

Plan for Improvement

An established process for SEL continuous improvement promotes high-quality implementation across the district and schools.

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 is SEL continuous improvement?

The entire process of district SEL implementation is driven by continuous improvement. *Continuous improvement* refers to a cyclical and structured process to set goals, develop plans to achieve them, and use data throughout implementation to learn, address problems, and improve outcomes.

One of the most prominently used continuous improvement frameworks is the [Plan-Do-Study-Act \(PDSA\) cycle](#) (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). The PDSA cycle is made up of four phases: PLAN, DO, STUDY, and ACT. You engage in this cycle throughout SEL implementation as you identify your goals and strategies (PLAN); take action on key activities identified in your plan (DO); compile and reflect on implementation and outcome data throughout the year (STUDY); and make adjustments to your plan based on what you've learned (ACT).

Planning for continuous improvement includes the work you've done in Focus Area 1, [Key Activity: Shared Vision and Plan](#) to develop an action plan based on your current needs, resources, and level of implementation.

A strong plan for continuous improvement also includes:

Establishing a process for monitoring and reflecting on district- and school-level SEL implementation and progress toward goals.

Ensuring clear roles, responsibilities, and timelines for the continuous improvement process.

Committing to reflect on data throughout the year.

Providing support and tools to help school teams establish their own continuous improvement processes.

Use the [Rubric](#) to assess how well you've planned for improvement.

Why does my district need to plan for SEL continuous improvement?

District teams face urgent, unpredictable, and often competing demands. Thoughtful planning around SEL can ensure that implementation gains and maintains momentum despite these challenges. A clear plan for continuously improving implementation makes it more likely that work around SEL will sustain and remain appropriately focused.

Districts that neglect continuous improvement activities are unlikely to know when adjustments are needed in their plans until it's too late to take corrective action. Worse, these districts will be unequipped to respond to questions from stakeholders about progress with implementation or impact. Being able to demonstrate the value of SEL to stakeholders, such as district leadership and staff, students, families, and the district's school board, is an absolutely essential factor for sustaining commitment and buy-in for SEL.

When should my district plan for SEL continuous improvement?

While you may engage in many different levels of continuous improvement for SEL, districtwide implementation typically follows a year-long continuous improvement cycle in alignment with your district's annual planning and budgeting timelines. This means that you'd typically develop a year-long district SEL action plan, collect and review data throughout the year, and draw conclusions at the end of the academic year to inform the next year's plan.

By establishing a timeline at the front-end of the continuous improvement process, the SEL team can estimate how much lead time they'll need for data collection, compiling data, and reporting results in useful formats for stakeholders.

Although CASEL's District Resource Center focuses on a yearlong cycle of SEL continuous improvement, districts may engage in many different levels of continuous improvement with different timelines. In addition to a yearlong cycle for your district's SEL rollout plan, you may also engage in shorter continuous improvement cycles to test out a specific SEL program or initiative, while also building capacity and supporting school teams in their own continuous improvement.

Who should be involved in planning for continuous improvement?

The district's SEL lead and team will play a central role in planning for continuous improvement. It's helpful to determine who on the team will manage the overall SEL continuous improvement process, and who will oversee data collection and organization.

In addition, consider involving the following stakeholders in planning for continuous improvement:

- Key staff members from departments that lead SEL work across the district
- Members of district Research & Evaluation department (or external evaluator if district chooses to partner with one)
- Other district staff and members of the community whose buy-in is needed
- Stakeholders with decision-making power (for example, a staff member who has decision-making power at the cabinet level, someone who is involved with making important academic decisions, someone who has the authority to authorize professional learning and other expenditures, and/or principal supervisors)

Process

The steps below will help districts establish a process for monitoring and reflecting on district- and school-level SEL implementation and progress toward goals. This includes clear roles, responsibilities, and timelines for the continuous improvement process, a commitment to reflecting on data throughout the year, and support and tools to help school teams establish their own processes to improve SEL practice. Use the [Rubric](#) to assess your current level of implementation.

1. Determine what data you'll need to measure success and develop a timeline for data collection and reflection.

Reflect on what data will be needed throughout the year, considering what is already available and what will need to be collected. This involves linking data sources to each of your implementation and outcome goals. It is good practice to use multiple sources of data whenever possible ([Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010](#); [Wayman & Stringfield, 2006](#)). Ideally, data being collected as part of the district's SEL evaluation plan can provide much of the data needed for continuous improvement, but some additional data may be needed, especially related to monitoring progress with implementation.

