

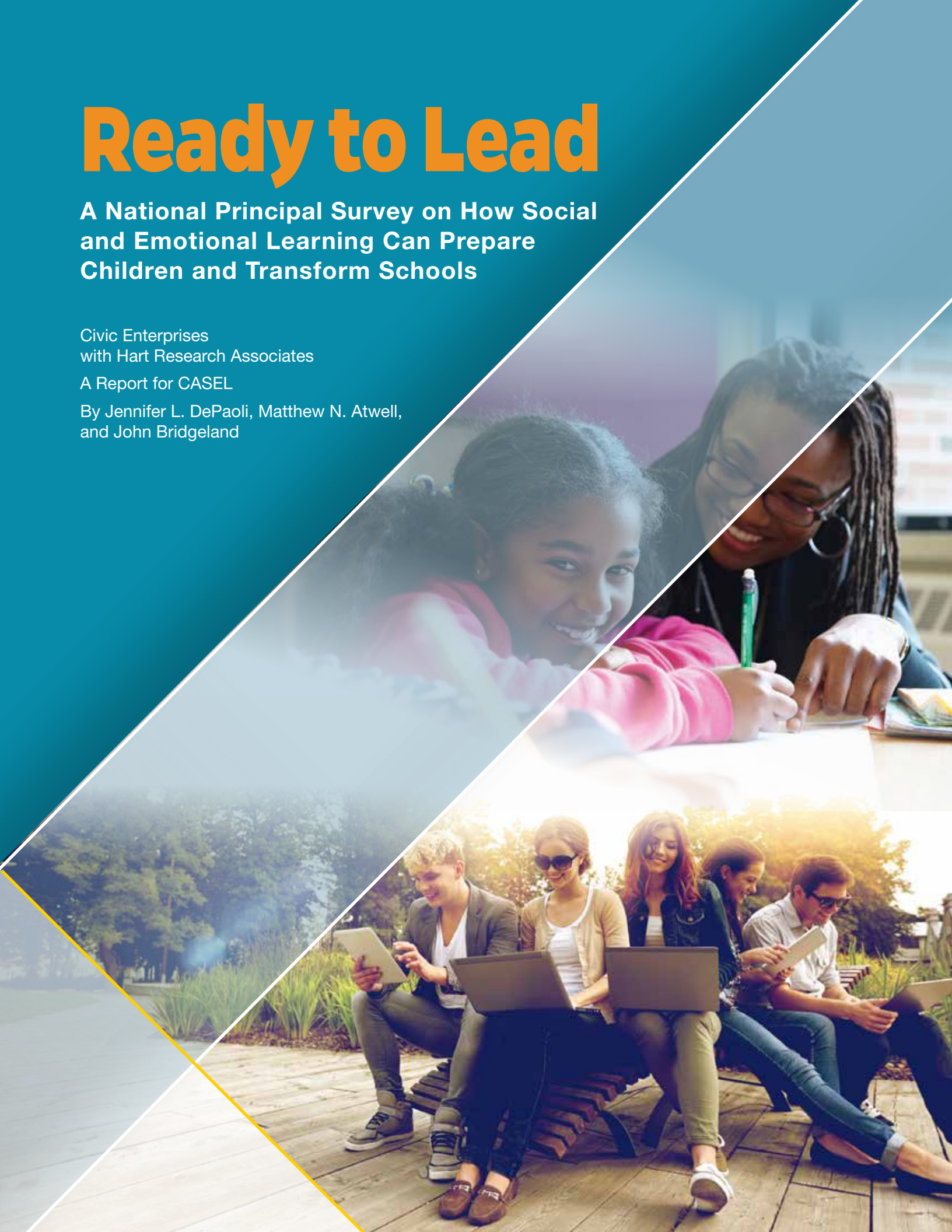
Ready to Lead

A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools

Civic Enterprises
with Hart Research Associates

A Report for CASEL

By Jennifer L. DePaoli, Matthew N. Atwell,
and John Bridgeland



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Executive Summary

The central message of this report is that principals across the United States understand how fundamental social and emotional learning (SEL) is to the development of students and their success in and out of school, but they need more guidance, training, and support to make solid and effective school-wide implementation a reality. Principals understand that SEL competencies are teachable, believe they should be developed in all students, and know that young people equipped with SEL skills will become better students now and better adults in the future. In today's environment of increasingly demanding jobs and the fraying of American communities, nothing could be more important than to foster, teach, and promote the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Some call it empathy, discipline, character, collaborative problem solving, or other names – but regardless of the name, they are the attitudes and skills that provide the glue of a functioning society, robust economy, and vibrant democracy.

Most principals see how SEL boosts student academic achievement, but they want more evidence of those impacts to strengthen the case for action. Although support among principals for embedding SEL in the culture and classrooms of schools is high, implementation varies widely across schools with about one in three principals implementing it school-wide, and only one in four meeting benchmarks for high-quality implementation. Encouragingly, when principals and teachers attempting to implement SEL are well supported by their district leadership, they have better outcomes, and when state policymakers back district leaders, the results are even more pronounced.

These and other findings come from a nationally representative survey of 884 Pre-K to 12 public school principals and interviews with 16 superintendents and 10 district-level research and evaluation specialists representing diverse school districts and with varying levels of experience in implementing SEL programming. Despite representing different grade spans, student populations, and geographic areas, the administrators in this report see the potential in social and emotional learning and provide key insights into the factors that can either slow SEL implementation at the school and district levels or help it grow and flourish. This strong support for SEL among our nation's principals builds on similar levels of support from teachers across the United States, as reported in the 2013 report, *The Missing Piece*. While our educational leaders and practitioners see the value of SEL, they need support, resources, and tools to help them fully implement systemic SEL initiatives that can improve students' SEL knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as their college, career, and life readiness.

