



District Resource Center

March, 2015

CASE STUDY

Washoe County School District (WCSD)

“The Washoe Way,” a unique approach to educational leadership in the Washoe County School District (WCSD), in Northern Nevada, is built on a strong commitment to sustaining high-quality educational reforms. In collaboration with teachers and administrators, WCSD’s leaders designed social and emotional learning (SEL) implementation to bolster their intensive Common Core State Standards (CCSS) instructional framework and professional development. Also, the district’s focus on “Every child, by name and face, to graduation,” required that WCSD’s leaders integrate SEL into the district’s goals and actions geared toward improving the graduation rate.



Leaders at all levels also agreed that sustainable, systemic, and systematic SEL could not be just “one more thing” for principals and teachers to cover. As a result, WCSD connected SEL implementation with improving student success by using SEL as

a means for working with teachers to change instructional techniques and improve the learning culture at the classroom and school levels.

This included:

- Embedding SEL throughout the district’s strategic plan.
- Integrating SEL into CCSS professional development.
- Including SEL strategies as a way to improve teacher performance through the professional growth and evaluation system.
- Incorporating SEL competency measures into accountability and school improvement structures.

SEL Implementation Strategy

Planning for WCSD’s districtwide SEL implementation began in February, 2012, with Washoe’s inclusion in CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI). As a collaborating district, WCSD received a \$125,000 SEL planning grant in 2012 and an annual grant of \$250,000 for three years from the NoVo Foundation and the support of two CASEL consultants,

DISTRICT INFORMATION

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Traci Davis,
Interim Superintendent

Enrollment: 62,986

Race/Ethnicity

Asian: 4.4%
Black: 2.4%
Latino: 38.9%
White: 46.3%
Multi-Racial: 5.4%

Other Subgroups

Economically Disadvantaged: 43%
Limited English Proficiency: 17%
Disabilities: 13%

Schools: 91

Elementary: 63
Middle: 14
High: 14

Staff:

Teachers: 3,411
Other Professionals: 1,028
Support Staff: 2,848

SEL Leadership

Trish Shaffer,
Coordinator of the Department of
Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Related Links

[WCSD SEL Web Page](#)

[WCSD SEL/MTSS Department](#)

[WCSD CASEL Collaborating District Page](#)

who provide technical assistance via phone, email, and in person (up to 50 days per school year). The superintendent assigned leadership of SEL to Trish Shaffer, Coordinator of the Department of Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and revised the strategic plan to reinforce the responsibility for SEL implementation across many of the district's departments and divisions. Initial actions focused on building the expertise of district leaders, along with identifying and training teams at 12 schools that agreed to be the first wave to pilot the district's systemic SEL implementation strategy. Before training a critical mass of educators, district leaders invited a group of multi-disciplinary practitioners to develop the district's SEL standards during a three-day work session.

During the first year of SEL implementation (2012-13), with SEL standards in place, district staff conducted a resource and needs assessment, which informed and continues to drive SEL implementation. WCSD also hired and trained an SEL specialist. The SEL specialist worked with the 12 pilot schools, focusing on teaching strategies for integrating SEL into instruction, school culture, and classroom climate. These strategies included:

- An innovative 12-hour "SEL Common Core Task Project" course taught in collaboration with the Curriculum and Instruction Department
- Site-based and district-based SEL professional development
- Professional learning communities (PLCs) focused on SEL
- Guidance for teachers who selected SEL as their professional growth focus area
- SEL professional literature study groups

During the first year of implementation, district staff conducted a SEL resource and needs assessment.

The second year of implementation (2013-14) began with a two-day training for the SEL implementation team, during which 23 teacher leaders and implementation specialists received SEL and facilitation training. The implementation team receives hourly pay to provide SEL professional development and facilitate SEL PLCs at their sites and across the district. These teacher leaders greatly extended the reach of the district's small SEL staff, which doubled in Year 2, from one to two full-time SEL specialists. CASEL consultants also facilitated one-day

and two-day SEL retreats for the WCSD Curriculum and Instruction Department, Striving Readers Specialists, the Regional Professional Development Program staff, Peer Assistance and Review Mentors, and Accountability and School Improvement staff. The SEL specialists dedicated their time to increasing common language and understanding of SEL, strengthening teacher skills and schoolwide climate and culture, and documenting effective strategies for integrating SEL.



