

# Turning Momentum into a *Movement*

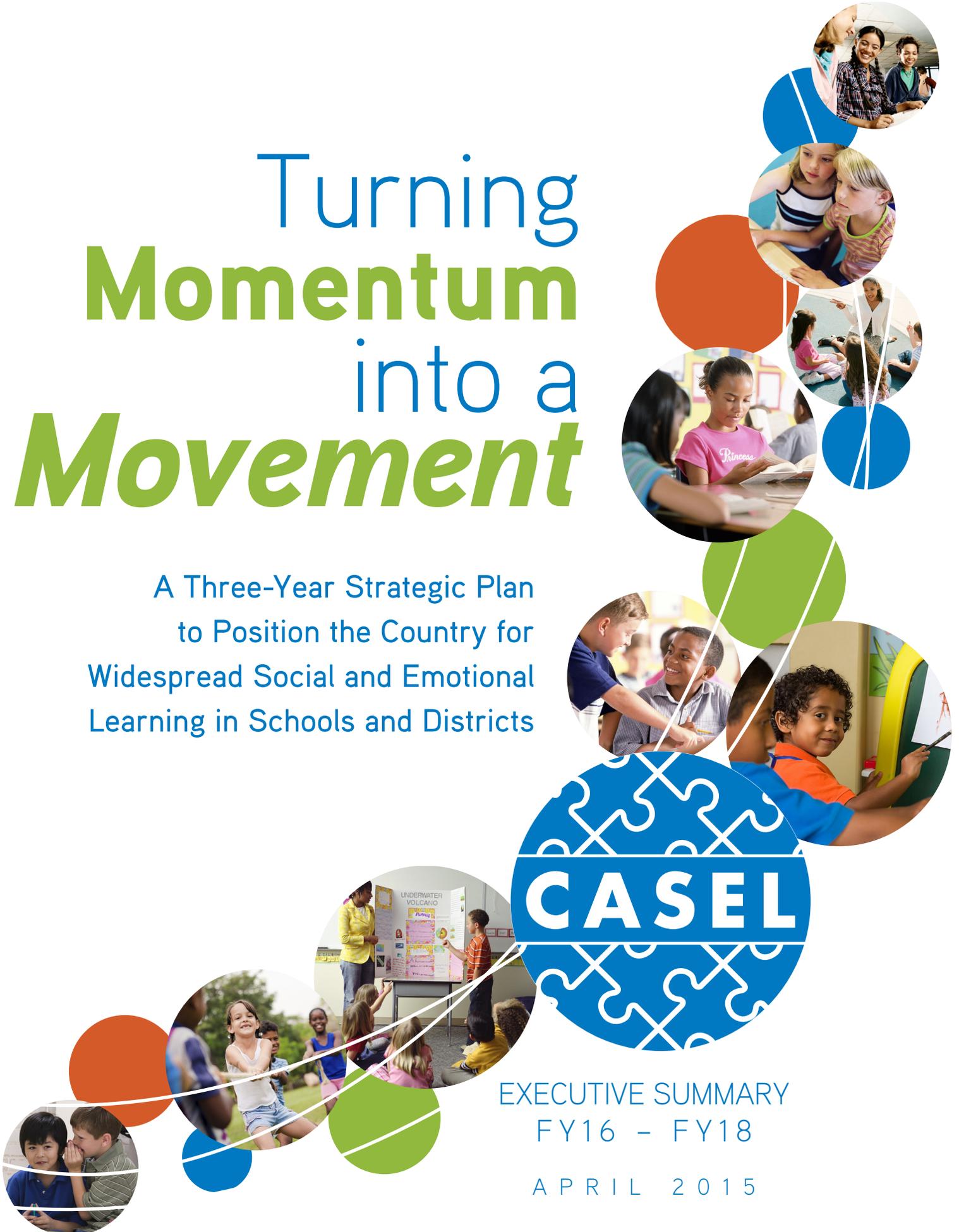
A Three-Year Strategic Plan  
to Position the Country for  
Widespread Social and Emotional  
Learning in Schools and Districts



**CASEL**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
FY16 - FY18

APRIL 2015



# Executive Summary

Recognition of the importance of enhancing students' social, emotional, and academic competence is at an all-time high. Educators, researchers, service providers, parents, and leaders in government, business, and philanthropy are increasingly seeing the value of social and emotional learning (SEL). Employer surveys repeatedly indicate that social and emotional skills are critically important skills that they are seeking in employees. Teachers believe that SEL should be a central component of education in their schools. And there is growing interest in federal and state policy circles to bring SEL frameworks and practices to scale.