Survey Findings

Findings from the principal survey are presented in four major areas: (1) Attitudes about SEL, (2) SEL implementation, (3) The path to increased SEL, and (4) Assessing SEL. This report combines these findings with SEL research from the past two decades to offer an understanding of how SEL is perceived by school and district leaders and where we stand in terms of systemic, school-wide implementation and assessment. The results are supported by findings from the 2013 teacher survey, as well as case studies from school districts implementing social and emotional learning district-wide. Together, these insights and key findings helped produce recommendations to bring forth greater evidence and assessments and strategically advance systemic SEL in schools nationwide through enhanced research, training, and evaluation.

Survey Findings 1 Attitudes about SEL

Among principals and district administrators, there is a high level of commitment to developing all students' social and emotional competencies and a belief in the potential benefits that will follow from doing so.

Principals Understand, Value, and Are Committed to Developing SEL Skills

Principals strongly endorse social and emotional learning (see definition below), and most (83 percent) consider it to be very important for schools to promote the development of these competencies in their students. Almost all principals believe that SEL is teachable in school (99 percent) and are committed to developing their students' social and emotional skills (95 percent).

Principals Believe SEL Should Be Taught to ALL Students

Nearly all principals (98 percent) believe students from all types of backgrounds – both affluent and poor – would benefit from learning social and emotional skills in schools, and this belief holds true for a large majority of principals, regardless of whether they lead high- or low-poverty schools.

Principals Believe in SEL's Benefits, but Are Less Convinced of Its Impact on Academic Achievement

Nearly all principals believe that an increased focus on social and emotional learning would have a somewhat major or very major benefit on promoting a positive school climate (99 percent), helping students become good citizens as adults (98 percent), improving relationships between students and their teachers (98 percent), and decreasing bullying (96 percent). Similarly, most principals say that an increased focus on developing SEL skills would help prepare students for the workforce (98 percent) and believe it would have a positive impact on students moving successfully through K-12 and graduating from high school (97 percent). Principals also believe SEL can have a major benefit on students' academic achievement in their coursework (97 percent) and preparing students to get to and through college (97 percent).

