Enacting Social-Emotional Learning: Practices And Supports Employed in CORE Districts and Schools

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Abstract

There is a growing consensus in education that schools can and should attend to students' social-emotional development. Emerging research and popular texts indicate that students' mindsets, beliefs, dispositions, emotions, and behaviors can advance outcomes such as college readiness, career success, mental health, and relationships. Despite this growing awareness, many districts and schools are still struggling to implement strategies that develop students' social-emotional skills. This report seeks to fill this gap by examining the social-emotional learning (SEL) practices in one network of California school districts—the CORE districts—that are working together to measure and improve SEL. We focus on schools with strong student-reported data on SEL outcomes, particularly for African American and Latinx students. To support the sharing of promising practices in this emerging field, we investigate how district and school leaders and educators interpret SEL and support it in and outside of the school day.

Introduction

For the past decade, a growing number of scholars and educators have explored the ways in which students' mindsets, beliefs, dispositions, emotions, and behaviors support learning. Teachers, administrators, researchers, and policymakers across the country have increasingly pushed to support students in these ways under the broad umbrella of social-emotional learning (SEL). Past studies have demonstrated that embedding high-quality SEL programs, curricula, and activities into a school may improve academic performance, attendance, behaviors, culture, and climate (Aos, Lieb, Mayfield, Miller, & Pennucci, 2004; Belfield et al., 2015; Berkowitz et al., 2017; Duckworth & Carlson, 2013; Duckworth, Tsukayama, & May, 2010; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicke, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2015).

Perhaps as a result of this emerging research base and popular texts (e.g., Tough, 2012), the growing consensus in education is that schools can and should attend to students' social-emotional development. This consensus is reflected in recent policy decisions, at the state and federal levels, which require schools and districts to measure and attend to non-academic outcomes. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 requires states to measure at least one indicator of "School Quality or Student Success," defined broadly to include measures of student engagement, educator engagement, student access to and completion of advanced coursework, post-secondary readiness, or school climate and safety. Similarly, under California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the supporting Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) process, districts are expected to develop and report indicators representing a wide range of educational goals, including measures of school culture-climate (CC) (California Department of Education, 2016). While no state has chosen to measure SEL at this time (Blad, 2017), in 2017, all 50 states had SEL standards at the preschool level, and eight states had SEL standards for K–12 (Dusenbury, Dermody, & Weissberg, 2018). Additionally, many more states are working to build capacity in developing approaches to SEL. For example, 25 states are currently working with the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) through the Collaborating States Initiative (R. Weissberg, personal communication, March 23, 2018).

Despite this growing interest, many districts and schools are still struggling to implement programs and practices that effectively develop students' social-emotional skills. In many ways, this is a new instantiation of an old problem in education. This phenomenon—the disconnect between having a solid knowledge base and the actual work that occurs—is often referred to as the *knowing–doing gap* (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999). Part of the challenge in implementing SEL is that the definition of SEL and what constitutes high-quality SEL support and instruction are often elusive and unclear (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Jones & Doolittle, 2016). This lack of clarity is significant because successful implementation of SEL instruction, supports, and programs must include a shared understanding of the who, what, when, where, and how. Research has shown that a key element of effective implementation is common language and definition, as well as coordinated work towards a shared vision (Durlak, 2011; Durlak et al., 2011). In implementing and sustaining high-quality SEL, then, practices are important, but so is

knowing whether and how the practices ultimately affect students. To this end, identifying and measuring the ways in which districts and schools are defining, supporting, and improving student SEL outcomes are areas of growing interest. As such, several researchers have called for more research on schools' implementation of SEL strategies (e.g., Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Similarly, policymakers and practitioners often talk about needing information about concrete practices and approaches that can provide a basis for action. While every school and district will have to choose for itself what approaches will be best for their specific context, knowing what successful schools and districts have done, and why, can provide a powerful starting point. This knowledge about what has worked in successful organizations is sometimes referred to as *practice-based evidence* (Bryk, 2015).

To this end, we explore in this report the SEL practices in one network of California school districts—the CORE districts—that are working together to measure and improve SEL outcomes. These eight school districts (Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Santa Ana) are perhaps best known for the *waiver* they received from the U.S. Department of Education that freed them from some of their federal obligations under No Child Left Behind. Under the terms of the waiver, six of the CORE districts[1] developed an innovative accountability system that included measuring social-emotional learning in their multiple measures accountability system. The CORE network of districts and schools serves over a million students and has been working for many years to implement SEL at scale. In the year of our study, the network had chosen to focus on closing the achievement gap in middle school mathematics for African American and Latinx[2] students and had hypothesized that SEL may play a particularly important role in improving academic achievement among African American, Latinx, and low-income students. To support the sharing of promising practices in this emerging field, we highlight in this report (a) the practices in schools with high levels of student-reported SEL and (b) the ways that schools advance SEL and districts support school-based practices. The experiences of district and school administrators, teachers, and staff in a set of CORE schools with strong self-reported data on SEL outcomes, particularly for African American and Latinx students, can yield important insights for educators and policymakers in California and beyond.

Specifically, the report addresses the following questions:

1. How do educators in the central office and the schools being studied define social-emotional learning?
2. What strategies do schools use to enact and support the various conceptions of SEL?
3. How do districts support school-based practices intended to develop SEL?

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[1] Excluding Garden Grove and Sacramento City unified school districts.

[2] The Hispanic/Latino group of students is increasingly referred to as *Latinx*, a gender neutral term often used in lieu of Latino or Latina that refers to individuals with cultural ties to Latin America and individuals of Latin American descent.

Using a multiple case study design (Yin, 2013), we gathered data on educators' conceptions of and efforts to facilitate social-emotional learning at the district, school, and classroom levels. In the spring of 2017, researchers interviewed CORE leaders[3] and central office administrators (*n*=12) as well as school leaders, teachers, and other staff members (*n*=55) in a set of 10 schools in five CORE districts (see Methods section for details on the selection of these "positive outlier" cases). Researchers also gathered documents and observed school activities and classroom instruction. We analyzed the data separately for each district and its schools, and then we conducted cross-case analyses to identify common definitions and practices (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

In this report, we first describe the definitions of social-emotional learning and what we know from extant literature about effective approaches. Then, we present background on the CORE districts and describe our research methods. Next, we present the results of our analysis of how districts and schools interpreted SEL, and how they supported it at the district, school, and classroom levels. We then conclude with implications of our work for policy, practice, and future research.

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[3] The work of the eight CORE districts is supported by staff members from the nonprofit organization, *CORE Districts*, that was created in 2010.

Background on Social-Emotional Learning

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) coined the term social-emotional learning in the 1990s (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006), defining SEL as the process of acquiring "the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life…. It includes self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working cooperatively, and caring about oneself and others" (Elias, 1997, p. 2). In recent years, the term SEL has become associated with a broad category of beliefs, attitudes, personality traits, and behaviors that are considered foundational for success in school and life. However, researchers lack a clear consensus on a name or definition for this category (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015); rather than using the term SEL, many scholars refer to "noncognitive factors" (Farrington et al., 2012), "success skills" (Conley, 2015), "mindsets, essential skills, and habits" (Gabrieli, Ansel, & Krachman, 2015), "character" (Tough, 2012), or "personal qualities" (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). In this report, we use the term social-emotional learning to refer specifically to student development in this broad domain, which includes beliefs, dispositions, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are distinct from academic achievement and are widely perceived as beneficial to individuals and society (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015, pp. 238–239).

