



9 Tips to Boost Social & Emotional Learning in Schools and OST Programs

What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to a range of skills including teamwork, setting goals and working toward achieving them, navigating social situations, empathizing with others, and making responsible decisions. Giving children a chance to build these skills can help them succeed in school and beyond.

Who can use these tips?

Schools and out-of-school time (OST) programs know that partnering to offer SEL opportunities takes preparation and ongoing work. The following lessons—drawn from the work of six communities studied by the RAND Corporation—can help these efforts succeed.

1

Commit to SEL

Success starts with engaging committed school principals and OST managers to lead planning and launch SEL activities. They set the vision for SEL programming and can prioritize SEL instruction by ensuring master calendars devote ample time to it.



2

Create SEL committees to guide implementation

Committees with members who champion SEL, like the principal and OST manager, can support SEL implementation. The SEL committee sets goals and guides improvements for SEL programming, monitors daily practices, and oversees SEL training and resources.



3

Build trust between school and OST partners

When school and OST instructors partner in SEL committee work and have face-to-face interactions, participants can build relationships and camaraderie. This helps create mutually reinforcing SEL practices for students.



4

Make SEL a priority across the full day

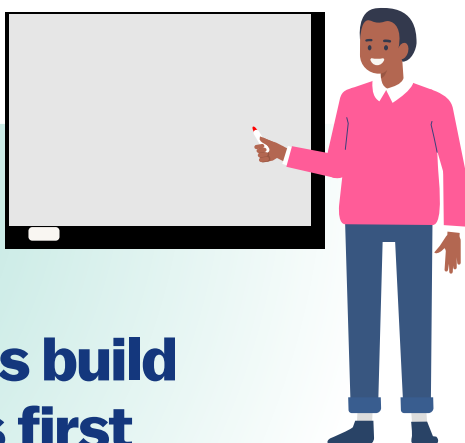
Prioritize SEL by identifying time in the weekly schedule for its instruction and for staff professional development. Ensure skills like responsible decision making, empathy, and teamwork are part of daily routines, reinforced during and after school. This makes SEL practices more concrete and actionable.



5

Help adults build their skills first

Adults need an understanding of SEL skills before they can teach them to students. Start by providing professional development to those central to the school and OST program's SEL efforts.



6

Provide clear guidance on SEL practices

Written SEL resources and guidance, like a staff SEL onboarding guide and lesson plans, can set clear expectations for adults and help ensure consistency.



7

Start with short daily SEL rituals

Easy-to-do rituals like high fives or personalized greetings to start the day can create an inviting climate. Practices like deep breathing between activities or end-of-lesson reflections can also contribute to a calm, welcoming atmosphere for students.



8

Spread responsibility for SEL across staff

SEL works better when all staff—including counselors, teachers, aides, and OST instructors—enact SEL rituals and have a sense of ownership of SEL work. This broad buy-in can make SEL efforts more sustainable, even as staff turn over.



9

Apply SEL practices to weather unpredictable challenges

SEL routines help schools and OST programs keep continuity for students in the midst of disruptions like COVID-19. Rituals and routines grounded in SEL can help students cope with change.



Tacoma

Boston

Denver

Tulsa

Dallas

Palm Beach County

About the source of these nine tips

Six communities joined a Wallace Foundation initiative, called the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative, to explore whether and how children benefit when schools and OST programs partner to improve and align SEL, as well as what it takes to do this work. These nine insights come from a RAND case study series and summary report, *Strengthening students' social and emotional skills: Lessons from six case studies of schools and their out-of-school time program partners*, which can be found at <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/PSEL>