

## Chapter 6

# Building and Sustaining a Whole-Community Approach to Equity-Rooted SEL

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### Abstract

This chapter details an evidence-led approach for implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in K-12 schools and districts. The chapter argues that SEL should be seen as both an approach to all teaching and learning, *and* as an articulated and intentional program. The first part of the discussion outlines how districts and schools must ground their SEL approach in the twin foundations of 1) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging; and 2) Teacher SEL and Wellbeing. The remainder of the chapter will reveal each of the five elements of a Whole-Community Approach to Equity-Rooted SEL.

**Keywords:** social and emotional learning (SEL), equity, whole-community approach, equity-rooted SEL, wellbeing, student voice, belonging

### Part One: SEL as an Approach and a Program

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) can best be conceptualized first and foremost, as an evidence-based pedagogical approach to all teaching and learning. Within the context of this approach, SEL is also an articulated program where students learn an intentionally sequenced set of skills and

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mindsets. There are four principles that can guide schools to ensure SEL goes beyond being ‘just’ a program and becomes part of the fabric of a school’s community and its approach to all teaching and learning (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Four Guiding Principles to Establish and Nurture SEL as an Approach and a Program

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| <i>Principle One:</i> SEL is the responsibility of every educator  |
| <i>Principle Two:</i> Focus on building caring and inclusive learning spaces, centered on relationships. |
| <i>Principle Three:</i> Commitment to including student voice and agency                                 |
| <i>Principle Four:</i> Assets-Based Approach   |

### **Principle One: SEL is the Responsibility of Every Educator**

SEL has often been, and in some cases still is, seen as the responsibility of a small number of educators, often school counselors or mental health specialists. This chapter argues that nurturing student social and emotional development is the responsibility of every educator. Just as all educators work to support students to develop skills such as critical thinking or high quality written and verbal communication, so too should all educators seek to nurture student social and emotional development. For many educators who completed training or teaching credentials with a narrower view of education, this may require a mindset shift and some reframing about what SEL is and isn’t, as shown in Table 2.

### **Principle Two: Focus on Building Caring and Inclusive Learning Spaces, Centered on Relationships**

All effective teaching and learning takes place in the context of caring relationships. This fundamental argument requires all educators to set up and maintain caring and inclusive learning spaces, supported by high expectations of behavior and engagement. Studies such as Jones et al., (2012) emphasize that adopting an SEL approach to all teaching and learning promotes inclusive and responsive teaching practices. SEL principles encourage educators to consider the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and needs of their students,

fostering a more equitable learning environment. Indeed, by prioritizing empathy, cultural competence, and positive relationships, educators can create classrooms where all students feel valued and supported, leading to greater academic success and social-emotional well-being.

**Table 2.** What SEL ‘Is’ and “Is Not”

| <b>SEL is NOT</b>                                    | <b>SEL IS</b>  |
|--|--|
| SEL is not therapy.                                  | SEL is about teaching a set of evidence-based fundamental skills and mindsets.   |
| SEL is not done ‘to’ students                        | Authentic and engaging SEL requires student voice and agency.  |
| SEL does not promote a particular set of values      | SEL empowers students with tools to understand different perspectives, to remain connected through disagreement, and to listen for understanding.                      |
| There is no ‘one size fits’ all way to do SEL        | SEL must be culturally responsive – based on a diverse and inclusive knowledge of the community of students, families, and educators.                                  |
| SEL is not static or set in stone                    | Based on principles of equity, SEL must be intentional and proactive, AND responsive to emergent themes and issues in the community, locally, nationally, or globally. |
| SEL is not a distraction or deviation from ‘content’ | All learning is social and emotional – this is backed by neuroscience, and research on motivation and belonging.   |

Some practical, widely used approaches for ‘how’ to build and nurture such learning spaces include:

1. Co-creating group agreements, that align with school-wide values or learning principles. Research by Hattie (2012) emphasizes that when students are involved in setting the agreements and expectations for their classroom, they are more likely to understand and adhere to them. This sense of ownership fosters a culture of accountability where students feel responsible for their actions and behavior, leading to improved classroom management and cooperation.
2. Building in rituals and traditions in classes that focus on connection. These may be ‘inclusions’ at the start of the class or intentional closings that offer moments for acknowledgement, sharing of

learning, or appreciation. These rituals are especially effective if they  
a) include student leadership, b) feel specific to that teacher and their  
passions or interests, and c) include connections to content/subject  
matter.