Extant literature suggests that SEL is foundational for students' well-being and academic performance; for example, researchers have demonstrated that SEL competencies such as self-efficacy, self-control, and growth mindset are powerful predictors of academic, social, economic, and physical outcomes (Almlund et al., 2011; Bandura, 1997; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Borghans, Duckworth, Heckman, & Weel, 2008; Duckworth, Tsukayama, et al., 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Jackson, Connolly, Garrison, Leveille, & Connolly, 2015; Moffitt et al., 2011; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteijn, 2012; Strayhorn, 2013; West et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 2000). Research also suggests that many SEL constructs are malleable and can be influenced by educational practice (Almlund et al., 2011; Berg, Osher, Moroney, & Yoder, 2017; Blackwell et al., 2007; Yeager & Walton, 2011). Research into SEL practices in the classroom has demonstrated an increase in positive social behaviors, fewer conduct issues, minimization of emotional distress, and improved grades and test results (Benson, 2006; Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman, 2003). Using an ecological framework, Becker and Luther (2002) found that for traditionally underserved students, four social-emotional components that influence achievement performance include academic and school attachment, teacher support, peer values, and mental health. Moreover, SEL programs have been tied to positive gains in school climate outcomes (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009), demonstrating the relationship between SEL and a school climate that allows participants in the school community to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe. Researchers using the CORE data have found similar relationships. For example, Hough, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2017) found a close relationship between SEL and school culture-climate (CC) measures, and West, Buckley, Krachman, and Bookman (2017) have shown that the CORE SEL measures are predictive of proficiency on math tests, overall academic growth in mathematics, and improvement on graduation rates and English Learner redesignation rate. In sum, the literature suggests that SEL supports students'

academic success and personal well-being and that SEL is linked to perceptions of a safe and supportive school climate.

Research also suggests that SEL support could foster greater equity for traditionally underserved groups, such as African American, Latinx, and low-income students (Aronson, Cohen, & McColskey, 2009; Blair & Raver, 2015; Borman, Grigg, & Hanselman, 2016; Elias & Haynes, 2008; Strayhorn, 2013). However, research has also provided evidence of disparities in SEL support for African American and Latinx students in comparison to their White peers. Scholars have observed gaps by race/ethnicity in both perceptions of school culture-climate and in reported social-emotional learning, echoing extensive literature on racial inequities in educational resources (e.g., Baker & Green, 2005; Hough et al., 2017) and in academic outcomes (e.g., CEPA, n.d.). Studies have shown that African American and Latinx students may be at higher risk for developing social and emotional problems, such as anxiety, than students of other racial groups (Allen & Majidi-Ahi, 1998; Varela, Sanchez-Sosa, Biggs, & Luis, 2009). Among Latinx students, an unwelcoming school climate and inadequate support for English learners may lead students to feel that they do not belong in the school community, contributing to poor SEL outcomes (Blanco-Vega, Castro-Olivo, & Merrell, 2008). Furthermore, African American students and Latinx students are more likely to experience peer aggression than White and Asian American students (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009), and this peer aggression may foster a perception of a hostile school climate and inhibit SEL. While the challenge facing African American and Latinx students is well documented, few studies have explored the link between SEL practices and outcomes for historically marginalized students.

However, the literature suggests a few key lessons for supporting SEL generally. Durlak et al. (2011) found that the most effective programs were those that incorporated four elements represented by the acronym SAFE: (a) sequenced activities that lead in a coordinated and connected way to skills, (b) active forms of learning, (c) focused activities to develop one or more social skills, and (d) explicit targets concerning specific skills. Embracing these findings, in 2017 the Aspen Institute identified some promising SEL practices—including a strong and intentionally integrated curriculum—as key factors contributing to student success (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). Some research also demonstrates that a successful SEL program involves:

> …all the adults in the building being trained in and familiar with a set of languages and practices that they can use in the hallways, in the gym, at recess, in the lunchroom, on the bus—all the times when kids have less structure, and are actually engaging in social interactions, when emotions are more likely to come up. (Schafer, 2016, p. 1)

At the same time, other work suggests that "kernels of practice"—low cost, targeted strategies that can be taught quickly and used multiple times per day—may be more feasible for schools and districts to implement and sustain as compared to more comprehensive programs (Jones, Bailey, Brush, & Kahn, 2017).

However, while the research suggests that comprehensive, integrated approaches are the most effective for school-wide change, questions remain about the kinds of district and

school practices needed to facilitate SEL. In particular, there is a lack of a practical knowledge base of concrete practices one can undertake in classrooms, schools, and districts to support SEL. To begin to address this knowledge gap, we designed our study to explore a set of positive outliers, or schools that, despite similar demographics and resource limitations to those of peer institutions, exhibit behaviors or strategies that have yielded better solutions and results (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010; Marsh, Schroeder, Dearden, Sternin, & Sternin, 2004). Such studies help surface strategies and practices that may be useful to others facing similar goals and challenges. In this way, we hope to contribute to the broader field's understanding of how schools can advance students' development of social-emotional skills.

SEL Implementation in the CORE Districts

The CORE districts began measuring SEL as part of the waiver they received from the U.S. Department of Education that freed them from some of their federal obligations under No Child Left Behind.[4] Under the terms of the waiver, six districts (Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and Santa Ana) developed an innovative accountability system focused on improving both academic and non-academic outcomes for students. In addition to measures of SEL, CORE's unique measurement system includes chronic absenteeism, suspension/expulsion, school culture-climate, high school readiness, graduation, English Learner progress, and academic achievement and growth. CORE's systematic measurement of school and student performance on SEL in particular is unparalleled and has generated widespread national interest in the field of education and in the popular press (Blad, 2015; Bornstein, 2015; Zernike, 2016).

In their development of a new system of indicators to measure school success, the CORE districts identified social and emotional well-being as an important focal point for schools' efforts to improve student performance. Because of research showing that students' social-emotional development can be supported through the implementation of policies and practices that improve a school's culture and climate and promote positive relationships (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Berg et al., 2017; Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2016; Blum, Libbey, Bishop, & Bishop, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; McCormick et al., 2015), the CORE districts also included school culture-climate as a key indicator. In both SEL and CC, the constructs were selected based on the criteria of (a) measurability, or the existence of validated metrics; (b) malleability, or the ability of educational practice to impact the competency; and (c) meaningfulness, or the association of the competency with desirable academic and life outcomes (Krachman, Arnold, & Larocca, 2016). To develop their survey instruments, the CORE districts consulted with leading scholars, including those affiliated with CASEL, which had been (and still is) working with several CORE districts through the

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[4] For more information about CORE's collaboration prior to and during the waiver implementation phase, see Marsh, Bush-Mecenas, Hough, Park, Allbright, Hall, and Glover, 2016; Marsh, Bush-Mecenas, and Hough, 2017.

Collaborating Districts Initiative. Ultimately, the CORE districts developed a survey instrument with four SEL constructs and four CC constructs (see Figure 1).[5]

Student-reported SEL and CC measures come from surveys of students in Grades 4–12. The districts also administer CC surveys to all parents and school staff. The results of these surveys are incorporated into CORE's measurement system, which includes school report cards and a variety of data views designed to be shared with stakeholders who are both internal (central office administrators, principals, and teachers) and external (parents, community-based organizations, and policymakers). Two districts present their school "dashboard" information on the CORE website itself,[6] including the percentage of students who reported positive responses on the four SEL measures: growth mindset, self-efficacy, social awareness, and self-management.

In our previous work, we showed that the CORE districts' decision to measure SEL and CC as part of their accountability system is based on district leaders' belief that social-emotional skills support success in students' educational, professional, and personal lives (Allbright & Marsh, 2017; Marsh et al., 2016). In developing their measurement system, CORE leaders believed that measuring SEL could inform important changes in educational practice and that these changes in practice could also foster improved academic achievement (Allbright & Marsh, 2017). In addition, CORE leaders have hypothesized that schools' support for SEL may play a particularly important role in improving academic achievement among African American, Latinx, and low-income students, thus presenting a potential route to reducing achievement gaps by race and socioeconomic status. CORE district leaders have also indicated that the inclusion of SEL measures in an accountability system gives educators permission to prioritize SEL work and devote resources, such as funding and professional development time, towards non-academic goals (Marsh et al., 2016).

Though the 2015 passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act effectively ended the CORE waiver, the CORE districts have continued to administer the SEL and CC surveys with the intent of using these data to inform future practice. Through implementing the waiver, the CORE districts established a deep commitment to collaboration and shared learning around their multiple measures data system. For this reason, in early 2017, the CORE districts re-organized as a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) committed to: (a) anchoring their shared work in the student and school quality measures in their measurement system, and holding each other accountable for specific outcomes; (b) looking inward and building coherence within each district as a way to improve the power of each system to improve student outcomes (Fullan & Quinn, 2015); and (c) using the tools of improvement science to anchor their collaborative work in cycles of inquiry (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015).

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[5] For more detail on the SEL constructs selected for inclusion, the rationale for inclusion, and full survey instruments, see http://www.transformingeducation.org/measuringmesh/. For full CC instruments, see http://coredistricts.org/core-index/. For additional research on CORE's SEL measures, see http://www.edpolicyinca.org/projects/core-pace-research-partnership.

