

Focus Area 1  
**Build Foundational Support and Plan**

Focus Area 2  
**Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity**

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**Promote SEL for Students**

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**Reflect on Data for Continuous Improvement**

# Trust, Community, and Collective Efficacy Among Staff

When staff have a positive staff culture, they can deepen SEL implementation and the impact on

What *quality implementation looks like*, *WHY it's important*, *WHEN to engage in* the [PROCESS](#) page for step-by-step guidance on how to engage in the *practical tools to support your efforts*.

## Staff trust, community, and collective efficacy?

Strong staff are strong predictors of how well schools can carry out (2003) and impact student achievement (Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018), and

serve as a critical foundation for SEL.

*Trust* between staff is developed over time through many interactions, and is essential for creating buy-in, motivating staff to take risks and give extra time and effort, and spreading best practices throughout a school and district (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

A sense of *community* among staff refers to a staff culture based on supportive relationships, mutual care and respect, and interpersonal connections.

*Collective efficacy* is one of the most significant predictors of school effectiveness (Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018). It means that staff not only feel connected with one another, but also believe that as a group they have the capacity to support students in succeeding and meet their academic, social, and emotional needs.

Well-designed structures for promoting staff trust, community, and collective efficacy:

Provide frequent opportunities for staff to build supportive professional relationships and a sense of shared purpose and efficacy.

Establish norms or shared agreements between staff that guide respectful interactions, effective collaboration, and inclusive district culture.

Provide staff with dedicated time to engage regularly in collaborative reflection and problem-solving, sharing ideas, and community-building.

Ensure regular collection of data on staff perceptions of their work climate that is used for continuous improvement.

Use the [Rubric](#) to assess your structures for promoting trust, community, and collective efficacy among staff.

## Why does my district need to promote staff trust, community, and collective efficacy?

Communities of adults who know and trust one another, who are skilled at working together toward shared goals, are more successful in implementing, improving, and sustaining SEL. Conversely, when the staff culture is characterized by mistrust, isolation, and feelings of powerlessness, SEL will at best be implemented in pockets, and most likely will not last beyond a school year or two.

The staff culture within a district team, within a school, and between schools and the district's central office will all impact whether SEL implementation will take hold, and the degree to which staff will make changes, work together, respond creatively to setbacks, or accept support. When leaders become aware of existing relational dynamics, they can

implement practices to strengthen relationships that will result in more meaningful collaboration and engagement with SEL.

- This [study](#) of school communities in Chicago describes the social relationships among adults that contributed to school improvement or stagnation.
- The research brief *How do principals influence student achievement?* (Allensworth & Hart, 2018) shows that administrators who successfully move the needle on student achievement most often do so through the lever of school climate and staff collaboration.

Staff culture also impacts individuals' choices and actions. For example, teachers in schools with strong collective efficacy have more respectful and caring interactions with students, teach more challenging content, and are more persistent and likely to change the way they teach when students aren't learning ([Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy 2004](#); [Sosa & Gomez, 2012](#)). This is essential in school communities that serve culturally diverse and marginalized students who are "consistently and persistently perceived as having deficits that impede them from academically learning or advancing" ([Sosa & Gomez, 2012](#)).

## When should my district promote staff trust, community, and collective efficacy?

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If trusting, collaborative relationships are not yet the norm, the district or individual schools may choose to step back and focus first on building community among adult stakeholders before focusing on SEL for students. Schools and districts that have a strong foundation of trusting staff relationships should still work to strengthen ties and maintain structures that promote inclusion and collaboration, but can more easily do so alongside student-focused SEL work.

District SEL teams can highlight the importance of staff trust, community-building, and practices to build collective efficacy within any overview of schoolwide SEL, professional learning targeted to school leaders or SEL leadership teams, and frameworks for improving SEL implementation.

## Who needs to be involved?

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When defining a strategy to build staff trust, community, and collective efficacy, consider three main types of relationships involving district staff, school leaders, and school staff:

- Relationships among members of district teams or among school staff teams
  - Structure opportunities for meaningful professional collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making. Collective efficacy is strengthened when members are able to "influence instructionally relevant school decisions" ([Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004](#)).
  - Implement practices to ensure that all team members feel emotionally safe, model SEL competence, and feel socially connected to their colleagues. The emotional experience of adults in schools impacts the learning environment, student motivation and well-being, and students' ability to cope with difficulty ([Stephanou, Gkavras, & Doukeridou, 2013](#)).
  - Regularly convene to review and reflect on data. When staff see evidence of progress, the experience of success builds collective efficacy, which increases the level of "press" felt by individuals to persist in their efforts ([Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004](#)).
- Relationships between district leaders and school leaders/staff
  - District SEL leaders should recognize the efforts and expertise from schools within the district, and respectfully draw upon their experience and perspectives as they make decisions and develop districtwide strategies.
  - District SEL leaders should be highly responsive to questions and requests from schools.
- Relationships between school leaders and their staff
  - School leaders should model social and emotional competence in the way they interact with staff.
  - School leaders should demonstrate trust and respect for school staff through shared leadership and decision-

making.