### **Principle Three: Commitment to Including Student Voice and Agency**

In the past, some SEL programs in schools were didactic, teacher-centred, and delivered ‘to’ students. These programs had the dual effect of being disengaging for students and teachers alike. For SEL to be culturally responsive, and offer authentic opportunities for student learning, educators must find ways to tap into the lived experience of students, activate their leadership voices, and include their insights into the implementation of SEL.

Research by Cook-Sather (2006) suggests that involving students in the development of SEL curriculum ensures that it is relevant to their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. When students contribute their perspectives, values, and interests to the curriculum design process, it reflects their diverse identities and fosters a sense of belonging and ownership. This approach promotes cultural responsiveness and authenticity, making SEL instruction more meaningful and impactful for students from diverse backgrounds.

There are many ways this can be accomplished, including Student SEL Committees, well-being surveys, feedback surveys, and gathering input and insights from alumni. Educators should ensure however that when student voice is included in the development of SEL in a school, it must be authentic and with demonstrable impact. Tokenistic ‘student SEL committees’ whose recommendations or input do not result in change can do much more harm than good and reduce student buy-in for the long term.

### **Principle Four: Assets-Based Approach**

Effective SEL takes an assets view of social and emotional skill development. This means that SEL skill and mindset development is seen as a universal (Tier I) ‘intervention’ that focuses on students’ strengths, resources, and positive qualities (Waters 2011). By emphasizing students’ assets rather than deficits, educators can promote resilience, self-efficacy, and well-being. This approach

also helps students develop a positive self-concept and belief in their ability to overcome challenges, leading to greater academic achievement, social and emotional competence. The less-common view of SEL comes from a deficit model where, particularly students, especially those from marginalized or disadvantaged communities, are seen as ‘in need’ of SEL skills in order to ‘make up’ for an area in which they are perceived to be ‘lacking.’ As such, a deficit-based approach to SEL can undermine students’ self-esteem and motivation.

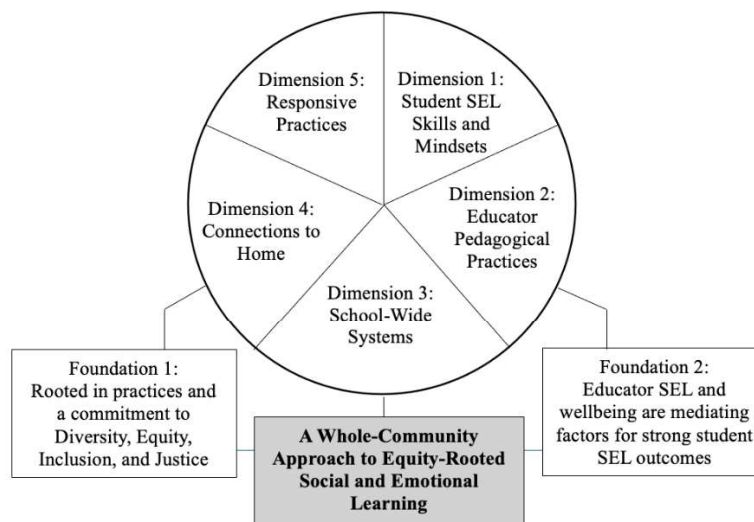
When educators focus primarily on students’ weaknesses, challenges, or deficits, it can lead to student feelings of inadequacy, shame, or disengagement. Research by Dweck (2006) suggests that framing SEL discussions around deficits may also reinforce a fixed mindset, where students believe their abilities are innate and unchangeable, leading to reduced effort and resilience in the face of setbacks. Such an approach can also perpetuate stereotypes and stigmatization, particularly for students of color, marginalized, or vulnerable student populations (Cipollone et al., 2022). When educators label students based on their perceived deficits or pathologize their behavior, it can reinforce negative stereotypes and contribute to feelings of shame or exclusion.

