



Emerging Insights



from States' Efforts to Strengthen Social and Emotional Learning

By Linda Dusenbury, Ph.D., and
Roger P. Weissberg, Ph.D.

Collaborating States Initiative

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About CASEL's Collaborating States Initiative (CSI)

The purpose and mission of the [Collaborating States Initiative \(CSI\)](#), launched by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in 2016, is to work with states and school districts to help ensure that preschool to high school students are fully prepared—academically, socially, and emotionally—to succeed in school, at work, and in life.

Participation in the CSI has grown dramatically in the past year. In May 2017, teams from 19 states participated in the CSI national meeting. In February 2018, teams from 25 states across the country attended the most recent national meeting of the CSI—a 32 percent increase in nine months. Collectively, those states serve about 11,500 school districts, 58,000 schools, and 30 million students. The support is nonpartisan—blue states, red states, and purple states.

States are asked as part of the CSI to develop customized SEL plans and activities based on each state's unique context. Some states are developing guidelines or professional learning to support student SEL. Others are articulating learning goals for student SEL. Some are strategically integrating SEL into existing programs and priorities, including academics. Still others are using a combination of these strategies. All are committed to creating statewide conditions where educators are effectively equipped and encouraged to support their students' social and emotional development.

CASEL's roles are to:

- Share research findings, information about best practices, and resources/tools such as guidance on

how to integrate SEL into English Language Arts, mathematics, and social studies

- Facilitate connections and sharing of examples and resources across states
- Provide technical assistance to states that request it
- Document how states, districts, and schools are implementing these policies and practices
- Share those findings to help other states that are on a similar journey

A national advisory group helps to guide the work:

- Sara Castro-Olivo, Texas A&M University
- Chrisanne Gayl, Trust for Learning
- Rolf Grafwallner, Council of Chief State School Officers
- Robert Jagers, University of Michigan and CASEL
- Stephanie Jones, Harvard University
- Mary Hurley, CASEL consultant, formerly Oakland Unified School District
- Stephanie Krauss, Jobs for the Future
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Introduction and Summary

Since CASEL started working with state education agencies in 2003, the level of activity to advance social and emotional learning (SEL) has accelerated significantly, particularly in the past few years. State education leaders and policymakers are taking numerous steps to help districts and schools support students' social and emotional development and closely align these efforts with academic improvements.



This report shares eight key insights and examples emerging from our work.

1. Since 2003, there has been growing momentum in state efforts to promote student social and emotional development, evidenced by an ever-increasing number of states that have developed policies and guidance to advance SEL.
2. Customizing SEL—each state is using an approach that works for its own districts and schools.
3. State education agency leadership is key.
4. Integration of SEL across state programs and policies is important to the ultimate success of these efforts.
5. Equity, cultural competence, and SEL are intertwined, and policymakers and educators must address them together to optimize student SEL generally and employability in particular.
6. Effective, customized messaging and communication are important to engage all the stakeholders.
7. Professional development is critical in advancing SEL, and states can play an important role in supporting districts and schools, using a variety of different approaches.
8. A cross-state community of practice can be very powerful in advancing systemic SEL.

OUR EVOLVING WORK WITH STATES

In 2003, CASEL was part of the working group that developed the Illinois Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) standards—the first K–12 standards for SEL to be adopted in the U.S. Between 2003 and 2015, CASEL supported eight additional state working groups advancing SEL. And in 2016, CASEL formally launched the Collaborating States Initiative (CSI). Twenty-five states have now participated in the CSI to varying degrees. Building on CASEL’s earlier work with states, the key objective of the CSI is to help state education agencies (SEAs) create statewide conditions that will make it more likely that educators will engage in evidence-based SEL approaches and practices. Each CSI state team develops a customized plan for policies or guidelines to support implementation of quality SEL. As a community of practice, the CSI is designed to learn about different approaches states are taking to advance SEL, share those lessons, and support other states that may be on a similar journey. [View current information about the CSI.](#)



KEY INSIGHT 1

Increasing State Support

The number of states that have developed policies and guidance to advance social and emotional learning (SEL) has increased steadily in the past several years.

In 2011, CASEL launched the **State Scorecard Project**, a scan of state policies and guidance related to SEL. Its purpose was to identify policies and guidance supporting students' social and emotional development. That included standards or competencies to articulate what students should know and be able to do with regard to SEL.

