Washington SEL Implementation Brief: Focus on Culturally Sustaining Practices

Consideration for Culturally Sustaining Practices

Culturally sustaining practices are approaches in which students' cultural strengths and identities are recognized as assets for developing social emotional and academic skills. These practices support students' academic achievement and sense of well-being by affirming their cultural place in the world. Culturally sustaining practices intentionally examine power and privilege, implicit biases, and institutional racism, which serve as barriers to realizing the full potential of transformative social emotional learning (SEL) practices.

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**[1] 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.[2]

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.

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[1] 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

[2] 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.

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> **Washington State's SEL Standards**[3]
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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.

Implications for Individuals

To strengthen cultural sustainment, educators need to reflect on their own cultural norms and upbringing as they engage in learning about their students' cultures and backgrounds. Educators—many with backgrounds different from their students—must be prepared to recognize how their own personal values, belief systems, and principles impact their instructional practice, language, and actions toward students.

Opportunities for Equity-Focused SEL Practices

Self-awareness and social awareness

Support students to develop positive racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identities and cultivate students' critical, social, and political consciousness.[4] Provide opportunities to examine and compare dominant and non-dominant values, such as individualism and collectivism. Help students understand how race, class, and other identities position them differently in various settings. Help students recognize that their ability to navigate these competing demands and messages is a strength.

Support educators to reflect on how their cultural worldview and biases influence their interactions with students and families. Provide opportunities for educators to develop a socio-cultural, historical, and equity-focused orientation to their work with students.

Self-management and social management

Help students to develop coping strategies to manage acculturative stress, microaggressions, and discrimination. Provide students with opportunities to engage in critical analyses of

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[3] 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

[4] Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465–491.

inequality and support them in processing their emotions and channeling their energies toward challenging inequities and advocating for themselves, their allies, or their communities.

Provide educators with opportunities to listen deeply to students' life experiences and perspectives. Support educators to integrate universal design for learning (UDL), culturally sustaining, and trauma-informed practices. Encourage educators to consider how school policies and practices may be interpreted and implemented differently depending on one's identity, as no practice is neutral.

Self-efficacy and social engagement

Support students in developing a sense of collective efficacy by working with others to challenge injustice and create positive change—for example, through youth participatory action research. Provide opportunities for students to participate in class, school, and community decision making.

Support educators in developing positive, trusting relationships with students whose identities and backgrounds differ from their own. Encourage educators to reflect on how they can offer students opportunities for collective empowerment through social engagement. Provide opportunities for educators to collaborate with others to enhance their own growth.

Resources for Equity-Focused SEL

Social Emotional Learning and Equity Pitfalls and Recommendations:
National Equity Project

Building Relationships with Tribes: A Native Process for ESSA Consultation:
Tribal Consultation Handout

Social and Emotional Learning in Washington schools, building foundations and strategies:
SEL Online Module

A brief from the Wallace Foundation exploring quickly taught SEL strategies:
Kernels of Practice for SEL: Low-Cost, Low-Burden Strategies

A practical guide with an elementary school and out-of-school-time focus that looks inside and across 25 leading SEL programs:
Navigating SEL From the Inside Out

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