## **Part Two: Foundations for a Whole-Community Approach to Social and Emotional Learning**

### **Foundation One: SEL Rooted in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

As noted above, if educators are to truly serve students and their communities, they must strive to ground all SEL efforts in the understanding and practices of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB). Equity-rooted SEL widens the lens of more traditional approaches to SEL. It invites educators to consider their own identity and positionality as they plan and deliver curriculum to students, perhaps from cultural, socio-economic, or racial backgrounds different to theirs. Equity-rooted SEL also calls on school leaders and educators to reflect and be aware of their own biases and privilege – and bring this insight into decision making and action.

Most importantly, equity-rooted SEL asks educators to look closely and reflect on the content of their SEL program. Of the many ways that an SEL curriculum should activate DEIB, schools need to ensure that work on self-awareness moves beyond a focus on just emotional self-awareness to include a focus on understanding their own multiple identities, privileges, and biases. It also should include expanding social awareness and relationship skills to include an emphasis on cultural competence and perspective taking (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** A Whole-Community Approach to Equity-Rooted SEL. Credit: The Institute for Social and Emotional Learning.

### **Foundation Two: Educator SEL and Well-Being as Mediating Factors for Good SEL Outcomes**

If as a profession, we want the best social and emotional outcomes for students, we must start with adults. In practice, this means shifting away from initiatives that just encourage ‘self-care’ – a strategy that puts disproportionate responsibility on individual educators, and especially those from marginalized groups. An SEL-informed approach to teacher wellbeing requires that educators are no longer told to ‘look after themselves’ while continuing to work in a system that, at times, fails to support their basic needs. Instead,

schools can seize the opportunity to see educator SEL and wellbeing as a system and build a sense of ‘communal care’ by:

1. Nurturing educator belonging and community, just as educators seek to do with students. This might include co-creating group agreements or working norms, establishing a ritual for appreciation and acknowledgements, and building opportunities for reflection and celebration. Establishing practices and structures for adult conflict resolution and relationship repair is also important.
2. Providing ongoing opportunities for educators to take part in SEL experiences. This could be as simple as starting meetings with a ‘Check-In’ or doing SEL activities together. In doing so, educators continue to activate their own social and emotional learning and gain more strategies and ideas to use in their own teaching.

The topic of educator wellbeing is a vast topic, worthy of its own book and not just one section of one chapter. It is however a critical foundation for SEL in schools and, as such, closer consideration is strongly recommended!

### **Part Three: Five Dimensions of a Whole-Community Approach to SEL**

The final section of this chapter offers a review of the five dimensions of a Whole-Community Approach to SEL (Table 4). These dimensions can be seen as the elements of the approach to which schools must pay close attention, nurturing practice, and collecting data to inform continuous improvement.

**Table 4.** Five Dimensions of a Whole-Community Approach to SEL Credit: The Institute for Social and Emotional Learning

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| <i>Dimension 1:</i> Student SEL Skills and Mindsets            |
| <i>Dimension 2:</i> SEL-Aligned Educator Pedagogical Practices |
| <i>Dimension 3:</i> School-Wide Systems                        |
| <i>Dimension 4:</i> Connections to Home                        |
| <i>Dimension 5:</i> Responsive Opportunities                   |

**Dimension One: Student SEL Skills and Mindsets**

The explicit instruction of a coherent set of SEL skills and mindsets for K-12<sup>th</sup> grade students is, for many educators, the primary goal of this work. There is a plethora of curriculum resources to draw upon in this work – most of which are aligned to the SEL competencies presented by CASEL (see Chapter 2). So, what are best practices and key factors that can inform an approach to the selection and curation of curriculum resources that will teach SEL skills and mindsets to students?

***Competencies – Towards a Shared Language for SEL***

CASEL’s five SEL competencies provide a unifying, shared language for SEL in schools. Such a shared language is crucial for all members of a community to have a common way of understanding SEL. The competencies also give a structure for the organization of curriculum resources used to teach these skills and mindsets.

