Three Levels of Schoolwide SEL Defined

Schoolwide SEL refers to a process for developing a school community that involves a systemic approach to integrating academic, social, and emotional learning. A systemic approach to SEL recognizes that to develop social and emotional competencies successfully, and sustain these skills over time, an integrated, supportive system of learning environments is required. These learning environments include:

- The classroom

- The school

- The family and community setting[3]

Classroom

SEL at the classroom-level typically involves:

- Cultivating a warm, supportive classroom environment.

- Explicitly teaching and modeling social and emotional skills.

- Using teaching practices that provide opportunities to practice and reinforce social and emotional skills.

- Integrating SEL objectives within academic lessons and social situations.

To accomplish this, teachers create structures and routines that increase the likelihood of students' having positive and supportive interactions with adults and peers. For example, an advisory period, class meeting, or talking circle provides students with the opportunity to connect with each other and build a sense of community. This is important for all students at all grade levels, but it is especially important for strengthening school connectedness among middle and high school students who engage with multiple teachers and groups of classmates throughout each day.

Additionally, teachers often use evidence-based SEL practices and programs and reinforce students when they use social and emotional skills throughout the day. Teachers may also embed SEL instruction into content areas such as English language arts, social studies, or math.

[3] CASEL (2017). *Key insights from the Collaborating Districts Initiative.* Chicago, IL: CASEL.

Learning standards guide SEL curriculum and instruction by defining what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level. Illinois has developed free-standing SEL standards for grades Pre-K-12. Teachers can use these standards to develop lesson plans that are aligned with and incorporate SEL.

Highly effective teachers also foster SEL skills through powerful SEL-integrated teaching strategies and their interactions with students. This approach focuses on adult practices that improve classroom quality and promote student skill development. These include:

- Aligning lesson plans with SEL goals and standards.

- Using facilitation techniques that activate thinking and SEL.

- Exploring instructional practices that support SEL such as project-based learning, peer tutoring, or student self-assessment.

Schools

At the school level, SEL occurs through systems and practices that promote a positive school climate. These policies, systems, and practices can be categorized into the four domains of the CPS School Climate Standards:
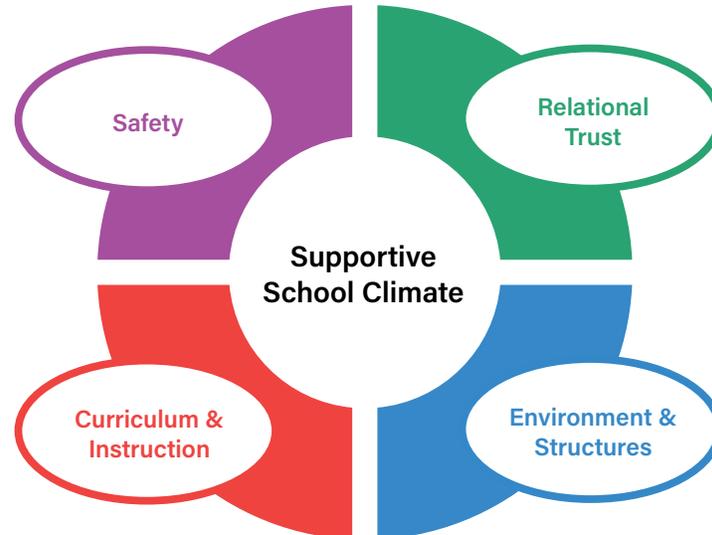
- **Safety -** Social, emotional, and physical safety set the context for student growth and are supported by the development of clear norms, values, and expectations for all students and staff. This includes well-known routines and procedures, acknowledgment and modeling of safe practices, and protocols for crisis situations and responses to bullying that protect our diverse student population so that all students have equitable access to education. Restorative discipline policies and bullying prevention practices can also promote safety at the building level.