The 2011 CASEL scan found that 48 states had articulated preschool competencies for SEL, two states had articulated SEL competencies that extended from preschool into the early elementary grades, and one state (Illinois) had articulated SEL competencies through 12th grade.


By 2013, 49 states had preschool standards for SEL, three states had PreK–early elementary standards, and three states had PreK–12 standards. In 2013, the CASEL state scan found that four states had also posted guidance for SEL, i.e., background, research, guidelines, and principles for effective SEL implementation either for specific grade levels or for all grade levels generally.

By 2015, all 50 states had preschool standards for SEL, seven states had PreK–early elementary standards, and four states had K–12 standards.

All  50 States

now have preschool SEL standards

 **12** states have K–12 SEL standards
(up from 1 in 2011)

 **6** additional states developing guidelines

 **17** states have SEL-related web pages

As of May 2018, CASEL has identified seven states with PreK–early elementary standards for SEL, and at least 12 states have articulated SEL competencies through 12th grade. Seventeen states have also posted guidance related to SEL.

Further, through our work with the [Collaborating States Initiative \(CSI\)](#), CASEL is aware of at least six additional states working on plans that will result in policies and guidance to support SEL. Thus, we expect that, by the end of 2019, at least 18 states will have articulated SEL competencies through 12th grade, an eighteen-fold increase since 2011.

What might account for the increase in state SEL policies and activities in the past few years?

The increase in SEL policies and activities since 2011 is likely a response to growing demand from educators, business leaders, scientists, and parents to provide today’s students with a well-rounded education that prepares them for success in school, at work, and in life. It also comes in the wake of the growing body of research documenting the many individual and societal benefits of SEL. In addition, the growing attention in the past two years has likely been stimulated in part by the increased policy flexibility states have under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The most recent federal spending bill almost tripled Title IV, an important source of funding for SEL (from \$400 million to \$700 million, for a total of \$1.1 billion). Such increased federal funding is likely to further encourage state support for SEL. (A 2017 CASEL brief, [“How State Planning for the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) Can Promote Student Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning: An examination of Five Key Strategies,”](#) identified five key strategies states are using to support SEL, including Title IV.)



LINKS TO STATE GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES*

States that have developed competencies (or standards) for SEL, from preschool through early elementary grades include:

- [Connecticut](#) (K–3)
- [Idaho](#) (birth to grade 3)
- [Massachusetts](#) (PreK–K)
- [Ohio](#) (K–grade 3)
- [Oregon](#) (early learning–kindergarten)
- [Pennsylvania](#) (PreK–2)
- [Vermont](#) (birth–grade 3)

States that have developed competencies for SEL through high school include:

- [Illinois](#) (2004)
- [Kansas](#) (2012)
- [Maine](#) (2012)
- [Michigan](#) (2017)
- [Minnesota](#) (2018)
- [Nevada](#) (2017)
- [New Jersey](#) (2017)
- [Rhode Island](#) (2017)
- [Tennessee](#) (2017)
- [Washington](#) (2016)
- [West Virginia](#) (2012)
- [Wisconsin](#) (2018)

Note: [New York](#) and [North Dakota](#) are expected to release their guidelines in June 2018.

At least 17 states have developed web pages to share K–12 resources on SEL, including resources to support implementation:

- [California](#)
- [Colorado](#)
- [Illinois](#)
- [Indiana](#)
- [Kansas](#)
- [Massachusetts](#)
- [Michigan](#)
- [Minnesota](#)
- [Nebraska](#)
- [New Hampshire](#)
- [New Jersey](#)
- [New York](#)
- [Oregon](#) (guidance for kindergarten)
- [Rhode Island](#)
- [Tennessee](#)
- [Washington: Report of Benchmark Group; Professional Development Module](#)
- [Wisconsin](#)

**Not all of the states listed are members of the CASEL CSI*

KEY INSIGHT 2

Customizing the Approach to SEL

State policies and guidance documents take various forms. Because of pushback against the Common Core academic standards, and because states' SEL guidance is voluntary rather than required, many states refer to what students should know and be able to do as “competencies,” “goals,” or “benchmarks,” rather than “standards.” Some states have avoided standalone standards for SEL altogether, and instead emphasize that SEL instruction should be part of core academic instruction. Other state teams in the CSI have proposed creating guidance documents or revising policies to integrate SEL across the curriculum rather than establish SEL standards.

