

ENACTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

PRACTICES & SUPPORTS IN CORE DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

FACTS-AT-A-GLANCE

Policy Analysis for California Education recently visited middle schools in the CORE districts to learn about the ways educators advance students' social-emotional learning. The research team specifically focused on schools that are yielding better results on social-emotional learning than schools with similar demographics on CORE's annual student survey. The goal was to investigate how educators define SEL, support it in and outside of the school day, and use data to guide efforts.

Why study social emotional learning?

There is a growing consensus that when schools attend to students' social-emotional development, improvements can be made in areas such as college readiness, career success, mental health and relationships.

“While every school and district will have to choose for itself what social-emotional learning approaches will be best for their specific context, knowing what successful schools and districts have done, and why, can provide a powerful starting point.”

- PACE

CONCEPTIONS OF SEL

Educators ideas about the definition of SEL fall into six categories:



Supporting student mental and emotional well-being



Creating a safe and supportive school climate



Developing social skills and appropriate behavior



Supporting adolescent development



Building a culture of inclusion and acceptance of difference



Addressing the needs of the whole child

How schools measure and use SEL data

District administrators report that using SEL data increases awareness and incentive to focus on SEL and guides improvements in SEL practice and outcomes. Districts use SEL data to monitor accountability and performance, and to provide targeted supports or interventions. School-level educators use SEL data to plan, identify areas of need, and set goals.

“The experiences of the CORE Districts and case study schools have the potential to inform the ongoing work of educators and leaders within CORE and in other schools, districts and states around the country.”

- PACE

SCHOOL-LEVEL PRACTICES

At the school level, we identified six common and overlapping practices intended to support student SEL. These include:

1 Strategies to promote positive school climate and relationships

- Whole-school culture-building strategies
- Promoting personal interaction to build trust and relationships
- Advisory period
- Organizing schedules and students to support relationships
- Inclusion strategies

2 Supporting positive behavior

- Positive behavior management and restorative practices
- Setting and enforcing clear values and expectations
- Targeted supports for individuals or groups

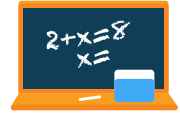


3 Promoting engagement, relationships, and SEL-related skills using elective courses and extra-curricular activities

- Elective courses
- Clubs to support leadership and inclusion
- Afterschool programs and activities

4 SEL-specific classroom practices and curricula

- Creating a positive classroom environment
- Strategies for managing emotions
- Modeling appropriate language and mindsets



5 Marshalling human capital resources in support of SEL

- Staff leadership teams focused on school culture-climate and SEL
- Non-instructional roles
- Supporting adult SEL

6 Measurement and data use



DISTRICT-LEVEL PRACTICES

In some districts, central office administrators played important roles in supporting school SEL efforts. These supports fell into five categories:



Priorities and Frameworks



Staffing



Programs and Curricula



Training and Adult Training



Measurement and Data Use

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Educators and policymakers should consider improving SEL policies by:



- Building common understanding and alignment regarding SEL;
- Investing in building adult understanding of SEL;
- Critically examining the measurement of SEL and the use of these data;
- Explicitly articulating how SEL efforts relate to racial equity goals; and
- Considering what content-specific SEL practice looks like and how to support it.

Practitioners in schools and classrooms should consider improving SEL practices by:



- Building common understanding and coherence regarding SEL;
- Considering the full range of strategies;
- Promoting student agency and leadership; and
- Building on assets.