Another helpful strategy is to leverage data already collected in the district. This is most efficient, since systems and structures for collecting these data have already been set up. Each district will have access to different kinds of data depending on what is collected at the school and district level. However, districts may find that available data don't fully address their continuous improvement priorities, or don't fully align with their definition of successful implementation. In these cases, you'll need to plan to collect new data to support continuous improvement.

There are two broad types of data that can be used for continuous improvement:

Implementation data

Data that provide information about if and how the activities within an implementation plan are being completed can help SEL teams identify what is going well and where there are challenges. A great source of implementation data is the CASEL District Implementation Rubric. This rubric provides a comprehensive overview of what systemic SEL looks like when it is fully implemented. [CASEL's Action Planning Workbook](#) is a tool for tracking data from the rubric, as well as action plans and key metrics. Depending on the goals and priorities you've set, you'll also want to identify specific metrics that help you measure implementation progress, such as number of staff who attend SEL professional learning or data collected from surveys on family engagement.

You'll also want to monitor implementation progress at the school-level to support school teams in their own continuous improvement processes, while also collecting data on the progress of your districtwide SEL roll-out strategy. CASEL offers multiple tools for assessing implementation progress at the school level. Used in combination, the district and individual school teams can obtain a comprehensive understanding of implementation progress and opportunities for improvement.

You can find school-level implementation monitoring tools in the [CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#), including:

- School-level implementation rubric
- Staff, Family and Community Survey of Schoolwide SEL Implementation
- SEL School Walkthrough Protocol

Outcome data

Data that show the result of a strategy or process can demonstrate changes over time and show whether the district is reaching its goals. These outcomes could relate to student social and emotional competencies (see [CASEL's SEL Assessment Guide](#)), academic achievement, attendance, equity-related outcomes, or attitudes and beliefs related to school climate and culture. Although it may take a year or two of SEL implementation to observe outcome

improvements, and sometimes longer for outcomes like academic achievement, forecasting a timeline and monitoring those outcomes can help to set realistic expectations and guide improvements.

Here are some available resources for finding and using SEL-related outcome measures:

- [SEL Assessment Guide](#): Spearheaded by CASEL, the SEL Assessment Work Group (AWG) created an online tool that offers guidance to educators on how to choose and use assessments of students' SEL competencies, specifically interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindsets. The SEL Assessment Guide focuses on measures currently used in practice and will expand over time as more are nominated.
- [Are You Ready to Assess Social and Emotional Development?](#): Including a brief, decision tree and an index of available SEL assessment, this suite of tools from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is intended to help education leaders, practitioners, and policymakers decide whether and how to assess social and emotional development.
- [School Climate Survey Compendia](#): The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) – from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) – maintains a compendium of valid and reliable surveys, assessments, and scales of school climate that can assist educators in their efforts to identify and assess their conditions for learning.

2. Establish clear roles and responsibilities for monitoring and reflecting on SEL implementation and progress toward goals.

District teams must also be clear about roles and responsibilities among those involved. Team members are set up for success when they know what is expected of them and how they can best contribute. A single person may fill several of these roles, or responsibilities can be distributed among team members, but clarity on this issue is key.

Here are some considerations for establishing roles and responsibilities:

- *Who will manage the process?* This role is critical for making sure team meetings that focus on the continuous improvement process are scheduled and keeping the team focused and on track throughout the year. This team member ensures there is time scheduled for reflecting on district SEL implementation progress at least once per semester and ideally at every team meeting.
- *Who will collection and manage data?* This role is critical for ensuring data are collected and accessible from administrators, the district, and other stakeholders who generate relevant data. This team member also ensures that relevant data is present, compiled, and in a format that is necessary for the team to effectively review.
- *Who will facilitate data reflection?* Having someone explicitly responsible for facilitating data reflection at meetings will ensure consistency and follow-through. A skilled facilitator effectively uses norms and protocols to guide the team through reviewing and learning from the compiled data.
- *Who will take the lead on sharing about progress, successes, and challenges?* This role is critical for ensuring communications about progress, results, and other aspects of the process the team wants to celebrate get shared with the right stakeholders. Openly and consistently sharing data and learnings can help reinforce that the purpose of this process is to drive improvement, rather than evaluate staff, students, schools, or the district itself.