***SEL Standards***

The range of SEL standards adopted by different states and countries varies widely, reflecting diverse educational priorities and contexts. For instance, some states in the United States, such as Illinois and California, have developed comprehensive SEL standards that outline specific competencies and benchmarks for students from K-12<sup>th</sup> Grade. Similarly, countries like Australia and Singapore have implemented national frameworks that incorporate SEL into their educational systems. The Australian Curriculum, for example, emphasizes personal and social capability as one of its general capabilities, encompassing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, social management, and responsible decision-making. In Singapore, the Ministry of Education has integrated social and emotional learning competencies into its Desired Outcomes of Education, which include the development of students’ character, values, and socio-emotional competencies.

The variation in SEL standards, the choice of language, and priorities requires all educators to think carefully about the purpose of these standards documents, and whether that aligns with their school’s rationale for focusing on SEL. For example, some SEL Standards focus clearly on including language and outcomes around Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice, while others focus more on employability skills. Finding standards that ‘fit’ your



school's culture and, where necessary, updating them is an important dimension of this work.

### ***Core SEL Skills and Mindsets***

While important to build a strong foundation for your school's approach, SEL Competencies and Standards are not usually the 'language of SEL' that eventually gets adopted and practiced by students and educators in their everyday interactions. For example, in Middle Schools, within the competency of "Social Awareness," we may have a standard relating to understanding different perspectives. To activate this competency and standard with students, we would want to consider what specific skills and mindsets need to be taught and modelled. In the case of this example, we would likely want to teach students skills like a) active and reflective listening, b) managing feelings of discomfort or difference, c) speaking from the 'I-perspective' (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Examples of Student Skills and Mindsets; Connections to SEL Competencies; Commonly Used SEL Standards

| Example of SEL Skill                                  | SEL Competency  | Common SEL Standard  |
|---|---|--|
| Naming emotions and moods, 'checking-in' with oneself | Self-Awareness  | Identify and understand their emotions and how emotions relate to their actions. Use understanding of emotions to inform actions. (New York, Standard 1A)  |
| Cool-Off Strategies                                   | Relationship Skills                                   | Student demonstrates ability to manage emotions constructively. "I can responsibly manage my emotions" (Alaska, Standard 2A)   |
| Active and Reflective Listening                       | Relationship Skills                                   | Recognize individual and group similarities and differences. (Illinois, Standard 2B)<br>Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others. (Illinois, Standard 2C)   |
| Advocacy  | Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills | Demonstrates a range of communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.<br>Demonstrates the ability to identify and take steps to resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. (Washington State, Benchmark 5A and 5B) |

Developing your school's SEL approach in this way, starting with competencies and standards, and moving into skills and mindsets, can make SEL practical and accessible for educators and students alike. SEL can become a shared language and a 'verb' – a set of active skills and mindsets that students can learn, practice, re-visit, and practice again.

### *Structures for Teaching SEL Skills and Mindsets*

When and where to dedicate time to teaching SEL skills and mindsets to students will depend on several structural factors, priorities, and resource availability. Using whatever time you have wisely is arguably more important than the total number of minutes. In elementary grades, SEL skills and mindsets are often taught through class meetings, morning meetings, or in homerooms. In middle and high school, SEL is often taught through Advisory classes, health classes, life skills classes, or in homerooms.

*Whatever the structure of a school's schedule, it is important that:*

- these moments prioritize connection, and the spaces should be set up to allow students to face one another comfortably. This might be on the floor in a circle, in a donut of tables, or in a more informal arrangement.
- the spaces feel notably different to other classes. Educators can set up these moments as a departure from other classes.
- the educator sees themselves as a facilitator of SEL, and not necessarily a teacher of content. In these moments, Connection *is* the Content.
- the use of devices and technology in these spaces is thoughtfully considered. If possible, establish the 'norm' for these moments that they are tech-free, focusing on face-to-face connection, except when the learning goals or activities require technology.

### *Spiraling Curriculum*

SEL skills and mindsets, such as those above in Figure 4, can be introduced, revisited, and reinforced in many ways, according to the developmental age of students and/or their prior experience and knowledge of SEL. Research by Durlak et al., (2011) suggests that a spiralling curriculum for SEL allows students to revisit and reinforce social and emotional skills over time. A well-designed spiralling curriculum aligns SEL instruction with students' cognitive, emotional, and social development, ensuring that content and activities are age-appropriate and scaffolded to support continuous growth.

