

# California's Social and Emotional Learning Guiding Principles



Representatives from more than 20 California education organizations and systems, in partnership with the

California Department of Education, have come together to affirm social and emotional learning as an essential part of a well-rounded, quality education in all youth-serving settings.

The following Social and Emotional (SEL) Guiding Principles (Principles) are intended to inform and support strong SEL practice across the state based on the collective experience of the contributors. A robust body of research tells us that when evidence-based SEL programming is implemented well, academic achievement increases as does student well-being. <sup>1</sup> Those results not only persist over time and lead to better relationships and life outcomes for students across all socioeconomic and racial groups, but can also save our schools and society as much as \$11 for every \$1 invested. <sup>2, 3</sup>

A recent consensus statement by The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development's Council of Distinguished Scientists asserted that "[i]ntegrating social and emotional development with academic instruction is foundational to the success of our young people, and therefore to the success of our education system and society at large." <sup>4</sup>

The integration of SEL to promote equity and address the needs of the whole child, and educators, is supported by many of our current policies, standards, funding and decision-making mechanisms, including Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP).

As education leaders and their stakeholders are beginning or continuing integration of SEL in schools, districts, and youth-serving organizations, the Principles can be a resource in a variety of ways: in the development of LCAP goals; for roll out of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS); to set school or district leadership team priorities; to inform the design of professional learning, instructional approaches, and curricula adoption; in determining assessment methodologies and tools; and, in the building of coalitions of families and community stakeholders.

The Principles should be refined to meet the unique needs of each community and can be used to measure progress toward shared social and emotional learning goals. To model a learn and improve approach, CDE and partners plan to update the Principles as they are put to the test in the field and input is received from learning communities across the state.

## INTRODUCTION

To achieve the California Department of Education's mission and vision, our schools must support every child's unique journey to fulfill their potential by providing:

- an equitable, culturally responsive education,
- academic, social, and emotional learning, and
- safe, engaging, inclusive environment.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” Importantly, all learning is contextual and relationship- driven and SEL can serve as a lever to enhance equity, build positive climate and culture, and foster a sense of belonging among all community members.

The following Guiding Principles are designed to build on the implicit and explicit SEL practices already happening in many schools and to promote the intentional use of evidence and research-based practices to guide decision-making.

These Guiding Principles seek to empower local stakeholders to continue to advance SEL in ways that meet the needs of their specific contexts and populations.



### **1 Adopt Whole Child Development as the Goal of Education**

Take a systems approach to promoting student academic, social, and emotional learning, physical well-being, and college, career, and civic life readiness. <sup>5</sup> Name SEL as not a “nice to have,” but a “must have” to ensure student success in school, work, and community.

#### **A. Systems change:**

- Embed and promote SEL across all education and youth development systems and structures, including but not limited to: vision statements, strategic plans, budgetary decisions, staffing, professional learning, school-wide policies, curricular adoption criteria, instructional practices, and instructional quality assessments. <sup>6</sup>

#### **B. Diverse and inclusive leadership teams:**

- Systems change is most effectively driven by bringing together educator, student, family and community member representatives of varied gender, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. <sup>7</sup>

#### **C. Social and emotional skills development:**

- Students and adults must have opportunities to practice, demonstrate, and reinforce social and emotional skills within the context of supportive relationships. <sup>8</sup> Additionally, social and emotional skills instruction and integration into academic content areas contribute to a comprehensive approach. <sup>9</sup>

#### **D. Student-centered discipline policies and practices:**

- Discipline policies that are aligned with promoting social and emotional growth, as opposed to punishment and exclusion, have been shown to yield the strongest student outcomes, while offering the opportunity to repair harm and build community. <sup>10, 11, 12</sup>

#### **E. Climate and culture:**

- SEL and school climate are interrelated and reciprocal. A positive school climate and culture can be developed when community members are building strong social and emotional skills. <sup>13, 14</sup>



## 2 Commit to Equity

All students must have opportunities to build SEL skills and receive an assets-based educational experience that is personalized, culturally relevant and responsive, and intentionally addresses racism and implicit bias. Use practices that build on the existing strengths of students, educators, families, and communities.

### A. Address the opportunity gap:

Opportunities to build SEL skills must be offered to all students and not be determined by race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, socioeconomic status, documentation status, and/or ZIP code.

### B. Ensure representation:

When the educator workforce is representative of, and connected to, the student body, academic, social, and emotional outcomes improve for students. <sup>15, 16, 17</sup>

### C. Student and adult-led:

SEL efforts are most effective when schools are participatory and engaging and diverse student voices are included in decision-making and improvement efforts. <sup>18, 19</sup>

### D. Healing-informed:

Educational experiences must seek to counteract the institutional and structural biases and related traumas that often drive inequitable outcomes for students. <sup>20</sup>



## 3 Build Capacity

Build the capacity of both students and adults through an intentional focus on relationship-centered learning environments and by offering research-based learning experiences that cultivate core social and emotional competencies. <sup>21, 22</sup>

### A. Positive relationships and belonging:

To cultivate resilience to adversity and build the foundation for social and emotional growth, ensure every student and adult feels that they belong, have value, and have a network of caring peers to rely on. <sup>23, 24, 25, 26</sup>

### B. Student and adult competencies

Identify specific, research-based social and emotional competencies to address, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible-decision making, or related pro-social mindsets and affective skills. Ensure common definitions of competencies are used. <sup>27</sup>

### C. Developmental standards:

To bring intentionality to practice, identify SEL teaching and learning standards or indicators that are responsive to student strengths and needs. <sup>28</sup>

### D. Pre-service training and ongoing professional learning:

Schools of education and ongoing professional learning should address student social and emotional development as well as personal growth strategies, including addressing bias, among those working with children, such as educators and other adult staff. <sup>29, 30</sup>



## 4 Partner with Families and Community

Maximize the resources of the entire school community, including expanded learning opportunities, early learning and care programs, and family and community partnerships, to advance SEL and student well-being. <sup>31</sup>

### A. Family engagement:

- Provide families with options for meaningful contributions to, and participation in, their child's learning experience to build respectful, mutually beneficial relationships. <sup>32, 33</sup>

### B. Expanded learning:

- Establish shared goals across all youth serving settings, such as after school programs and summer learning programs, to leverage capacity and increase shared responsibility for positive student outcomes. <sup>34</sup>

### C. Early learning:

- Consider the inclusion of early learning and care programs as SEL systems are developed. <sup>35, 36</sup>

### D. Community partnerships:

- Address the basic needs of students and families, including social and emotional well-being, through partnerships with community-based organizations and other local stakeholders. <sup>37, 38</sup>



## 5 Learn and Improve

Adopt continuous improvement practices and use evidence to guide decision-making while aiming to enhance the quality of student social and emotional learning opportunities. Use data to inform improvement of instructional and school practices, not for accountability purposes. <sup>39, 40</sup>

### A. Implementation plans and progress monitoring:

- To drive high quality implementation, conduct comprehensive planning, monitor implementation, and adopt policies and practices which highlight places where additional resources or supports are most necessary. <sup>41</sup>

### B. Measurement:

- Educators working to improve students' social and emotional skills should track linked outcomes such as school climate and the quality and quantity of opportunities for students to learn and practice social and emotional skill building in both the school day and expanded learning settings. Educators that choose to directly assess students' social and emotional skills should use evidence-based, improvement-focused tools. <sup>42</sup>

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