Different states are at different points in the process, with varied priorities and sensitivities, and each state is using an approach that works for its own districts and schools. For example:

In 2012, **Kansas** adopted comprehensive Social, Emotional, and Character Development Standards. Since then, the state has continued to expand a variety of tools and resources to support teachers implementing the standards (all found [here](#)). Kansas already had important policies in place by 2016 and is now focusing on how to encourage more teachers to integrate the standards into their instruction.



In contrast, **California** had not yet engaged in systemic planning for SEL before joining the CSI and only recently began thinking about the best ways to advance student social and emotional development statewide. The state's team is well-organized and is approaching the work very systematically. It has focused intensively on organizing key stakeholders, including county education agencies, to come together to develop strategic goals and recommendations for the SEA and other stakeholders to support strong SEL implementation. Simultaneously, the team is collaborating on supportive guidance for educators, issued through the California Department of Education, such as the recently released [California](#)

[SEL Guiding Principles](#), and expects to release a practitioner resource guide in Summer 2018.

Connecticut had adopted a strong and widely used set of school climate standards years ago. Its priority in the CSI has been to revise and expand those standards to explicitly infuse SEL competencies. The Connecticut team is collaborating closely with districts in this work. The team has also worked to engage stakeholder groups throughout the state, including institutions of higher education and local nonprofit providers, to consider the relationship between SEL competencies and prevention, trauma-informed practice, and chronic stress reduction. The team is also working with various stakeholders to expand entry points for SEL, including civics and leadership, parent engagement, drug use prevention, and artistic expression. With one of the strongest anti-bullying laws in the country, adopted in 2011, the team has worked to move the state toward a more integrated preventive model.

Each state is using an approach that works for its own districts and schools.

Massachusetts created preschool and kindergarten standards for SEL (and Approaches to Play and Learning) in 2015 but has opted not to develop standalone K–12 SEL standards at this time. Instead, the state’s team is working to infuse SEL into existing “high-leverage” policies and guidance, including ELA/literacy, math, and history/social sciences curriculum frameworks as well as comprehensive health frameworks. Massachusetts leaders anticipate this approach will

help educators promote student SEL throughout and beyond the school day. The department also updated its guidelines on implementing SEL curricula, K–12, available along with other state resources at www.doe.mass.edu/candi/SEL.

States like **Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, and Wisconsin** (among others) have all worked to develop evidence-based competencies and to support student SEL, but each has approached the task in a customized way that reflects specific priorities within the state. For example, **Minnesota** schools are required under *The Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools Act* to “use evidence-based social emotional learning practices to prevent and reduce bullying.” The School Safety Technical Assistance Council organized a Social Emotional Learning work group, which, over the past three years, has worked to systematically identify needs and develop competencies, guidance, and other resources to support evidence-based practices for SEL in schools.

In contrast, the **Nevada** Office of Safe and Respectful Learning Environments is sharing PreK–12 social and emotional learning competencies across the state.

These were based on competencies originally developed in districts that had already begun to adopt and implement SEL competencies, including Washoe County School District.

The statewide work group in **Wisconsin** drafted PreK–Adult SEL competencies that expanded the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standard SEL benchmarks to adulthood. The competencies have now been posted.

KEY INSIGHT 3

Elevating State Leadership

State superintendents ultimately must take the lead to ensure that all programs and policies are examined and coordinated to identify and promote connections to SEL. They also can make sure that these efforts are adequately funded. In addition, their influence and support can help districts make the case locally for an increased focus on SEL.

When the CSI began in 2016, all state chiefs had authorized the work of their SEL teams, but most had not been actively and directly involved in that work. However, that is changing. At a February 2018 meeting of 25 state teams, 13 states were represented by their superintendent or top deputy. “People want this. They see the



“We’re responding to demand. This is coming from the grassroots.”

OHIO CHIEF PAOLO DEMARIA

inadequacy of interventions so far. Real success depends on what states do to build capacity,” says Gene Wilhoit, the long-time director of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

A major reason for the heightened leadership interest? Growing demand from districts for assistance on SEL policies and practices. “We’re responding to demand. This is coming from the grassroots,” **Ohio** chief Paolo DeMaria says, noting the long-term leadership of Ohio districts such as Cleveland, Warren, and Youngstown in implementing SEL.

Many states are local control states, i.e., the SEA cannot mandate SEL. Superintendents recognize this reality. As **Wisconsin** chief Tony Evers says, “We’re late on this issue. Districts are way ahead of us. We’re finding good practices from them and then sharing with others.”