SEL is a cost-effective catalyst to reduce risky behavior, including substance abuse and violence, and to promote better relationships, academic performance, mental health, citizenship, career success, and life satisfaction. Decades of research document these outcomes. CASEL's groundbreaking meta-analysis shows that SEL significantly improves students' self-esteem, connection to school, behavior, and academic achievement. In addition, a major report catalyzed by CASEL indicates that SEL interventions generate substantial benefits—\$11 for every \$1 invested. With the momentum gained by these proof points, it is clear that now is the time for change.

However, the expanding field is fragmented and often misaligned. There are multiple and confusing terms, spotty standards, a lack of scientifically sound and actionable assessment measures, limited understanding among the public and stakeholders about what SEL really is, and inadequate governmental support.

Our field will advance when diverse but kindred groups of researchers, educators, policymakers, funders, and child advocates come together to articulate and promote developmentally appropriate intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies based on the best science and educational practice. It is time for us to collaborate to present an aligned perspective on how schools, families, and communities can enhance the social, emotional, and academic growth of all students from preschool through high school.

To that end, CASEL's board of directors, staff, advisors, and collaborators have engaged in a thoughtful strategic planning process. We have evaluated our organizational accomplishments, strengths, limitations, and priorities. We have interviewed scores of researchers, educators, funders, and thought leaders in SEL-related fields for their views on (1) the educational practice and policy landscape; (2) what the broader field must address to put the social and emotional dimensions of learning at the heart of every classroom,

## What Is Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes 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. These social and emotional skills and attitudes are critical to being a good student, friend, citizen, and worker. In addition, multi-year, systemic SEL efforts prevent and reduce many risky behaviors such as drug use, violence, bullying, and school dropout.

SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of safe, supportive relationships and environments. Effective programming includes: challenging and motivating classroom instruction; student engagement in prosocial activities in and out of the classroom; positive school climate and culture and whole-school, community-building activities; and broad parent and community involvement in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Systemic SEL begins in preschool and continues through high school.

school, and district nationwide; and (3) what CASEL most needs to do as a leader and collaborator to advance SEL-related research, practice, and policy. Based on this assessment, we have developed a three-year plan for how we can have the greatest impact and help make SEL an integral part of American education.

CASEL's three-year strategic plan (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2018) is designed to create the conditions for widespread adoption of high-quality, systemic, evidence-based SEL. With contributions from CASEL and key thought leaders, the collective field will create a strong, influential national platform for promoting SEL evidence, models, and tools that will both help educators implement SEL and influence policymakers.

The strategic plan sets forth three key goals: (1) growing an aligned, stronger, and collaborating field; (2) identifying and sharing evidence, models, and resources for schools and districts; and (3) strengthening federal and state support for SEL research and practice. Work across these three goal areas is mutually reinforcing so that success in one area will accelerate success elsewhere.

## WHEN WE SUCCEED ...

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... a growing and influential field of educators, researchers, policymakers, and others will be committed to implementing a set of coordinated activities, catalyzed by the recommendations of a blue-ribbon National Commission. And key stakeholders who are committed to the social, emotional, and academic well-being of children will be collaborating on all aspects of research, practice, and policy.

... many more districts and schools, beyond the 1,400 schools and 850,000 students already participating in our eight-district Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), will be implementing high-quality, systemic SEL practices.

... state and federal policymakers will be embedding SEL into their policies and funding streams in order to advance SEL research and program development.

With all of these conditions in place, more schools, families, and communities will be working together toward the academic, social, and emotional success of students, and more students will become caring, contributing, knowledgeable, and responsible citizens, co-workers, family members, and friends.

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES

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The three goals and six interconnected and reinforcing strategies, with specific activities, deliverables, and metrics for success, have been developed to bring SEL to scale. By 2018, the field will be strengthened in many tangible ways.