This developmental progression allows students to build upon foundational skills and gradually acquire more complex social and emotional competencies as they advance through school. Let's take an example of the skill of 'Advocacy.' The concept of advocacy can be introduced to younger students through the 'I-Message.' In an 'I-Message' students express their feeling from the I-perspective, and then ask for what they want, need, wish, or hope (Figure 4).

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_.  
And what I wish/need/hope/want is \_\_\_\_\_."

**Figure 4.** Structure of an I-Message. Credit: The Institute for Social and Emotional Learning.

The 'I-Message' is a foundational skill for all effective communication in life, and young students find it empowering. However, by the time students get to older grades, and have used the 'I-Message' for a while, they may need to evolve the language to feel less scripted. The concepts that underpin the 'I-Message' remain, however students may relate more when we introduce styles of communication – from more passive to more aggressive. As students progress into the older grades and adulthood, we can continue to deepen the sophistication and complexity of this skill by talking about advocacy, and managing power differentials between those involved, and cultural norms around communication and status.

This one example, briefly outlined, illustrates the importance of conceptualizing SEL skills and mindsets as spiraling. Not all skills need to be taught or revisited each year, but an intentional sequence of lessons, informed by school culture and context, supports the development of a shared language for SEL, and a sense of coherence and clarity from the educator and student perspective.

#### *Proactive AND Responsive*

The final principle to explore is the importance of balancing the proactive teaching of SEL skills and mindsets, while also leaving space for this work to be responsive to student need, interest, and events within the community, locally, nationally, and globally. A good rule of thumb is to plan and proactively teach lessons and experiences for about two-thirds of the available

SEL instructional time. Leave the remaining third of time open to respond to emerging needs and trends.

*Ways to Use this Responsive Time:*

- ✓ Class discussion on a particular topic that has emerged
- ✓ Group problem solving on a class/grade issue
- ✓ Revisiting a lesson previously taught; or bringing forward a lesson usually taught in older grades
- ✓ For younger grades, reading a story relating to the emerging need.

## **Dimension 2: SEL-Aligned Educator Pedagogical Practices**

The previous section outlined the ways in which SEL skills and mindsets can be explicitly taught and practiced in settings such as classroom meetings, morning meetings, homeroom, or in Advisory programs. For SEL to be sustainable and a shared responsibility, SEL-aligned pedagogies should be integrated into all teaching and learning moments. At face value, this may sound like adding ‘another thing’ to teacher’s plates. To the contrary, a lot of high-quality teaching and learning in schools is already SEL-aligned. Indeed, many teachers, in their work to nurture positive relationships with students and build a caring, productive classroom environment are already drawing upon several SEL strategies. The following is a selection of three low-prep, high-reward strategies to integrate SEL into all teaching and learning moments, units of work, and topics.

### ***Identifying SEL Goals for Subject Areas***

Alongside setting learning targets or goals for skill progression in a subject area, setting SEL goals can sharpen our attention on the ‘SEL’ dimension of the learning moment. Examples of SEL goals for subject lessons include:

- In this group math project, students will practice skills of cooperation and collaboration.
- In this history class, students will practice language for constructive disagreement.

- Students will reflect on ‘failure’ and mistakes.
- Students will identify pros and cons of positive and negative self-talk.
- Students will deepen emotional awareness through class/group check-ins.

### ***Intentional Group Design***

Groupwork is a powerful pedagogical practice for students and allows them to practice so many of their SEL skills and mindsets. However, the process of organizing students into groups can sometimes be challenging for them, and when not done thoughtfully, it can have a detrimental impact. Intentional Group Design is a strategy where educators make an intentional decision on how to group students and avoid just asking students to ‘get into groups.’ When students have to self-organize, some students may struggle to feel included, and others might choose to work with friends who in turn may (or may not) be effective teammates for a group project. Options for Intentional Groupings might include:

- Grouping based on the learning goal, and the skills and abilities offered by different students
- Random groupings: for example, drawing names or numbering off, or more creative options like finding a shoe-buddy (finding someone with a similar style/color of shoe).