During the second year of SEL implementation, WCSD issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to evidence-based SEL programs to provide a resource for teachers to teach social and emotional competencies to students. A committee of teachers and administrators reviewed the proposals for K-12 schools. The committee recommended and the district's board of trustees approved the adoption of MindUp for grades K-8. They also selected School Connect as a resource for grades 9-12.

Midway through the second year of implementation, the SEL Team used the resource and needs assessment, along with learnings from the work with the 12 pilot schools, to develop a multiyear plan to scale and provide SEL in all schools to all students. Key to the design was securing cabinet and superintendent support and approval for an integrated approach, along with the commitment of district and grant funds.

In May 2014, all WCSD schools were invited to take part in the first of five cohorts implementing SEL. The district provided information and schedules to principals and schools so they could match their respective school site plans with the most appropriate SEL implementation cohort. Before formally joining an SEL implementation cohort, WCSD principals agree to the following:

- Develop a site SEL leadership team that consists of five or more members, including the principal, teachers, and other support staff.

- Attend a three-day SEL leadership training with their SEL leadership team that focuses on integrating SEL into curriculum and instruction, SEL as a means for improving culture and climate, and social and emotional skills instruction using the adopted evidence-based SEL curriculum resource. This three-day professional development session includes a train-the-trainer component (three one-hour SEL modules) that site SEL leadership teams subsequently use with their staffs.
- Schedule three to four one-hour professional development sessions for staff, facilitated by the site SEL leadership team using a PowerPoint presentation, facilitator guide, and materials provided by the district's SEL department.
- Support members of their SEL leadership team in attending quarterly SEL PLC meetings to discuss SEL implementation, solve problems, share ideas, and receive additional training.
- Welcome SEL specialists to their campus to provide coaching, professional development, and gather data about SEL implementation.

Each school leader commits to a three-year SEL implementation process. Although the three-day initial site SEL Leadership Team training occurs only once, SEL leadership teams continue to attend quarterly SEL PLC meetings, engage in regular site-level meetings, provide three to four SEL professional development sessions for staff per year, and work with district SEL specialists to deepen site SEL implementation over the next three years. Teachers on the SEL leadership team receive hourly stipends or substitutes for attending district-level professional development and PLC meetings.

As of February 2014, three leadership team cohorts comprised of 46 schools have taken part in the three-day training and have begun providing SEL professional development at their school sites. By winter 2016, SEL teams from all 93 schools in the district will have attended the three-day introductory training, will be receiving SEL specialist coaching, and will be participating actively in quarterly PLCs.

Along with this school-based SEL implementation model, WCSD continues to offer multiple courses, PLCs, literature study groups, and other means for individual teachers

and groups of teachers to learn more about SEL and to practice their SEL skills. Through WCSD's administrative and supervisory meetings principals and other administrators receive regular professional development in SEL. The district's Parent University Program offers SEL parent workshops in which parents can learn about SEL in general or focus on topics ranging from parenting a teenager to reviewing the evidence-based programs used by their students.

SEL Budget Strategy

WCSD's leaders made several budget assumptions early in their SEL planning to facilitate a financially sustainable SEL model, even in an atmosphere of continuing annual district budget reductions. Below are some key decisions district leaders made in developing cost-effective and sustainable districtwide SEL implementation.

"We needed to build capacity creatively, which included modifying job descriptions to include SEL as part of existing positions and also drawing on our teacher leaders."