### **Goal 1: Aligned, Strengthened, and Collaborating Field**

A coalition of leaders representing a broad array of fields with shared interests will organize and work together to align and advance research, practice, and policies that enhance the social, emotional, and academic development of students. Specifically:

**STRATEGY 1. In collaboration with more than 100 key stakeholders, CASEL will catalyze and co-convene a National Commission that prioritizes the social and emotional dimensions of learning.**

The Commission will offer the nation an aligned voice on the importance of social and emotional development and related practice, create a developmentally oriented framework for education, and develop an actionable agenda designed to command the attention of the country. By 2018:

- The majority of commissioners, co-convening groups, and collaborating advisors will be working together to execute the implementation plan.
- The U.S. Department of Education, 10 state departments of education, and 10 funders will incorporate Commission recommendations in policy and funding priorities.
- CASEL will execute a communications strategy for the National Commission to increase demand, creating the groundswell that will influence policies, funding priorities, and practice.

**STRATEGY 2. In collaboration with field-leading researchers and practitioners, CASEL will develop a practical, actionable guide for social and emotional (SE) competence assessments.**

What gets assessed is more likely to be addressed in education. Thus, it is critically important that we establish SE assessments that are scientifically sound, developmentally appropriate, feasible to administer, affordable, and actionable. The *Consumer Reports*-style guide will help educators measure SE competencies at all grade levels. A parallel scientific review will provide researchers with a roadmap for developing next-generation SE assessment priorities, and researchers will start to develop these new tests. By 2018:

- Educators from at least 1,000 districts will have downloaded the Assessments Guide or requested additional information from CASEL on SE competence assessments, with evidence of the CASEL supports informing selection and implementation of evidence-based assessments (methodology for tracking utilization to be determined).
- The U.S. Department of Education, 10 state departments of education, and 10 funders incorporate SE Competence Assessments Group recommendations into policy and funding priorities.
- Five research teams will have proposed projects to create next-generation, preK–12 assessments for implementation in preK–12 settings.



**Goal 2: Evidence, Models, and Resources for Schools and Districts**

We will collectively create conditions that support nationwide implementation of evidence-based, systemic SEL, including rigorous research to support the work, and models and tools to guide and support implementation. Specifically:

**STRATEGY 3. CASEL will work with the eight urban districts in the CDI to document outcomes and develop models and resources.**

In 2010, CASEL launched a first-of-its-kind, national research-based SEL expansion initiative to demonstrate and document the feasibility of systemic SEL in large, urban districts. Working with eight of the nation's 200 largest school districts (Anchorage, Austin, Chicago, Cleveland, Nashville, Oakland, Sacramento, and Washoe County, NV), a third-party evaluation of the CDI has documented improvements in students' academic performance and in their behavior, as well as in school climate. Going forward, the CDI districts will demonstrate to other districts, policymakers, the media, and others what systemic SEL looks like, how to do it, and the benefits/outcomes that result. By 2018:

- CDI evaluations will demonstrate the positive impact of high-quality SEL on student achievement and behavior, and results will have been disseminated broadly.
- At least 40 demonstration sites will be established in the CDI (five in each district), and other schools and districts will be visiting these sites twice per year.
- Research-based tools and resources will have been tested, proven to be impactful, and ready for broad dissemination.

**STRATEGY 4: CASEL will leverage evidence, models, and resources from the CDI school systems to support the expansion of SEL nationwide.**

CASEL will use the knowledge gained from the CDI and the field to share a clear framework with educators in 15,000 districts across the nation about best practices of systemic SEL, along with resources and tools that support high-quality implementation. Educators, researchers, policymakers, and funders will have a reliable, trustworthy go-to resource for information about SEL and systemic implementation. By 2018:

- More districts will implement SEL as measured by the Peter D. Hart and Civic Enterprises representative national survey of school districts.
- A 20 percent year-over-year increase in downloads of CASEL online resources and visits to the CASEL website, with evidence of active utilization of the tools to inform practice (methodology for tracking utilization to be determined).
- CASEL will provide support (e.g., audits, professional development) to districts outside the CDI and generate a minimum of \$500,000 in annual revenue by FY18.
- More than 1,000 educators will be participating in CASEL’s SEL professional learning communities to share with and learn from each other, supporting SEL implementation nationwide.



**Goal 3: State and Federal Policies**

Federal and state policymakers will provide funding and support for SEL-related research and for districts and schools to implement SEL-related programming.

