having on school leaders. 42% of Principals Want to Leave Their Position. Will We Let Them? He also highlighted the recent findings from a National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) report that "42 percent of surveyed principals indicated they were considering leaving their position. The percentage of principals planning to move to a different school was higher for those in high-poverty schools and rural communities." Forty-two percent represents a 110 percent increase from a previous national average of 1 in 5 principals who leave the role every year. Principals indicated working conditions, including lack of decision making, support, and well-being, across their schools as some of the reasons that impacts their decisions to leave their school. This report reflects a similar tone in recent months where the well-being, mental health, stress, and anxiety of our educators and school leaders have been an unsettling but growing trend.

There is growing concern inside and across our teaching profession. Teachers need support. But school leaders also need support. As one moves up the educational career pyramid, one's peers and colleagues often become fewer and fewer. Teachers have colleagues across a grade level, subject area, or a school. Principals, unless they are part of a district or professional network, tend to have fewer colleagues to turn to, connect with, and learn from. Often school leaders stand at the top of their school community pyramid taking care of others they lead and the schools they nurture.

Organizations have tried to pivot and adjust to these concerns starting professional learning communities or piloting support networks for both teachers and school leaders. But what has been a remarkable observation during these efforts has been the untapped need for such support, especially with our school leaders. Many school leaders have admitted that they were flying solo with little or no support systems. School leaders are giving support to others, but they are too frequently left to their own devices for their own well-being.

Reopening schools in a post-COVID world will require an increased focus on trauma, mental health, and well-being across the entire school and its community. Many schools are already putting in place programs and processes for dealing with increased anxiety and uncertainty. Schools are also focusing attention on learning loss—though as many have already outlined quite succinctly, the latter won't occur until the former is addressed.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding that is now being sent to states and eventually on to districts will undoubtedly help. But if we are sage, we will understand that student mental health will be impacted by staff and school leader mental health and well-being. Often the best-intentioned plans and programs are curtailed by not taking care of our caregivers,

or worse, assuming that they can just take care of themselves.

Education is very much an upstream industry. What occurs upstream flows or trickles down to impact everything else. School climate is dependent upon the attitude and actions of the principal more than anything else. Classroom culture is reflective of what and how the teacher teaches. If we want to see improvements in student growth, learning, and well-being, we need to focus attention not only on the students but also on their teachers. If we want to see growth, learning, and well-being improve amongst our teachers, we need to focus attention on our principals and school leaders.

This falls directly into the hands of district leadership and superintendents (who themselves need support). Why superintendents and not the principals? Because education is an upstream industry.

Teachers look after and care for their students. When a teacher receives a gift of money, what do they do? They spend it on the students. Principals look after their teachers. When they receive funding or resources, they spend it on their staff. Who supports the school leaders? Superintendents.

Most educators won't tap into available funds to support themselves, and they need their supervisors, their caregivers, to support them.

Well-being is a prerequisite for learning. Well-being is a prerequisite for teaching, and it's a prerequisite for leading. If we want to come out of this year strong, if not stronger. If we want to create thriving schools. If we want to grow flourishing communities, then we need to support well-being of all our students, staff, and perhaps particularly our school leaders. ■

Sean Slade and Alyssa Gallagher are the co-heads of education at BTS Spark North America, helping develop the next generation of education leaders. Gallagher is the co-author of Design Thinking for School Leaders *(ASCD, 2018) and* Design Thinking in Play *(ASCD, 2020).*

Additional Resource
School Leaders Were Asked About Their Stress Levels. Here's What They Told Us

— IULIIA/iStock/Getty Images Plus

OPINION

Published on May 11, 2021

Where Does Social-Emotional Learning Go Next?

The pandemic should prompt us to reexamine education priorities

By John M. Bridgeland & Francie Richards

There is no shortage of data or anecdotes about the trauma and disruption that students, teachers, and parents have endured throughout the pandemic. While the entirety of our nation's education system was upended, students of color and students from low-income communities continue to be disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As our country begins to emerge from the pandemic and students return to the classroom, we must now face the question of the path forward. At this crucial moment, we have the opportunity to revisit the purpose of the educational enterprise and ensure schools, families, and communities are working together to define student success through a holistic lens. As one parent told us during a focus group, "This is the groundwork that begins to allow this country to heal."

Academic challenges have been well cataloged, and new reports show severe negative social and emotional consequences for children. The sad truth is that trauma and the lack of social-emotional supports in schools were serious problems for students even before the pandemic aggravated the situation. The pandemic provided an opportunity to listen to parents, teachers, and students to understand their perspectives on student development and their ideas for the way forward.

In our new report, written by Civic and supported by the Allstate Foundation, we drew on a February 2020 nationally representative survey of parents and teachers on their views of social-emotional learning and service learning and on focus groups with parents and teachers in November 2020 to understand how those views had changed during the pandemic.

Parents across socioeconomic lines agree that their top goals for their children are developing good character, integrity, and finding happiness—more than getting a good job or preparing for college. In turn, teachers see it as their duty to prepare students for all facets of their future, especially applying classroom learning to situations outside of school. One

teacher spoke for many in saying, "Students gain a sense of agency and confidence in themselves when they can participate in the real world and do something to benefit others."

Majorities of both parents and teachers want schools to develop social-emotional skills as much as academic ones. They strongly endorse integrating social-emotional learning and service learning—linking classroom learning with real-world opportunities to serve others—and believe schools should place a stronger emphasis on both.

The overwhelming support for more SEL and service learning has merit. A national commission on integrating social, emotional, and academic development brought science together with practice and found SEL boosts everything schools already measure—from better attendance and behavior to higher grades and graduation rates. It also builds discipline, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving.

It has long been the case that students themselves want more social-emotional and service-learning opportunities in school. In a 2005 Civic survey of students who made the devastating decision to drop out of high school, we found that the leading reason was not academic failure. Instead, it was not seeing the relevance of school to life. Their top suggestion for educators was to provide more opportunities to connect classroom learning with real-world experiences, a primary goal of service learning. In 2012, another Civic report highlighted a survey of youth disconnected from school and work, which showed that nearly 7 in 10 wanted to serve in their communities. Only 3 percent reported having opportunities to do so.

The nearly universal demand from parents, teachers, and students for a holistic approach to education and opportunities to link learning to life should be a wake-up call to school systems to prioritize such efforts. The cascading challenges of the current moment will require a generation of leaders with knowledge, empathy, resilience, appreciation of diversity, and civic dispositions to innovate through times of crisis.

However, fewer than 1 in 4 teachers say SEL is implemented in their school on a programmatic, schoolwide basis, and fewer than 1 in 4 parents and teachers say their students have service-learning opportunities on their campuses. The SEL and service-learning opportunity deficits are most pronounced for students from low-income families and in rural areas.

Listening to those on the front lines of schools—teachers, students, and parents—paints a clear path forward. States need SEL standards and competency benchmarks backed by resources for full implementation, including support for efforts led by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, to create a best-practices network across participating school districts and states. Both SEL and service learning should be integrated into workforce-development systems to ensure students have the skills most in demand from employers.

Crises are times for reflection and resetting. The pandemic has rattled our education system and caused parents and teachers to ask for more focus on both social-emotional learning and service learning in America's schools. We should listen to the perspectives of those closest to the needs of students whose education will determine the future of our society, economy, and democracy. ■

John M. Bridgeland is the founder and CEO of Civic and the COVID Collaborative and was formerly the director of the White House Domestic Policy Council. Francie Richards is the vice president of social responsibility at the Allstate Foundation and a former classroom teacher.

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