

Strengthen Central Office Expertise

When central office leaders understand SEL research and practices, they are able to promote and sustain systemic implementation.

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 strengthen central office SEL expertise?

When you strengthen SEL expertise, you ensure that leaders and staff across the district develop a strong knowledge base in SEL research, theory, and implementation methods.

A strong approach to strengthening central office expertise includes:

Providing professional learning that relates to SEL research and practice to central office leaders and staff from all departments.

Providing foundational professional learning as onboarding for new staff.

Supporting central office staff in understanding their role in integrating SEL into their area of work and speaking clearly about the value of SEL.

Convening SEL learning communities among central office staff.

Use the [Rubric](#) to assess your approach to strengthening central office expertise.

In order to understand their role in integrating SEL into their work and speak clearly about the value of SEL, staff need to understand:

- The framework for [systemic social and emotional learning](#), including the [five core social and emotional competencies](#) and how to reinforce these competencies across district, schools, communities, and home.
- The [approaches](#) used to foster SEL
- The [impact of SEL](#) on academics, behavior, and life outcomes.
- How SEL supports [educational equity](#) and inclusive learning environments.
- How SEL supports the [district's overall vision and goals](#).

Why is it important to build SEL expertise in the central office?

The more that leaders in the central office understand the practices and benefits of SEL, the better able they'll be to promote and sustain systemic SEL implementation districtwide. This ensures that SEL is not siloed into a single department or viewed as a stand-alone initiative, but ingrained into all of the district's work.

Leaders who have a solid knowledge base in SEL can also work more effectively to advocate and budget for SEL in the district and in the classroom, and identify specific opportunities within their departments for integrating and promoting SEL.

SEL expertise allows district leaders to:

- Communicate the importance of SEL to schools, funders, students, families, and the community.
- Make strategic and budgetary decisions informed by SEL priorities.
- Identify new opportunities for promoting SEL.
- Embed SEL into various professional learning, resources, frameworks, and guidance.

When should my district begin building expertise in SEL?

Ideally, building SEL expertise is one of the first steps for districtwide adoption of SEL. Begin with core district leaders, including the superintendent, cabinet members, board members, and those who are directly responsible for leading key aspects of SEL implementation. After these leaders have established a foundational level of SEL knowledge to support SEL policy and implementation, you can begin introducing SEL principles and practices to larger groups of central office staff. Deepening expertise in SEL will be an ongoing process throughout implementation, with different timelines and approaches based on staffs' roles and needs.

Who should be involved?

Ideally, your district will support all staff in building a foundational level of SEL knowledge. Some of the district leaders you may wish to prioritize when developing a plan for building and deepening SEL expertise are:

- SEL lead and team
- District school board members
- The superintendent and cabinet
- Instructional leaders and coaches
- Professional learning leaders
- Principal development leaders
- Student behavior and supports leaders
- Key department leaders (such as equity, academics, etc.)
- Principal supervisors
- Human resources staff
- Budget/grants staff
- Union leaders
- Communications leader
- Family and community engagement leaders

Be aware, however, that the same type of SEL development session may not be appropriate for all the staff listed here. Some, like board members, need a higher-level, less practice-oriented understanding of SEL, while professional learning leaders and instructional leaders need more in-depth expertise. Learn more about how to differentiate your development sessions in the [Process](#) section.

Process

This process will support districts in providing professional learning about SEL research and practice to enable central office staff to understand their role in integrating SEL into their area of work and to speak clearly about the value of SEL. Use the [Rubric](#) to assess your current level of implementation.

1. Identify which district leaders will provide strategic support for SEL implementation and determine the appropriate level of engagement.

Although SEL expertise is important for a variety of central office leaders and staff, not all will need the same level of expertise. Before you begin planning engagement focused on SEL, think about the levels of engagement necessary for different groups of district staff.

You can use or adapt this [Central Office Expertise Development Plan template](#) as a starting point for mapping out who to engage and the level of expertise needed. Here is an example of Austin's [plan to develop SEL expertise](#), with differentiated learning plans for staff who are deeply, moderately, and least involved in strategic support for SEL implementation.