– Trish Shaffer

- Salaries are the largest part of the budget. According to Trish Shaffer, "We needed to build capacity creatively, which included modifying job descriptions to include SEL as part of existing positions and also drawing on our teacher leaders." The district hired a small SEL staff, which they augment by building the capacity of existing teacher leaders and coaches (implementation specialists). Members of the SEL implementation team receive compensation to provide training and support for teachers and parents.
- Nearly all aspects of SEL implementation use a train-the-trainer model, which capitalizes on existing district professional learning and support structures.
- The district invests in hourly pay, substitutes, and stipends to provide professional development for teachers and support staff.
- SEL implementation is linked to and integrated with the highest-profile district priorities. SEL standards have been incorporated into professional development in areas as diverse as CCSS, 21st Century Learning, and arts education. There is

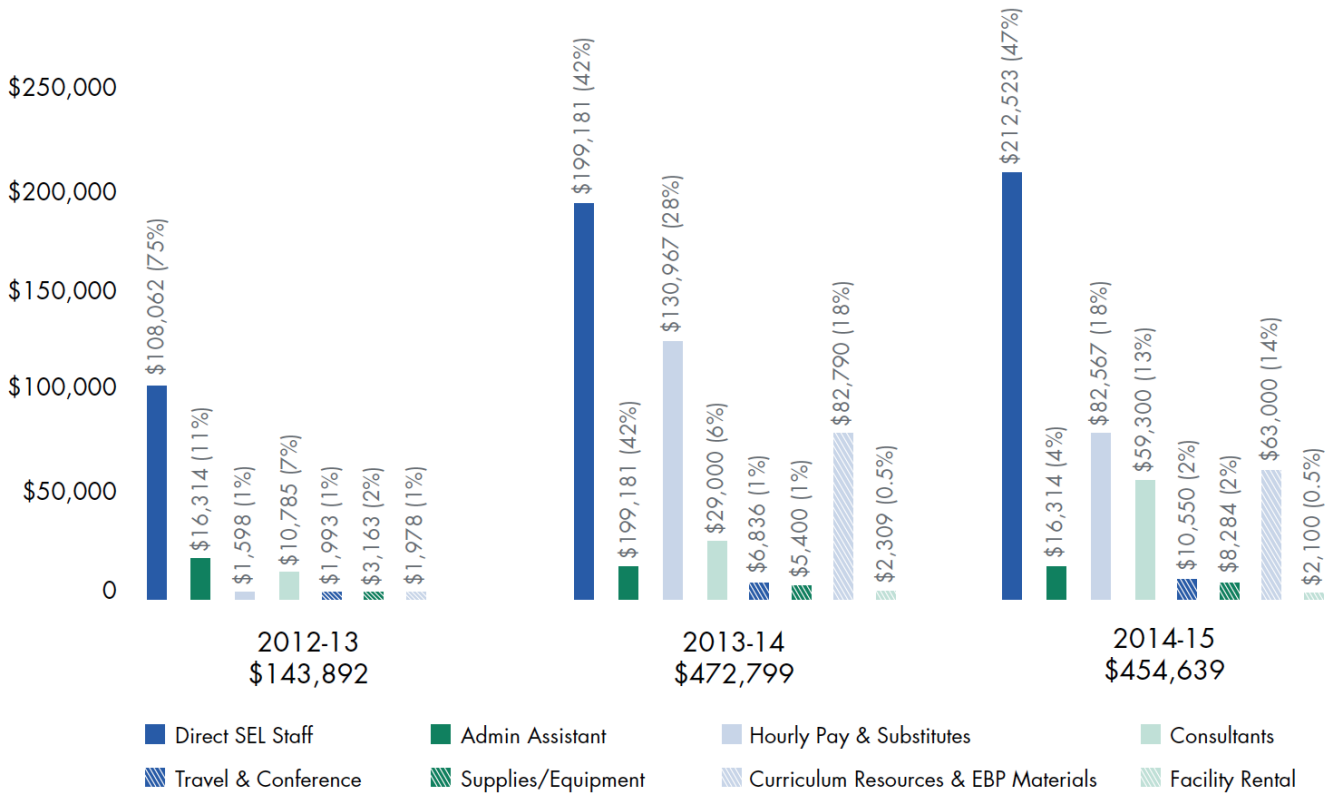
continual attention to evolving district priorities. Strategic and explicit connections are developed between new initiatives and SEL, with an overarching focus on fostering student success through SEL.