Relationships between staff and students' families and community members are also key to successful SEL implementation, and you can find resources for strengthening those relationships in Focus Area 3, [Key Activity: Family and Community Partnerships](#).

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#### Focus Area 1

### Build Foundational Support and Plan ▼

it opportunities for staff to build supportive professional relationships and a nd efficacy. This includes establishing staff norms or shared agreements, d building community, and using data on staff perceptions to improve work it level of implementation.

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### Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity ▼

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staff perceptions of their work climate, including lective efficacy.

#### Focus Area 4

### Reflect on Data for Continuous Improvement ▼

t the level of trust and connection between the SEL department and s they serve. This data can provide insight into implementation challenges erved, and can also help to identify the team's most successful ge of data sources to access diverse perspectives. To gather and assess

this data, you may wish to:

- Include a feedback survey link in the email signatures of district team members.
- Analyze the responsiveness of principals or SEL leads to emails and calls from the district team and the relative ease of scheduling visits to each school.
- Track which schools do or don't send staff to voluntary and mandatory professional learning provided by the department. While there may be many reasons for non-attendance, in combination with other data sources this information can provide clues about how school leaders perceive the department.
- Use department team meeting time to map the close/personalized connections between district team members and school-level leaders (e.g., they have exchanged cell phone numbers, they worked together in the past, they interact socially, or they have worked closely on a major project). Analyze how the presence or lack of a close/personalized connection may impact the school's participation and implementation of SEL.

You may also want to collect and review data about the level of trust, connection, and collective efficacy within central office and within individual school communities. Since a strong staff culture is an important prerequisite for any school improvement initiative, this information can help a district team determine which schools are ready to learn and implement a new SEL practice right away, and which schools would benefit from support to build adult community first.

This data may come from school climate surveys, which often include measures of staff relationships, or other staff surveys. Here are a few examples:

- [The Omnibus T Scale](#) (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003)
- [The Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale](#) (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004)
- [Panorama Education's Teacher Survey](#)
- University of Chicago's [5Essentials](#) Survey
- [PBIS School Climate Surveys](#)
- A blog post from Cult of Pedagogy: [Principals—are you brave enough to ask for staff feedback?](#) (Gonzalez, 2015)

Beyond direct surveys, these other data sources can be indicators of the strength of the adult community within a school:

- Staff attendance and turnover.
- Breadth of implementation of schoolwide initiatives (e.g., if all teachers are expected to use a specific questioning

technique, monitor the hallway during passing periods, literature circles, etc., what is the real rate of “uptake” across the school?).

- Percent of staff who are involved in teams or activities outside of their contractual obligation.
- Percent of staff who participate in existing opportunities for collaboration and community-building.
- Observations during team meetings: who does and doesn't speak or express opinions, and what is accomplished? It's a mistake to assume that a lack of feedback is a sign that people are content, as withdrawal is a common response to a distrustful work environment.
- Observations of informal social networks (e.g., where staff gather during unstructured time, where people sit during staff meetings).

When reviewing these data sources, it is important to probe for root causes of any potential disconnection and nonparticipation. Look for patterns (consider race, age, grade band, hire date, social networks, or other relevant factors) that can help the team take a step back from their ideas about the individual people who make up the adult community, and instead think more deeply about the structures and patterns of interaction that are leading to disconnection. Teams should seek to learn more, particularly from those who seem disconnected, through low-threat means such as anonymous surveys, informal one-on-one conversation with a trusted leadership team member, and exit interviews with those who choose to transfer.

## **2. Establish norms or shared agreements between district staff to guide respectful interactions, effective collaboration, and an inclusive district culture.**

A district team's cohesion is visible at trainings, events, and meetings and can serve as a model for schools that are working on their own community development.

As a starting point, it's helpful to bring central office staff together to develop shared agreements that help set the context for how staff will interact to foster a supportive work environment. If you work in a smaller district, this may involve bringing a representative from each department together as a group. In larger districts, each department may wish to develop its own shared agreements, or you may wish to begin with the SEL team or a subset of departments that work closely on SEL-related work. As a group, you'll want to consider setting shared agreements that address:

- How do staff, including leadership, agree to interact with each other?
- How do staff agree to interact with school communities?
- How will staff model self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making through all of their interactions?
- How will staff hold each other accountable for living up to these agreements?