2. Design a central office professional learning program that addresses the staff groups you need to reach.

You'll want to ensure you've planned professional learning that reaches leaders and staff from all departments, including foundational professional learning for all new staff. To further strengthen expertise, plan to convene SEL learning communities among central office staff.

There is a range of approaches you may choose to take when designing professional learning to meet the needs of the various groups you identified in Step 1. Here are a few approaches and resources: [Strategies and Resources to Support Central Office Expertise](#).

If you plan to differentiate learning materials by student age to support the learning of leaders who focus on specific grade levels, reference this curated set of [articles and videos organized by elementary, middle, and high school levels](#).

3. Assess how well professional learning prepares central office to support SEL implementation.

To ensure your professional learning program is strengthening central office expertise, you'll want to regularly monitor how well central office staff understand their role in integrating SEL into their area of work and are able to speak clearly about the value of SEL. You may want to administer surveys or conduct interviews to help you collect this information.

Also consider whether key district leaders:

- Advocate for SEL even when dedicated SEL staff aren't present.
- Can explain the impact and value of SEL to any audience.
- Can explain how SEL supports district priorities, equity, academic standards, and quality instructional practices.
- Ask questions about and provide ideas for integrating SEL into their work.

Use this information to differentiate engagement strategies, highlight the voices of the strongest SEL advocates, focus efforts on new leaders and groups who are less conversant about SEL, and improve engagement strategies that have not been effective.

4. Monitor emerging opportunities to strengthen SEL expertise and sustain SEL as a priority for leadership.

As the district landscape changes, new leadership, strategies, and opportunities will call for renewed efforts to ensure SEL remains a priority among district leaders.

- Integrate SEL into conversations with funders, government officials, board members, and other potential supporters.
- Provide leaders with detailed statistics on implementation and metrics on student SEL outcomes in your district.
- Re-engage all leaders in advance of budgetary or strategic planning to keep SEL on the radar.
- Invite leaders to see SEL in action in your district or a district with more advanced implementation.
- Engage new leaders as they join the district or take on new roles.
- Report to the board of education about the district's progress and impact of SEL implementation at least once annually.

Resources

Below, you'll find resources to help strengthen central office expertise.

See how districts have strategized and planned to strengthen central office expertise

TITLE

[SEL Expertise Development Year 1 Plan](#)

Austin created 3 professional development outlines for leaders needing different levels of learning about SEL, includes links to videos and presentations and discussion questions for each leader audience.

SOURCE: Austin Independent School

District

TAGS SEL partnerships reading lists - staff SEL overview professional learning

integrate with district priorities district SEL expertise building buy-in for SEL SEL leadership

[Year-Long Expertise Development and Implementation Planning for Schools and Central Office](#)

El Paso's plan for developing SEL expertise among school and district leaders over the course of one academic year.

SOURCE: El Paso Independent School

District

TAGS SEL partnerships implementation plan professional learning planning

integrate with district priorities district SEL expertise SEL leadership

Find ready-to-use tools

TITLE

[Recommended Videos](#)

This list contains links to videos that can be used to introduce SEL, strengthen commitment, and discuss key topics with stakeholder groups. Videos are arranged by category and length.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS videos

[The Impact of Social and Emotional Learning \(video\)](#)

The research is clear: SEL is essential for academic and life success. In this video, district and CASEL leadership highlight data that demonstrates improvements in attendance, drop out rates, suspensions, expulsions, and academic growth.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [videos](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [continuous improvement](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[What is Social and Emotional Learning? \(video\)](#)

From CASEL and school district leadership, this video conceptualizes social and emotional learning and describes what it looks, feels and sounds like in educational spaces.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [videos](#) [SEL overview](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#) [SEL leadership](#)

[Strategies and Resources to Support Central Office Expertise](#)

There are a range of approaches you may choose to take when designing professional learning to meet the needs of the various groups you identified as stakeholders. In this document you'll find a few approaches and resources.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [professional learning](#) [integrate with district priorities](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[SEL: Creating Safe & Supportive Learning Environments \(video\)](#)

Creating a safe, supportive environment for social and emotional learning (SEL) has been, and remains, a high priority for CASEL. It is inherent in our focus on integrating SEL into all aspects of school and district practice through a systemic approach.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [videos](#) [SEL overview](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#) [SEL leadership](#)

