



Quick Reference Guide: District Level Social and Emotional Supports

Monitor Climate and Build Capacity for Social and Emotional Learning

Social Emotional Learning Definition

“Social and emotional learning (SEL) is 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.”

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2016). [Social, and Emotional Learning, Definitions](#). p.1

The district reviews data on each school’s climate to ensure that ELs have safe and collaborative learning environments; the district provides professional learning opportunities to administrators and teachers on developing students’ social and emotional competencies.

District leaders conduct in-depth, multi-faceted evaluations to assess the presence and quality of social and emotional learning and supports for English Learners (ELs). They review school climate data from surveys and focus groups that gather EL perception about the learning environment. They also gather and review data from EL families, community, members and employers about how well they perceive the district is addressing ELs’ social and emotional learning (SEL) needs. For example, they use tools such as the [Model Feedback Survey](#), the [Views of Climate and Learning \(VOCAL\) Survey](#), and [Views of Instruction,](#)

[State Standards, Teaching, and Assessment \(VISTA\)](#) and District Analysis Review Tools ([DART](#)) to gather data or develop local methods to gather data tailored to the ELs served by the district. In addition, district leaders use data to identify what is working and in need of improvement, and to inventory current efforts and potential future strategies to better support ELs. They establish priorities and goals for addressing needs in [district and school plans](#) and consider the cultural and linguistic diversity of their student populations to ensure SEL initiatives are culturally responsive. They also provide professional learning focused on meeting the social and emotional needs of ELs and promoting SEL competencies and collaborate with school leaders and educators to identify gaps in SEL implementation and align resources to support improvement.

Deploy Staff to Provide Tiered Social and Emotional Learning Supports

District leaders strategically deploy support staff to schools to provide tiered social and emotional learning supports where they are needed.

Effective SEL instruction and support for ELs requires appropriate staffing and adequate resources. To develop [SEL core competencies](#) ELs need qualified staff and a system of supports that is consistently understood and implemented. District leaders ensure educators and support staff are well-versed in SEL competencies, EL social and emotional assets and needs, and [strategies for ensuring ELs can develop these competencies](#) and for supporting ELs social and emotional needs. Educators and staff who provide SEL supports may also need professional learning on how to do so in culturally and linguistically responsive ways that are appropriate to each role (ESL, bilingual, content area, guidance counselor, etc.).

For example school adjustment counselors working with ELs may need help learning strategies for overcoming language barriers and additional professional learning on how linguistic, social and cultural aspects may influence the way they support ELs. Supporting effective SEL supports for ELs may also require providing collaborative time for educators and support staff to discuss EL needs and progress, and plan interventions together. In addition, district leaders stay current on the SEL needs of ELs to leverage existing resources or fund new staff to deliver necessary supports. For example, a bilingual reading specialist providing supports at a dual language program may be assigned a high school intervention class that supports readers in Spanish Literacy, if appropriately licensed.

Strategies that Promote SEL

- Free-standing Lessons that provide explicit, step-by-step instruction to teach SEL competences
- Practices that create conditions that facilitate SEL development in students
- Integration of skill instruction and practices that support SEL in academics
- Guidance to District and Building Administrators on how to facilitate SEL school wide

[Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning](#)

Communicate Urgency and Support Collaboration to Maximize Resources

District leaders communicate urgency around meeting ELs’ social and emotional needs and support collaboration across schools and with families and community-based organizations to maximize available resources.

District leaders set the tone for expectations regarding SEL for ELs. They can communicate urgency around SEL for ELs by:

- Setting targets for SEL practices and climate perceptions for ELs in district plans

- Establishing implementation teams who oversee, monitor, and support implementation of SEL initiatives and who ensure it happens for ELs at all levels
- Developing a district professional learning plan that differentiates the needs of students and reinforces SEL practices for specialized EL populations ([Newcomers](#), students with limited and interrupted formal education, etc.)
- Gathering data on progress and effectiveness of SEL initiatives with ELs
- Regularly communicating to key stakeholders (school committee, EL parents, educators, staff, and external partners) about SEL for ELs as a priority, SEL goals, and progress towards meeting those

Effective district leaders also partner with EL families and community organizations to support ELs' SEL. EL families can share social and emotional issues that need addressing as part of SEL interventions and supports. Community organizations may be able to help meet specific SEL needs that a district is unable to address. For example, community partners can be instrumental in providing family counseling, housing resources, job retraining programs, food bank supports, childcare vouchers, or transportation assistance to ELs and their families.

Actions-at-a-Glance: Social and Emotional Supports

Social and Emotional Supports: What can educators at the district level do?