- **Relational Trust -** Prioritizing the development and continued growth of positive relationships throughout the school building is a critical part of schoolwide social and emotional learning. This process begins with modeling from leadership and adults. Relational trust can be built in many ways, including through community–building rituals in classrooms as well as embedding SEL practices such as gathering and closing activities into staff meetings and professional development sessions. As adults model SEL practices they cultivate an environment of trusting relationships for all students and adults. Additionally, community building aspects of [Restorative Practices](#) help foster SEL competencies such as relationship building and responsible decision making for all students, staff, and leaders throughout the building.

- **Curriculum and Instruction -** A schoolwide scope and sequence to teach social-emotional competencies and integrate them into instruction, the intentional promotion of engaging instructional strategies in the classroom, and the creation of opportunities for authentic student voice are critical components of a schoolwide approach to SEL. In strong SEL schools, there is a shared understanding that instruction should include high expectations for both academic and social-emotional development of students in a way that is also culturally responsive. School leadership also includes these goals in conversations with teachers on their instructional planning and practice.

- **Schoolwide Environment and Structures -** Organizational structures help to ensure that collaborative leadership, with a focus on continuous improvement of school climate, is in place to cultivate a warm, welcoming environment. Adults and students take ownership in that process. These structures help set a positive tone throughout the building and establish routines within the school to help support SEL. Additionally, the school's physical appearance honors the diversity and voices of students in the building.

Ultimately, the establishment of Safety, Relational Trust, Curriculum and Instruction, and Schoolwide Environment and Structures all work together to create the conditions necessary for fostering academic, social, and emotional learning throughout a school building.

Family

A systemic approach to SEL calls for families and schools to act as authentic partners. Key to an effective school-family partnership is the cultivation of caring relationships, ongoing two-way communication, and family participation in students' education both at home and in school. Students are better able to learn and apply SEL knowledge when instruction is reinforced both in the school and the home. Research shows that:

- School-family partnerships around SEL that regularly engage families are linked to improved academic performance, increased student engagement, and reduced school dropout rates (Greenberg et al., 2003).

- When teachers and families collaborate in SEL program selection, design, implementation, evaluation, and improvement, students experience the greatest benefit. Evidence-based SEL programs are more effective when they are extended into the home (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007).

Schools can partner with families by:

- Helping families become knowledgeable about and supportive of SEL.

- Engaging families in ways that promote a shared ownership of SEL.

- Inviting families to be active collaborators in the planning and implementation of SEL activities.

- Building trusting relationships and supportive relationships between families and school staff.

Communities

Community partners and organizations can strengthen and expand the impact of SEL by supporting and sustaining classroom and school efforts and by providing students with additional opportunities for SEL.[4, 5, 6, 7]

Similarly, schools can expand upon the efforts of community partners that focus on social and emotional learning by reinforcing strategies that benefit students. Such partnerships may include[8]:

- Out-of-school-time providers

- Community-based organizations

- Health care providers

- Governmental agencies

- Other community institutions

These organizations can invite students to participate in community-based projects, provide funding and resources for SEL programming, and offer knowledge and experience that benefits students' social-emotional development (Elias et al., 1997).

Schools can also invite community-based project leaders to be part of the SEL team, attend the school's professional learning community sessions, and participate in SEL programs and practices to align language and strategies.

Ideally the strategies a school chooses to adopt at each level are aligned to the five core social and emotional competencies and are coordinated and integrated with one another so that efforts are not repetitive or fragmented. This *Guide* presents strategies to accomplish this and ensure full integration of SEL into the core fabric and functioning of the school.

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[4] CASEL (2015). CASEL guide: *Effective social and emotional learning programs: Middle and high school edition.* Chicago, IL: CASEL.

[5] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 45, 294-309. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-93000-6

[6] Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T. et al. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

[7] Oberle, E., Domitrovich, C. E., Meyers, D. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Establishing systemic social and emotional learning approaches in schools: A framework for schoolwide implementation. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 46, 277-297. doi:10.1080/030576 4X.2015.1125450

[8] Harris, E., & Wilkes, S. (2013). *Partnerships for learning: Community support for youth success*. Retrieved from http://www.hfrp.org/ publications-resources/browse-our-publications/partnerships-for-learning-community-support-for-youth-success

[9] Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T. et al. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.