### ***Reflection Questions for SEL***

Building student’s metacognitive capacity for reflecting on their own social and emotional learning is vital. One way to do this is to offer students thoughtfully chosen reflection questions for SEL at the end of subject classes.

Ideally, these questions should link back to the SEL goal for that class. Taking the examples from “*Identifying SEL Goals for Subject Areas*”, Table 7 offers some possible reflection questions for students to consider.

## **Dimension 3: School-Wide Systems**

Zooming out from the focus on teaching and learning, the next dimension of the Whole-Community Approach explores the importance of SEL-aligned school design, structures, and systems. *School-Wide Systems* (Table 8) are the result of design decisions taken by educators for how to structure teaching,

learning, and the school experience in general. They are the manifestation of the values, beliefs, and hopefully, the research that educators draw from in designing school. To ensure that SEL is sustainable and integrated into a school, it is important for leaders and educators to reflect on the following questions:

**Table 7.** Integrating SEL Into All Subject Areas; SEL Goals and Reflection Questions. Credit: The Institute for Social and Emotional Learning.

| SEL Goal  | Possible Reflection Questions for Students  |
|---|---|
| In this group math project, students will practice skills of cooperation and collaboration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What worked for your team? What didn't work for your team?</li> <li>• Did you engage or contribute as much as you wanted to? Why? What would you do differently next time?</li> <li>• What ideas or habits did you let go of to participate productively in the activity? Was that easy or challenging for you?</li> </ul>                   |
| In this history class, students will practice language for constructive disagreement.       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your perception, did everyone who wanted to share, get a chance to share?</li> <li>• Did anything you heard during this discussion make you change or shift your own thoughts?</li> </ul>   |
| Students will reflect on 'failure' and mistakes.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you had a setback or failure in this class, did you find yourself wanting to step back or try again? What might you say to yourself next time you have a setback?</li> <li>• What inner and outer resources can you draw from when you have a setback?</li> </ul>   |
| Students will identify pros and cons of positive and negative self-talk.                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After participating in this activity would you change anything about your actions or thoughts for the next time?</li> <li>• What did you notice your inner friendly voice saying during this activity?</li> <li>• Did your inner critical voice get loud? How did you manage that? Were there any useful lessons from that voice?</li> </ul> |
| Students will deepen emotional awareness through class/group check-ins.                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What surprised you in hearing your classmates' check-ins?</li> <li>• Did you notice any change in your level of focus after checking in with yourself?</li> </ul>  |

1. Which systems and structures at school are working to support your vision for SEL?
2. Which systems give students opportunities to practice the SEL skills and mindsets that they are learning?
3. Are there systems that work against your vision for SEL, or undermine work to activate student or adult SEL?

**Table 8.** Examples of School-Wide Systems

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule</li> <li>• Recess</li> <li>• Trips</li> <li>• Extra-Curricular Activities</li> <li>• Discipline and Behavior Management</li> <li>• Educator Hiring and Onboarding</li> <li>• Educator Wellbeing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bus Program</li> <li>• Reward Systems</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution and Restorative Practices</li> <li>• Award Ceremonies</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Digital Literacy</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

While sometimes complex and often time-consuming work, schools can advance SEL sustainably by identifying any systems that are not positively building SEL and those that work against SEL. The following example (*System Spotlight: SEL-Aligned Discipline and Behavior Plan*) illustrates the opportunity presented when schools engage in such systems work.

***System Spotlight: SEL-Aligned Discipline and Behavior Management***

An SEL-aligned approach to Discipline and Behavior Management typically includes a combination of a) Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and b) Restorative Practices. As previously discussed in an earlier chapter, PBIS encourages positive behavior through reinforcement within the context of a positive school culture. Restorative Practices prioritize repairing harm and repairing relationships, by fostering accountability and empathy. For either of these approaches to be effective however, students must learn and be adept at using a wide range of SEL skills, including emotional self-awareness, emotion regulation, active and reflective listening, perspective taking, and problem solving. When this ecosystem of approaches and responses is in place and is used consistently by all adults, there is greater harmony between the skills and mindsets that students are taught, and the way they are supported to put them into action in moment-to-moment decisions and behaviors.

