

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning has become a highly dynamic, challenging, and social process. Students need safe, inclusive, culturally responsive, academically engaging, and equitable environments for optimal learning.

As a result, the Austin Independent School District (Austin ISD) has prioritized the integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, practices, and approaches into teaching at every level. This implementation guide provides an overview of Austin ISD's SEL story and tips learned along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| 01 Section 1:
Why SEL Matters | 08 Section 3:
What Sustainable Practices Look Like on Austin ISD Campuses |
| 04 Section 2:
The Austin ISD SEL Story | 13 Section 4:
What Districts Should Consider Before Implementing SEL |



SECTION 1

Why SEL Matters

WHAT IS SEL?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.

The Austin Independent School District—which serves more than 80,000 pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade students across 129 schools—prioritizes providing comprehensive educational experiences in optimal learning environments. Focusing on the core SEL competencies that allow students to work together, solve problems, and get ready to learn in the classroom exemplifies this priority.



**Safe, inclusive, culturally responsive,
academically engaging, and
equitable learning environments**

Why Focus on SEL?

Social and Emotional Learning helps children and adults thrive in social, academic, personal, and professional life through the development of a wide range of interpersonal skills, including conflict resolution, decision-making, focusing attention, self-control, problem solving, goal setting, and teamwork. It is the vision of Austin ISD that all students will internalize and demonstrate the social and emotional competencies needed to thrive in school and in life.

Both researchers and educators see growth in students participating in SEL programs. The evolving field of neuroscience continues to affirm essential links between SEL, academic performance, and healthy student development.

In particular, Austin ISD has seen promising results in areas of student performance and scores, school climate, attendance, bullying, and behavior. Students taking part in SEL activities increase their academic successes, improve the quality of their relationships with teachers, and decrease the incidence of disciplinary infractions.[1] SEL programs also reduce students' emotional distress and improve students' social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, connection to school, and pro-social behavior.

These benefits are more evident at campuses with high levels of SEL implementation. As students at both the elementary and secondary school levels increase their pro-social behaviors, teachers see them getting along better with others, working through their emotions, and paying attention more in class.

[1] The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger (2011)

Below are a few examples of these successes:

IMPROVED ACADEMICS. Teacher ratings of their third-grade students' SEL competencies were positively related to students' performance in state reading and math tests. Additionally, seventh-grade students' ratings of the SEL competency item "I have strong self-control" were positively related to their performance in state reading and math tests.[2]

HIGHER ATTENDANCE RATES. Attendance rates at secondary schools with more years in SEL improved more than attendance rates at other secondary schools.[3]

LOWER CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM. Middle and high schools participating in SEL for more years experienced a greater decrease in chronic absenteeism than did schools participating in SEL for fewer years.[4]

REDUCTIONS IN PROBLEM BEHAVIORS. Secondary SEL schools with more years in SEL showed a greater reduction in campus discretionary removals than did schools with no years in SEL.[5]

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS. Elementary school students with fewer disciplinary infractions received higher teacher ratings of the SEL competency item "respects the property of others" and "gets along well with adults" than students with more disciplinary infractions.[6]

[2] Social and Emotional Learning: Summary of Accomplishments. Department of Research and Evaluation, Austin Independent School District (2016)

[3] Social and Emotional Learning Competency Survey. Department of Research and Evaluation, Austin Independent School District (2016)

[4,5] Social and Emotional Learning: The Effects of Program Implementation and Longevity, 2011-2012 Through 2016-2017. Department of Research and Evaluation, Austin Independent School District (2018)

[6] Social and Emotional Learning Technical Report: Student Level Outcomes, 2015-2016. Department of Research and Evaluation, Austin Independent School District (2017)



SECTION 2

The Austin ISD SEL Story

OUR IMPLEMENTATION STORY

As one of the first urban education districts in the nation to commit to the development of the whole child by implementing an SEL program, Austin ISD receives widespread local and national recognition for its efforts. Since implementing the pilot SEL program in 2010, the district has observed that SEL creates a culture of caring and responsibility, and learning environments where youth can thrive. Austin ISD's SEL strategic plan, first approved in 2011 and revised for 2017-2020, drives SEL implementation.

Austin ISD worked through the district's vertical team structure to implement Social and Emotional Learning. A vertical team consists of a high school and all of its feeder schools. Within five years (2011-2016), SEL was implemented at all Austin ISD schools.