The mechanisms for learning take many forms. Most states have created work groups and advisory committees, which are actively shaping policies and strategies. For example, **Rhode Island** created an SEL Advisory Committee that meets three times a year. Participants include teachers, superintendents, principals, social workers, psychologists, parents, and higher education leaders. **Washington’s** work group includes similar sectors along with funders, nonprofit advocacy groups, and leaders from commissions representing the Asian, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American communities. **Oregon** has created a “big tent” with participation



3 COLLABORATING STATES INITIATIVE TOOLS

States have been using planning tools created by their peers through the CSI.

- [Key Features of High-Quality Policies and Guidelines to Support SEL](#)
- [Recommended Process for Developing State Policies and Guidelines to SEL](#)
- [A Process for Developing and Articulating Learning Goals or Competencies for SEL](#)

from those representing youth development, out-of-school time, early childhood, special education, and local districts. As a result of our collaboration with states since 2003, in 2017 the CSI introduced a suite of three tools (see box above) to support work groups in planning and producing policies and guidance to support SEL.

Ohio, Rhode Island, and Iowa used statewide educator surveys to help develop their plans. **Delaware** began getting organized by conducting a broad scan of statewide SEL efforts that included educator surveys and interviews. **Washington** held two months of public vetting to gather input on its SEL Standards and Benchmarks. **Massachusetts** consults with a broad group of stakeholders, including its State Student Advisory Council.

“We’re late on this issue. Districts are way ahead of us. We’re finding good practices from them and then sharing with others.”

WISCONSIN CHIEF TONY EVERS

KEY INSIGHT 4

Integrating SEL Across State Programs and Policies

One of the key challenges SEAs face is how to ensure that SEL is integrated and reflected across all state programs and policies. To facilitate this, state work groups often include members from a wide variety of programs (including academics and student supports). For example, **Michigan** began its SEL work with representatives from all the SEA's offices (about 20) at the table. **California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington** are among the states proactively seeking input from inside and outside the agency.

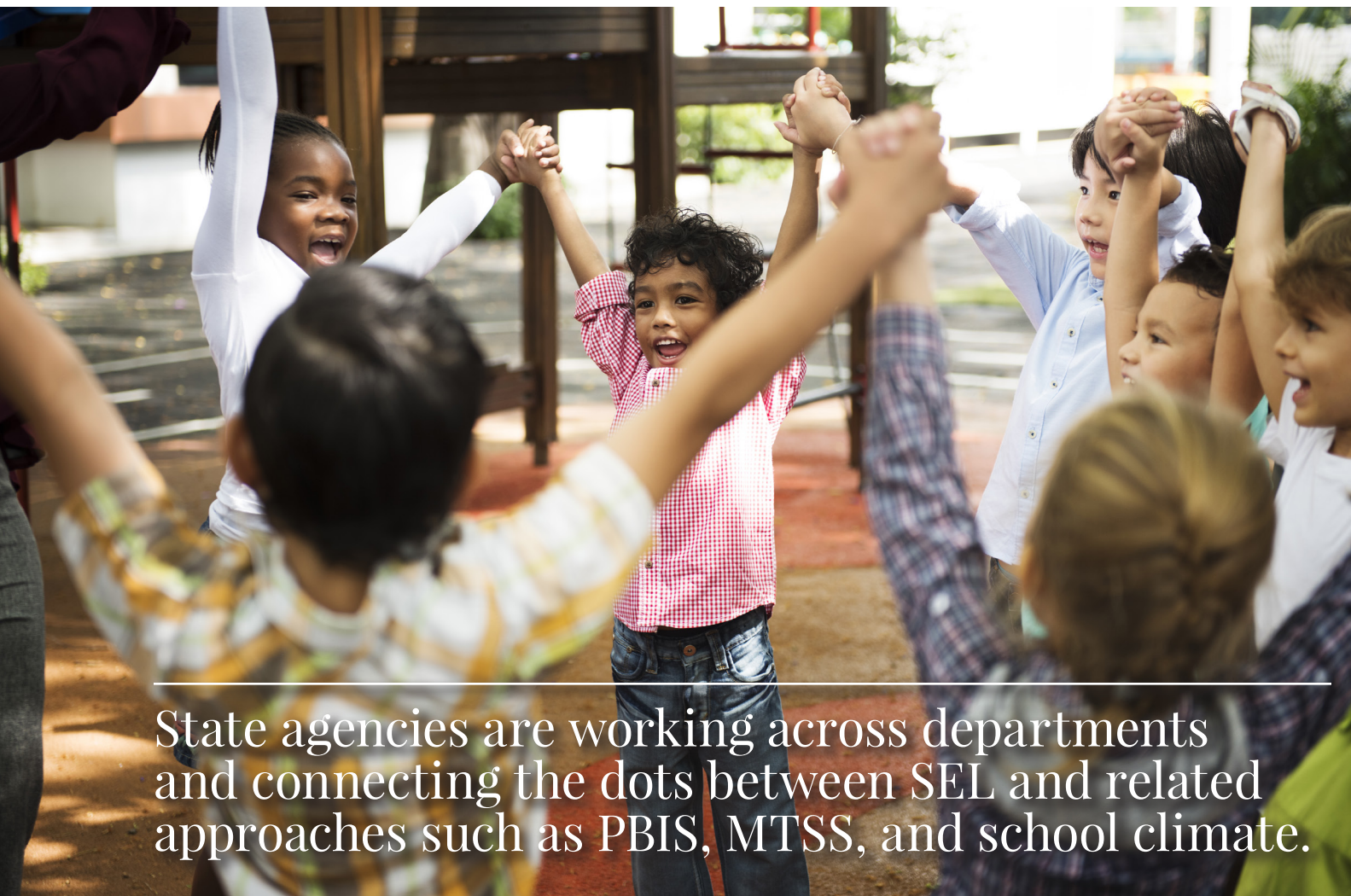
To help **Michigan's** chief appreciate why SEL should be a priority, the SEA's SEL lead showed how four of the seven goals in the state's strategic plan related to SEL. **Virginia's** interim chief is connecting SEL to statewide priorities such as wraparound services and tiered systems of supports, as well the SEA's Profile of a Graduate. **Ohio** has identified SEL as one of its



