

Promote trust, community, and collective efficacy among staff

When districts create a supportive and productive staff culture, they can deepen SEL implementation and the impact on 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 promote staff trust, community, and collective efficacy?

Trust, community, and collective efficacy among staff are strong predictors of how well schools can carry out improvement initiatives ([Bryk & Schneider, 2003](#)) and impact student achievement ([Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018](#)), and serve as a critical foundation for SEL.

Trust between staff is developed over time through many interactions, and is essential for creating buy-in, motivating staff to take risks and give extra time and effort, and spreading best practices throughout a school and district ([Bryk & Schneider, 2003](#)).

A sense of *community* among staff refers to a staff culture based on supportive relationships, mutual care and respect, and interpersonal connections.

Collective efficacy is one of the most significant predictors of school effectiveness ([Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018](#)). It means that staff not only feel connected with one another, but also believe that as a group they have the capacity to support students in succeeding and meet their academic, social, and emotional needs.

Well-designed structures for promoting staff trust, community, and collective efficacy:

Provide frequent opportunities for staff to build supportive professional relationships and a sense of shared purpose and efficacy.

Establish norms or shared agreements between staff that guide respectful interactions, effective collaboration, and inclusive district culture.

Provide staff with dedicated time to engage regularly in collaborative reflection and problem-solving, sharing ideas, and community-building.

Ensure regular collection of data on staff perceptions of their work climate that is used for continuous improvement.

Use the [Rubric](#) to assess your structures for promoting trust, community, and collective efficacy among staff.

Why does my district need to promote staff trust, community, and collective efficacy?

Communities of adults who know and trust one another, who are skilled at working together toward shared goals, are more successful in implementing, improving, and sustaining SEL. Conversely, when the staff culture is characterized by mistrust, isolation, and feelings of powerlessness, SEL will at best be implemented in pockets, and most likely will not last beyond a school year or two.

The staff culture within a district team, within a school, and between schools and the district's central office will all impact whether SEL implementation will take hold, and the degree to which staff will make changes, work together, respond creatively to setbacks, or accept support. When leaders become aware of existing relational dynamics, they can

implement practices to strengthen relationships that will result in more meaningful collaboration and engagement with SEL.

- This [study](#) of school communities in Chicago describes the social relationships among adults that contributed to school improvement or stagnation.
- The research brief *How do principals influence student achievement?* (Allensworth & Hart, 2018) shows that administrators who successfully move the needle on student achievement most often do so through the lever of school climate and staff collaboration.
- The SCARF model describes five key factors of job satisfaction and productivity that are rooted in the quality of relationships and communication among adults (see this [article](#) and summary [video](#)).

Staff culture also impacts individuals' choices and actions. For example, teachers in schools with strong collective efficacy have more respectful and caring interactions with students, teach more challenging content, and are more persistent and likely to change the way they teach when students aren't learning ([Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy 2004](#); [Sosa & Gomez, 2012](#)). This is essential in school communities that serve culturally diverse and marginalized students who are "consistently and persistently perceived as having deficits that impede them from academically learning or advancing" ([Sosa & Gomez, 2012](#)).

When should my district promote staff trust, community, and collective efficacy?

If trusting, collaborative relationships are not yet the norm, the district or individual schools may choose to step back and focus first on building community among adult stakeholders before focusing on SEL for students. Schools and districts that have a strong foundation of trusting staff relationships should still work to strengthen ties and maintain structures that promote inclusion and collaboration, but can more easily do so alongside student-focused SEL work.

District SEL teams can highlight the importance of staff trust, community-building, and practices to build collective efficacy within any overview of schoolwide SEL, professional learning targeted to school leaders or SEL leadership teams, and frameworks for improving SEL implementation.

Who needs to be involved?

When defining a strategy to build staff trust, community, and collective efficacy, consider three main types of relationships involving district staff, school leaders, and school staff:

- Relationships among members of district teams or among school staff teams
 - Structure opportunities for meaningful professional collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making. Collective efficacy is strengthened when members are able to "influence instructionally relevant school decisions" ([Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004](#)).
 - Implement practices to ensure that all team members feel emotionally safe, model SEL competence, and feel socially connected to their colleagues. The emotional experience of adults in schools impacts the learning environment, student motivation and well-being, and students' ability to cope with difficulty ([Stephanou, Gkavras, & Doukeridou, 2013](#)).
 - Regularly convene to review and reflect on data. When staff see evidence of progress, the experience of success builds collective efficacy, which increases the level of "press" felt by individuals to persist in their efforts ([Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004](#)).
- Relationships between district leaders and school leaders/staff
 - District SEL leaders should recognize the efforts and expertise from schools within the district, and respectfully draw upon their experience and perspectives as they make decisions and develop districtwide strategies.
 - District SEL leaders should be highly responsive to questions and requests from schools.
- Relationships between school leaders and their staff
 - School leaders should model social and emotional competence in the way they interact with staff.

- School leaders should demonstrate trust and respect for school staff through shared leadership and decision-making.

Relationships between staff and students' families and community members are also key to successful SEL implementation, and you can find resources for strengthening those relationships in Focus Area 3, [Key Activity: Family and Community Partnerships](#).