Below is an overview of Austin ISD's scale-up of the SEL program:

- 2011-12**  **AUSTIN ISD BEGINS IMPLEMENTING SEL IN TWO VERTICAL TEAMS**
Crockett High School and Austin High School were chosen as the first two vertical teams to implement SEL.
- 2012-13**  **THREE ADDITIONAL VERTICAL TEAMS WERE ADDED**
Implementation began with Eastside Memorial, McCallum and Travis high schools' vertical teams.
- 2013-14**  **SEL IMPLEMENTATION EXPANDS TO SEVEN VERTICAL TEAMS**
Akins High School and part of LBJ High School vertical teams were added.
- 2014-15**  **TWO ADDITIONAL VERTICAL TEAMS JOIN**
Bowie High School and Reagan High School vertical teams were added, along with the remaining schools within the LBJ High School vertical team.
- 2015-16**  **SEL IMPLEMENTATION GOES DISTRICT-WIDE**
As of 2015-16, all schools in Austin ISD were officially implementing SEL, including 86 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, 17 high schools, and 8 special campuses.

SEL in Action

Elementary and middle schools in these teams have received explicit instruction materials from Second Step. Lessons are designed to be taught weekly and reinforced in all areas of the school. High schools have received School-Connect as their explicit instruction resource. Some use School-Connect in advisory class; others have students participate in Restorative Practices; still others use approaches such as developing lessons based on needs informed by campus data. Some campuses adopt systemic approaches encouraged by programs like Responsive Classrooms and rooted in culturally responsive restorative practice models that integrate SEL through many facets of the learning environment.

In addition to explicit SEL skills instruction, SEL has become central to academics and school climate and culture.

- All schools are implementing the district's Whole Child, Every Child initiative, a collaborative effort that frames SEL as a district-wide effort, not an isolated program.
- All teachers and principals receive targeted professional development in SEL.
- Curriculum writers integrate SEL objectives and instructional methods into all exemplar lessons in all subject areas, including the 3 Signature SEL Practices.
- Mindfulness strategies are widely used across the district.
- Additionally, the focus extends beyond the school buildings into the community.
- Through partnering with community organizations, students and families can locate services and supports that address academic enrichment and support, as well as social, emotional, and behavioral health.
- The district has also provided training in SEL to multiple out-of-school providers.
- Partnering with University of Texas and Region XIII, the district provides teacher trainings for local education prep programs.
- The SEL Planning for Organizational Change (SPOC) process has been used with multiple campuses to support systems change.

Professional Learning & Leadership Development

The SEL department is dedicated to providing ongoing, meaningful professional learning opportunities for AISD staff to participate in collaborative, engaging, and self-reflective interactions in which they grow their social and emotional understanding and are able to implement the tools they gain.

- Leadership Pathway
- Facilitator Workshops
- Symposium
- Mindful Leaders
- Leadership Institute
- AP Institute

SEL Evaluation

The Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) works in conjunction with the SEL team to design and conduct formative and summative program evaluations. The evaluations report objectively about program implementation and outcomes, and serve to inform program staff, decision makers, and planners in the district. Austin ISD's SEL department has two dedicated DRE staff members who regularly issue SEL reports used to help guide campus and district-wide SEL planning, and evaluate multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and CP&I in addition to SEL.

In Austin ISD, we believe that SEL is at the heart of equity-centered systems and structures. In an effort to grow this belief into a reality, the SEL department has defined equity-centered SEL, adopted from CASEL's transformative SEL definition, and is working hard to create brave, respectful, collaborative spaces to support all students, staff, families and communities throughout our district.

The SEL department includes the following teams:

- Cultural Proficiency & Inclusiveness
- Families as Partners
- Restorative Practices, and
- Social & Emotional Learning

Cultural Proficiency & Inclusiveness (CP&I)

Cultural Proficiency is when an adult understands that their personal culture and background impacts the students with whom they work. Inclusiveness is a way of being that shows respect, understanding and acceptance, and in which diversity is valued as an asset within the Austin ISD community. Established in 2010–11, Cultural Proficiency and Inclusiveness works to embed depth of thought and action among adult educators. The goal of Cultural Proficiency and Inclusiveness is to embed CP&I into the work of the school district, and to provide professional learning sessions on how to interact with students and their families in a manner that considers the diverse needs of all. The work of restorative practices and cultural proficiency and inclusiveness has been primarily funded through federal grant programs, including the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Texas Office of the Governor - Criminal Justice Division.