“equally-valued domains of learning,” which support the development of the whole child as a lifelong learner who is an engaged, culturally aware, and contributing member of society.

Just as important, many teams are purposefully “connecting the dots” between SEL and similar efforts, such as PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports), Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), and restorative practices. That helps address a key concern among educators at all levels—resistance to “one more thing.” For example, **Georgia** is purposefully explaining the connections between SEL and PBIS (implemented widely across the state), Response to Intervention, trauma-informed practices, restorative practices,

mental health, MTSS, and school climate—all of which have existing constituencies. **Kansas** is aligning SEL with MTSS, growth mindset, bullying, trauma-sensitive schools, career advising, child sexual assault, mental health/wellness, and suicide prevention—some of which already are required by law. The career advising model features integrating SEL across the academic, career, and social-emotional domains of the Kansas School Counseling Standards. **Wisconsin** is connecting SEL to its digital internet safety initiatives as well as integrating SEL with PBIS, student mental health, and trauma initiatives. SEL is also nested in the Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework, released in 2015.



State agencies are working across departments and connecting the dots between SEL and related approaches such as PBIS, MTSS, and school climate.

KEY INSIGHT 5

Addressing Equity, Cultural Competence, and SEL Together

States and school districts increasingly are grappling with how to address issues of equity and cultural competence within the context of SEL. Key issues include:

1. How the school system defines SEL. For example, some have observed that unless educators are culturally sensitive, SEL may be defined as “mindfulness” in affluent districts and “behavior management” in more disadvantaged ones.
2. Teaching practices and modeling that create equitable conditions for learning in the classroom. For example, students may experience “acculturative stress” when a member of the dominant social group (white adult) teaches a disempowered group (children of color). Becoming culturally competent can help teachers avoid promoting this type of stress in students. Cultural competence may be especially critical for SEL, since social and emotional development begins at home in the context of the family’s culture of origin. In order for teachers to effectively connect to and support a child’s continued growth and development, they must be culturally responsive – so that their teaching reflects an understanding and



respect for the background of all students, and also intentionally includes examples from different backgrounds in their instruction.

3. How to describe and articulate the cultural competence students will ultimately need for future employability. States use a variety of strategies to advance equity, cultural competence, and SEL. Many states frame SEL in terms of the *employability* skills graduates will need to navigate multicultural teams in their jobs. **Michigan** had its draft SEL competencies reviewed by the Great Lakes Equity Center, which helped to ensure that the state’s guidance was equitable and culturally competent. **Washington State** also thought deeply about cultural competence and equity in developing its [professional development modules](#).