- Collect data from ELs, EL parents, educators, staff and district and school leaders regarding SEL needs and existing supports and identify gaps
- Include EL SEL goals and objectives in the district improvement and professional learning plans, monitor progress, and communicate achievements and improvements to key stakeholders on a regular basis
- Invest resources to provide professional learning focused on culturally responsive SEL for all students and EL-specific SEL strategies
- Partner with community-based agencies and organizations to establish, implement and evaluate SEL supports for ELs

Planning Resources

DESE Practical Tools and Resources

[Planning for Success DESE, The District Planning Process](#) provides a hands-on planning process designed to build district and school capacity and coherence while also building community understanding and support. It includes a multi-year improvement plan and annual action plan for implementation.

[MODEL Feedback survey](#) provides sample surveys that can be used in educator evaluation, including a student feedback survey for classroom teachers, and a staff feedback survey for school-level administrators.

[District Analysis Review Tools](#) (DART) provides district level EL data on a range of student achievement benchmarks, including attendance, suspension, and graduation rates.

[Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Reflection Tool](#) provides a tool for inquiry-based process to improve safe and supportive learning environments.

[Views of Climate and Learning \(VOCAL\) Student Survey](#) presents student views on three dimensions and nine topics of school climate: Engagement, Safety, and Environment.

[Views of Instruction, State Standard, Teaching and Assessment Survey Project](#) presents educators' views on the implementation and supports of five statewide initiatives: Educator effectiveness (hiring, developing, evaluating, and retaining effective educators), State curriculum frameworks, Social and emotional learning, health and safety.

[Cultural Proficiency: A Strategy to Address Equity Gaps in Students' Achievement and Learning Experiences](#) provides guidance regarding cultural responsive instruction.

DESE Guidance

[Massachusetts Model for Educator Effectiveness: Classroom Teacher Rubric](#) outlines criteria for effective educators, including criteria specific to the Culturally Proficient Indicator (p. 8).

[Massachusetts Model for Educator Effectiveness: School Level Administrator Rubric](#) outlines criteria for effective building-level school leaders, including Meeting Diverse Needs of Students (p. 2), Social Emotional Well Being (p. 10), and Culturally Proficient Communication, (p. 18).

[Massachusetts Model for Educator Effectiveness: Superintendent and District Level Leader Rubric](#) outlines criteria for effective district-level leaders, including expectations for Shared Responsibility (p. 18) and Culturally Proficient Communication (p. 19).

[Edwin Analytics](#) is a reporting and data analysis tool that gives authorized users access to new information, reports and perspectives on education and programs that specifically support improvements in teaching and learning. Several Edwin Reports can be used to learn about educator effectiveness and student access to effective teachers, such as EV319: Educator Evaluation, Student Learning Experience Reports (SE 321 and SE 322), EL 637: Performance of Students in ACCESS (EL 627).

[Social Emotional Learning](#) offers an overview of the Social Emotional Learning work happening across the state and provides links to relevant guidance.

[DESE Educator Effectiveness Guidelines for Inclusive Practices](#) includes tools for districts, schools, and educators that are aligned to the MA Educator Evaluation Framework and promote evidence-based best practices for inclusion following the principles of Universal Design for Learning, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and Social and Emotional Learning.

Federal Resources

[A Review of the Literature on Social and Emotional Learning](#) includes four related reports and literature review about effective SEL programs.

[The Newcomer Toolkit](#) offers guidance on welcoming newcomers and addressing their SEL needs (see Chapter 4: [How Do We Support Newcomers' Social Emotional Needs?](#)).

Other Featured Resources

[9 Ideas to Support ELs' Social-Emotional Learning](#) offers suggestions on how to differentiate SEL practices with ELs.

[SEL Impact](#) provides links to a variety of research reports that discuss the impact of SEL on academic achievement.

[District-level SEL](#) provides guidance for prioritizing SEL at the district level.

[SEL Trends: Reorganizing District Central Offices](#) provides examples and an anecdotal context of how some districts are reorganizing to better coordinate and distribute SEL supports to create more responsive classrooms and schools.

[Social Emotional Learning: Three Signature Practices](#) highlights three strategies that one school district prioritized for implementation of SEL impact across buildings and classrooms.

[Is Social-Emotional Learning Really Going to Work for Students of Color?](#) examines the overall benefits of SEL and why people question its impact on students of color.

[Indiana Department of Education Social Emotional Learning Toolkit](#) offers descriptions of what SEL is and why it is important, along with helpful suggestions for practicing SEL.