Families as Partners

Families as Partners (FAP) is an Austin ISD initiative originally funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation with the goal of creating sustainable and effective school-family partnerships for academic success, with continued funding support from the Orsinger Foundation. The initiative is grounded in the principle that authentic engagement flourishes when families and faculty build trusting relationships and see each other as equal partners. Other goals included finding and actively encouraging less engaged

parents to be involved in the FAP and their children's schooling, and scaling to the program across the district by utilizing the lessons learned in the early process and on-boarding new schools over time.

Mindfulness

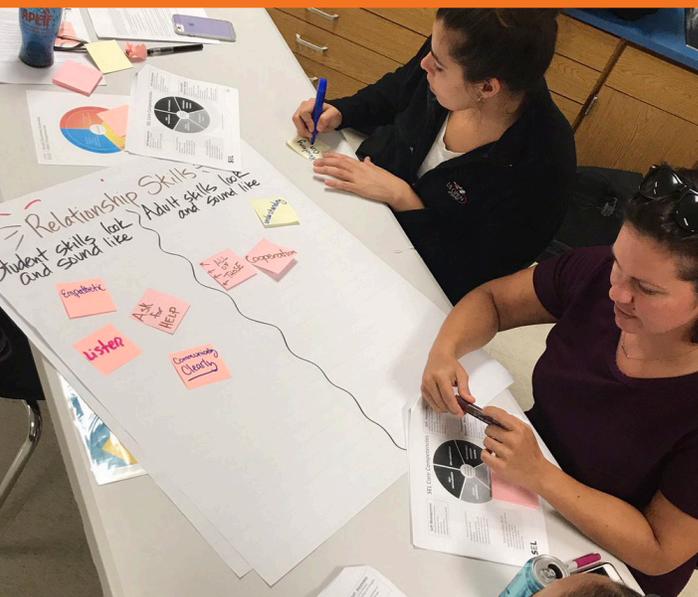
All campuses have received some level of exposure to mindfulness practices by the district's mindfulness specialist, and professional learning opportunities exist for the development of mindful leaders.

Coordinated Leadership

SEL work in Austin ISD is supported by a strong Department of Social and Emotional Learning. The department has a dedicated director of social and emotional learning, an SEL assistant director, and a communications coordinator. Each campus has a dedicated SEL specialist and two on-site facilitators.

The SEL specialist supports implementation on campus by providing professional development, observing lessons and giving feedback on integration of SEL skills as well as explicit instruction, developing campus goals and plans with the coordinated leadership team, comprised of a campus administrator, two facilitators and the steering committee, which is representative of the school community.

Campus SEL facilitators serve as the liaison with the district's SEL department and lead the campus steering committee which guides the school's SEL work.



During the fourth session of a six session campus book study, a parent shared...

“ I thought I was coming to these sessions to learn about my son, but instead, I've figured out that I am learning about myself so I can be a better parent.”

SEL SUCCESS STORY

Implementation Results

In 2018-2019, **86% of schools exceeded their baseline SEL implementation score** (compared to 54% in 16-17).



Elementary school staff who model SEL skills, and create structures in the classroom to promote SEL skills, have a **higher percentage of students who pass STAAR reading and math.**



Teachers who indicate **greater confidence in their own SEL skills** are more likely to support their school's disciplinary practices.



In 2018-2019, Seed schools were **4.5 times more likely to be high implementers of SEL** than were non-Seed schools. Teachers at Seed schools reported **more increases in their own SEL skills** compared to teachers at non-Seed schools.



Schools with higher SEL implementation scores have staff who report **feeling more supported in embedding SEL into their daily work.**



SECTION 3

What Sustainable Practices Look

IMPLEMENTATION TO INTEGRATION

2017 marked the first year of the roll-out of the SEL 2.0 strategic plan, which is designed to deepen the SEL work within Austin ISD and the community over the next three to five years.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, Austin ISD, along with SEL lead donors, sponsored a fellowship for 14 district leaders in various roles. This group engaged in an intensive learning experience in social and emotional learning. Fellows had numerous opportunities to participate directly with some of the nation's leading experts in neuroscience, child and youth development, and program design. From the onset, the fellows understood their charge: **To bring their unique, functional expertise and insights to help define the future of SEL within the district.**

Over 12 months, with additional input from parents, teachers and students, Austin ISD clarified its SEL vision and developed five priorities to guide the district's SEL work and capture the evolution in thinking about how best to achieve SEL integration district-wide.