Massachusetts posted the following policy statement, developed in consultation with experts, on cultural competency: *“The Department strongly recommends sustained professional development and collaborative learning around issues of cultural competency and Social and Emotional Learning. Developing students’ social emotional competencies can provide an opportunity to develop a sense of positive self-worth in connection to a student’s race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin,*

Definitions, teaching practices, and modeling inclusiveness all matter.

and sexual orientation. Educators are encouraged to develop examples and illustrations of these competencies that are congruent with the social and cultural experiences of their students. In addition to contributing to academic success, SEL programs can also support the development of students’ sense of autonomy, agency, and social justice.” The state team



has now developed more detailed guidance in a report, [Social and Emotional Learning for All: Access, Cultural Proficiency, and Cultural Responsiveness](#).

Wisconsin’s state superintendent convened an Equity Council to assist with developing the state’s ESSA plan. The council opted to continue working on a few areas, including

SEL. Priorities include how to communicate about SEL and equity, how to help districts implement the SEL competencies equitably, and how agencies/groups can support districts in this work. The council includes legislators, advocacy groups, parent and family groups, and higher education representatives.

KEY INSIGHT 6

Customizing Messaging and Communications

Clear communication about SEL is important for several reasons. First, terminology can be confusing. Many priorities – such as workforce readiness, employability skills, equity and cultural competence, MTSS, PBIS, mindfulness, grit, whole child, and character education – all come

under the broad banner of SEL. Stakeholders need to understand the connections.

Second, employers, educators, parents, and others increasingly are tying SEL to college- and career-readiness, recognizing that students must develop social and emotional competencies as well as academic skills to succeed after high school. Clear communication about SEL can help explain the linkages.

Third, following pushback against the Common Core State Standards, many states report “standards fatigue” and say that key stakeholders may not have an appetite for developing new standards. At the same time, CSI teams also recognize that educators speak the language of “learning standards.” In order to resolve this tension, states have been careful to communicate that recommended SEL competencies are voluntary, not mandated. Some states are also using different terminology (e.g., “competencies” rather than “standards”).

Fourth, some states find it helpful to use specific language to discuss SEL, electing to use terms such as “career readiness” (e.g.,



Pennsylvania). **Arkansas** refers to “personal success skills,” and “preparing and supporting Arkansans for the future.” The CSI recognizes that state teams need to listen carefully to their communities and be sensitive to the issues different language and terminology may present.

State leaders are clarifying what SEL is, why it matters, and how it aligns with related priorities.

Fifth, beyond different uses of language, some states have encountered pockets of political resistance to having schools involved in SEL at all. Opponents of SEL often say it is the primary responsibility of families. These communication challenges can be successfully weathered. Critical to success is deep listening to understand concerns of the community, as well as a clear plan for communicating with and engaging stakeholders. The plan should identify key goals and audiences, clarify key messages, and prioritize key strategies for sharing those messages.

States have developed a variety of communication strategies to support their work. **Tennessee** Commissioner Candice McQueen has developed

a useful [video](#). **Kansas** Commissioner Randy Watson makes the case for SEL in a March 2016 video on his agency’s [website](#). **Washington** State’s [online module](#) features a testimonial from a state legislator about the importance of SEL. States like **New Hampshire** and **Wisconsin** are sharing useful, basic explanatory materials.

During the February 2018 CSI meeting, state teams reported that getting assistance on communications is their top priority. In particular, they would welcome help from CASEL and others on how to: (1) make the basic case to noneducators; (2) explain to educators how SEL connects to work they’re already doing such as PBIS, school climate initiatives, and restorative disciplinary practices; and (3) address skeptics.



KEY INSIGHT 7

Supporting Professional Development

Professional development is critical and needs to happen for SEL to be a priority and implemented effectively. The extent of state involvement can vary according to the specific circumstances. States do not necessarily need to conduct the professional development themselves, but can turn to expert practitioners on the ground. However, states *can* develop curricula and help coordinate and support professional learning. For example, in

Massachusetts, the SEA helped identify PD models that can be scaled (i.e. materials, online modules, etc.) and funding structures that districts can use to pay for this training (i.e. Titles IIA and IV).

Professional development is likely to be most effective when local education agencies can provide ongoing support – with more cultural competence, a greater awareness of local needs, and ongoing professional development opportunities (e.g,



workshops and coaches). For this reason, the ideal role for states may be to develop qualified “experts” within the state who can partner with district professional development teams to fill specific needs (e.g., on trauma-informed practice or equity). In addition, states can help gather and organize high-quality content for professional development resources that district teams can use. The CSI is developing a national database of relevant professional development content and tools to support this effort.



