Promote Collaboration Around SEL,

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quality implementation looks like, WHY it's important, WHEN to engage in e the PROCESS page for step-by-step guidance on how to engage in the al tools to support your efforts.

r collaboration among school and district leaders ity?

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 and collaborating on accountability strategies and professional learning.
- 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

ı the SEL team/lead has influence, developing structures to promote cross-
ɡies, and embedding SEL into frameworks for equity, academics, and
ss your current level of implementation.

ɔals, plans, and frameworks around SEL, academics,

y outlining the relevance of SEL within other district goals and
Case for School Connectedness" outlines the base of evidence showing
tful relationships, and emotional safety are linked to outcomes that
achievement, graduation, attendance, and reduced misconduct.

Crosswalk your SEL goals and strategies with your district's strategic plan, school improvement goals and frameworks, and any other major district priorities or initiatives. Determine:

- Which district priorities and goals have clear connections to SEL?
- What district priorities and goals could be strengthened by SEL?
- How does SEL implementation currently support these priorities and goals?
- How could SEL implementation better support these priorities and goals?

In particular, you'll want to review your district's priorities and plans around SEL, academic, and equity efforts. Consider the following questions:

- Does your district have a strategic plan that aligns the goals and efforts around SEL, academics, and equity? Or are there separate implementation plans around each effort? Who is involved in each of these plans?
- How do the goals, strategies, and frameworks around SEL, academics, and equity connect? Are there any areas of disconnect?
- What do districtwide efforts around SEL, academics, and equity require of school and district staff? Are there overlapping or competing demands?

If you're finding any disconnect between your SEL plans and academic- and equity-related efforts, you'll want to bring department or team leads together to discuss and address these areas of disconnect. It may also be beneficial to create or discuss shared goals, and outline how each department's strategies contribute to these goals. ISD 197 in Minnesota shares a strong example of this — their SEL and Equity leaders co-developed a set of learning experiences and classroom walkthrough tools to improve understanding of how SEL and equity initiatives intersect.

If you've created an SEL implementation plan, you'll also want to review this plan closely and identify areas where collaboration with other departments or with schools is needed. For example, rolling out an SEL curriculum will require close collaboration with schools to train and support teachers. It will also likely require working with academic departments to ensure the SEL curriculum is aligned to and supported by teaching frameworks or practices. You may also need to work with the Equity department or staff to review the cultural relevance of the curriculum and identify ways to support teachers in culturally competent SEL instruction.

2. Review your district's existing departmental structures and collaborative practices.

Next, review what structures already exist in the district that promote collaboration within the cabinet, between departments, and between central office and schools.

You may want to start by looking at the district's organizational chart and, in particular, where the SEL team is housed. One of the clearest ways to promote collaboration is to create departmental structures that ensure SEL, academics, and equity have shared priorities and strategies. For example, many districts house the SEL team under academic departments such as Teaching and Learning or College and Career Readiness; others have established the SEL team as a part of their Equity department.

While there are many ways to organize departments, CASEL strongly recommends that SEL work is housed in a department that is focused on all students rather than placing SEL in a specialized service department. This ensures that SEL efforts are woven into the district's holistic approach to education, not used as an isolated intervention for only at-risk students or schools. Here are some sample organizational charts:

- Sacramento City Unified School District houses SEL within the academic office
- Austin ISD has a district office for SEL and MTSS
- Denver Public Schools includes SEL within the district office for Student Equity and Opportunity

If the SEL team is housed in a separate department from academics and equity, review how regularly these teams come together to plan and share best practices. Also, examine how the central office works with school leaders and their supervisors to plan and implement key priorities.

Lastly, you'll want to review how the SEL team is able to collaborate with and influence the district's top leadership. Consider the following questions:

- How often does the SEL lead or team get to meet with the cabinet?
- How often does the cabinet discuss SEL progress and receive updates on implementation?
- How does the cabinet communicate feedback to the SEL team?

3. Schedule regular updates and feedback sessions for the superintendent's cabinet on SEL priorities and plans.

If the superintendent's cabinet is not already engaging regularly with the district's SEL lead, plan how you will maintain senior leadership's focus on SEL priorities and plans. You may want to plan a regular cadence of SEL updates as part of existing cabinet meetings. This may be an opportunity for the SEL lead to present on progress toward implementation goals, highlight successes, or raise challenges that need senior leadership's support. This also provides a way for senior leadership to provide feedback to ensure SEL implementation stays aligned to the district's overall vision. Ongoing collaboration with the cabinet helps ensure SEL remains a top district priority.

4. Set up collaborative structures between district leaders who are responsible for SEL, academic, and equity initiatives.

After you've developed shared goals and aligned frameworks for SEL, academics, and equity, you'll want to ensure collaboration continues throughout implementation. It's a good idea to set up regular cross-departmental meetings so that district staff working on SEL, academics, and equity can collaboratively monitor progress toward shared goals, keep each other updated on implementation plans, share best practices, and continue aligning strategies. These meetings are also an opportunity to build supportive relationships between staff that help deepen the level of collaboration. You may want to use the three signature practices of SEL as a way to structure these meetings to build collaboration.

Work together to identify common goals and strategies for integration. The goal is to explore areas of mutual enhancement, not areas of overlap or to "tack on" SEL to something they are doing, which could make a potential

partner feel territorial or inconvenienced. Consider the following questions as you explore integration possibilities:

- Can SEL enhance student or adult skill development to better achieve the objective of the priority?
- Can SEL build connections among students or adults to improve their ability to work collaboratively to achieve a goal related to the priority?
- Can SEL practices enhance the priority with students or parents by offering positive and supportive opportunities for engagement?
- Can SEL training increase positive and supportive staff engagement with students to help them take full advantage of strategies or interventions related to the priority?
- Can aligning any of the priorities with current SEL activities provide greater continuity for students, staff, or parents to help with implementation or increase success for the priority?