3. Establish data reflection norms and protocols.

Establishing norms and protocols help ensure that continuous improvement conversations are focused and productive. In many districts, staff may feel nervous about how data is used, especially when tied to funding, staff evaluation, and

other high-stakes decisions. Establishing clear norms for how SEL data will be used for continuous improvement helps promote a safe, supportive environment for reflection.

Some considerations for data reflection norms include:

- The purpose of data reflection is to promote SEL continuous improvement and improve practice, and not to evaluate the districts, schools, staff, or students.
- All district-level data conversations should be “blame free,” and individual student data should be kept private by utilizing districtwide or school-level data.
- Conversations about data are meant to be authentic, challenging, and productive.
- Data help bring focus and objectivity to the conversation.

To develop data reflection norms, your SEL team can consider the following resources:

- [Creating norms tool](#) developed by [Learning Forward](#)
- [Setting group norms tool](#) developed by [Brushy Fork Institute at Berea College](#)

You’ll also want to consider how to structure conversations around data. Using a protocol can help participants focus on the data without making assumptions and ensure that the team draws on the full range of skills and perspectives in the room.

You may find it helpful to use this [ATLAS Looking at Data Protocol](#), which has been adapted for SEL continuous improvement. This protocol encourages team members to describe what they see in the data, make inferences, and share implications for future work. (Read more about how districts use protocols to guide data reflection meetings in [Key Activity: Data Reporting and Reflecting](#).)

4. Provide support and tools to help schools establish their own SEL continuous improvement processes.

Districts can support school teams with SEL continuous improvement in at least two ways:

- Trainings on how to collect and reflect-on different kinds of data
- Inviting school teams to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) facilitated by the district team.

During these PLCs, the district SEL team, ideally partnering with research and evaluation staff, can bring together school teams from across the district to learn from each other. These PLCs provide an opportunity to collaboratively reflect on data, share successes and challenges, and engage in collaborative problem-solving and planning.

Given the high demand on school teams’ time and the complexity of developing training sessions and PLCs, it’s important to begin planning for support to schools early in the year. It’s recommended that districts communicate dates for sessions by the start of the school year so that school teams can ensure participants are available and prepared (see [CASEL’s Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#) for tools and resources).

Resources

Below, you'll find resources to help plan for improvement.

See how districts have strategized and planned for improvement

TITLE

[Making SEL Assessment Work: Ten Practitioner Beliefs](#)

The National Practitioner Advisory Group, convened by CASEL and AIR as part of the work of the Assessment Work Group, share a statement of 10 beliefs about assessing SEL, actions to achieve each belief, and reflection questions for leadership teams.

SOURCE: Assessment Work Group

TAGS [student assessment](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#)

[Social Emotional Learning: Goal-Setting and Relationships are Part of District's Academic Core \(video\)](#)

Washoe County School District is featured in this video from Edweek, describing the district's process for developing SEL metrics for instructional purposes and growth.

SOURCE: Washoe County School District

TAGS [student assessment](#) [videos](#) [assessment](#) [continuous improvement](#)

[On the Road to Collecting SEL Data](#)

This presentation from Keeneyville School District describes their timeline of districtwide SEL implementation, the development of their walk-through protocol, and the way observaton data has been shared and used to drive improvement.

SOURCE: Keeneyville School District
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TAGS [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [school visit/observation tool](#) [conducting local SEL research](#)
[continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

[SEL-Related Metrics](#)

Nashville's combination of student surveys (Tripod and Safe & Supportive Schools), other data collected by schools and the district, and observable measures of SEL and climate.

SOURCE: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

TAGS [student assessment](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#)
[implementation evaluation](#)

[Washoe County's 17 Item Student Social and Emotional Competency Self Report](#)

Summary of the process of developing a 17 item student self-assessment of SEL used in Washoe, including the use of student focus groups, with results and connection to achievement and behavior outcomes. Item text is included.

