Washington SEL Professional Learning Network Peer-to-Peer Virtual Exchange: Beyond SEL Time: Exploring Challenges and Successes With Integrating and Embedding SEL in the Learning Environment

Session Summary

The Washington SEL Professional Learning Network provides Washington state education professionals with social emotional learning (SEL)-related learning opportunities to support local educational agencies (LEAs) around the state in building the conditions, supports, and community partnerships that allow students to develop and apply social emotional skills. This Peer-to-Peer Virtual Exchange brought 13 LEAs together to discuss and troubleshoot their efforts to embed SEL in the learning environment. Prior to the session, LEAs reflected on current strengths and challenges in embedding SEL. During the session, LEAs met in small groups to discuss a specific challenge and collaboratively brainstorm strategies and solutions, keeping in mind multiple, interconnected approaches to embedding SEL (school climate and culture, integration in academic instruction, and explicit skill instruction). Next, LEAs began building an action plan, coming back together as a whole group at the end to share their next steps. The session ended with participants discussing their positive, forward-looking feelings about embedding SEL in the learning environment and a desire to continue connecting with LEA teams as they address their SEL-related challenges.

Common Challenges and Potential Strategies

The three most common challenges LEA teams shared were (1) creating conditions to support student and staff SEL, (2) providing effective professional learning and building educator buy-in, and (3) embedding SEL schoolwide.

This section describes each challenge area, provides a summary of the strategies and solutions discussed, and provides resources that can support follow-up learning.

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Creating Conditions to Support Student and Staff SEL

Creating the conditions to support student SEL is an essential element of SEL implementation. Districts shared that building a positive school culture is a challenge because they lack the necessary resources and support to effectively develop students' social emotional competencies. Teachers feel as though student needs are beyond what SEL can support, and students need opportunities to build community and relationships between themselves, teachers, and support staff. In addition, staff need support in developing and modeling their own SEL competencies. To create the conditions needed to support student SEL, staff need to learn how to help their students acquire these social emotional competencies, and there must be opportunities for staff to build their own social emotional competencies.

Peer LEAs identified several potential strategies for addressing this challenge area. These strategies include incorporating youth voice using surveys and student advisory groups, providing additional Tier 1 SEL supports to mitigate Tier 2 and 3 needs, making time for staff to receive supports and work through their processes, and making time for SEL overall.

The following list of resources can support additional learning and action planning.

Resource	Author	Connections to the Challenge Area
Washington SEL Module Segment 5: Trauma-Informed Social Emotional Learning	OSPI	The fifth segment of the SEL online module focuses on ensuring that SEL practices are trauma-informed and recognize the unique strengths and challenges of children and youth in light of the adversities they face.
School Climate Improvement Action Guide	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments	The *School Climate Improvement Action Guides* are designed to provide district leaders, school leaders, instructional staff, noninstructional staff, families, students, and community partners with action steps on how to support school climate improvements; tips on what it looks like when it is being done well and what pitfalls to avoid; and questions to ask to engage in the school climate improvement process.
Transforming Learning Environments – Whole Child Policy Toolkit	Science of Learning & Development Alliance; Learning Policy Institute	This toolkit provides strategies and examples of fostering positive developmental relationships between students, educators, and families and caregivers.

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School Climate and Social and Emotional Learning: The Integration of Two Approaches	Edna Bennet Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University.	This brief reviews research on how positive school climates support SEL and how improved SEL contributes to improved school climate in elementary and secondary schools.
Guide to Schoolwide SEL: Foster a Supportive School Climate	CASEL	This resource provides guidance and resources for intentionally cultivating a supportive school climate.
Youth Suicide Prevention, Intervention, & Postvention Webpage	OSPI	This webpage offers resources, including Educational Service District (ESD) Behavioral Health Navigators in all nine ESDs, to provide a network of support for school districts to develop and implement comprehensive suicide prevention and behavioral health supports for students.
Forefront Suicide Prevention Webpage	University of Washington	This webpage offers a wide variety of support for schools and districts regarding implementation of suicide prevention and intervention programs.
Workforce Secondary Traumatic Stress Webpage	OSPI	This webpage provides legislation, resources, and a Washington state-specific assessment to assist districts in the implementation of requirements under state law to address workforce secondary traumatic stress.