- To minimize costs, SEL implementation began in the first two years with 12 schools and their leaders who were willing to learn together and develop effective strategies for scaling SEL across the district. Teacher and principal champions emerged early, also at a minimal cost, due to the intentional and targeted investment of SEL department time.
- Aware that providing an evidence-based SEL program districtwide would be challenging and expensive, Shaffer worked with funders and district administrators to develop a finance plan that included using upfront savings from minimizing dedicated staffing in the first two years, then utilizing those carry-over funds in the third year to purchase evidence-based program materials, resources, and professional development.

- WCSD began investing in evidence-based SEL program materials at the end of the second year (2013-14) for use in Year 3. By extending program purchases over two fiscal years and applying multiple budget sources, including grants, district general funds, and federal funds, the district was able to afford the expenditure.

WCSD has focused on integrating SEL throughout the district and has made use of existing district structures for implementing and supporting systemic change. This has enabled SEL to have a broad reach with a small investment of designated SEL funds. In their CDI evaluation report, the American Institutes for Research noted, "Staff working on SEL in WCSD achieved significant milestones in the 2012–13 school year, despite lean staffing."¹ WCSD has accomplished many goals and appears to be on track to enhance student outcomes in a cost-effective manner.³ Early data indicate that WCSD students with higher social and emotional competence have increased criterion-referenced test scores.

WCSD SEL Expenditures 2012-2015



WCSD's largest SEL expense in the first three years of systemic SEL implementation was direct SEL staff (Figure 1). Other expenses in Year 1 (2012-13) were nominal. As SEL implementation expanded, the annual SEL budget tripled in Years 2 and 3. In these years, hourly pay and substitutes, curriculum resources and evidence-based SEL program materials and consultants were among some of the district's other major expenditures.

Sustaining SEL

WCSD leadership navigated a challenging budgetary, political, and leadership landscape during the first three years of SEL implementation. Their SEL journey began amid the fallout of the 2009 national financial crisis and as implementation of the CCSS was becoming the highest instructional priority for the district. During this period WCSD had two superintendents, two interim superintendents, serious reductions in the district's budget, and membership changes on the Board of Trustees.

Financial support for SEL implementation from the district's general fund has increased each year.

The SEL department strategically navigated all of these changes. SEL is now a strong, integrated component of districtwide instructional improvement and support programs, and it continues to be an integral part of the district's strategic plan. During the annual WCSD State of Education Report the previous superintendent and the current interim superintendent featured SEL as a key strategy being implemented to support student success, including raising graduation rates². This is significant because SEL was adopted by a preceding superintendent and neither of these leaders were in the district when SEL initially took root. Financial support for SEL implementation from the district's general fund has increased each year. Through the development of SEL leadership teams, parent training and engagement, training for teachers and staff (e.g., bus drivers and cafeteria workers), out-of-school time programs, and community presentations, the constituency for SEL has steadily grown. Several factors have contributed to the survival and growth of SEL in WCSD.

- **The district used external funding and technical support for SEL from strong national organizations.** The external funding from NoVo Foundation and the technical assistance support of the CASEL consultants sustained SEL through leadership changes and budgetary challenges, and led district leaders decide to invest in SEL. Trish Shaffer and the CASEL consultants have built strong, supportive relationships with the superintendent and many other district leaders. The stable, consistent presence of the CASEL consultants and increased

visibility of SEL implementation activities have also contributed to the sustainability of SEL. With superintendent and district leadership attendance at annual CASEL meetings, district leaders have had multiple opportunities to discuss SEL as a part of the district's reform strategy and to network with other leaders who are implementing SEL in their districts. WCSD strategically leveraged grant funds and technical assistance supports to weather leadership changes and budgetary challenges.

- **Local leadership for SEL has remained consistent.** Trish Shaffer, Coordinator of the Department of Multi-Tiered System of Supports, has led WCSD's SEL implementation since its start in 2012. Despite the changes at the superintendent and top leadership levels and the 100 percent turnover of SEL specialists, Shaffer's steady and reliable strategic leadership has provided for continuous growth in SEL design, development, and implementation. During the entire initiative she has had primary responsibility and significant autonomy in SEL budgeting, grants management, and planning for sustainability.