These results show that principals see clear benefits of placing a larger focus on SEL, but it should be noted that fewer are fully convinced of a large-scale benefit on academics. Most principals (83 percent) see the largest benefits of SEL as improving school climate, citizenship, and relationships; 78 percent believe a greater focus on SEL would have a very major benefit on students becoming good citizens

What is SEL?

For the purposes of this report, SEL is defined as the process through which people 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. SEL focuses on knowledge, attitudes, and skills in five competency areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

as adults, while approximately three in four say there would be a very major benefit on relationships between teachers and students (77 percent) and relationships among students (74 percent). However, while virtually all principals believe there would be at least a somewhat major benefit on students' academic achievement and preparation for college (both 97 percent as noted above), there is a clear drop off in those that believe these benefits will be very major (61 percent and 58 percent, respectively). Superintendents and research and evaluation specialists reinforced the need to better communicate research findings regarding SEL's benefits, especially on raising academic achievement.

Principals Believe SEL Can Positively Affect Students' In-School Experience

Nearly all principals believe it is definitely or probably true that teaching SEL skills in school will improve student behavior and reduce the need for discipline referrals (97 percent, including 56 percent definitely true) and help students take more responsibility for their own learning and development (97 percent, including 51 percent definitely true). They also feel it will either definitely or probably make learning more engaging and enjoyable for students (95 percent, including 46 percent definitely true). While most

principals are inclined overall to believe SEL will improve students' academic achievement (93 percent say this is definitely or probably true), less than half are entirely convinced of its effects on academic performance (40 percent definitely true) and improving student attendance (40 percent definitely true).

Survey Findings 2 SEL Implementation

Many principals have the recognition and understanding of the importance of developing students' social and emotional competencies, but implementation of SEL programming – especially at a systemic level – has a long way to go.

Support for SEL is High, but Implementation Varies Greatly

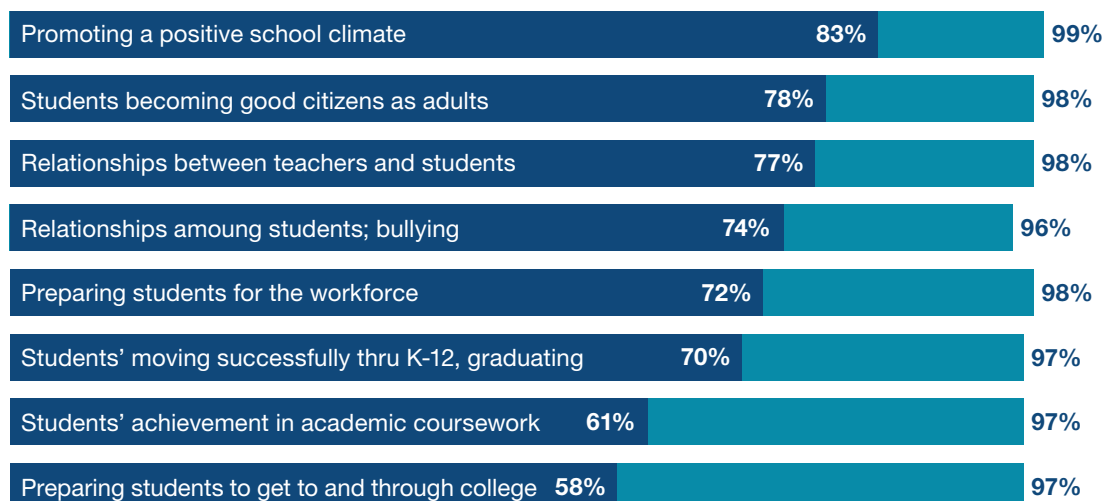
A little more than one-third of principals (35 percent) reported having a plan for teaching SEL and were currently systematically implementing it school-wide, while just slightly more (38 percent) have a plan for SEL that has been partially implemented. School-wide implementation was more likely to be reported by elementary school principals (41 percent vs 31 percent in middle school and 25 percent in high school) and those in urban schools (41 percent vs

Most principals are convinced that SEL improves school climate, citizenship, and relationships; a small majority expect academic gains.