SOURCE: Washoe County School

District

TAGS [student assessment](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [data dashboards](#)
[conducting local SEL research](#) [continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#) [youth voice](#)

Find ready-to-use tools

TITLE

[Develop Short-Term Goals for Districtwide SEL](#)

Short-term goals are what the district SEL team aims to accomplish within one year. This tool builds on a district's shared vision, long-term SEL goals, and SEL implementation roadmap and will support the district team in developing a detailed one-year action plan.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [define SEL metrics](#) [implementation plan](#) [continuous improvement](#) [planning](#)

[The CASEL Assessment Guide](#)

The Assessment Guide provides several resources for practitioners to select and use measures of student SEL, including guidance on how to select an assessment and use student SEL data, a catalog of SEL assessments equipped with filters and bookmarking, and real-world accounts of how practitioners are using SEL assessments.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [student assessment](#) [toolkit](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#)
[continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

[MeasuringSEL - Implement Assessment](#)

From CASEL's Measuring SEL practitioner resources, this page provides recommendations for implementing any chosen SEL assessment, including important decisions to make and strategies for communicating about the assessment with stakeholders.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [student assessment](#) [anti-bias](#) [toolkit](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#)
[continuous improvement](#) [planning](#)

[Goal and Metric Tracking Template](#)

A template for tracking progress toward a district priority, with example goals from Chicago and Washoe County.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [assessment](#) [data dashboards](#) [implementation evaluation](#) [planning](#)

[Data Sources to Analyze SEL Implementation and Outcomes](#)

A breakdown of how to gather data and use to measure implementation quality, program quality, academic, attendance & behavior outcomes, and student SEL skill growth, with useful links to additional resources.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [student assessment](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#)
[continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

[Tool for Selecting Measure\(s\) of School Climate](#)

Guidance and useful links for selecting a tool to measure school climate, or for evaluating a tool the district is already using.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)
[culture and climate](#) [family and community engagement](#) [youth voice](#)

[Student Survey](#)

This tool from the CASEL's Guide to Schoolwide SEL has students rate their perception of school climate, adult support, and sense of belonging on a 5 point scale.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [assessment](#) [continuous improvement](#) [culture and climate](#) [youth voice](#)

[U.S. DOE School Climate Surveys and web-based platform](#)

This adaptable survey and web-based platforms allows states and districts to collect and act on validated school climate data in real time, and can be downloaded and administered at no cost.

SOURCE: United States DOE

TAGS [toolkit](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#) [continuous improvement](#)
[implementation evaluation](#) [culture and climate](#)

[Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in the Context of New Accountability](#)

A paper from the Learning Policy Institute on how SEL and school climate indicators can be included in accountability and improvement systems under ESSA. Appendix includes survey tools from districts and states.

SOURCE: Learning Policy Institute

TAGS [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#) [continuous improvement](#)
[implementation evaluation](#)

[School Climate Survey Compendia](#)

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments maintains this list of valid and reliable surveys, assessments, and scales of school climate.

SOURCE: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments

TAGS [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [continuous improvement](#) [PK-12](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

[MeasuringSEL: Review the Assessment Options](#)

From CASEL's Measuring SEL practitioner resources, this page describes the advantages and limitations of self reports, interviews, observations, and performance-based assessments.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [student assessment](#) [budgeting](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#)
[continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

[Definitions of Important Measurement Concepts](#)

Everything you need to know about validity, reliability, and bias when selecting a measurement tool.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [student assessment](#) [anti-bias](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [culturally responsive](#) [assessment](#)

[RAND Education Assessment Finder: Measuring social, emotional, and academic competencies](#)

A web-based tool that practitioners, researchers, and policymakers can use to explore what assessments are available, what they measure, how they are administered, and how to use results.

SOURCE: RAND

TAGS [student assessment](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [continuous improvement](#)
[implementation evaluation](#)

[CORE Districts Tool: Social-Emotional Competencies Selection Process](#)

A 6 step prioritization exercise used by CORE districts to vote on competencies to include and exclude in their assessment.