Once shared staff agreements are developed, you'll want to reflect and review these throughout your work, including during routine staff meetings. Here are some examples of shared agreements and processes for creating them:

- [Oakland Unified School District's Process for Working Agreements](#)
- [CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL tool: Creating Shared Agreements](#)

## **3. Provide regular opportunities for staff to build supportive professional relationships and engage in collaborative reflection and problem-solving, sharing ideas, and community-building.**

Building staff trust, community, and collective efficacy is not a simple matter of having more social events or staff appreciation days. A group of adults can enjoy each other and feel appreciated without doing the hard collaborative

work of learning something new, changing their practices, sharing and accepting professional feedback, making important decisions, and following through on commitments. While a staff retreat or community-building workshop can help, a trusting, collaborative community is built through the accumulated day-to-day interactions, shared reflection and decision-making, and group successes that continually validate trust and collective efficacy ([Bryk & Schneider, 2003](#)).

Beyond developing and committing to shared agreements, district teams can set up a variety of opportunities and structures to enable the interactions that develop trust, community, and collective efficacy. For example:

- Establish regular space in the district calendar for both informal connection and professional collaboration. Use these spaces to reflect on progress and review evidence of success, engage in real problem-solving and decision-making, and strengthen social ties. You may wish to:
  - Create dedicated time for departments to work together on planning and monitoring progress toward shared goals (See also Focus Area 1, [Key Activity: Collaboration](#)).
  - Create space for all team members to share about their lives and formative experiences, including why they decided to pursue a career in education.
- Invite shared leadership for major initiatives through rotating responsibilities, project-specific working groups, and steering committees.
- Provide opportunities for staff to contribute to districtwide initiatives in ways that showcase their strengths or creativity.
- Communicate openly about major decisions and changes, and encourage and respond to team input.
- Set up clear, welcoming ways for individuals to seek support or share a concern about the district.
- Use restorative practices to address conflicts.
- Foster a growth mindset among staff about the schools and leaders they work with, and ensure that all staff view their role as supportive rather than oversight.

#### **4. Support schools in analyzing data and planning structures to build trust, community, and collective efficacy among their staff.**

As you develop a district plan for SEL rollout across schools (See Focus Area 1, [Key Activity: Shared Vision and Plan](#)), it's important to include adult community-building as a component of the work. You can support school staff communities in engaging in processes similar to the district process, including developing shared agreements for interaction, establishing regular structures for connection and open communication, creating opportunities for leadership, and addressing conflicts restoratively.

[CASEL's Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#) provides additional resources for staff collaboration and community building (including tools for school staff to create shared agreements, form professional learning communities and mentoring relationships, integrate SEL practices into meetings, mindfully model SEL practices in their interactions, and engage in collaborative problem-solving.)

In addition to including staff trust and community as a component of a schoolwide SEL rollout plan and sharing resources, a trusted district staff member (such as a district SEL coach) can provide personalized support for targeted schools in a number of ways:

- After collecting data on staff trust and collective efficacy, help SEL leadership teams analyze data objectively to aid problem-solving.
- Facilitate communication between staff and leadership, particularly if staff do not feel comfortable sharing their views or do not trust that leaders will listen. For example, a district staff member might conduct individual interviews or group circles without leadership present, and summarize general feedback.
- Provide guidance or facilitation support for consensus practices.

- See a study of how consensus practices contribute to staff trust: [Developing Relational Trust in Schools through a Consensus Process](#) (Redburn, 2009)
- Coach school leaders on how they provide feedback and communicate, and how they invite staff engagement.
  - The booklet [Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers](#) (Brewster & Railsback, 2003) focuses on the importance of trust between teachers and administrators, and includes case studies, common obstacles to trust, and actionable strategies for strengthening trust.
- Share successful community-building structures from other schools and districts by arranging cross-school visits or featuring them in newsletters and at professional learning communities.
- Build collective efficacy through vicarious experience by organizing visits to similar schools that have experienced success with SEL implementation and student growth.

## 5. Plan to define metrics for success, and continue to use data on staff perceptions for continuous improvement.

Once new practices have been put in place to strengthen trust, community, and collective efficacy, determine when and how you will check in on progress. District SEL staff should plan to monitor progress for their own district teams and coach schools to do the same. For more on continuous improvement, see [Focus Area 4: Practice Continuous Improvement](#).

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has been updated and is now online! It includes a growing library of sample practices, , and templates to help you incorporate the practices skillfully into your context.