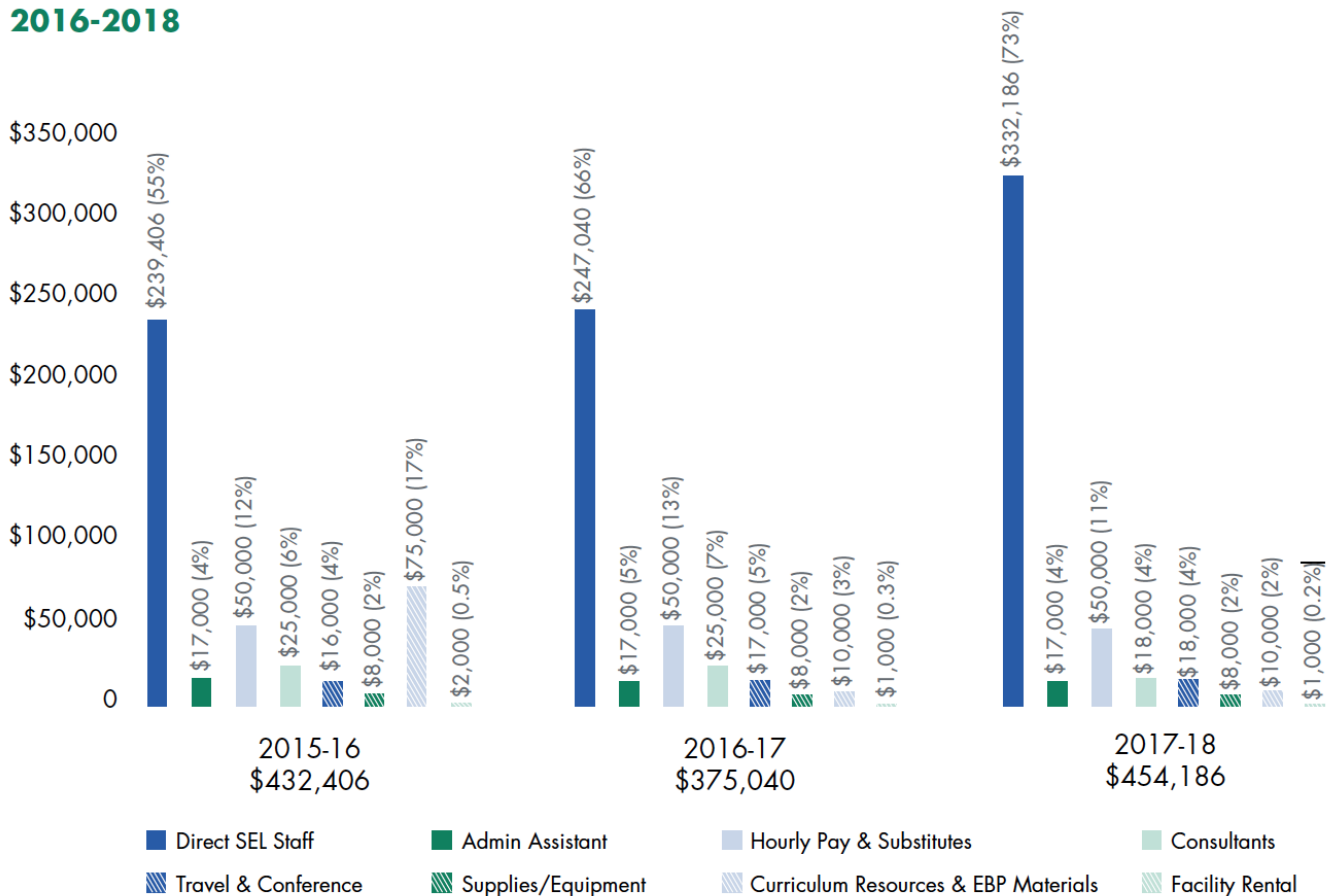
- **Top district leaders understand and value SEL.** Although WCSD's superintendents have changed, other top district administrators have generally continued in their roles. The SEL department and CASEL consultants have invested in relationship building, increasing the SEL expertise of these leaders and their staffs, and co-planning integrated SEL professional learning within and among the various departments. Many senior administrators are strong SEL supporters, advocating for SEL implementation and budgets during leadership meetings and budget negotiations. They also support Trish Shaffer's work to the fullest extent.