Since then, Austin ISD has welcomed other leaders and staff, including assistant superintendents, principals, and SEL team members, to participate in the fellowship. This fellowship developed from being a planning team to a series of groups engaged in a professional learning cohort, offering SEL growth opportunities and allowing for continuous input and direction around social and emotional learning.

Austin ISD SEL Priorities



Strengthen Austin ISD's culture by embracing the principles of Social and Emotional Learning district-wide—from the boardroom to the classroom and into the community.



Develop the social and emotional knowledge and competencies of all district staff to create the environments that optimize teaching and learning.



Leverage the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning to advance Austin ISD's commitment to cultural proficiency, inclusiveness, and equity.



Develop an innovative integrated system of social, emotional, and mental health support for students that includes and extends beyond SEL.



Contribute to the national evidence base for Social and Emotional Learning.

2017 MARKED THE INAUGURAL YEAR OF THE SEED MODEL CAMPUS COHORT



SEL Seed Model Campuses

In order to engage in the process, all participants are asked to submit a proposal, which includes a S.M.A.R.T.I.E. goal around one of four SEL critical practice areas identified as identified by the CASEL roadmap:

- Take time to cultivate and deepen relationships, build partnerships, and plan for SEL.
- Design opportunities where adults can connect, heal, and build their capacity to support students.
- Create safe, supportive, and equitable learning environments that promote all students' social and emotional development.
- Use data as an opportunity to share power, deepen relationships, and continuously improve support for students, families, and staff.

This designation is given to schools which effectively demonstrate the process of continual social and emotional growth and for each successive year they choose to engage in continued documentation of their SEL progress and goal-setting.

Austin ISD's Seed Model Campus Cohort has grown from 19 campuses to over 80 campuses in a few short years.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

2017-18: 9 Elementary Schools
2018-19: 36 Elementary Schools
2019-20: 47 Elementary Schools
2020-21: 59 Elementary Schools

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

2017-18: 5 Middle Schools
2018-19: 8 Middle Schools
2019-20: 11 Middle Schools
2020-21: 10 Middle Schools

HIGH SCHOOLS

2017-18: 5 High Schools
2018-19: 8 High Schools
2019-20: 9 High Schools
2020-21: 8 High Schools

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

2018-19: 3 Special Schools
2019-20: 5 Special Schools
2020-21: 7 Special Schools



I was walking a scholar to my classroom and asked him if he had done the breathing sheet with a parent. He said he had done it three times with his mom. Then he said his mom told him she was really mad at work yesterday and did the breathing at work and it helped her calm down."

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARIAN



SEL Funding in Austin ISD

As the SEL initiative has been scaled to include all schools, budgets have risen as well—from \$690,000 to more than \$2 million in recent years. The district has supplemented local district funding with philanthropic funds, along with some additional federal funding for its specialists, a central part of the implementation strategy.

The district's office of innovation and development, comprised of internal and external leaders, focuses its effort on building relationships with local philanthropies and grant organizations. Austin ISD has taken multiple steps to communicate about the importance of the work with all stakeholders—from the board and cabinet to parents, students, and the community.

