

Common Pitfalls to Avoid for SEL Solutions

Studies show that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has led to benefits ranging from improved classroom behavior to higher graduation rates. Educators across the country are codifying approaches to social emotional learning. Whether you're just starting out with SEL or looking to enhance an existing solution, here are a few tips on avoiding common mistakes when implementing SEL in schools and districts.

Starting without community buy-in

Social-Emotional Learning programs are often built with a top-down approach, starting at the state and/or superintendent level. But without the inclusion of teacher practices in the classroom and parents/guardians at home, an SEL program won't get off the ground. When building out a program, ensure involvement from stakeholders (including parents) and develop shared language as a foundation. This can culminate in student work that involves every stakeholder: consider developing projects where students solve a relevant problem within the community.

Failing to define success

The good news is that SEL is an educational paradigm shift that empowers educators to center student voice and get both school and home communities involved in education. One challenge school administrators face, however, is the question of measuring success of SEL implementation. A successful SEL program is embedded seamlessly in a student's daily life - whether in class, at home or while talking to a friend in the lunch line. Consequently, there's no single indicator that allows teachers to measure the success of an SEL program. Once again, stakeholder buy-in is key. Whether your community decides on measuring teacher usage of evidence-based SEL resources, academic indicators such as attendance, or other behavioral indicators, defining success should be part of program design - never an afterthought.



Why Invest in SEL?

For every \$1 spent on effective SEL programming, the return on investment is \$11 in long-term benefits to students, schools and communities.¹ Outcomes include higher lifetime earnings, improved health (mental and physical), and reduced juvenile crime.

What do educators believe about SEL?

- 95% believe that social-emotional skills are teachable
 - 97% believe that SEL will benefit students from all backgrounds
- but-
- 56% believe SEL is not taught on a schoolwide, programmatic basis.²

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Boxing in SEL instruction

SEL instruction isn't inextricably linked to a single content area. Rather than sporadic activities or lessons designed around SEL, ensure teachers connect their lessons to SEL skill development by including specific SEL learning objectives. CASEL's outline of the 5 SEL core competencies³ can serve as a guide for outlining units, establishing guiding questions, and building learning pathways. When designing instruction for SEL, confirm that pathways are replicable and embedded across the curriculum for a holistic approach. The magic of SEL is that the skills are highly transferable between subjects, and even outside the classroom.

Stopping short of student ownership

When introducing new concepts and modeling new skills, showing beats telling. No matter the grade level, choosing appropriate active learning techniques is key, and this isn't limited to teacher-driven instruction. Educators can empower and amplify student voice by using student-centered learning strategies: think reciprocal teaching, group discussions, and case studies. When teaching mindfulness strategies like deep breathing and positive visualization, create connections to conflict resolution and cooperative learning. These strategies not only center the learning experience on the students' lives and reactions to content, but offer opportunities for them to build relationships, resolve disagreement, and take action with their peers.

Failing to check in along the way

Starting with community buy-in is essential, but coordination, collaboration, and iteration along the way are also key. Since SEL concepts and skills are best reinforced in different situations, not just in specific classroom lessons, teachers need to check in continually with their colleagues to align on strategy and implementation. In addition to checking in on pedagogy, coordination is necessary to successfully regulate the proper climate for SEL. Safe spaces to practice SEL skills should not be limited to individual classrooms; consequently, teachers need to collaborate in defining safe spaces and other norms that contribute to SEL culture permeating the school - as well as the surrounding community.



Resources for You

Newsela + SEL

Newsela's SEL Collection is a valuable addition to any program, whether you're just getting started or are looking to enhance an existing program. Why is it unique? It empowers teachers to weave SEL into core classroom instruction. Find out more at newsela.com/collections/#sel.

¹Columbia University's Center for Cost-Benefit Analysis, <http://cbcse.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SEL-Revised.pdf>.

²The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, "Ready to Lead" http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead_FINAL.pdf.

³The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, <https://casel.org/>.