Providing Effective Professional Learning and Building Educator Buy-In

Professional learning is a key component of Washington's SEL essential element, building adult capacity[1]. Districts shared how providing professional development that builds adult capacity is a challenge because teachers are so fatigued that they are not attending the activities. Staff also need support in developing a professional culture at their school, which could offer opportunities for teachers to collaborate with one another on the integration of SEL. Lastly, districts also seek effective and efficient ways to deliver professional development on instructional strategies.

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[1] RCW 28A.415.4530 requires that school districts, v\every other school year (starting in 2020–21), must use one of the professional learning days funded under RCW 28A.150.415 to train school district staff on one or more of the following topics: SEL; trauma-informed SEL practices; recognizing and responding to adverse childhood experiences, emotional or behavioral distress; mental health literacy; anti-bullying strategies; culturally sustaining practices.

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Peer LEAs identified several potential strategies for addressing this challenge area. These strategies include restructuring the timing of professional development activities, building trust and curiosity within staff, hosting SEL talks, developing evaluation teams to assess staff needs and connections, reframing the definition of SEL and how it fits with multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and lastly, identifying an "SEL champion" who can help model and build understanding with colleagues.

The following list of resources can support additional learning and action planning.

Resource	Author	Connections to the Challenge Area
Washington SEL Module Segment 3: Creating a Professional Culture Based on SEL	OSPI	The segment provides strategies to create a professional culture in which culturally responsive SEL is a key ingredient (e.g., implementing an SEL practice at staff meetings, professional learning communities on SEL, and coaching and feedback on SEL).
SEL Online Module and Facilitator's Guide	OSPI	These resources are designed to build knowledge and awareness for teachers, administrators, and school staff of what SEL is and why it is important. The module explains how to implement and integrate SEL into different contexts in a culturally responsive way. The facilitator's guide can support professional learning leaders in leveraging the SEL online module to create professional learning that is engaging, relevant, and interactive.
Professional Learning Day Guidance	OSPI	This resource provides guidance for the implementation of professional learning days funded under RCW 28A.150.415 to train staff on SEL or SEL-related topics.
Build Foundational Support and Plan	CASEL	This webpage provides key activities to help SEL leaders build support across the school district community and create a plan to ensure that SEL can thrive.
Design and Implement an SEL Professional Learning Program for Schools	CASEL	This webpage provides a process and resources to assess, plan, and deliver comprehensive SEL professional learning.

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Embedding SEL Schoolwide

SEL implementation needs to be intentional and integrated throughout the school day, inside and outside the classroom. Although educators are working diligently to connect and embed SEL within their academic instruction, staff are struggling to intentionally incorporate SEL into their classroom schedules because of timing and academic structures. Districts are also exploring new ways to address the importance of embedding SEL schoolwide, such that SEL is not an add-on but a part of the fabric of school life. In addition, there is a need to obtain curricula that are culturally relevant, are grounded in equity, and provide sufficient adult support.

To address these challenges, peer LEAs identified several potential strategies to promote SEL within the classroom. These strategies include centering on professional development, SEL curricula and frameworks for teachers, obtaining curricula that are culturally relevant and offer sufficient adult support, and creating pacing guides for SEL curricula.

The following list of resources can support additional learning and action planning.

Resource	Author	Connections to the Challenge Area
Washington SEL Module Segment 2: Embedding SEL Schoolwide	OSPI	This segment includes a strong focus on leadership, delineating the actions that administrators and instructional leaders can take to embed SEL within the core functioning of the school, such as defining the collective values of the school through the development of an SEL vision and mission, and aligning SEL with other initiatives (e.g., cultural responsiveness, universal design for learning [UDL], trauma-informed practices, MTSS, educator effectiveness [Teacher/Principal Evaluation Program, or TPEP], discipline, mental health, and bullying prevention).
Washington SEL Module Segment 4: Integrating SEL into Culturally Responsive Classrooms	OSPI	This segment explores the implementation of social emotional programming and practices through a culturally responsive lens and the potential barriers to implement SEL.

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Instructional Practices That Integrate Equity-Centered Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning	Nicholas Yoder, Harmony SEL at National University/AIR; Angela M. Ward, Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety; and Sara Wolforth, AIR	This brief explores 10 educator practices that promote social, emotional, and academic development to support educators in integrating SEL into academic instruction.
Washington SEL Implementation Brief: Focus on Culturally Responsive Practices	OSPI	This brief provides guidance and resources to support a culturally responsive approach to SEL.
Schoolwide Guide for SEL: Promote SEL for Students	CASEL	This webpage provides guidance and resources to support students' SEL across the school, classrooms, homes, and communities.

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