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Equity and SEL

SEL can be a lever for advancing educational equity.

SEL can be a powerful lever for creating caring, just, inclusive, and healthy communities that support all individuals in reaching their fullest potential.

Systemic implementation of SEL both fosters and depends upon an equitable learning environment, where all students and adults feel respected, valued, and affirmed in their individual interests, talents, social identities, cultural values and backgrounds.

While SEL alone will not solve longstanding and deep-seated inequities in the education system, it can help schools promote understanding, examine biases, reflect on and address the impact of racism, build cross-cultural relationships, and cultivate adult and student practices that close opportunity gaps and create a more inclusive school community. In doing so, schools can promote high-quality educational opportunities and outcomes for all students, irrespective of race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and other differences.

This requires that SEL is implemented with an explicit goal of promoting educational equity.

When SEL is leveraged to promote equity:

- SEL is relevant for all students in all schools and affirms diverse cultures and backgrounds.** All students bring to school their identities, strengths, values, lived experiences, and culture. SEL does not seek to have students conform to the values and preferences of the dominant culture but uplifts and promotes understanding of the assets of diverse individuals and communities.

What it looks like: Schools use SEL as a framework to examine the importance of the range of adult and student identities and assets, reflect on and appreciate diversity, and foster an inclusive environment. Schools adopt evidence-based programs that are culturally-affirming and relevant to their communities and needs.

- SEL is a strategy for systemic improvement, not just an intervention for at-risk students.** While SEL reduces risky behaviors and improves mental health (Taylor et al, 2017), the impact is maximized when systemic SEL becomes a coordinating framework that transforms all aspects of schooling — from how staff collaborate to how classroom instruction is delivered.

What it looks like: Systemic implementation fosters schoolwide conditions that promote social and emotional growth for all students, including opportunities to build trusting relationships, welcoming learning environments, consistent routines, engaging teaching strategies, culturally-relevant practices and authentic family and community partnerships.

- SEL is a way to uplift student voice and promote agency and civic engagement.** The goal of SEL is to build skills and competencies that help students successfully navigate and meaningfully contribute to their schools, careers, families, relationships, and multicultural communities. This occurs when SEL goes beyond behavior management and positions young people “as experts in understanding and fashioning a world that is more just and equitable” (Jagers, 2016, p. 3).

What it looks like: All students have developmentally-appropriate opportunities to engage in discussions with each other, raise problems and identify solutions in their schools and communities, productively challenge the inequities that they see, have a voice in how the classroom and school operate, and take on authentic leadership roles.

- SEL supports adults to strengthen practices that promote equity.** SEL also offers a way for adults to examine how their own social and emotional competencies and the policies and practices that they put in place may impact equity, and acknowledge and address the larger impact that systemic and individual bias, racism or oppression may have on the lives of their students.

What it looks like: Adults reflect on their own identities, assets and biases, and engage in culturally-relevant practices and conversations around equity. School teams examine disaggregated data, analyze root causes of disparities, and engage various stakeholders to co-develop policies and practices that support equity.

- Schools must engage students, families, and communities as authentic partners in social and emotional development.** The relationships between school staff, students, families, and communities are at the core of systemic SEL. In order for SEL to affirm the assets of children from diverse backgrounds, schools need to understand the cultures, lived experiences, and values of families and communities, and all students need to feel ownership over their own social and emotional development.

What it looks like: Students, families and community partners are active partners in the planning and implementation of schoolwide SEL and are represented on the SEL team. All students, families, and community partners have frequent opportunities to share their perspectives and feedback.

In the CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL, equity is not a separate focus area, but woven throughout the approach to implementation. As you engage in schoolwide SEL, we encourage you to continuously center this work around equity and leverage SEL to create school communities where all students can use their talents and interests to realize their fullest potential.

For more on SEL and equity:

- CASEL Worksheet: [Guiding Questions for Educators: Promote Equity Using SEL](#)
- CASEL Webinar Recording: [Leveraging SEL to Promote Equity—What Educators Need to Know and Do](#)
- CASEL: [Why We Can't Have Social and Emotional Learning Without Equity](#)
- CASEL: [Equity & Social and Emotional Learning: A Cultural Analysis](#)
- National Equity Project: [Social & Emotional Learning and Equity](#)
- Aspen Institute: [Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: 5 Strategies for System Leaders to Take Action](#)
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: [Applying an Equity Lens to Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#)

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