- The school-based SEL implementation model is straight-forward, adds value at the school site, and is affordable.** After nearly two years of capacity building, increasing adult SEL expertise, and partnering with schools to test components, WCSD’s SEL leaders developed the SEL implementation plan, which consists of three-day trainings for site SEL teams, professional development modules for site teams to use in training their own staffs, and PLCs to support SEL teams in building their local SEL strategies. This model is relatively low-cost since it does not require consultants or central office personnel to train, entire school staffs. The district leadership team approved the implementation plan in June 2014 and will engage all 93 schools by January 2016. As of February 2014, 46 site SEL leadership teams have been trained. Principals and teachers are using common SEL language and strategies and are integrating SEL into their academics, culture, and

climate both in classrooms and schoolwide. While this model is affordable, it is challenging for WCSD’s small SEL department to provide and coordinate training, professional learning, and support of school site work at a significant level of depth and breadth.

Sustaining SEL financially in WCSD will require maintaining important relationships and partnerships across all levels of the district, developing and supporting reliable systems for building capacity and expertise of leaders and teachers, seeking ongoing and reliable financial resources, and controlling expenditures. Trish Shaffer has a keen sense of which levers to engage, communication strategies to employ, and strategies to deploy. “Today, if you ask anyone in the district about SEL,” says Shaffer, “they can talk about the basics. It is already a thread in the district quilt. We continue to write major grants to integrate SEL further, looking to the day when our current funding ends.”

WCSD Projected SEL Expenditures 2016-2018



WCSD’s largest SEL expense in the first three years of systemic SEL implementation was direct SEL staff (Figure 1). Other expenses in Year 1 (2012-13) were nominal. As SEL implementation expanded, the annual SEL budget tripled in Years 2 and 3. In these years, hourly pay and substitutes, curriculum resources and evidence-based SEL program materials and consultants were among some of the district’s other major expenditures.



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Resources

1. Osher, D., Kendziora, K., Friedman, L., American Institutes of Research, Collaborating Districts Initiative Evaluation: Washoe County School District Implementation Year 1 Executive Summary, August 2013.
2. Martinez, P., Washoe County School District State of Education Presentation, January 2013 & January 2014; Davis, T., Washoe County School District State of Education Presentation, January 2015.
3. Davidson, L., Shaffer, T., Washoe County School District, Social and Emotional Learning in the Washoe County School District, Presentation to the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, September 2014.

This case study was conducted by the Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The purposes of the funded project, Identifying Effective Financial Strategies to Sustain Social and Emotional Learning, were to document different districts' approaches to sustaining social and emotional learning (SEL) and to create financial models (scenarios) and planning tools that districts can use to determine how to sustain SEL long-term.

Washoe County School District
Social and Emotional Learning Budget and Financial Sustainability Plan

Washoe County School District	Past and Current Years			Future Years (Estimated)		
	SY2012-13	SY2013-14	SY2014-15	SY2015-16	SY2016-17	SY2017-18
Number of Schools Served/Number of SEL Specialists	12/1.15	27/2.45	55/2.45	93/2.9	93/2.9	93/3.9
Number of Teachers Served	516	1161	2366	4000	4000	4000
Number of Students Served	8042	18094	36858	62324	62324	62324
Estimated Operating Costs:	SY2012-13	SY2013-14	SY2014-15	SY2015-16	SY2016-17	SY2017-18
SEL Director/Coordinator (salary and benefits)	\$47,201.80	\$52,200.60	\$48,768.70	\$49,745	\$50,740	\$51,755
Specialist (salary and benefits)	\$60,860.15	\$146,980.66	\$163,754.51	\$189,662	\$196,300	\$280,431
Administrative Assistant	\$16,314	\$16,314	\$16,314	\$17,000	\$17,000	\$17,000
Hourly Pay and Substitutes	\$1,598	\$130,967	\$82,567	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Consultants(PD, fund development, communications, etc.)	\$10,785	\$29,000	\$59,300	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$18,000
Travel and Conference	\$1,993	\$6,836	\$10,550	\$16,000	\$17,000	\$18,000
Supplies/equipment	\$3,163	\$5,400	\$8,284	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Curriculum resources & Evidence Based Program Materials	\$1,978	\$82,790	\$63,000	\$75,000	\$10,000	\$10,000
Other: Facility Rental		\$2,309	\$2,100	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Annual Operating Costs	\$143,892	\$472,799	\$454,639	\$432,406	\$375,040	\$454,186
Budget Sources	SY2012-13	SY2013-14	SY2014-15	SY2015-16	SY2016-17	SY2017-18
Local District Funds	\$69,996	\$83,686	\$159,589	\$107,000	\$110,000	\$113,000
Federal Funds:						
State Funds:						
NoVo Foundation grant (anticipated continued support)	\$73,896	\$389,112	\$295,049	\$275,067	\$250,000	\$250,000
Other Funding (Foundation Grants, Donations, Etc.):						
Total Budget Sources	\$143,892	\$472,799	\$454,639	\$382,067	\$360,000	\$363,000
Estimated Development Need	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$50,339	\$15,040	\$91,186