■ Very Major Benefit ■ Somewhat Major Benefit

Proportions saying increased focus on social and emotional would have a major benefit on:

Total very/somewhat major benefit



32 percent in suburban and 31 percent small town/rural). Almost 70 percent of principals said they expect all teachers in their school to teach students social and emotional skills, though the percentage of principals who reported that this is fully realized in their school, either through integration into the academic curriculum or a separate curriculum, is much lower (25 percent).

Few Schools Fully Meet SEL Implementation Benchmarks

CASEL has developed a set of benchmarks to help guide school-wide SEL implementation, from developing a clear vision statement to creating long-term plans for student support, professional development, program evaluation, and developmentally-appropriate learning standards. When principals were asked if their school was meeting those benchmarks, few were. Just 25 percent of principals could be considered high implementers of SEL based on the benchmarks, while 39 percent are moderate SEL implementers and 36 percent low SEL implementers. In school districts where district leaders place a high level of emphasis on SEL, principals are more likely to score high on SEL implementation.

District Leadership Plays a Large Role in Driving SEL

A large majority of principals (72 percent) said their school district places a fair amount or a great deal

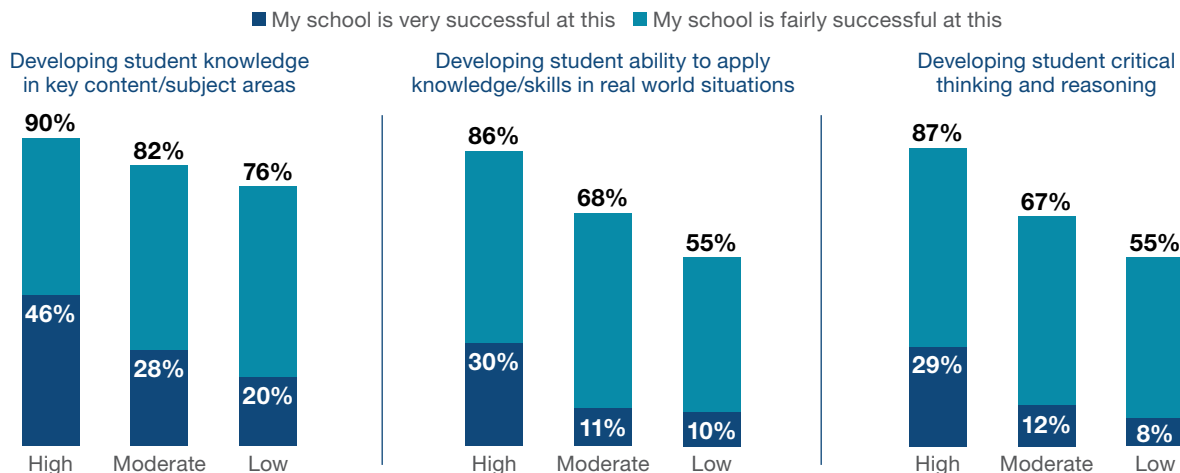
of emphasis on developing students' SEL skills, but only 40 percent reported that their district leadership requires all schools to have a clear plan for teaching social and emotional skills. Principals were far more likely to report having a plan for SEL and systematic implementation in school districts where central office leadership places a great deal of emphasis on teaching SEL than in those where emphasis from district leaders is less. Superintendents bolstered these findings, saying that when district leaders are invested in SEL, buy-in is greater and systemic implementation is more extensive.

Schools that are Systemically Implementing SEL Involve More People, See More Success

Most principals said they involve teachers in developing students' SEL skills, but those in schools reporting high implementation of SEL are more likely to involve a more diverse group of in- and out-of-school stakeholders. In a self-report of how their schools are faring at developing students' social and emotional competencies, 23 percent say they are very successful, while 48 percent say their efforts are fairly successful. High-implementing principals report greater overall success at developing students' SEL skills than either moderate- or low-implementing principals. Principals considered high SEL implementers also report greater academic success and are more likely to believe SEL can improve school climate and students' in-school experience.

