

Washington SEL Implementation Brief: For Educators

Learning Is Inherently Social and Emotional

Schools that focus on creating welcoming and inclusive environments and on supporting all students' social emotional development in ways that honor students' histories and cultures can promote their long-term success and well-being. Emotions and relationships directly affect how students learn and how they apply that learning. Emotions and relationships can either motivate students to engage in learning, or, if unmanaged, interfere with attention, memory, and positive behaviors.¹ For example, learning happens when these conditions are met:

- **Students are seen and heard.** When students believe their educators respect their identity and culture, they are more likely to succeed in school.
- **Strengths are leveraged and built upon.** When adults deliberately focus on students' strengths—academic, social, and emotional—learning increases, and students are more likely to reach their potential.
- **Students form meaningful relationships.** When educators build strong relationships with their students, learning increases and everyone feels more committed to school.²

What Is Social Emotional Learning?

Social emotional learning (SEL) is broadly understood as a process through which people build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life. (See Washington state's SEL Implementation Guide)

SEL is **not** a way to "grade" or identify deficits, and it is not just a curriculum or add-on. Rather, SEL is an intentional approach to building student assets.

SEL supports **education equity**³ in multiple ways: emphasizing whole-child development, drawing attention to the social nature of learning, advancing the belief that all children can learn, developing young people's skills to navigate social contexts, and improving relationships between students and educators—a key protective factor for **all** students.⁴

¹ CASEL. (2007). Retrieved from www.casel.org

² Aspen Institute. (2019). *From a nation at risk to a nation at hope: Recommendations from the Commission of Social, Emotional, and Academic Development*. <http://nationathope.org/communication-tools/>

³ Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential. Retrieved from the National Equity Project website: <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/education-equity-definition>

⁴ Jones, S. M., & Kahn, J. (2017). *The evidence base for how we learn: Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development. Consensus statements of evidence from the Council of Distinguished Scientists*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.



Washington State's SEL Standards⁵

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| Self-Awareness: | Individual has the ability to identify their emotions, personal assets, areas for growth, and potential external resources and supports. |
| Self-Management: | Individual has the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. |
| Self-Efficacy: | Individual has the ability to motivate themselves, persevere, and see themselves as capable. |
| Social-Awareness: | Individual has the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures. |
| Social Management: | Individual has the ability to make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions. |
| Social Engagement: | Individual has the ability to consider others and show a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community. |

Washington State SEL Framework: Essential Elements and Guiding Principles

1. Create the conditions to support student SEL through climate and culture.
2. SEL requires collaboration among families, educators, community partners, and young people in its design and implementation.
3. Build adult capacity.

Equity: Each child receives what they need to develop their full potential.

Culturally sustaining: Culture is viewed as a resource for learning, not a barrier.

Universal design: Learning differences are planned for and accommodated.

Trauma-informed: Knowledge of the effects of trauma is integrated into policy and practice.

"Transformative SEL [lets] 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 societal problems."⁶

⁵ Social and Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup. (2016). *Addressing social emotional learning in Washington's K–12 public schools*. Retrieved from <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2022-12/selbworkgroup2016report.pdf>

⁶ Jagers, R. J., Rivas-Drake, D., & Borowski, T. (2018). *Equity and social emotional learning: A cultural analysis* [Framework brief]. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Measuring SEL.



Entry Points for Promoting SEL in Classrooms Now

1. **Relationships matter.** Build positive relationships with your students. Affirm the culture and background of the diverse students you serve. Draw from your students' cultural assets to enrich SEL in the classroom.
2. **Context matters.** Students and adults use their social emotional skills depending on the context in which they find themselves. Create environments that support student application of social emotional skills.
3. **Knowledge of self matters.** Begin with developing your own SEL competencies. Use a [self-assessment](#), such as this one from the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, to reflect on how your experiences and cultural background impact your teaching.
4. **Awareness of current SEL work matters.** Learn about the current SEL work in Washington State by checking out standards, benchmarks, indicators, and guiding principles. Explore ways you can meet these standards in your classes or embed them into classroom rituals.
5. **Using effective SEL strategies matters.** Use and assess instructional strategies and classroom management techniques that foster a supportive, caring classroom environment—such as these [Three Signature SEL Practices](#) from Oakland Unified School District.
6. **Creating culturally sustaining classrooms and integrating SEL matters.** Complete the [OSPI SEL Online Module](#) for educators on integrating SEL into culturally sustaining classrooms. Use the complete [SEL Implementation Guide](#) to practice, model, and implement SEL with fidelity.

10 Teaching Practices That Promote SEL⁷

- ✓ Student-Centered Discipline
- ✓ Teacher Language
- ✓ Responsibility and Choice
- ✓ Warmth and Support
- ✓ Cooperative Learning
- ✓ Classroom Discussions
- ✓ Self-Reflection and Self-Assessment
- ✓ Balanced Instruction
- ✓ Academic Press and Expectations
- ✓ Competence Building—Modeling, Practicing, Feedback, Coaching

⁷ Yoder, N. (2017). *Teaching the whole child: Instructional practices that support social-emotional learning in three teacher evaluation frameworks* [Research-to- Practice Brief]. Washington, DC: Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research.



Teacher SEL Resources

CASEL Teacher SEL Resources

A curated list from CASEL that focuses on SEL resources for teachers.

Center on Great Teachers and Leaders

Social Emotional Learning in the Daily Life of Classrooms includes activities and strategies for teachers.

Social Emotional Learning and Equity Pitfalls and Recommendations

Resources for achieving educational equity in your classroom.

Kernels of Practice for SEL: Low-Cost, Low-Burden Strategies

A brief from the Wallace Foundation exploring quickly taught SEL strategies.

Professional Learning By State

Massachusetts: [Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practice](#)

Michigan: [Connecting Social and Emotional Learning to Michigan's School Improvement Framework](#) (pp. 18–19)

Minnesota: [SEL District Implementation Development Guidance](#)

New York: [Social Emotional Learning: Essential for Learning, Essential for Life](#) (pp. 28–29)

Tennessee: [Professional Learning Planning and Evaluation Rubric](#)

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