[6] These reports can be found at https://reports.coredistricts.org.

Figure 1. CORE SEL and Culture-Climate Constructs and Definitions

SEL competency	Definition
Growth mindset	The belief that one's abilities can grow with effort. Students with a growth mindset see effort as necessary for success, embrace challenges, learn from criticism, and persist in the face of setbacks.
Self-efficacy	The belief in one's own ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and environment.
Self-management	The ability to regulate one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, delaying gratification, motivating oneself, and setting and working towards personal and academic goals.
Social awareness	The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
Culture-climate construct	Definition
Support for academic learning	High scores on this construct indicate that survey respondents feel that the climate is conducive to learning and that teachers use supportive practices, such as encouragement and constructive feedback, varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills, and support for risk-taking and independent thinking. Respondents report that the atmosphere is conducive to dialog and questioning, academic challenge, and individual attention to support differentiated learning.
Sense of belonging and school connectedness	High scores on this construct indicate that survey respondents report a positive sense of being accepted, valued, and included by others (teacher and peers) in all school settings. Students and parents report feeling welcome at the school.
Knowledge and perceived fairness of discipline rules and norms	This construct measures the extent to which survey respondents report clearly communicated rules and expectations about student and adult behavior—especially regarding physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment, and teasing—clear and consistent enforcement, and norms for adult intervention.
Safety	This construct measures the extent to which students and adults report feeling safe at school and around school, including feeling safe from verbal abuse, teasing, or exclusion by others in the school.

Based on extensive review of network-wide data and interviews with teachers and students in CORE schools, the CORE Improvement Community (CIC) decided to focus on closing the math achievement gap for African American and Latinx students in Grades 4–8.[7] Similar to CASEL, CORE's emerging theory envisions improvement in academic outcomes as the integration of academic and social-emotional supports, with an added focus on race and equity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. CORE's emerging theory of improvement
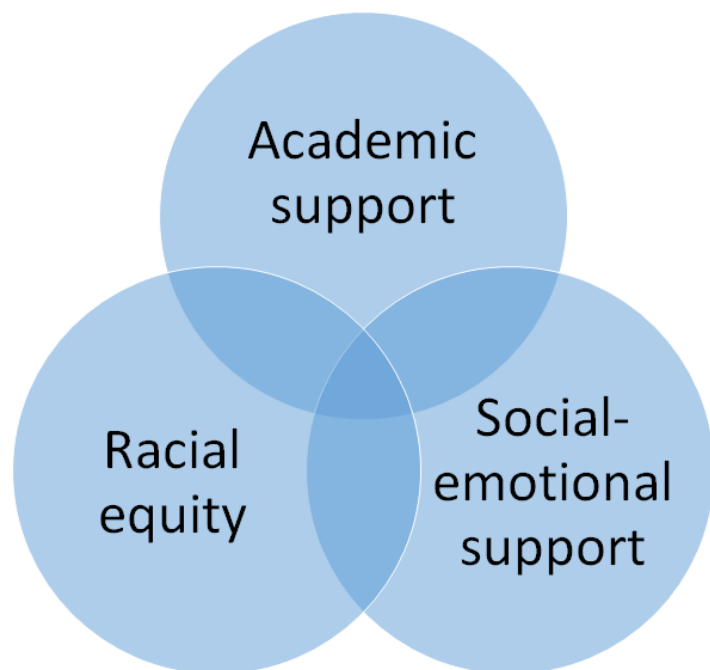
A central tenet of working together as a Networked Improvement Community is learning from one another about effective practices in districts and schools across the network. Based on such knowledge, districts in the CORE network collaborate to develop new approaches that address well-defined problems of practice or adapt existing research-based practices to local conditions, iterating the development and modification of approaching in cycles of inquiry often referred to as "Plan-Do-Study-Act" cycles. To support this learning, as the CORE network began working to accelerate achievement for African American and Latinx students, they asked us to pursue information about what SEL practices may reduce gaps in both the SEL and the academic domain. Our intent was to document practices at the district offices and in schools that could be shared across the CORE districts and beyond. To this end, to support and deepen the work around the CIC's focus on racial equity and SEL gaps in middle grades mathematics, in this study we chose a set of middle schools that had demonstrated higher-than-average performance in student-reported social-emotional skills for African American and/or Latinx students.

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[7] For a more in-depth discussion of the work of the CORE Improvement Community since forming as a NIC in September 2016, see Nayfack, Park, Hough, and Willis, 2017.

Study Method

We used a multiple, embedded case study design (Yin, 2013) to address three key research questions:

1. How do educators in the central office and the schools we studied define social-emotional learning?
2. What strategies do schools use to support the various conceptions of SEL?
3. How do districts support school-based practices intended to develop SEL?

While answers to each question are important independently, it is only through answering all three that we can fully understand how schools support SEL. Notably, how SEL is defined determines the kinds of approaches educators pursue and why. As such, understanding conceptualizations of SEL is critical (question 1). Our understanding then deepens with an analysis of the strategies school-level educators report using to advance SEL and the rationales for these activities (question 2). Finally, we investigate the ways in which districts support schools' work around SEL (question 3). Together, the answers to these questions provide a comprehensive understanding of how the CORE districts and schools we studied went about supporting SEL.

Sample

In previous work, researchers using the CORE data found that among the available demographic measures, race/ethnicity is the factor most strongly associated with SEL and culture-climate outcomes, after controlling for other student characteristics (Hough et al., 2017). Specifically, these researchers found that African American students, Latinx students, and students in special education report the lowest levels of SEL, and that differences between these groups and other student sub-populations persist even within the same school. Notably, the authors found wide variation in within-school gaps, with some schools demonstrating large gaps between student groups while others had relatively high levels of SEL for their African American and Latinx students in particular. Our goal in drawing the sample for this study was to identify schools that might be leaders in sharing promising practices. If some schools are able to close these gaps, what are they doing differently?

Our school sampling plan was then developed in partnership with the five CORE districts that chose to participate in the study. Together, we decided that the following considerations were important for selecting schools for this study: (a) that researchers felt confident that student reports of SEL were meaningfully high for selected schools; (b) that the schools selected served large proportions of African American or Latinx youth and that those students reported high levels of SEL; (c) that selected schools also were performing relatively well in mathematics; and (d) that schools were selected in each of the participating CORE districts. To be considered for the sample, a school had to have SEL scores in the top quartile across both years SEL had been measured (2014–15 and 2015–16). By eliminating schools that had high scores in one year but not the other, we isolated schools where the high SEL reports are more consistent across

time and thus more likely to represent "true" SEL for students (rather than being an anomaly or the result of measurement error). If this method oversampled schools, we then imposed further restrictions on the sample to include (a) only schools eligible for Title 1 designation, (b) schools with a concentration of student subgroup greater than schools in that district at the 25th percentile, and (c) schools with math growth scores higher than a level 3 (out of 10) in 2015–16 for the specified subgroup.[8] This sample selection resulted in five schools selected for high SEL for both African American and Latinx students, four for just Latinx students, and three for just African American students.

Our final sample differs slightly from our sample design, because schools and districts could voluntarily decide whether or not to participate. In the end, five of the six CORE districts with available data agreed to participate in the study. In each participating district, we contacted principals via email at the first two schools listed in our sample selection. If a principal declined to participate, we then contacted the next school on the list. In one case, district leaders recommended and connected researchers to another school within their district when a school on the list did not respond to requests for participation. Ultimately, we visited two schools per participating district, and the selected schools serve students that match the demographics of the districts. See Appendix A for a detailed explanation of the sampling procedures.

To identify interviewees within each school we asked the principal to suggest at least one math teacher for us to speak with and observe (due to the math focus of the CIC) and at least one teacher who was explicitly involved in promoting SEL or culture-climate at the school. We also asked to interview administrators or non-teaching staff tasked with SEL or culture-climate issues, including school counselors or social workers, afterschool program directors, as well as teachers, administrators, or other staff managing campus climate initiatives or SEL-related activities or programs.