Schools that are systematically implementing SEL also see more academic success.

Evaluation of School's Success in Selected Areas, by Schools' Level of SEL Implementation



Survey Findings 3 The Path to Increased SEL

School and district leaders are receptive to a greater emphasis on social and emotional learning, but they still see several barriers to full implementation. They also identify strategies, including increased training, that can enhance implementation of effective SEL programming.

Principals Want More SEL Training for Teachers, Access to Research-Based Strategies

Sixty percent of principals pointed to a lack of teacher training to support students' social and emotional development as a big challenge, and less than half (45 percent) feel that teachers in their schools are either very or fairly prepared to successfully teach SEL. When asked to choose from a list provided, what would help ensure schools are successful at developing students' social and emotional skills, more than half of principals (54 percent) chose additional professional development for teachers. Sharing research-based strategies about effective ways to promote students' social and emotional skills also scored high (44 percent of principals).

High Implementers of SEL are More Likely to Report Better Trained Teachers

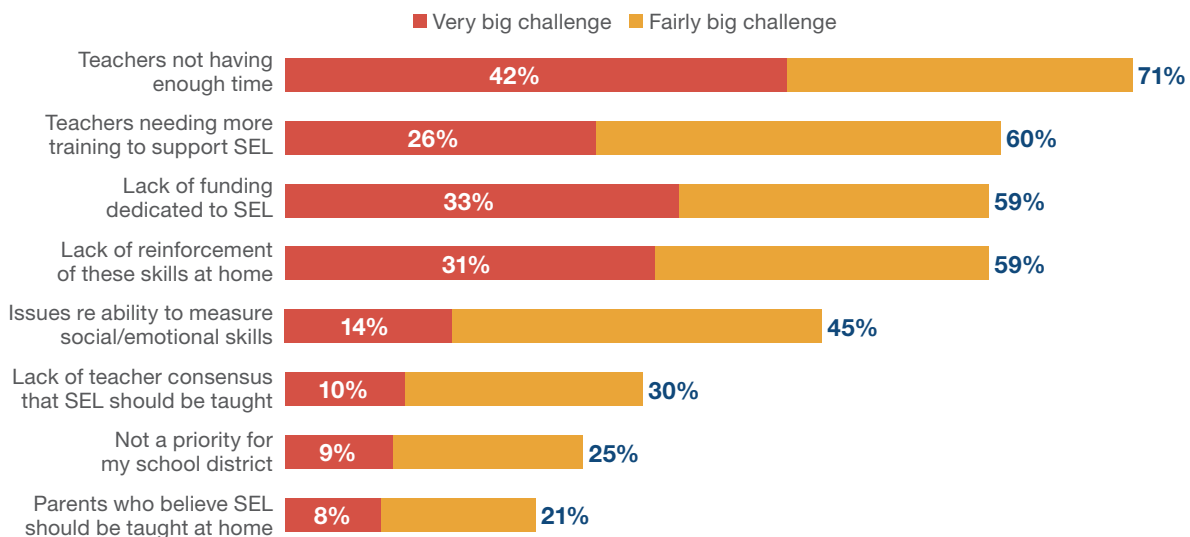
A key takeaway is that in districts that emphasize SEL and score high on SEL implementation, higher numbers of principals report that their teachers are able to successfully teach SEL. Seventy-eight percent of principals who said their district places a great deal of emphasis on SEL said that their teachers are well prepared to teach social and emotional skills, compared to just 21 percent of principals where emphasis on SEL is minimal. Similarly, 80 percent of high-implementing principals – opposed to just 15 percent of low-implementing principals – report that their teachers are prepared to successfully teach SEL.

Lack of Time, Funding Also Seen as Barriers

Nearly three-quarters of principals (71 percent) say that teachers “not having enough time” is a big challenge in implementing the teaching of social and emotional skills. A majority of principals also cited a lack of funding dedicated to SEL as a barrier to implementation.