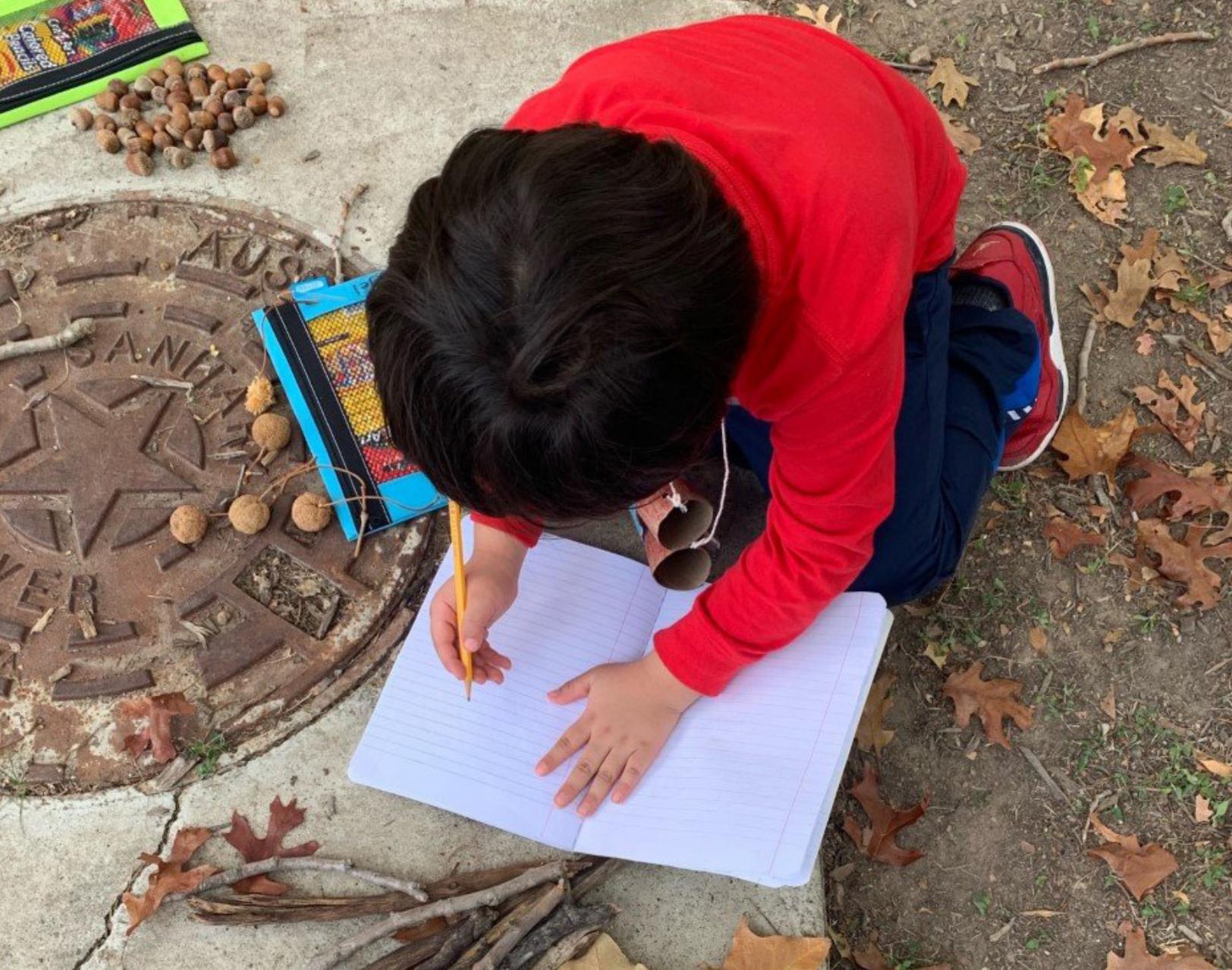
Funding Spotlight: Local Benefactors

Local benefaction has been a primary source of support for Austin SEL adoption and implementation. Early funding came from three local foundations—Buena Vista Foundation, Tapestry Foundation, and the Klein Foundation. Funding was used for early implementation to off-set Title II funds for SEL positions.

Over the years, the following local benefactors have supported the efforts of Austin ISD's SEL implementation:

Buena Vista Foundation | Klein Family Foundation St. David's Foundation | Tapestry Foundation

Alice Kleberg Reynolds Foundation | Austin Ed Fund | Casey Family Programs | Covalent Foundation Cullen Family Charitable Foundation | Education First | Kozmetsky Family Foundation Lowe Foundation | LSG Charitable Foundation | Maher Charitable Foundation | Mary & Howard Yancy | MFI Foundation | NoVo Foundation | One Skye Foundation | Orsinger Foundation | Powell Foundation | Stratus Properties | Tecumseh Foundation | U.S. Department of Education | W.K. Kellogg Foundation



SECTION

4

What Districts Should Consider Before Implementing SEL

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

CASEL has created a framework of four focus areas for systematically implementing SEL throughout a district (<https://schoolguide.casel.org/how-it-works/>).

Districts that implemented these components saw improvements in school climate, behavior, attendance, graduation rates, and academic achievement. Implementation may look different in each district, depending on the school and community context.



In Austin ISD, the district rolled out SEL by vertical team, supported by a systemic approach to implementation that was collaborative and flexible. While Austin ISD has implemented each of the focus areas since the initial pilot, the district did not follow this exact order.

Austin ISD invites other districts to use the following framework from CASEL as a guide to implementation.

ORGANIZE

Developing a strong foundation for SEL helps ensure that efforts are sustained long term. This requires engaging the entire school community and developing a coordinated plan for implementation.

Focus Area 1A

Build Foundational Support

Build foundational support by establishing an SEL team, fostering commitment to SEL, and developing a communications strategy.