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COST CALCULATOR ASSUMPTIONS

Washoe County School District Model

Washoe County Implementation Summary

Washoe County School District utilized the first two years of their implementation to widely educate teachers, pilot strategies with a dozen schools, build consensus building, and develop an intensive three-day training for SEL Leadership Teams from all schools, which took place in years three and four. Each leadership team then leads site-level professional development based on modules provided by the district. Once implementing, each school receives additional professional development, coaching, and consulting by District SEL Specialists.

- This structured SEL implementation focuses on integration with and support of instruction and student learning of Common Core State Standards.
- With training and district coaching and support, principal and school site SEL leadership teams provide professional development to school staff and drive local SEL implementation.
- A low cost strategy for rapid roll out and authentic implementation in classrooms and at school sites.
- The district supports a high school freshman seminar course focused on teaching the five CASEL competencies, through professional development and curriculum resources.

Staffing Assumptions:

- .45 full time equivalent (FTE) SEL coordinator
- .3 FTE administrative assistant
- Washoe employed 1.15 FTE SEL specialists in year 1, and 2.45 FTE in years 2 & 3, with a gradual increase to 3.9 projected in year 6. Student enrollment is used in calculating SEL specialists. A minimum of 1 FTE SEL specialist is assumed.

Washoe County Cost Calculator Detailed Assumptions

Fixed Costs

- .45 FTE SEL Coordinator and .3 SEL Administrative Assistant

Variable Costs

- During year 1, 12 schools (13%) piloted SEL without evidence based programs.
- During year 2, 27 schools (29%) began implementation with evidence based programs, including the original 12.
- During year 3, 28 additional schools (30%) began implementation, with a total of 55 schools (59%) implementing.
- During year 4, 38 additional schools (41%) will begin implementation with a total of 93 schools (100%) implementing
- If student enrollment is larger than Washoe, enrollment is factored into number of specialists provided.
- If student enrollment is less than Washoe, a minimum of one specialist is provided in year 1 and a minimum of two SEL specialists in years 2-6
- Student enrollment is factored into number of SEL Specialists
- Student enrollment is factored into projections for hourly pay and substitutes
- Student enrollment is factored into projections for consultants
 - Consultants include costs for Evidence Based Program providers to provide direct training and training of trainers.
- Student enrollment is factored into projections for travel
- Student enrollment is factored into projections for supplies and equipment
- Student enrollment is factored into projections for curriculum materials.
 - K-8 curriculum materials assume MindUp and include teacher access to online resources. (Training costs are found in consultant costs)
 - 9-12 curriculum materials assume School Connect (Training costs are found in consultant costs)

Notes

- Costs for new curriculum materials are covered as schools begin implementation (years 2-4)
- WCSD budgeted \$75,000 for additional 9-12 SEL Evidence Based Materials in year 4. Student enrollment adjusts this.
- Student enrollment adjusts WCSD's estimated annual \$10,000 materials replacement budget in years 5-6
- Student enrollment is factored into facility rental costs.