■ Lack of teacher time is the biggest barrier to increasing SEL; teacher training and funding also need to be addressed.

How big a challenge is this in trying to implement teaching SEL in your school?



Survey Findings 4 Assessing SEL

Although school and district administrators are optimistic about measuring SEL skills and using the data that could come from it, many are unfamiliar with available measurement tools and how they and their staff can use them to guide planning and practice.

Most Principals Believe SEL Skills Can Be Accurately Measured and Assessed

Most principals (71 percent) believe it is definitely or probably true that students' development and acquisition of SEL skills can be accurately measured and assessed. More than half of principals (58 percent) believe social and emotional learning should be part of students' annual assessments.

Few Administrators are Familiar with Current SEL Assessments, Understand What Measures Count in Assessing SEL

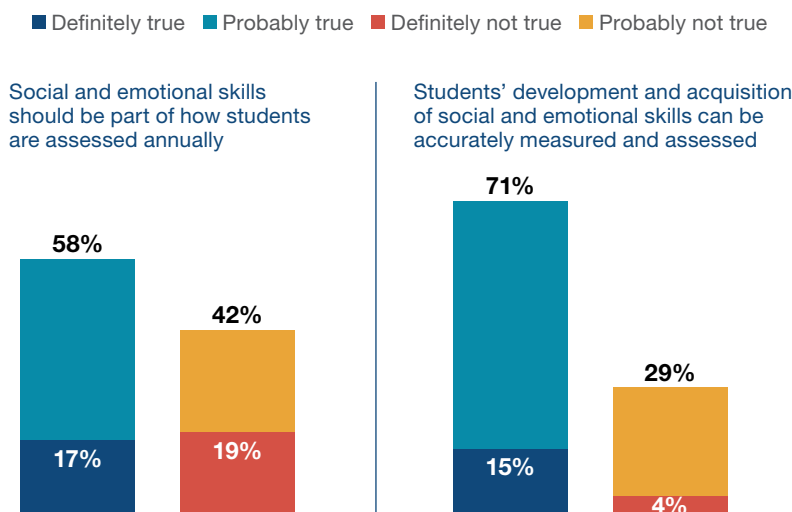
Only 17 percent of principals are very or fairly familiar with current assessments for measuring students' SEL skills, but as with other aspects of SEL, high-implementing principals report greater familiarity with SEL assessments. Principals' knowledge of

assessment is correlated with their level of implementation. When asked about current methods schools are using to assess students' SEL skills, most principals and superintendents pointed to behavioral observations and analyzing disciplinary records. Variation in understanding what counts as a measure of SEL competencies also exists in research and evaluation specialists, who would presumably have the greatest understanding of assessing SEL.

Few Principals are Assessing All Students' SEL Development

Only a quarter of principals (24 percent) are currently assessing all students' development of social and emotional skills. In high-implementing schools, however, the percentage assessing all students jumps up to 48 percent, indicating that schools that are focused on systemic implementation are more likely to see value in measuring the development of all students' SEL competencies. Forty-two percent of principals report assessing only some students (based on criteria other than age or grade level), while 23 percent say they do not assess their students' social and emotional skills at all.

■ Principals are optimistic that social and emotional skills can be assessed, but are not entirely convinced.





More Useful Assessments, Greater Training in Using SEL Data Needed

Of the 77 percent of principals who are currently using SEL assessments, less than 40 percent said the assessments are very or fairly useful. Principals who report assessing all students are more likely than those who are assessing only some students to find their current assessment tools useful. Principals also see a great need for increased teacher training in using SEL assessment data. Sixteen percent of principals think their teachers have either a great deal or fair amount of knowledge on using SEL assessment data to improve instruction, compared to 61 percent who say their teachers have little to no knowledge.