[Cross-District Visit Observation Tool \(Sacramento\)](#)

This observation tool was used at CASEL's 2019 Cross District Learning Event in Sacramento. It highlights the intersections of SEL and equity goals in Sacramento City Unified School District.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [equity](#) [school visit/observation tool](#)

[Cross-District Visit Observation Tool \(Chicago\)](#)

This observation tool was used at CASEL's 2018 Cross District Learning Event in Chicago. It highlights the 4 domains of Chicago's School Climate Standards.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [school visit/observation tool](#)

[Recommended Readings for Staff](#)

Recommended Readings for staff development. Topics include Introducing the Importance of SEL, SEL and Equity, SEL and Academic Integration, Restorative Practices, Adult SEL, and Partnering with Families for SEL.

(Within each topic, readings are listed in order of length)

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [reading lists - staff](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[Central Office Expertise Development Plan](#)

You can use or adapt this template as a starting point for planning how to develop central office expertise by audience.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [professional learning](#) [integrate with district priorities](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[What does SEL look like in elementary, middle, and high school?](#)

This curated list of articles and videos illustrate what SEL looks like in elementary, middle, and high school settings. Explore these links to deepen your knowledge and find grade-differentiated resources for professional learning and planning.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [middle school grades](#) [high school grades](#) [elementary school grades](#)

[SEL 3 Signature Practices introductory video - Adult SEL](#)

Video describing the SEL 3 signature practices (welcoming inclusion activity, engaging practices, and optimistic closure) and how to use them in settings with adults, such as a meeting or professional learning.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [PLC](#) [mindfulness](#) [three signature practices](#) [videos](#) [self awareness](#) [SEL coaching for staff](#)
[building community](#) [professional learning](#) [district SEL expertise](#)

[SEL Learning Walk Protocol - Anchorage](#)

Anchorage's protocol for preparing and facilitating learning walks, well suited for districts that are organizing cross-campus visits to exemplary classrooms.

SOURCE: Anchorage Public Schools

TAGS [model SEL schools](#) [school visit/observation tool](#) [conducting local SEL research](#) [classroom level](#)
[culture and climate](#) [professional learning](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

RELATED RESOURCES

[SEL Learning Walk Observation Tool – Anchorage](#)

Anchorage's handout for observers to take notes after visiting a classroom during a Learning Walk.

SOURCE: Anchorage Public Schools

TAGS [model SEL schools](#) [school visit/observation tool](#) [conducting local SEL research](#)
[classroom level](#) [culture and climate](#) [professional learning](#) [district SEL expertise](#)
[building buy-in for SEL](#)

[CASEL Personal Assessment and Reflection Tool: SEL Competencies for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults](#)

Professional learning activity where participants rate their SEL competencies through a series of statements and reflect on their challenges and strengths.

SOURCE: CASEL

Find presentation templates that you can adapt and use

TITLE

[Presentation to the Austin ISD Board](#)

CASEL and district SEL leaders co-led this three hour experiential session with the Board to strengthen and formalize support for SEL. Facilitator notes include a link to presentation slides.

SOURCE: CASEL

TAGS [Adult SEL](#) [school board](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[SEL Administrator Academy: Implementing Social and Emotional Learning Systemwide to Improve Student Achievement](#)

Presentation for district and school administrators to connect SEL standards with Common Core and workforce skills and how to implement/monitor district-wide SEL. Includes activities that model SEL and a full presenter script.

SOURCE: CASEL

TAGS [board policies](#) [SEL overview](#) [implementation plan](#) [college and career readiness](#)
[professional learning](#) [integrate with district priorities](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)
[SEL leadership](#)

[Social and Emotional Learning in the Daily Life of Classrooms](#)

Facilitator guide and materials for a 6 hour session aimed at state and district leaders, outlining ways to integrate an SEL emphasis into policy and planning, draw connections between SEL and instructional priorities, and support school leaders to guide teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices and SEL competencies.

SOURCE:

AIR

TAGS [Adult SEL](#) [CCSS](#) [professional learning](#) [integrate with district priorities](#) [district SEL expertise](#)

[The Case for SEL sample presentation](#)

CASEL's presentation introducing SEL and its evidence base can be adapted for a range of audiences, including district leaders and potential community partners or funders.