Approaches to discipline and behavior management that are more punitive or detached from the social and emotional dynamics of the situation, often do little to build student's prosocial skills or build positive school cultures. Punitive approaches can build student resentment and disengagement, and often disproportionately affect students from marginalized groups (Communities for Just Schools Fund, 2020). Indeed, recent research suggests that students who attend schools that rely heavily on suspensions are at greater risk of being arrested and incarcerated as young adults (Communities for Just Schools Fund, 2020).

Aligning approaches to discipline and behavior management with a vision for SEL is difficult work. Initially, many teachers may feel de-skilled when they are discouraged from using approaches upon which they have historically relied. However, with careful planning and high-quality professional development, educators can quickly find success and improved relationships with students.

#### **Dimension 4: Connections to Home**

The teaching of SEL skills and mindsets in school can be supercharged when done so in partnership with parents and caregivers. There are two elements of such a partnership that need attention. First, ensuring that parents and caregivers are informed and knowledgeable about the school's approach to SEL. This is especially important as the majority of this generation of parents and caregivers will not have had SEL in their own education. Schools should introduce the 'what, why, and how' of the school's approach to SEL for all families when they join the school. This introduction should then be followed with regular updates from teachers sharing the latest SEL tools and strategies that students have been learning. Second, schools should work closely with parent and caregiver groups to offer workshops focusing on culturally responsive, SEL-rooted parenting strategies. Topics that parents and caregivers often request include:

- ✓ Strategies to support emotional regulation and co-regulation at home
- ✓ Approaches to manage and resolve conflict
- ✓ Ways to support children to understand and respond to major events in an increasingly complex world.



### **Dimension 5: Responsive Opportunities**

The final dimension of this Whole-Community Approach to SEL focuses on the ways in which SEL can inform educator responses at a range of levels. At one end of the scale, we should consider everyday interactions with students, from welcoming a student who arrives late to school, to reminding students of class agreements and reinforcing positive behaviors. At the other end of the scale, it may be a major world event, the death of a community member, or a conflict or behavior issue in school. Across all such ‘Responsive Opportunities’ educators can model SEL-informed responses which result in prioritizing understanding, empathy, accountability, compassion, and relationships.

Students will learn just as much from SEL lessons as they will from seeing the adults in their community model SEL in the decisions and actions they make. Nurturing this shared responsibility to ‘live’ SEL in all our daily actions as educators requires: 1) ongoing focus and support from school leaders; 2) time for adults to connect and build a sense of belonging; and 3) a commitment to educator wellbeing. Indeed, just as this chapter opened with a call for all SEL to start with adults, so it closes with a call to prioritize, lift-up, and celebrate all educators.

### **Key Chapter Takeaways**

1. SEL is both an approach to all teaching and learning and an articulated program and curriculum.
2. SEL is the responsibility of every educator. It must take place in the context of caring and inclusive learning spaces and should include student voice and agency.
3. A Whole-Community Approach to SEL should be founded in principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, and should prioritize Educator SEL and Wellbeing. Implementing and sustaining SEL requires attention to five dimensions of the Whole-Community Approach:
  - Student SEL Skills and Mindsets
  - SEL-Aligned Educator Practices
  - SEL-Aligned School-Wide Systems

- Connections to Home
- Responsive Opportunities (Table 4).

## Action Steps

1. Work with colleagues and students to co-create (or refine) a vision or mission statement for SEL at your school. Consider reading this chapter as a group before drafting a statement. Find ways to integrate language from your school's core values (e.g., Respect, Responsibility, Community etc.) to make the vision statement really resonate for your school.
2. Reflect on each of the elements of a Whole-Community Approach, identifying strengths of your existing provision and areas for further work. Consider using this free School and District Self Reflection Tool from The Institute for Social and Emotional Learning to reflect with colleagues: <https://www.instituteforsel.net/sel-resources/self-reflection-tool>.
3. Take an assets-based approach by celebrating and spotlighting examples of SEL practice already in place. Provide opportunities for educators to share ways in which SEL can inform their practice.

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