Organize District to Promote Collaboration around SEL, Academics, and Equity

When school and district leaders align their efforts around SEL, academics, and equity, they support a greater impact in advancing life opportunities and outcomes for all students.

Below you’ll find an overview of: WHAT high-quality implementation looks like, WHY it’s important, WHEN to engage in this key activity, and WHO to involve. Also see the PROCESS page for step-by-step guidance on how to engage in the work, and the RESOURCES page for additional tools to support your efforts.

What does it mean to organize for collaboration among school and district leaders around SEL, academics, and equity?

Meaningful and regular collaboration ensures that district efforts around SEL, academics, and equity are aligned in their goals and strategies. This type of collaboration often requires thoughtfully designed structures that prevent or break down silos between district departments and ensure school leaders are partnering with a central office in planning and setting priorities.

When districts are well-organized to promote collaboration:

- The district SEL team/lead has influence at the cabinet level.
- The SEL team is housed in a department that is focused on all students, such as Teaching and Learning, College and Career Readiness, and/or Equity.
- Established structures promote cross-department collaboration and the SEL team partners with key departments to develop common goals and aligned strategies for supporting schools and students.
- SEL is embedded into frameworks for equity, academics, and school improvement.

Use the Rubric to assess how well you’ve organized the district to promote collaboration.

Strategies for organizing the district to promote collaboration may include:

- Designing district organizational charts to bridge connected workstreams.
- Ensuring that the SEL team is housed in a department that is focused on all students rather than specialized student services.
- Developing and monitoring a strategic plan that aligns SEL, academics, and equity efforts.
- Aligning district frameworks around SEL, academics, and equity.
- Planning regular SEL updates to the superintendent's cabinet and providing a process for the cabinet to provide feedback on key SEL-related decisions.
- Setting up regular cross-departmental meetings between district leaders in SEL, academics, and equity to share best practices and progress toward goals, collaboratively plan, and reflect on collaboration.
Creating frequent opportunities for the SEL lead/team to work with school leaders and their supervisors in supporting implementation.

Why is organizing for collaboration important?

SEL is a powerful lever for advancing deep academic learning and educational equity. When the efforts are siloed, however, SEL can be viewed as a competing priority or just another district initiative that will come and go. It's critically important that school and district leaders are able to see the connections between SEL, academics, and equity and are able to reflect this connection in their daily work. When district efforts around SEL, academics, and equity are aligned in their goals and strategies, they will have a greater impact in advancing life opportunities and outcomes for all students.

Connecting the dots at the district level leads to greater investment at the school level. Educators choose to use class time for SEL when they see how it helps students get along, stay engaged, and improve motivation and effort. School leaders embrace SEL when they see it as part of their strategy to improve school climate and connectedness, reduce disciplinary infractions, increase attendance and enrollment, and retain and attract highly-skilled staff members. District leaders expand support for SEL when the case is made clear: SEL is a major lever for school and student success and enhances any school improvement effort. This integration of SEL throughout district work requires dedicated collaboration.

When should my district promote collaboration?

As you develop a plan for SEL implementation, you'll want to begin planning how cabinet, central office, and school staff will collaborate around SEL, academics, and equity. Throughout implementation and as part of continuous improvement, you'll also want to routinely review and adjust collaborative practices to ensure they are supporting your district's goals.

Who needs to be involved?

Promoting collaborative structures may include reviewing departmental organizational charts and reporting structures, and will likely require some involvement from the district superintendent or chief of staff. In addition, you'll want to develop collaborative structures among the following stakeholders:

- The superintendent's cabinet
- The SEL lead and team
- The Academic department lead and key team members
- The Equity lead and key team members
- Supervisors of school leaders
- School leaders and key team members
- Any other departments that may intersect with the district's SEL priorities