Data Collection and Analysis

In each of the five participating CORE districts, the research team conducted semi-structured interviews with between one and three central office administrators responsible for SEL-related work (n=12), including administrators overseeing measurement and evaluation, school climate, student discipline, SEL, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), and career readiness, among other areas. Teams of two researchers visited each school in the spring of 2017 (March–June). In each school, we conducted interviews with school leaders (n=15), other adults responsible for social-emotional supports for students during and outside of the school

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[8] CORE's academic growth measure takes into account an individual student's prior test history, socioeconomic disadvantage, disability status, English learner status, homelessness, and foster care status, and uses this information to measure how quickly they grow relative to students similar to them in these categories. The CORE model also accounts for concentration of these characteristics within schools. In this way, the CORE growth measure is constructed as a "value added" model, estimating the school's impact on student achievement relative to that of other schools serving similar students. A school with a score of 10 has the highest growth, whereas a school with a score of 1 has the lowest growth.

day (*n*=13), and teachers (*n*=26). We also gathered documents and other artifacts (e.g., program descriptions, data reports, school and classroom posters with SEL material) and observed school activities and classrooms (a total of 28 observations of classes, passing periods, lunch periods, and other events) to understand how SEL opportunities played out on campus during and after the school day. We also interviewed three leaders from within the CORE staff and two CORE non-profit partners. (See Appendix B for a list of all interviews by district and school.) We used semi-structured protocols in all interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed. In order to protect the anonymity of respondents, we are not including the names of any organizations or individuals included in the research.

Through our case analysis, we sought to understand how district and school administrators and educators defined SEL and the approaches taken to improve in these areas. To inform our analysis we drew on theories of *sensemaking*, which suggest that individuals make meaning of new policies and experiences based on their prior understandings and frameworks (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006; Weick, 1995). This literature also indicates that broader social, organizational, and professional contexts likely shape educators as they seek to understand and support SEL. As such, educators in CORE districts and schools likely develop shared understandings of SEL in ways affected by the values, norms, and culture of an organization, as well as their individual experiences supporting students' noncognitive development in the past.

We analyzed the data separately for each district and its schools, developing detailed case memos. These initial embedded case study memos helped to specify the local SEL definitions, strategies, and practices, along with key contextual elements in each district and school. Next, we completed cross-case analysis, drawing on the case study memos and all transcripts to examine how definitions and implementation varied across cases (Miles et al., 2013). To further understand patterns across districts and schools, the research team met in person for a two-day retreat to identify key findings. Whenever possible, we also triangulated findings among multiple respondents and data sources to strengthen the validity of our findings. Finally, we revised the report based on extensive review and feedback from two external reviewers.

Several caveats are important to keep in mind. First, our intent with this study is *not* to make causal claims or to identify "effective" practices. We have not evaluated the impact of the practices or strategies identified herein, nor can we attribute the schools' SEL outcomes to these practices or strategies. Instead, this is an exploratory study intended to highlight common conceptions, strategies, and approaches from which other schools and districts can learn and explore further as they advance SEL in their own contexts. Second, we selected schools based on the *level* of SEL score, not the extent to which a school influenced student growth in these schools;[9] in this way, we cannot eliminate the possibility that students may come to the school

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[9] While we were conducting our field work for this study, other members of the broader research team were developing an SEL growth model, to begin to understand the extent to which schools affect SEL development. Results from this study are forthcoming.

already with high levels of SEL. Third, we acknowledge that a few of the schools studied are atypical in their enrollment process or context and may limit the applicability to other sites. Throughout the report, however, we try to focus on process wherever possible, to highlight how context influenced implementation. We then hope the detailed descriptions we provide of broad categories of practice can transcend the specific context and be useful to those in other settings. Finally, while we started this study with an intent to understand SEL practices in the context of mathematics, our data collection ultimately surfaced a set of broader approaches and strategies that are not limited to mathematics but rather to school improvement more broadly.

In the remainder of the report, we classify respondents in three broad categories: (a) *district-level administrators* include individuals from the central office with responsibilities that include supporting schools and educators with SEL resources; (2) *school-level educators* include principals, assistant or vice principals, and other adults supporting SEL outside of individual classrooms, such as social workers and coordinators of afterschool programs; and (c) *classroom-level educators* include teachers and paraprofessionals. Throughout the report, we have provided information on the prevalence of the definitions and practices unearthed in our data. To flesh out these findings, we include examples and quotes, which are meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive of the evidence gathered across cases. Our goal in writing this report is to highlight specific practices that educators discuss as being effective in advancing SEL in their classrooms and schools. Maintaining their anonymity is extremely important, so we have changed details where necessary to protect the identity of schools, districts, and the educators within them.

Findings: Conceptualizing SEL

The first major question we sought to answer was how educators at district, school, and classroom levels understood social-emotional learning. While CORE had a clear set of competencies undergirding its conception of SEL, we wanted to understand how educators within the districts were making sense of the broad concept of social-emotional learning. Since our study is primarily exploratory and descriptive, we did not attempt to create a strict typology of conceptions or to resolve the debate within the field around definitions of SEL. Rather, we wanted to know how and whether individuals at the district, school, and classroom levels understood the competencies identified by CORE, or if they drew on other notions of SEL instead of or in addition to these.

Overall, we found respondents varied widely in their conceptions of SEL. Respondents' conceptions were often broad and overlapping. When asked how they define SEL, some respondents cited CORE constructs such as "growth mindset" (by far the most widely cited of the CORE constructs), while others at all levels used terms such as "soft skills," "noncognitive skills," and other, more general language about factors that prepare students to learn. Only in one district did educators have an explicit, district-driven conception of SEL that we heard throughout the interviews. This district had adopted a formal definition aligned almost completely with that of CASEL,[10] with an additional statement reflecting the connection between SEL and equity. This finding of variation is of course not surprising, given that researchers themselves lack a clear consensus on a name or definition for social-emotional learning (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015), as noted earlier. Below, we describe our findings in greater detail.

Respondents' Varied in Their Use of CORE Constructs to Define SEL

Although district administrators we interviewed were generally familiar with the four CORE competencies and used them when defining SEL, we found significant variation in the extent to which school- and classroom-level respondents embedded these competencies into their definitions of SEL.

District level. In three of five districts, administrators cited the CORE competencies in their definitions of SEL, though they did not necessarily feel that all four competencies were equally salient in their districts' implementation of SEL. For example, an administrator in one district noted that **growth mindset** was the priority there, due to the popularity of Carol Dweck's work (Dweck, 2006). In another district, an administrator cited the CORE definition (with the addition of self-awareness, from CASEL), then went on to say that SEL in terms of "soft skills" and skills "needed for students to master content" was the approach common in her district. In a third district, the district administrator cited the CORE competencies, then identified "emotional regulation" as a primary focus in the district—a term likely meant to

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[10] Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making. These are slightly different from CORE's constructs (growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, social awareness).

describe the CORE competency of **self-management.** In a fourth district, the official organizational definition of SEL was drawn from CASEL which, administrators recognized, has some overlap with the CORE definition. In the final district, administrators cited **growth mindset** as a priority but also used other terms such as "noncognitive skills" or "resiliency" to define SEL.

School and classroom levels. In schools, when asked to define SEL, most respondents either did not explicitly cite the CORE competencies, or they used one or two of them, but not all four. Once again, **growth mindset** was the most commonly mentioned of the four competencies: 17 of 55 classroom- and school-level respondents included growth mindset in their definition of SEL. Awareness of growth mindset was particularly robust in one district, aligning with that district's priority and highlighting the importance of district messaging. As with district-level respondents, school-level respondents also occasionally described the CORE competencies in other terms. For example, a counselor said,

> We think of social-emotional learning as helping students develop a set of skills and beliefs that help them to regulate emotions, work towards goal[s], take the perspective of others, and understand that they can improve with effort.

While this counselor did not explicitly use the CORE construct language, this definition of SEL clearly referred to **self-management** ("regulate emotions"), **social awareness** ("take the perspective of others"), and **growth mindset** ("they can improve with effort"). We discuss the other conceptions of SEL expressed by respondents—and their links to the four CORE competencies—below.

Respondents' Conceptions of SEL Fell Into Six Categories

Overall, the conceptions of SEL conveyed in interviews fell into six broad groupings (Figure 3). Note that these categories are not mutually exclusive, as many respondents included more than one of the categories below in their definition of SEL, and many of the ideas are overlapping.