For an example of how this process can look, read about West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools and how they collaborated to create a unified approach to SEL, built upon a district framework prioritizing relationships, equity, and achievement.

5. Set up collaborative structures between the SEL team, school leaders, and their supervisors.

Because the success of your district SEL plan will likely rely heavily on how schools engage in implementation, it is critically important to collaborate closely with school leaders and their supervisors. You'll want to ensure that any plans for SEL implementation are closely aligned to and supportive of any overall school improvement plans and that SEL is embedded in the school's own strategic plans. This may mean setting up regular meetings with district leaders who supervise principals to align goals and strategies and get their feedback on SEL rollout plans. Many districts have also found it helpful to bring together cohorts of principals and/or school teams regularly to collaborate on SEL implementation.

6. Review and refine collaborative practices.

While cross-departmental meetings and aligned frameworks help build collaboration, these structures alone do not ensure that meaningful collaboration is occurring. It's important to build in a regular routine of reflecting on and refining collaborative practices. This may occur as a debrief during existing collaboration meetings, through surveys and focus groups, or during a separate set-aside time. When reflecting, consider the following questions:

- How well did we collaborate over this past [project, month, quarter, etc.] to reach our shared goals?
- Did all involved stakeholders feel like they were kept "in the loop"? Why or why not?
- Were all of our different priorities and needs represented and addressed during collaboration? Were any priorities routinely left out?
- Were our collaborative meetings run efficiently and effectively, and did they provide an opportunity for equity of voice?
- Were there any missed opportunities for collaboration?
- What can we do to improve collaboration going forward?

The SEL team can also take stock of all SEL-related initiatives to improve collaboration, and regularly share with other departments how SEL efforts support broad district priorities and goals in order to prevent the viewing of SEL as an isolated objective.

Go Back

Focus Area 1
Build Foundational Support and Plan

Focus Area 2
Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity

Focus Area 3
Promote SEL for Students

Focus Area 4
Reflect on Data for Continuous Improvement

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om Visits and Look-Fors

:arning experiences and classroom walk-through tools to develop a shared
ves intersect in classroom environments and instruction.

ta Heights-Eagan Area Schools

TAGS equity school visit/observation tool

District-Level Learnings From the Field: Redesigning School District Systems and Structures for Human Thriving

Part of the BELE learning series, this paper explores insights from our equity initiatives in partner districts. It focuses on the conditions necessary to create equitable learning environments that enhance the student experience, and where districts should focus their efforts to sustain meaningful change.

TAGS SEL partnerships equity

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

2011 to 2021: 10 Years of SEL in U.S. School Districts

Ten years ago, CASEL began collaborating with school district SEL leaders to explore the question - Is it possible to implement SEL systemically to positively impact students across a large urban school district? Not only did districts demonstrate that it was possible, but every district has deepened and expanded SEL implementation since joining the collaborative. This anniversary report details 6 key insights from these districts about how they were able to sustain SEL over the long term, even as the people and contexts within the district changed.

SOURCE:
CASEL

Convening a Cross-Functional Advisory Council for SEL: Resources, Best Practices, and Suggestions

Key considerations for districts as they build a council consisting of members from different organizations and departments to align social and emotional learning between in-school and out-of-school time settings.

SOURCE:
CASEL

TAGS community partnerships | community relations | out of school

SEL Trends: Reorganizing District Central Offices

From CASEL's SEL Trends series, this issue highlights ways districts' organizational structure has shifted to house SEL staff within departments dedicated to teaching and learning, as a reflection of the priority to integrate SEL with academics and yield benefits for all schools and students.

SOURCE:
CASEL

TAGS SEL and Academic Integration | district organizational charts | human and financial resource alignment | integrate with district priorities

SELWell Menu of Supports

Boston's Office of Social Emotional Learning & Wellness (SELWell) is made up of a range of departments that work together to improve the social, emotional, and physical health and wellness of all students. This menu includes a snapshot of each contributing team and their services organized by tier.

SOURCE: Boston Public Schools

TAGS trauma | SEL partnerships | MTSS | professional learning

Find ready-to-use tools for districts

TITLE

Integrating Equity and SEL: Classroom Visits and Look-Fors

A Minnesota school district shares a set of learning experiences and classroom walk-through tools to develop a shared understanding of how SEL and equity initiatives intersect in classroom environments and instruction.

SOURCE: ISD 197 - West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools

TAGS equity | school visit/observation tool

See artifacts shared by districts and schools

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Boston Public Schools Office of Social Emotional Learning & Wellness brochure

Boston's Office of Social Emotional Learning and Wellness (SELWell) is a collaborative department including athletics, health services, health and wellness, behavioral health, and other student support services alongside social and emotional learning instruction.

SOURCE: Boston Public Schools

TAGS SEL partnerships | communications

Sacramento SEL Board Training

Sacramento's presentation to the Board, sharing evidence of effectiveness of SEL implementation at pilot sites.

SOURCE: Sacramento City Unified School District

TAGS school board | budgeting | fundraising | SEL overview | implementation plan | college and career readiness | professional learning | integrate with district priorities | district SEL expertise

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Mid-sized District Organizational Chart

Sacramento City's org chart shows SEL housed within curriculum & instruction.

SOURCE: Sacramento City Unified School District

TAGS district organizational charts | human and financial resource alignment | integrate with district priorities

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District Organizational Chart: SEL within Student Equity and Opportunity

Denver Public Schools' Student Equity and Opportunity Office includes SEL within the larger category of Whole Child Support

SOURCE: Denver Public Schools

TAGS district organizational charts | human and financial resource alignment | integrate with district priorities

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Find resources to help you learn more on this topic

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