Principals See Many Uses for SEL Data; Hold Mixed Views on SEL Accountability

Given the assumption of access to valid and reliable SEL assessment data, principals see a number of important uses for it, including identifying students needing intervention (86 percent), evaluating SEL program effectiveness (79 percent), sharing the data with parents (73 percent), and improving teacher instruction (72 percent). When asked specifically about accountability purposes, less than half (49 percent) agreed that teachers should be held accountable for developing students' SEL skills, and

only a small percentage were strongly in favor (13 percent). Even fewer principals (44 percent) believe schools should be held accountable for improving students' SEL skills.

Principals Support Inclusion of SEL in State Education Standards

School leaders feel much more positively about the inclusion of social and emotional competencies in their state standards. Nearly three-quarters of principals (73 percent) say they believe the development of SEL skills should be explicitly stated in state education standards.

Recommendations

Based on our survey findings and the SEL evidence base, we recommend the following to help advance SEL implementation:

Sustain Social, Emotional, and Academic Development through High-Impact Levers

Enhance the “will” – Prioritize policies and funding to support SEL

To help schools advance social and emotional learning and systemize SEL at all levels of practice and policy, federal and state policymakers, as well as grantmakers in education, will need to prioritize policies and funding for SEL training, implementation, and assessment. Funding considerations should include resources, technical assistance, evaluation, and the creation of learning networks between districts and states. Funding streams for increased research will also be critical for expanding knowledge and creating lines for SEL advocacy. Policy action should include advancing new federal policies to promote SEL and allotting resources toward its growth in both Pre-K to 12 and higher education, in addition to adopting state SEL standards.

Support state student learning standards

State SEL standards can provide a vision for what school and district social and emotional learning programs should accomplish and developmental benchmarks to inform teachers and principals of what students should be working toward in every grade. State SEL standards can also serve as guidance for institutes of higher education by providing the groundwork for integrating SEL into pre-service

teacher training programs. Unlike academic standards, which have served as a basis for high-stakes accountability systems, SEL standards should be used solely to improve teaching and learning and guide investments in SEL programming.

Advance an SEL research agenda and communicate findings to practitioners and policymakers

The SEL evidence base has been building for more than two decades, and current efforts, including the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development and the SEL Assessment Working Group, have created centralized platforms for studying and distributing knowledge on SEL. Based on this study, we recommend further research in the following areas: the value of implementing systemic, school-wide SEL; the link between improving SEL skills and academic achievement; the impact of improved training on SEL implementation; the benefits of integrated and stand-alone SEL approaches; the value of SEL for diverse learners; and how data on SEL can be used effectively by teachers to improve instruction, by principals to improve school climate, and by districts to better prepare all youth for success in school, postsecondary, careers, and life.

Strengthen SEL Training Among Teachers and Administrators

Communicate the knowledge base on evidence-based SEL programming and effective training, implementation, and assessment

It is critical that administrators and teachers have access to a knowledge base on effective SEL programming and training in how to effectively integrate SEL into academic instruction and school climate improvement initiatives. While this study makes clear that school and district leaders value the development of their students' social and emotional competencies, they need a better understanding of how best to improve these skills in students and create a systematic plan for SEL implementation. School leaders and teachers also need exposure to best practices in SEL implementation, as well as valid and reliable tools to assess SEL programming and students' development of social and emotional competencies.

Build teacher knowledge through pre-service education and in-school professional development

Both administrators and teachers agree that increased training in teaching SEL is necessary to achieve successful school-wide implementation. Integrating this training into pre-service teacher programs will help guarantee more teachers have the knowledge and skills to implement SEL from the start, while high-quality professional development can provide continuous training for both new and experienced teachers.

Strengthen Assessment

Continue to improve SEL assessment tools and training in how to use them

Though administrators see the importance of assessing students' SEL skills, they lack familiarity with the tools to do so. It is therefore critical that knowledge be shared on existing measures and that researchers, funders, and policymakers prioritize improving SEL assessments. This survey also makes it abundantly clear that one of the greatest areas of improvement in SEL lies in building understanding of how to appropriately use SEL assessments and the data they produce to increase all students' social and emotional competencies and evaluate implementation of SEL programming.