Figure 3. The Six Categories of Respondents' Conceptions

Supporting student mental and emotional well-being

Creating a safe and supportive school climate

Developing social skills and appropriate behavior

Supporting adolescent development

Building a culture of inclusion and acceptance of difference

Addressing the needs of the whole child

Conception 1: Supporting student mental and emotional well-being. One common category of ideas surrounding SEL related to the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of students, in other words, helping students cope with trauma, personal crises, and stress. Some of these stressors came from school, but others came from students' home lives, neighborhoods, mental health status, or other sources. This conception was more common at the school and classroom levels than at the district level.

District-level respondents, overall, were not focused on student emotional and mental health in their conceptions of SEL—though 3 of 12 respondents did answer in this way. In one particular district, two central office administrators included this conception in their definitions of SEL. One referenced student well-being and the other linked SEL with the climate and safety goal under the district's LCAP.[11] In another district, the central office administrator discussed the promise of mindfulness as a set of approaches that focus on multiple aspects of helping students find focus and awareness of their present state mentally, emotionally, and physically,

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[11] This administrator was referring to the goal in California's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) that "students and staff will work in a healthy, safe, and secure environment that supports learning."

thus teaching skills involved in **self-awareness** (CASEL's framing of the construct) and **self-management**.

At the ***school level,*** student mental and emotional health was a very common conception, mentioned by 19 of 29 school-level respondents. Particularly in schools with large numbers of students experiencing trauma, this conception of SEL was viewed as key to helping students succeed academically by learning to manage their emotions, triggers, and responses. Thus, this conception can be linked to the CORE construct of **self-management**. One principal explained, "Social-emotional learning for me is whether students have stick-to-it-ness, that they're able to manage themselves, that they are able to use skills to get through their trauma in order to manage themselves, basically." This principal's reference to getting through trauma may also refer to the CORE construct of **self-efficacy**, demonstrating the overlap we found among respondents' conceptions of the CORE constructs. The same individual also reported that she had recently begun using a mindfulness practice, and that she felt bringing such a thing to the school could enhance SEL for her students.

In some cases—particularly among teachers who worked with high-achieving students—SEL framed as emotional or mental well-being was perceived as important for students' personal development and health as they managed perfectionism, parental pressure, or the stress of a demanding academic load. One staff member conveyed this view, also aligned with the CORE construct of **self-efficacy**:

> The academic performance of the students here is very high. I think with that, a lot of the problems that we've seen coming in and out of the [a room on campus where students could find a trusted adult to listen] are high anxiety, high depression, high suicidal ideations, self-harm. Those sorts of things.

At the ***classroom level***, 17 of 26 teachers described SEL this way, identifying support for social-emotional well-being as a way to help students cope with trauma, personal crises (e.g., parents' divorce), or academic stress. In most cases, the idea of SEL as emotional and mental well-being was viewed as a prerequisite to academic success. For example, one teacher said:

> The social-emotional aspect is just if you're uncomfortable emotionally in whatever way, and you don't have the social environment to support you, then I think you're just alone and uncertain, and I think that's so disruptive to trying to learn at all, let alone like write an essay.

Some respondents who viewed SEL in these terms saw it as taking precedence over academic learning when a student was experiencing a personal crisis, as this teacher explained:

> ... [whether] parents are going through a divorce, whether they are having problems outside of the classroom, whether they're having friend drama, what's happening with them to allow me to make sure that they're able to learn in my classroom? Because if

they have a million things going on, then you know, them knowing when Rome fell doesn't really matter. It really doesn't.

A health teacher connected students' emotional health and ability to manage stress (**self-management**) with the idea of mindfulness or mindful learning. When her students used mindful learning techniques (such as deep breathing) she also believed that they were able to return to the task at hand with a can-do attitude (**growth mindset**). She told us,

> … I'm a big supporter of social-emotional learning because I do teach health, and I also feel that mindful learning should be incorporated in the schools, because a lot of these kids face anxiety or stress—there's a lot going on. The kids do complain about, "We have so many projects."… There's so many things that they get overwhelmed with and it's hard, the time management…. They're overwhelmed with school work and so I [like] engaging them in stress relieving techniques. Like I know in my class I like to do a little meditating and just relaxing and breathing. Just allows them to bring it back to a good calm place where they know, okay they can do this. Again, it's that feeling of, "I can do this" and that outlook, that growth mindset, that we want to build at this school.

Conception 2: Creating a safe and supportive school climate. Some individuals placed SEL within the concept of overall campus climate.[12] This conception emphasized students' feelings of belonging and safety and, especially, on building relationships among students and between students and adults. This understanding of SEL was common among more than half of respondents at the district, school, and classroom levels. Few respondents explicitly connected this conception of SEL to one of the four CORE constructs, but many believed relationships and climate were key to students' overall well-being, as well as their academic, social, and emotional growth.

At the ***district level,*** 7 of 12 respondents mentioned culture-climate in their conceptions of SEL. As mentioned earlier, one district administrator linked SEL with their district's LCAP goal for campus climate and safety. Most often (in 6 of the 7 cases) the connection between SEL and campus climate was articulated in terms of relationships. In one district, all three district administrators we interviewed included relationship-building skills within otherwise broad definitions of SEL. For example, one administrator felt that relationships can help students be successful academically, as the Common Core standards emphasize more collaborative learning. Another administrator in this district even noted that relationship-building skills are being newly emphasized in her pilot program, based on data from the prior year. Another district placed a significant emphasis on relationships when discussing SEL. "We're a very relationship-oriented district," said one administrator. Strong relationships were thought to make not only student learning but also measurement and accountability more robust in schools, in that they enabled people to get to know and trust one another. These administrators also saw relationship-building between and among adults and students as

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[12] Defined by CORE as support for academic learning, sense of belonging and school connectedness, perceived fairness of discipline rules/norms, and safety.

central to creating equity. Specifically, they believed that culturally responsive teaching would directly improve relationships, by helping teachers connect better with students from different cultures.

At the ***school level,*** 18 of 29 respondents connected SEL to campus climate in some form, often in terms of culture-building and relationship-building (among students and between students and adults). In one school, the principal explained that a goal for them was students getting along with one another, despite differences:

> For us, in terms of social-emotional learning, we knew we were going to have to really work on building a culture because on the same street we have students [who] may have gone to different elementary schools and they may not have gotten along. Now, all of a sudden, they're all here.

At schools in another district, individuals consistently affirmed the ideas we heard at the district level, that relationships were central to SEL. These ideas generally aligned with the district's focus on Restorative Justice,[13] equity and collective/collaborative work, and the shift to new academic standards. One school leader summarized the connections this way:

> So, if there was like a dream formula out there, I would say that social-emotional learning processes—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—these abilities are how to do Common Core work and how to resolve conflicts through Restorative Justice. It's almost like we needed to introduce SEL before or prior to the shifts to Common Core from more direct instruction to more community-based instruction model, right? So, SEL is the glue that teaches teachers and students how to make the instructional shifts to a community model for Common Core with the emphasis on going deep with the content, with the subject matter. And social-emotional learning also gives kids the agency and voice they need to resolve their conflicts through Restorative Justice.

At the ***classroom level,*** we found this conception of SEL being about relationships among 13 of 26 respondents, consistent with the demonstrated importance of teacher–student relationships from the literature (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Cornelius-White, 2007; Quin, 2017). In the majority of cases, teachers articulated a focus on building relationships with or getting to know their students and their circumstances. At one school, SEL was often framed around school culture described as a close-knit family, with a culture characterized by teamwork and humor. The bonds that this culture created among teachers were also viewed as pertaining to teacher–student relationships, in which bonding and a positive atmosphere made it possible to address more serious things. One teacher explained,

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[13] For more on Restorative Justice, see Payne and Welch (2015).

I think it goes the same way with students: If you start creating that relationship where you have fun in my classroom, but when things are going wrong, we're going to have a serious conversation on a separate note.

Conception 3: Developing students' social skills and appropriate behavior. A minority of respondents at all three levels conceptualized SEL in terms of developing and supporting students' social skills and behavior within the school community as a whole.