- SEL TEAM: Establish a diverse and representative team that leads a coordinated approach, ensuring schoolwide SEL implementation does not become fragmented and stays on the radar of all stakeholders.
- FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING: Engage all stakeholders in an introduction to SEL that fosters awareness and helps define what SEL means for their school community.
- TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION: Establish structures to support consistent two-way SEL communication between the SEL team and all stakeholders.

Focus Area 1B

Create A Plan

Develop a shared vision, assess needs and resources, then develop a yearlong SEL implementation plan and budget.

- Moving into the planning stage, define your SHARED VISION and how to achieve it.
- Take stock of current efforts and engage in a NEEDS AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT of SEL strategies that can be developed or improved.

- Develop an ACTION PLAN with clear benchmarks, action steps, roles, and timelines, then align your BUDGET to support this plan.

IMPLEMENT

Schoolwide SEL means that both adults and students are actively cultivating their own social and emotional competencies. Here you'll find guidance for supporting SEL for all.

Focus Area 2

Strengthen Adult SEL

Cultivate a community of adults who engage in their own social and emotional learning, collaborate on strategies for promoting SEL, and model SEL throughout the school.

- LEARN: Support staff in reflecting on personal social and emotional competencies and developing capacity for supporting SEL in their peers and students.
- COLLABORATE: Set up structures, such as professional learning communities (PLCs) or peer mentoring, for staff to collaborate on how to hone their strategies for promoting schoolwide SEL.
- MODEL: Support staff in modeling SEL competencies, mindsets, and skills throughout the school community with students, students' families, community partners, and one another.

Focus Area 3

Promote SEL for Students

Develop a coordinated approach for supporting students' social and emotional learning across the school, classrooms, homes, and communities.

- SCHOOL: Align school climate, programs, and practices to promote SEL for students.
- CLASSROOM: Foster supportive classroom environments that provide opportunities for both explicit SEL skill instruction as well as integration of SEL throughout all instruction.
- FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS: Create meaningful partnership opportunities and two-way communication that invite families to understand, experience, inform, and support the social and emotional development of their students.
- COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: Develop and leverage strategic and aligned community partnerships that ensure students receive consistent SEL supports, increase access to a broad range of community services, and expand the professional learning opportunities for SEL.



“

Starting out our week with explicit SEL instruction and integrating skills throughout the week is an absolute necessity. My students need to set an intention with SEL and I do too! It sets the tone for learning success with a positive attitude!”

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER
Second Year of SEL Implementation

IMPROVE

Continuous Improvement is essential for quality implementation that's aligned to your school's needs. Here, teams use data to reflect and take action.

Focus Area 4

Practice Continuous Improvement

Establish a structured, ongoing process to collect, reflect on, and use implementation and outcome data to inform school-level decisions and drive improvements to SEL implementation.

- CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE SCHOOLWIDE SEL IMPLEMENTATION: Use a continuous improvement cycle to drive high-quality schoolwide SEL implementation.
- TEST INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES: Use shorter continuous improvement cycles to refine new strategies.



“

We like using the peace path and conflict resolution script because then we can solve the problem on our own.”

ELEMENTARY STUDENT

EQUITY & SEL

SEL can be a lever for advancing educational equity.

(See <https://schoolguide.casel.org/what-is-sel/equity-and-sel/> for more information.)

Creating safe, inclusive, culturally responsive, academically engaging and equitable learning environments.

Systemic implementation of SEL both fosters and depends upon an equitable learning environment, where all students and adults feel respected, valued, and affirmed in their individual interests, talents, social identities, cultural values and backgrounds.

- SEL is relevant for all students in all schools and affirms diverse cultures and backgrounds.
- SEL is a strategy for systemic improvement, not just an intervention for at-risk students.
- SEL is a way to uplift student voice and promote agency and civic engagement.
- SEL supports adults to strengthen practices that promote equity.
- Districts must engage students, families, and communities as authentic partners in social and emotional development.



TRANSFORMATIVE SEL

Austin ISD uses the CASEL definition of Transformative SEL to describe their equity-centered SEL process.

*A PROCESS WHERE
STUDENTS AND TEACHERS BUILD
STRONG, RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS
FOUNDED ON AN APPRECIATION OF
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES;
LEARN TO CRITICALLY EXAMINE
ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUITY;
AND DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE
SOLUTIONS TO COMMUNITY AND
SOCIAL PROBLEMS.*



Contact:

512.414.1700

austinisd.org/sel