**STRATEGY 5: Develop model state SEL student learning standards and implementation guidelines.**

To help states and districts implement comprehensive preK–12 SEL standards and guidelines, CASEL will develop and widely share model standards and implementation guidelines. By 2018:

- Experts in the field will have developed and endorsed model SEL student learning standards and guidelines.
- Five states will have adopted these standards or guidelines through the Collaborating States Initiative.

**STRATEGY 6: Increase federal supports for SEL research and practice.**

Across federal and state legislatures, we want more policymakers committed to advocating for SEL through policies that support SEL in districts across the country. With policies in place at the federal and state levels, we will create the conditions for districts to implement systemic SEL as well as raise awareness, demand, and support. By 2018:

- The U.S. Department of Education will be incorporating Commission recommendations into its policies and funding priorities.
- Language supporting social and emotional development will be incorporated into five proposed congressional bills that support SEL pre-service and in-service training, district/school implementation, and SEL research.

## IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

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To strengthen the organization and position us for long-term sustainability, CASEL is seeking multi-year funding to expand our core staff and support our operations. The total budget for the three-year period is \$19.6 million. CASEL's annual budget (not including the Commission) is \$6.79 million for FY16, \$6.38 million for FY17, and \$6.40 million for FY18. In addition, we will partner with co-convening organizations to support the development of a National Commission, with costs estimated at \$4.0 million over three years.

Over the next three years, CASEL will make strategic hires in the areas of practice, communications, development, and operations. This will enable us to execute our goals and create bandwidth for our leadership to focus on strategy and long-term sustainability.

## VISION FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

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Through our work, we will help catalyze kindred groups (e.g., character education, deeper learning, life skills training, mindsets, efforts to help traumatized children, prosocial education, student-centered learning, 21st-century skills, whole child education) to collaborate and present an aligned perspective on how schools, families, and communities can enhance the social, emotional, and academic growth of all students, from preschool through high school. We will proactively showcase demonstration sites and districts supporting systemic, evidence-based SEL practices and programs so that other districts and schools know what to do and how. And we will promote federal and state policies that support the scaling of district and school efforts to provide quality education to all students. By 2025, we envision significant progress in the field, demonstrated by:

- A broad coalition collaborating strategically and systematically to continuously advance social, emotional, and academic development in research, practice, and policy.
- 50 percent of the nation's districts and schools implementing high-quality, systemic, evidence-based SEL programming.
- Students, families, educators, and policymakers have adopted a more holistic view of student success that goes beyond academic competence to value the development of caring, compassionate, and responsible citizens.



# Why CASEL Is Well-Positioned to Be a Leader of This Movement

Since 1994, CASEL has been a thought leader, field builder, collaborator, and convener in advancing SEL research, practice, and policy and linking social and emotional learning with academic outcomes.

**COLLABORATING TO BUILD THE FIELD.** In 1997, CASEL's groundbreaking book, *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* introduced and defined "social and emotional learning." Most recently (2015), we published the comprehensive and definitive *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and Practice* with more than 90 collaborators. Over the years, we have convened (1) superintendents to advise us on strategies to make SEL an essential part of preK–12 education in America, which also led to the development of the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI); (2) a research advisory council and working groups to provide guidance about key scientific issues, leading to improved frameworks for designing, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based SEL programming; (3) program providers to set quality standards for the field, leading to improved program development; and (4) Illinois policymakers and educators to establish the nation's first preK–12 SEL student learning standards.

**SHARING RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES WITH THE FIELD.** Our pioneering 2011 meta-analysis of more than 200 studies documented how SEL helps boost academic achievement. In 2015, a report we encouraged and reviewed on the economics of SEL demonstrated its 11-1 return on investment. Since 2010, CASEL has demonstrated and documented the feasibility of systemic SEL in eight of the country's 200 largest urban districts; external evaluations show consistent improvements in culture, climate, and academic achievement. We are currently conducting research under two major federal grants through the Investing in Innovation (i3) program and the Institute of Education Sciences. The results of these studies will help to improve and inform best practices and assessment.

**PROMOTING SUPPORTIVE POLICIES.** CASEL has worked with members of both houses of Congress to include evidence-based SEL as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. And we have collaborated with the U.S. Department of Education to incorporate SEL into program and grant priorities. CASEL helped Illinois become the first state to adopt statewide preK–12 SEL learning standards and policies, and we have since advised about 10 other states working on similar standards.