At the *district level,* only 1 of 12 district-level respondents mentioned individual skills and behavior in her conception of SEL. At the *school level*, 7 of 29 people defined SEL in terms of specific behaviors and skills. Often this conception came from counseling staff, particularly when referring to their efforts to support social-emotional learning of individual students. For example, when asked to explain SEL, one counselor described working with a student on the autism spectrum to help him understand why his socializing behavior was annoying to a neuro-typical friend, and when it was socially appropriate to spend time with this friend. This example aligns well with a conception of SEL as helping students develop **social awareness.**

At the *classroom level,* more respondents (11 of 26 teachers) articulated SEL in these terms. In most cases this had to do with helping students either develop social skills or engage in behavior appropriate to the school setting. One teacher believed that students' ability to understand their social context and manage their emotions related to the ability to make appropriate decisions about behavior. Though this teacher used different terms, they linked a conception of SEL as appropriate behavior to the CORE constructs **social awareness** and **self-management**.

So, for me, it means being able to be metacognitive about who you are socially and how you're perceived by people around you, both socially and emotionally. Being able to understand your own emotions, process it, make decisions once you come to understand your own emotions. So, making the right decision, knowing, "Okay, I'm really upset right now, these are the decisions I want to make," but being able to be reflective and be like, "But, I don't actually want to make these decisions until I'm a little calmer." So, social and emotional is being able to reflect on my social image of myself, how I show the world, and my emotional well-being and how I'm feeling right now and how that affects my decision-making.

Another teacher in this district used as an example a hard rule in her classroom that there could be no "trash talk" or swearing, no matter what students were feeling.

In another district, three teachers (in two schools) described SEL in terms of etiquette, manners, and being polite. Two used the example of boys opening doors for female teachers. At a school in another district, the connection between student behavior and SEL appears to rest, in part, on a prior behavior management program. Among the key ideals undergirding the program are the beliefs that building relationships and fostering positive interactions with students encourages motivation and responsibility, and that students must be taught what they

need to do in order to be successful. This school's team lead for the program explained the connection this way:

> [The program has] been in our district for over almost 15 years. It has evolved over time, so a lot of the ideas that we have in our Guidelines for Success, we've developed those over working with ideas that the students have, and building on what ideas they want to have on their Guidelines for Success.

In this school, the previous (and still operative) program provided a long-embedded structure that enabled teachers and school leaders to work with students to develop and teach behavior norms that support or lead to SEL-related skills and a **positive school climate**.

Conception 4: Supporting adolescent development. A number of respondents cited middle school students' developmental stage or neurological development in their definitions of SEL. These individuals viewed middle school as a challenging time for students and SEL as a means to provide appropriate support for their particular developmental stage. While not particularly common overall, this conception was more often expressed at the school and classroom levels than at the district level.

At the *district level*, only two individuals articulated this view. In both cases, administrators cited adolescent brain development in their descriptions of SEL. One administrator indicated that more information about adolescent brain development could be helpful for teachers in understanding SEL. The other administrator said that brain research was a rationale for following up with mindfulness as an approach to SEL.

At the *school level,* 6 of 29 individuals cited adolescent development as a rationale for SEL. Respondents indicated that middle school students' emotions are "all over the place" and students need help with **self-management** and interpersonal relationships. One principal saw students' developmental stage as contributing to the need for SEL, particularly **self-management** tools:

> I think another strategy technique is self-management, because of the trauma, I really think that adolescents need, just in general, but especially ours, need their own reminder, their own red flag that waves for them so that they can make it through.

A principal from another district felt that middle school presented a new opportunity for developing SEL that extended beyond what was possible in elementary school:

> [Social-emotional learning] is big at the middle school, because it's where kids are really understanding what they're about…. They've become aware of their own social status, or structure within the school, and then how they respond to others in an appropriate way as they're growing up. So in terms of that, the developmental stage of middle school kids is really off the charts. They are a little crazy if you will, when it comes to growing, because physically the body is just developing probably a lot faster than they

are emotionally. And we've got to work on that. And so there's a lot of counseling that goes on, there's a lot of reassuring them that your feelings, your fears, whatever is going on with them, even aspirations and positive things, are normal for this age, but this is how you socially and appropriately handle some situations when you're not in agreement with somebody. Or you really feel like you want to use your fists instead of your speech or your diplomatic ways to handle the situation.

According to these school leaders, adolescent changes provided a key moment for helping students manage emotions and learn to behave in socially appropriate ways (**social awareness** and **self-management**).

At the ***classroom level,*** 4 of 26 teachers cited some aspect of brain development as relevant to SEL. A math teacher in one district included "math maturity," or readiness for abstract thought, in her definition of SEL. A math teacher in another district defined SEL this way:

…To me [SEL] is how the emotions of a child, what they bring in from their home life, from their peer activities or peer interactions, how they bring it into the classroom, and how it affects them. I don't know if that's right or not, but that's what I think it is, and because in middle school with all the adolescent growing up that people do, it's a big thing. It's a huge part of their learning environment and their learning success. So that's what I think social-emotional learning is, and we have to address it.

Conception 5: Building a culture of inclusion and acceptance of difference. In some cases, SEL definitions included additional references to diversity and inclusion. These explanations often build upon previously discussed categories, such as developing a positive climate that valued diversity and helping each student feel connected to the school.

At the ***district level,*** an equity-focused definition of SEL emerged in two districts. In one of these districts, we heard this view from all three central office administrators. Moreover, district documents reflected an understanding that "developing social competencies leads to a stronger connection with people of diverse backgrounds." In addition, the specific skills defined also include inclusion as a goal. For example, this district had centrally developed SEL competencies, and competency in **social awareness** is defined as demonstrating "empathy for other people's emotions, perspectives, cultures, languages, and histories." A district administrator in the other district specifically discussed equity, describing concerted efforts to provide professional development focused on developing educators' understanding of SEL challenges for student populations underrepresented in gifted and accelerated programs:

We do a separate class just focusing on underrepresented populations. We talk about… African American and Latinx students and ELs, what the research says, and how... students [have] difficulties related to identity, and usually that hits in the middle school or upper elementary too. [In] middle school, how do you help them navigate and mediate that?

Figure 4. Visual Cues for Inclusion and Equity

This district was focused on providing training[14] for teachers that was culturally responsive and that would enable teachers to help underrepresented students (in particular) develop integrated academic identities and navigate multiple group membership for success in advanced courses. The district was also training school leaders and teachers to be mindful of the ways in which underrepresented students experience stereotype threat, social issues, psychological challenges, and cultural biases, and how these experiences may impact students in the classroom.

Notions of SEL as related to diversity and inclusion, and in some cases equity, came up at the **school level** in 4 of 10 schools. In one school, equity is an explicit goal. When we asked the Assistant Principal to share her vision for the school, the reply was, "I would just say *equity*: an equitable environment where there's consistency with flexibility."

In two schools, leaders noted that various forms of difference or diversity are either (a) assets that promote SEL or culture-climate or (b) an inherent, positive part of SEL as a process. An example of the former, one principal described the feeling of their campus, particularly in reference to inclusion of Special Education students in PE classes and peer-to-peer programs: "[I]t creates, in my opinion, a really inclusive atmosphere here… [and] has a really powerful impact on our campus". Here, inclusiveness and diversity were seen as an integral part of a campus climate that promotes student inclusion and connectedness. In an example of the latter, a school staff member in another district reported that difference is a positive part of SEL as a dynamic learning process: "The intention for social-emotional learning is not so much dispensing a learning, but becoming aware that we are different and different is good. Different is very good. Different is really good. Different is good!" (Figure 4 shows an example of the visual cues we found in many schools.)

Two of 26 respondents at the **classroom level** connected diversity to SEL, particularly to positive culture-climate, illustrating the way respondents' conceptions often combined more than one of the six categories we identified. Describing the racial and socio-economic diversity at her school, one teacher said:

We have the most diverse campus I've ever stepped foot on. When you walk into a classroom you see a little bit of everything, and the kids interact with one another, and they're friends. It's really nice, both ethnically and social[ly]… to have such a diverse campus, and really you could count the amount of fights on one hand. It just doesn't happen and they all gather together and they all get along. I think the administration really fosters that diversity.

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[14] This is a training designed by the Gifted and Talented Education office, but offered to teachers district-wide.