## CASEL

### TAGS

SEL and Academic Integration

mindfulness

three signature practices

teacher tool

toolkit

social awareness

self awareness

instructional practices

building community

SEL leadership

## RELATED RESOURCES

### [3 Signature Practices – Developing Your Own Activities](#)

Once you have explored the SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook, this template will help you design new welcoming activities, engaging strategies, and optimistic closings for your learning setting.

#### SOURCE:

CASEL

### [Micro SEL 3 Signature Practices – For Everyone, Every Day](#)

One-pager handout describing how to apply the principles of the 3 signature practices in brief ways to create positive and productive relationships throughout the day with everyone you encounter.

#### SOURCE:

CASEL

### [3 Signature Practices for Adults](#)

One-pager handout summarizing the 3 Signature SEL Practices and examples of each, adapted to turn the focus to the way adults interact with one another in the workplace, how they learn, and how to set up the learning environment to maximize engagement and growth.

#### SOURCE:

CASEL

### TAGS

three signature practices

teacher tool

SEL coaching for staff

building community

professional learning

SEL leadership



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### [3 Signature Practices in the Classroom](#)

One-pager handout summarizing the 3 Signature SEL Practices, examples of each, and alignment with SEL competencies and school priorities.

**SOURCE:**

**CASEL**

**TAGS** mindfulness three signature practices teacher tool social awareness self awareness  
instructional practices building community

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### [Summary – The SEL 3 Signature Practices](#)

One-pager describing and providing examples of 3 signature practices that bring SEL experiences into any learning setting and build a foundation of safety, consistency, and belonging.

**SOURCE:**

**CASEL**

**TAGS** SEL and Academic Integration english/language arts math social studies arts  
mindfulness three signature practices teacher tool social awareness self awareness  
reading lists - staff teacher training advisory/homeroom instructional practices  
building community

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**SOURCE:**

**CASEL**

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### [Creating Shared Agreements](#)

This tool from CASEL's Guide to Schoolwide SEL outlines a 6 step process for a school or district team to develop shared agreements about how they will work together to achieve a shared vision and nurture adult SEL.

**SOURCE:**

**CASEL**

**TAGS** Adult SEL mindfulness teacher tool teacher training advisory/homeroom  
building community professional learning SEL leadership

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### [How to Develop Working Agreements for Any Group](#)

Oakland's step-by-step instructions for establishing working agreements for a group, and returning to them regularly to check in.

**SOURCE: Oakland Unified School**

**District**

**TAGS** [Adult SEL](#) [teacher tool](#) [advisory/homeroom](#) [building community](#)

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## Find resources to help you learn more on this topic

### TITLE

#### [Practices of Promise: Creating a Caring Culture Through SEL in Atlanta Public Schools](#)

How can districts weave social and emotional learning throughout their work to foster a systemwide culture of connection and trust? Atlanta Public Schools saw SEL as a key strategy for rebuilding culture and redefining how to pursue desired outcomes. Learn more about their journey and how SEL is a focus in their offices of safety and security and human resources.

**SOURCE:**

**CASEL**

**TAGS** [hiring practices](#) [SEL partnerships](#) [culture and climate](#) [integrate with district priorities](#)  
[district SEL expertise](#)

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#### [Structural Supports to Promote Teacher Well-Being](#)

This brief summarizes what research says about supporting teacher well-being, and includes strategies to consider and strategies to avoid.

**SOURCE: EdResearch for**

**Recovery**

**TAGS** [research brief](#) [culture and climate](#) [SEL leadership](#)

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#### [Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement – Implications for Principals and Teachers](#)

This booklet looks at the importance of trust in school improvement, particularly regarding relationships between teachers and between teachers and administrators. It includes case studies in middle and high schools, a review of relevant research, common obstacles to trust, and actionable strategies for strengthening trust.

**SOURCE: Northwest REL**

**TAGS** [Adult SEL](#) [building community](#)

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#### [Connecting Teacher Efficacy Beliefs in Promoting Resilience to Support for Latino Students](#)

Results of this study suggest that efficacy beliefs related to resilience are linked to building important relationships through connecting with students, building on their experiences and knowledge, and understanding the issues they confront.

**SOURCE: Research**

**Journal**

**TAGS** [cultural competence](#) [Adult SEL](#) [anti-bias](#) [culturally responsive](#)

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### [How Do Principals Influence Student Achievement?](#)

This research brief from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research shows that administrators who successfully move the needle on student achievement most often do so through the lever of school climate and staff collaboration.

**SOURCE: University/Nonprofit Research  
Institution**

**TAGS** culture and climate SEL leadership

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