States are developing criteria, sharing resources, and providing support.

States also can work with districts to fill gaps, building on the work underway in many communities. For example, **Washington State** worked with Nick Yoder at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to develop an online [SEL Module](#) in five segments to support SEL professional development. States also are leveraging the [U.S. Department of Education’s Comprehensive Center Network](#) to support online professional learning. The **Tennessee** Department of Education collaborated with the [Center on Great Teachers and Leaders \(GTL Center\)](#) and the [Appalachian Regional Comprehensive Center \(ARCC\)](#), as well as Nashville educators, to develop high-quality videos for professional development.

Similarly, **New Jersey** is working with the GTL Center and the [MidAtlantic Comprehensive Center](#) to develop professional development organized around the five SEL competencies. **Oregon, Michigan** (through the GTL Center and [Great Lakes Comprehensive Center](#)), and **Wisconsin** (through the GTL Center and [Midwest Comprehensive Center](#)), and other states are beginning to adapt the Washington modules for their own context.

KEY INSIGHT 8

Taking Advantage of a Cross-State Learning Community



Based on our national CSI model, a community of practice helps motivate and validate the work of state teams. All states connected to the CSI are fully engaged and making good progress on their individual plans, often with feedback from their peers.

The types of collaborations described in Insight 3 (Elevating State Leadership) illustrate the organizational structures that states are using to ensure a steady stream of insights, information, and best practices. The CSI also has a thriving Google+ Community that allows state teams to raise questions and share helpful resources in real time. For example:

- One state recently posted to the Google+ Community that it had “developed draft statewide guidance for schools and districts on SEL assessment, implementation, professional development and considerations

for SEL in special education. We are seeking individuals to review and provide comments and/or feedback to the documents to improve their usability, format and content.”

- Another posted, “Thought some of you might find the work of Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor interesting as you work on SEL. They were instrumental in helping (us) a form our foundation for Learning Strategies and Supports that are now part of our growing MTSS process across the state.”

States are collaborating with each other ... and with their districts.

- Yet another: “Our first SEL stakeholder work group met today! (Feels so awesome to be moving forward!!!) In showing them the updates on all of your states, they asked if I could find out what some of your ‘pot holes’ were in the process so maybe we can prevent them.”

Collaborating with other states

The CSI also facilitates ongoing conference calls and webinars on questions raised by states. These vehicles have created a powerful forum for state teams to share information and strategies while learning from each other and invited experts. Calls have focused on issues such as equity, effective communication and messaging, and how to integrate SEL across state programs and priorities.

The CSI plans to convene one national meeting and four regional meetings a year that involve multiple states, such as the February 2018 gathering in Chicago that brought together teams from 25 states. In addition, states are increasingly taking the initiative to organize regional meetings so they can work together more frequently. In September 2017, the **Iowa** team proposed a Midwestern meeting at the CASEL

offices in Chicago, and seven states participated: **Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Nevada, and Wisconsin**. Similarly, the **New York** team hosted a Northeastern meeting in October 2017, with seven participants: **Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island**.

States are able to develop policies, guidance, and other resources more quickly and with greater quality because of these shared approaches.

States learn most effectively from each other

using the [tools and structures](#) developed for the CSI. They include key features of high-quality standards and guidelines to support SEL, a recommended process for developing state

policies and guidelines to support SEL, and a process for developing and articulating learning goals or competencies for SEL. Regional agencies in **North Dakota** recently used these tools to develop an exemplary set of guidelines. Building on the good work of others also is efficient. **Rhode Island** leaders recently reviewed examples of state and district standards curated by the CSI and elected to adapt the Oakland (Calif.) district standards, with minimal edits, because they closely matched their needs.

Collaborating with districts

Equally beneficial are collaborations between districts and states. Based on ongoing conversations with the staff of CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), consultants, and CSI state teams, as well as interviews with 12 district leaders and SEL leads, we recommend the following:

- Recognize that districts, like states, are unique and many are already doing good work on SEL. Districts may be leading the way. SEAs can help elevate and build on that good work but should be careful not to interfere with it. To benefit

from this local wisdom, bring districts into state-level conversations from the beginning.