In another district, a teacher praised the school's climate in terms of acceptance of special education students, saying:

> I know that our school is so big on acceptance. We have a lot of special ed students who... you see around campus and they feel so accepted because the kids know and understand that we may not all look the same or act the same or learn the same, but we're all essentially the same, so…

Conception 6: Addressing the needs of the whole child. Tying together many of these conceptions, a number of respondents defined SEL as addressing the "whole child" or the "whole kid." Respondents communicated the idea by highlighting the importance of attending to the child's full self and circumstances in their social-emotional and academic learning—including a student's history, family situation or responsibilities, and any struggles he or she may face inside or outside of school. This language was prevalent throughout two districts in particular, though it was also present elsewhere. Once again, this conception was more common among school- and classroom-level respondents than among district-level respondents.

At the *district level,* only one respondent conveyed this understanding of SEL. In this definition, SEL encompassed an approach to facilitating more than just academic learning:

> I'm so grateful that we're looking at more than just academic outcomes… because we talk about the whole child a lot and how important it is to look at the whole child in education... So I'm appreciating the promise of multiple measures. We're doing it. We're still too messy, for sure.... I know that we're moving in the right direction. And looking at SEL is definitely moving in the right direction.

Four of 29 *school-level* respondents mentioned the "whole child" or a similar idea. One teacher gave us a broad definition: "When we talk about social-emotional learning, we're looking at the entire history of a person, and situation ethics come into play as well."

At the *classroom level,* we heard this conception from 6 of 26 people. The following description from one teacher exemplifies these responses:

> These kids need to have some kind of joy, because in the classroom it's hard, and it's not fun.... I think that's part of the whole thing, [it] is not just the academics. It's addressing the whole kid, giving them something that they can find for themselves.

Cross-Cutting Disagreements/Debates in Educator's Conceptions of SEL

Overall, we found some disagreement between those who saw SEL as a means to ensuring academic learning and those who saw it as more of an end in and of itself. Another

divide emerged between individuals who believed SEL was beneficial for particular groups of students compared to others who saw it as beneficial for all students.

SEL as a means versus an end. Despite their specific SEL conceptions and the categories into which their definitions fell, most—but not all—respondents at all levels viewed SEL as operating in service of academic learning. At the ***district level***, 10 of 12 administrators viewed it this way. As one put it, "SEL is being the conditions for academic learning that are embedded in all aspects and moments of the school system and not just an add-on program."

At the ***school level***, 18 of 29 people saw SEL as primarily a vehicle to support academics. This was particularly true among principals and assistant principals. Echoing this sentiment, one assistant principal said, "A healthy kid emotionally is going to eventually transfer over to a higher performing student academically." Some school leaders, however, saw SEL as more of an important end in itself. These individuals believed SEL served to nurture each child in ways that extended beyond academics and that this nurturing on its own was valuable. One assistant principal, for example, ascribed to this view because she believed that academic achievement was a given for the students at her high-achieving school:

> [H]ere, [SEL is] more about the kid. I think that's just the nature of the kids that we get…. they are proficient and advanced kids. They're already reading college-level material. So they're going to learn, they're going to get it done no matter what I do for them, okay?

Counseling staff were less likely to view SEL as primarily supporting academics. In fact, only two of eight respondents in this role spoke about SEL primarily in terms of its relationship to academics. This finding is perhaps not surprising, given that many persons in this role explicitly focus on mental health and social issues in their work.

Among ***classroom-level*** respondents, 18 of 26 couched their definitions of SEL in the service of academic learning. In some cases, these were teachers who saw SEL skills such as **self-management** (including coping with crises or trauma) as a necessary prerequisite to students' academic learning. This response from a teacher echoed comments we heard across districts:

> [SEL is]… I think, getting them into a classroom and having them learn. If we don't meet those needs about where they're coming from or what their days are like before they come to us, or if they have all this background and this baggage that we need to address before we can even teach them anything.

SEL as relevant to all students vs. particular students. Across districts and at all levels, the overwhelming majority of respondents viewed SEL as applicable to all students. All 12 ***district-level***, 24 of 29 ***school-level***, and 22 of 26 ***classroom-level*** respondents thought of SEL in this way. One school-level administrator went so far as to say, "Yeah, so I don't think there is such a thing as social-emotional learning. Learning is a social-emotional experience." This view

implies that all students would and should, by definition, participate in social-emotional learning as a necessary way of approaching academic content.

In cases where respondents saw SEL as an approach for particular students (four each at school- and classroom-levels), they usually viewed SEL as a type of support necessary for those struggling academically, behaviorally, or emotionally. For example, one teacher, when asked to define SEL, told us about a group of her students who were on the autism spectrum and whom she had helped to develop more social skills. Her selection of this story suggests a view of SEL as applying mainly to students who have particular needs in the social realm, not as a beneficial process for everyone. In some cases, these respondents conflated SEL with therapy or counseling. For example, an afterschool coordinator told us: "I know the school does a great job [with SEL] because we do have a great counseling group and psychologists and therapists."

In the end, respondents across the CORE districts and schools articulated a variety of ways to conceptualize SEL. In many instances, educators' definitions extend beyond the traditional domain of SEL to include aspects of school culture and climate. This broad understanding of SEL thus informed their reported practices, which we investigate next.

Findings: SEL Practices, Supports, and Cross-Cutting Themes

A second focus of this study was to understand how administrators, teachers, and other staff promoted SEL in their schools and districts. Specifically, our study captures what educators and leaders reported when we asked them what they do to support SEL. Overall, educators reported using multiple practices to advance SEL. Some of these were formal or institutionally driven, while others were more informal or driven by the interests and concerns of individual faculty and staff. We also found a range of district-level practices intended to support school-level SEL efforts. In the following sections we describe these practices and supports, along with the specific conceptions of SEL (defined in the previous section) they were intended to promote/advance. Here we bridge to the previous section and the varied ways in which educators conceived of SEL. Note that in many cases a given practice was thought to support several elements or conceptions of SEL. Thus, a given practice may overlap with more than one conception or construct.

As a reminder, our intent is not to identify a set of tightly specified SEL programs or interventions, but instead to identify a set of cross-cutting strategies or approaches that were common to many school and district efforts. Many of these practices may in fact be part of particular programs identified as supporting noncognitive and SEL student outcomes (e.g., Restorative Justice, Safe and Civil Schools). Further, we should note again that from our analysis of interviews and observations, we are not able to discern the quality or impact of these practices and supports. Yet, by conveying what educators are doing to advance SEL, we are contributing to a practical knowledge base of concrete practices one can undertake in classrooms, schools, and districts. Rather than endorsing these as effective practices per se, we instead provide them as examples of common approaches taken in a set of schools demonstrating positive SEL outcomes for students, in the hopes that they may provide ideas that educators and leaders can investigate further. Another approach a school could take is in choosing from evidence-based practices in improving SEL (e.g., Grant et al., 2017). While this kind of information about the causal impact of particular interventions is certainly useful for building knowledge about what kinds of changes might support improvement at the school or district level, our research approach is designed to better understand the range of approaches used by practitioners in natural settings.

School-Level Practices

At the school level, we identified eight common and overlapping practices (Figure 5) intended to support student SEL.

Figure 5. The Six School-Level Practices to Support Student SEL

1. **Strategies to promote positive school climate and relationships**
   a. Whole-school culture-building strategies
   b. Promoting personal interaction to build trust and relationships
   c. Advisory period
   d. Organizing schedules and students to support relationships
   e. Inclusion strategies

2. **Supporting positive behavior**
   a. Positive behavior management and restorative practices
   b. Setting and enforcing clear values and expectations
   c. Targeted supports for individuals or groups

3. **Promoting engagement, relationships, and SEL-related skills using elective courses and extra-curricular activities**
   a. Elective courses
   b. Clubs to support leadership and inclusion
   c. Afterschool programs and activities

4. **SEL-specific classroom practices and curricula**
   a. Creating a positive classroom environment
   b. Strategies for managing emotions
   c. Modeling appropriate language and mindsets

5. **Marshalling human capital resources in support of SEL**
   a. Staff leadership teams focused on school culture-climate and SEL
   b. Non-instructional roles
   c. Supporting adult SEL

6. **Measurement and data use**

In our descriptions below, we highlight the conception of SEL that respondents believed the strategy promoted. In some cases, respondents stated the link explicitly, and in others we inferred it based on our data and the literature.

Practice 1: Strategies to promote positive school climate and relationships. For many respondents, when we asked about how they support SEL, they discussed ways that they made the school welcoming and supportive for all students. These practices included building whole-school culture, fostering trust and positive relationships, and promoting inclusion.