SOURCE:

CASEL

See artifacts shared by districts and schools

TITLE

[Oakland Unified School District SEL Video Library](#)

Oakland Unified School District's extensive SEL video library includes sections of content for lower elementary, upper elementary, middle school, high school, adult learning and collaboration, and leadership.

SOURCE: Oakland Unified School

District

TAGS [videos](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [SEL leadership](#)

[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](#)

[SEL Central Office Professional Learning Community Description](#)

Sacramento's overview and invitation to other central office departments to participate in a district-level SEL professional learning community.

SOURCE: Sacramento City Unified School

District

TAGS [Adult SEL](#) [implementation support](#) [PLC](#) [SEL partnerships](#) [professional learning](#)
[integrate with district priorities](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#) [SEL leadership](#)

RELATED RESOURCES

[SEL Central Office Professional Learning Community Save The Date](#)

Half sheet flyer for Sacramento's 4 session central office SEL professional learning community.

SOURCE: Sacramento City Unified School

District

TAGS [Adult SEL](#) [implementation support](#) [PLC](#) [SEL partnerships](#) [professional learning](#)
[district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[SEL Central Office Professional Learning Community Agenda](#)

An agenda from Sacramento's SEL professional learning community for central office staff to better align district departments to improve adult practices and student SEL outcomes.

SOURCE: Sacramento City Unified School

District

TAGS [Adult SEL](#) [implementation support](#) [PLC](#) [SEL partnerships](#) [professional learning](#)
[district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

Find resources to help you learn more on this topic

TITLE

[The Neuroscience of SEL \(Video\)](#)

20 minute lecture by Richard Davidson on the neuroscience of emotions and emotional response, and how SEL trains and changes the brain. Best for educating SEL leaders or building buy in with audiences looking for a scientific basis for SEL.

SOURCE:

Edutopia

TAGS [Adult SEL](#) [mental health](#) [videos](#) [research brief](#) [teacher training](#) [evidence-based programs](#)
[professional learning](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[Integrating Social-Emotional Learning into State and District Policies](#)

Powerpoint and webinar covering how districts have incorporated SEL through curriculum and standards.

SOURCE:

AIR

TAGS [school board](#) [SEL standards](#) [board policies](#) [integrate with district priorities](#) [SEL leadership](#)

[How to Create a Professional Learning Community](#)

Edutopia article on developing strong PLCs, includes quick tips on teaching participants how to collaborate, creating an atmosphere of trust, carving out enough time for meaningful work, and more.

SOURCE:

Edutopia

[The Positive Impact of Social Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth-Grade Students: Executive Summary of Three Scientific Reviews](#)

Findings in this summary of 3 large-scale research reviews of K-8 SEL programs show that SEL is among the most impactful youth development support for school-age youth, and it can be incorporated into routine educational practice.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [journal article](#) [reading lists - staff](#) [define SEL metrics](#) [evidence-based programs](#) [out of school](#)
[district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[Book Chapter: Social Emotional Learning: Past, Present and Future](#)

Chapter by Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, and Gullotta that provides a framework and evidence base for SEL and also important factors for quality implementation.

SOURCE:

CASEL

TAGS [implementation support](#) [reading lists - staff](#) [research brief](#) [SEL overview](#)
[evidence-based programs](#) [district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[Students with Strong Social Skills in Kindergarten More Likely To Thrive As Adults](#)

Short article describing a 20 year study connecting students' social skills in kindergarten to their well-being as adults.

SOURCE: Robert Wood Johnson

Foundation

TAGS [reading lists - staff](#) [SEL competence](#) [research brief](#) [evidence-based programs](#)
[district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)

[Social-Emotional Competence: An Essential Factor for Promoting Positive Adjustment and Reducing Risk in School Children](#)

Medium length scientific journal article (Domitrovich, Staley, Durlak, and Weissberg, 2017) reviews research behind SEL and what is known about effective intervention approaches, and proposes an intervention model to promote resilience.

SOURCE: Research

Journal

TAGS [journal article](#) [reading lists - staff](#) [SEL competence](#) [evidence-based programs](#)
[district SEL expertise](#) [building buy-in for SEL](#)