- Conduct district site visits and listening tours to see the work in action. Similarly, state support of district-to-district visits helps spread expertise.
- Make any policies and guidelines voluntary. Districts, like states, need the flexibility to customize their own priorities and approaches.
- Launch and facilitate professional learning communities made up of interested district teams to create a community of practice for teachers and administrators who want to share expertise and resources on SEL, as **Rhode Island** has done. The CSI will more closely examine this approach in 2018 and also consider how states might support regional training centers by making high-quality professional development content available.



DISTRICTS' ADVICE TO STATES

As part of our efforts to inform the CSI, CASEL staff interviewed about a dozen school district leaders, asking how their state education agency could best support their local efforts. We spoke with four district superintendents, one assistant superintendent, five directors of SEL (or people in a similar role), two directors of student services, and one chief accountability officer. The following seven recommendations reflect their views.

1. Help communicate the importance of SEL.

"Everyone should feel, understand, hear, and know how SEL connects to student success." — Mai Xi Lee, Director of Social Emotional Learning, Sacramento City Unified School District, California

2. Show the clear alignment between SEL and other priorities, regulations, and requirements.

"We sometimes need help seeing how all of our initiatives are actually connected to SEL. SEL is not one more thing on the plate, it is the plate!" — Gene Olsen, Director of Student Services, Community Consolidated School District 89, Illinois

3. Advance the work by providing frameworks that allow for flexibility.

"Districts benefit when states move away from the 'one-size-fits-all' model. Districts do appreciate being given a structure, but they also need flexibility within that structure to determine what is best for their students." — Denine Goolsby, Executive Director of Humanware, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Ohio

4. Learn from, and take advantage of, good work already happening in districts.

"There is an opportunity to leverage the districts that are already doing SEL. It would be powerful to have a model that uses the work from a successful district to help other

districts." — Meria Carstarphen, Superintendent, Atlanta Public Schools, Georgia

5. Use districts' requests for SEL support to drive the state's work.

"Districts are critical partners in the work of SEL, because we are the ones on the ground. Professional development happens within the context of the community, but states can provide guidance and resources." — Kyla Kregel, Director of Social and Emotional Learning, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Tennessee

6. Facilitate bi-directional communication.

"States and districts can learn a lot from one another, but both have to come to the table with the right mindset: this is a learning time. We aren't coming in with one initiative to solve everything. This has to be based on honest sharing." — Paul Cruz, Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, Texas

7. Help connect districts.

"Every time I send a notice about a community of practice meeting, the response is amazingly positive. Meetings fill up quickly. I am always looking to link people to opportunities and other districts that could be helpful." — Alice Woods, Education Specialist, Office of Student, Community, & Academic Supports, Rhode Island Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

Going Forward

CASEL has witnessed the power of a collaborating network of state teams in facilitating and advancing the work of SEL. Going forward we will continue to support the professional learning community of states, and will also continue to develop tools and resources to support states in achieving the next steps in their process. Specifically, to assist states in their work with SEL, CASEL will continue to identify excellent examples of policies and guidance and use these examples to create open-sourced tools and resources that any state or district team can use or adapt. These evidence-based resources will help states provide high-quality guidance for implementing SEL effectively.

We also will identify and make available professional development modules and training activities that states can draw from to build a comprehensive professional development system. Having a common framework and understanding

of SEL will facilitate implementation. Such resources can save states enormous amounts of time in creating their own resources.

As growing numbers of states complete competencies, guidance, and professional development related to SEL, states are beginning to explore, often in a deep and systematic way, how to support districts with implementation. Many tools are available for this purpose, notably CASEL's [District Resource Center \(DRC\)](#). Increasingly, the CSI will add information and tools designed to help states organize and support the work of districts, including through district-state partnerships and collaborations. In coming months, the CSI will release two reports that share examples of how districts and states are collaborating to support evidence-based, systemic SEL. These and similar efforts will be an important part of taking SEL within the states and districts to a new level of refinement and impact.

A key challenge now is to help school districts implement quality SEL policies and practices effectively.



The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the world's leading organization advancing one of the most important fields in education in decades: the practice of promoting integrated academic, social, and emotional learning for all children. The nonprofit, founded in 1994, provides a combination of research, practice, and policy to support high-quality social and emotional learning in districts and schools nationwide.

Thank you to CASEL's many critical collaborators — *our partner educators, researchers, policymakers, civic leaders, program providers, funders, and others* — for contributing to and supporting efforts to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education, preschool through high school.



COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING
815 W VAN BUREN STREET, SUITE 210, CHICAGO IL 60607 | 312.226.3770 | CASEL.ORG