SOURCE: California CORE

Districts

TAGS student assessment SEL competence define SEL metrics assessment
family and community engagement youth voice

[MeasuringSEL: Considerations for SEL Competency Assessment](#)

From CASEL's Measuring SEL practitioner resources, this page describes important factors any district should consider when choosing to measure students' SEL competencies or analyze results.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS student assessment define SEL metrics equity culturally responsive assessment PK-12

[MeasuringSEL: Plan the Role of Assessment](#)

From CASEL's Measuring SEL practitioner resources, this page differentiates between formative and summative purposes of SEL competency assessment, prompting thinking about intended use of assessment in order to select appropriate measures.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS student assessment define SEL metrics assessment continuous improvement
implementation evaluation

[Measuring MESH](#)

TransformEd's measures of mindsets, essential skills, and habits that are correlated with GPA, test scores, attendance, and suspension. Survey items and administration protocols are included within the paper.

SOURCE: Transforming Education

TAGS student assessment toolkit define SEL metrics assessment continuous improvement
implementation evaluation

[California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys](#)

Customizable validated surveys for students grades 5 and up, families, and staff focusing on connectedness, climate, safety, well-being, and support. Cost of surveys and reports are subsidized in California.

SOURCE: California

DOE

TAGS student assessment define SEL metrics assessment continuous improvement
implementation evaluation culture and climate

[Making Use of Existing Outcome Data](#)

Suggested sources for using data your district already collects to monitor progress and outcomes of SEL, with reflection questions.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#) [continuous improvement](#)
[implementation evaluation](#) [SEL leadership](#)

[American Institutes for Research Conditions for Learning Survey](#)

Contact information to use this no-cost survey, appropriate for grades 2-12. It gathers students' views on climate, support, challenge and expectations, and social and emotional skills.

SOURCE:

AIR

TAGS [student assessment](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [continuous improvement](#)
[implementation evaluation](#) [culture and climate](#)

[CORE Case Study Tools](#)

A set of 11 tools to support districts into deciding whether to assess, what skills to focus on, selecting valid measures, and interpreting and acting on data.

SOURCE: Transforming Education

TAGS [student assessment](#) [PLC](#) [toolkit](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#)
[conducting local SEL research](#) [continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

[Are You Ready to Assess Social and Emotional Development?](#)

Toolkit from AIR providing key background information about SEL assessment to weigh risks and benefits, a decision tree, and a comprehensive index of validated tools for measuring SEL outcomes.

SOURCE:

AIR

TAGS [student assessment](#) [toolkit](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#)
[continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

See artifacts shared by districts and schools

TITLE

[Baltimore City Public Schools SEL Evaluation Framework](#)

Developed with evaluation partner Hanover Research, this document provides a framework for the evaluation of Baltimore's social and emotional learning programming.

SOURCE: Baltimore City Public Schools

TAGS [define SEL metrics](#) [continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#)

[Minnesota DOE SEL Assessment Guidance](#)

An example of state guidance for districts on the purpose, methods, considerations, reporting, and using the results of SEL assessments for continuous improvement.

SOURCE: Minnesota DOE

TAGS [student assessment](#) [board policies](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#)
[integrate with district priorities](#)

[SEL Department and Specialist Logic Model to Improve District SEL Implementation](#)

Describes the purpose, goals, and activities of Austin's SEL Specialists -- good tool for a district team that is lobbying for the creation of new SEL-focused positions.

SOURCE: Austin Independent School District

Find resources to help you learn more on this topic

TITLE

[Making SEL Assessment Work: Ten Practitioner Beliefs](#)

The National Practitioner Advisory Group, convened by CASEL and AIR as part of the work of the Assessment Work Group, share a statement of 10 beliefs about assessing SEL, actions to achieve each belief, and reflection questions for leadership teams.

SOURCE: Assessment Work Group

TAGS [student assessment](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [assessment](#)

[A Primer for Continuous Improvement in Schools and Districts](#)

This white paper lays out a model and principles for improvement, describes the Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle, and includes examples for using a Fishbone Diagram and a Driver Diagram to define a problem and establish an aim.

SOURCE: University/Nonprofit Research Institution

TAGS [assessment](#) [continuous improvement](#) [implementation evaluation](#) [planning](#)

[Youth Participatory Evaluation](#)

Youth Participatory Evaluation is an approach that engages young people in evaluating the programs and systems designed to serve them. This page provides resources and principles that can support districts in working with students in the cycle of continuous improvement.

SOURCE: External website

TAGS [toolkit](#) [student leadership](#) [assessment](#) [conducting local SEL research](#) [continuous improvement](#)
[youth voice](#)
