Helping Principals Address Their Top Priorities

What Principals Want

In a national survey of nearly 900 principals released in November 2017 by CASEL, Civic Enterprises, and Hart Research, school leaders say they understand the need for an integrated approach to learning that addresses the social and emotional development and academic achievement of students. They are also ready and willing to make social and emotional learning (SEL) a priority in their schools, and would welcome more support in several areas of implementation.

CASEL and its collaborators offer multiple free tools and resources to address these priorities, which include more time, more training, more funding, reinforcement in the home, and a focus on assessment. More tools are being created and curated regularly.

Priority 1. More time

71% of school leaders say that teachers not having enough time is a challenge. In an earlier 2013 survey of teachers, 61% agreed.

One way to make time for prioritizing SEL is to avoid reinventing the wheel. Successful districts, such as those in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative, are integrating SEL into every aspect of their work — from strategic plans and budgets to academic curriculum and professional development. That way, SEL is not “just one more thing to do” but how school is done. SEL is embedded into the vision, board policies, budgets, and more.

CASEL’s SEL District Resource Center has guidance, strategies, and tools addressing everything from strategy and vision to professional learning and staffing. The website also provides tools to assess your own efforts.

Priority 2. More training

60% of school leaders say that teachers need more training in SEL. In the 2013 teacher survey, 45% of teachers had not received training.

The SEL District Resource Center offers extensive advice from leading districts on how to strengthen professional development. The module offers a four-part rubric that you can use to assess your own efforts.

There are flexible ways to take structures already in place and use them for professional learning opportunities, like team time. Using an evidence-based, high-quality SEL program is key. CASEL’s Program Guides evaluate the best evidence-based SEL programs in the country, preschool through 12th grade, and share advice on how schools and districts can select a program that best fits their needs.

Washington State has also developed an excellent online set of professional development tools available for free.

Subscribe to CASEL’s monthly newsletter and/or check out our website for regular updates.
Training involves helping teachers integrate SEL into academic course offerings. Several tools, developed with the help of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, show how to integrate SEL with math, English Language Arts, and social studies.

**Priority 3. More funding**

59% of school leaders say lack of funding is a challenge.

It's important to effectively fund SEL so initiatives can be developed, implemented, and sustained. Supportive district policies can help.

The SEL District Resource Center offers practical advice and numerous tools for how to align financial and human resources. These include a four-part rubric to assess your own efforts.

The Financial Sustainability website profiles budgeting efforts by Austin, Chicago, Washoe County, and a small district in the Chicago suburbs, including videos, case studies, and online budget tools.

**Priority 4. More reinforcement at home**

59% of school leaders say lack of reinforcement at home is a challenge. In the 2013 teacher survey, 81% of teachers agreed.

Effective SEL requires an approach that involves everyone — district and school leaders, community partners, and families — working together to ensure students receive the support they need.

The In the Home section on CASEL's website includes annotated links to multiple websites, articles, blogs, videos, newsletters, and guides, notably excellent online parent guides from Edutopia and NBC.

Expert Jennifer Miller's Confident Parents, Confident Kids blog offers a wealth of useful advice. Or check out her interview with CASEL.

**Priority 5. Better measures of social and emotional skills**

45% of school leaders want help measuring SEL skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

We know that if it gets assessed, it gets addressed. The Assessment Work Group is leading a multiyear effort by educators, researchers, and assessment experts to help the field develop, test, refine, and roll out quality SEL assessments. The work group is sponsoring design challenges to identify top performance-based assessments, developing a series of briefs that lay out key issues, and publishing guides that will analyze the current state of the field and recommend policies and practices. MeasuringSEL.com is regularly updated with new information, including a weekly blog.

Another strategy is looking at data, such as school climate and attendance, to inform changes. California's CORE Districts have been breaking new ground in using surveys and other tools to measure climate and students' SEL competencies.

Washoe County (Nev.) Public Schools, a member of CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative, also has developed and shared useful tools.

Subscribe to CASEL’s monthly newsletter and/or check out our website for regular updates.