1a. Whole-school culture-building strategies. The culture-building strategies here were linked to respondents' conceptions that SEL involved **promoting a positive and safe campus climate**. In three schools, faculty and administrators spent the first one and a half to two weeks of each academic year building the whole-school culture. At one of these schools, teachers used the time to develop activities with their students so that all get to know each other and to set rules and expectations. These are the foundations of the relationships that develop through the year and that form the basis of SEL work. Moreover, each subject has an SEL-related theme for their activities to ensure that students get full exposure to SEL concepts. For example, math teachers might work with the concept of perseverance while English teachers might draw more heavily on self-awareness.

One common element to culture-building across schools was the promotion of school pride and values (identified in 5 of 10 schools). Often educators developed ways of communicating the school's values, such as compassion, tenacity, or having fun while learning. These approaches were seen by school- and classroom-level respondents as important to school climate (which they viewed as a component of SEL), infusing the school with joy and making it a place students want to attend. School values were often communicated in such a way as to promote school pride and identity, with a catchy acronym or with language linked to a school's mascot. These values helped school leaders communicate clear expectations for student behavior, detailed in Practice 2.

Three schools used music in common areas, in order to promote a positive environment or stimulate positive student emotions (calm, for example, or a happy atmosphere). At one such school, the principal put a portable speaker outside her office (near the cafeteria) before school as students entered the cafeteria for breakfast, and during lunch. In the morning she played soothing music, and at lunch, upbeat music. At both of the schools in one district, students played music at lunch. Respondents further believed that student leadership in selecting and playing music helped to further promote a positive school climate.

1b. Promoting personal interaction to build trust and relationships. In six schools, respondents cited relationship-building as a school-wide priority and central to their SEL goals. A teacher at one school connected this focus with building trust on campus, a priority derived from continuous review of student survey data by the school's Campus Climate Team. The results revealed that 75% of students reported that they could identify a trusted adult on campus. "So that means a quarter of the kids don't feel like there's an adult that they can talk to," the teacher noted. In order to build relationships with his students, this teacher greeted them by name and shook their hands as they entered the classroom. This practice also helped him gauge students' emotional states, making the practice a strategy to promote the conception of SEL as **mental/emotional well-being** as well as the conception of **climate/relationships**. Observationally, we noted a high level of trust in this school. Two staff members told us that students regularly referred their friends for counseling and related services. We even saw one staff member leave open her exterior office door when she stepped out during lunch, suggesting a great deal of trust in the students at this school, many of whom were eating or moving throughout the campus during lunch and not confined to a single area.

Connecting with students by greeting them and shaking hands appeared to be a fairly common practice across schools and districts, including among teachers and staff whom we saw but did not interview. There were many examples of this kind of practice. One principal greeted students as they arrived and stood out near the buses at the end of the day. At another school, a teacher and administrator greeted students as they came in the room, often by name and with a hand on the shoulder as they entered the campus cafeteria for breakfast. Relationship-building was also an important ingredient in the disciplinary practices of the two schools that used Restorative Justice and restorative practices as a centerpiece of the schools' approach. (For more detail, see Practice 2a: Positive behavior management and restorative practices.)

1c. Advisory period. School-level respondents in five schools identified a formal Advisory period as a key support for SEL in their schools. Educators in these schools believed that combining Advisory with homeroom allowed students to build relationships with their homeroom teacher and classmates. As one school leader said:

> Advisory is the time where… we do circles…, so you're connecting, you start to hear what's happened over the weekend with students or just where they are. You're to bring thematic work or activities or things that address those issues that are popping up…. our goal around it is to get every student access to a caring and supportive adult [who] knows them way better than anyone else in the school. The idea is to create a safe group setting as well, so it's not just this access to this adult, but this environment is where home is. This is my base at this school. That's the point.

These classes also offered an opportunity to teach SEL explicitly, including direct lessons on topics such as bullying. In fact, a respondent in one school described Advisory as the only place in the school where students experienced SEL-specific instruction. Advisory also afforded time for class meetings, in which students could learn social skills and process difficult events happening on or off campus.

Two schools leveraged student leadership in their Advisory. In one case, these students facilitated teachers' implementation of Advisory lessons, co-developing class meeting rules (Figure 6). In the other case, members of a student club worked on SEL-related messages to be shared during Advisory. One school created a Leadership Advisory class of students who were trained to act as teacher assistants during the (regular) Advisory period, when much of the explicit SEL teaching happened at this school. At another school, school leaders, using student behavior data, determined that African American students were getting a disproportionate number of discipline referrals. Administrators consulted with the school Black Student Union to understand the problem and craft a solution. An administrator explained:

Figure 6. In-Class Guidelines for Respect
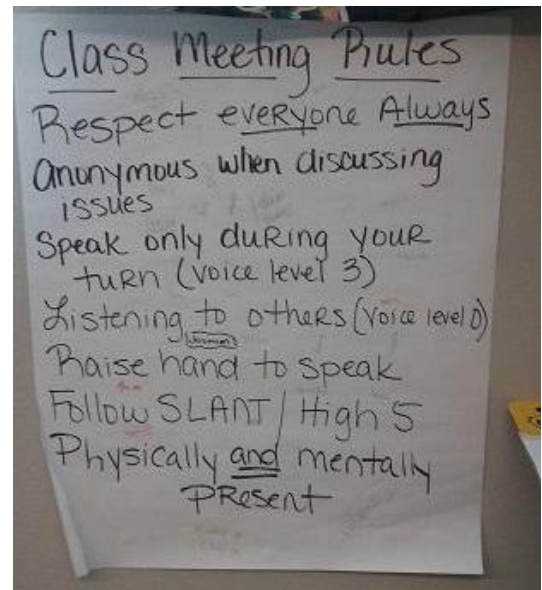
> [T]hey looked at, "Why is it that we're getting so many referrals? And what are the reasons why we're coming in?" And so they saw that it was a lot of "disrespect," or just anything around disrespect. So they created Advisory lessons around respect, and they actually made a competition, they said, "The Advisory class that can come up with the best definition of what respect should look like, and what it's not…" And so we did a competition for that. We also did some videos about disrespect and respect. But that was coming from their peers. So they got to see their peers on these videos, or teaching the lessons. And we did that, and the discipline referrals came down. And I think it's

because now they had a say-so about it… and they were actually doing something instead of getting in trouble.

Implementing Advisory periods in a consistent manner, however, was not always easy, according to several respondents. One challenge was time. While two schools (one in each district) held Advisory weekly, the other two schools had a daily Advisory period. The additional minutes meant that in one case, the school needed permission from the district to comply with the teachers' contract. The Principal was committed to providing the time for explicit SEL instruction in this setting by maintaining the daily Advisory period, which in this school included time for class meetings and discussion of SEL-related themes or (sometimes traumatic) events in the community. These conversations took time, time that this principal felt was vital to the students and the school:

> The built-in structure to support social-emotional learning, sometimes you need time to just talk about social-emotional needs. At the same time, I recognize everybody needs to learn how to integrate it. That's kind of our new learning. Then I continue to fight for class meeting time. By going two days a week…. It needs to go over two days, two consecutive days on the theme to teach, instruct, and then to talk about it.

Other school leaders reported that at times it was challenging to ensure that the advisories were actually being used to promote relationships and SEL. At one of these schools, teachers reported that Advisory class sizes of more than 20 students made it difficult to implement this type of program, and that part of the Advisory time was often taken up with academic activities rather than more SEL-related topics. At another school, teachers were not contractually obligated to plan lessons for Advisory and, as a result, a school leader decided to develop the lesson plans herself over the summer and distribute them to teachers.

1d. Organizing schedules and students to support relationships. Some of the schools in our sample organized overarching campus structures to further relationship-building and provide additional supports to particular groups of students**.** For example, recognizing the unique needs of students transitioning to a new, middle school campus, many schools implemented structural supports to advance the social-emotional development of sixth graders. Three schools in two districts organized classes and schedules in ways that keep sixth-grade students together all day, separated from seventh and eighth graders. A school leader at one of these schools said:

> We're super intentional about having the sixth graders have a different middle school experience than the seventh and eighth graders…. We've cored out sixth-grade English and history. And then also they have family group, so they travel to their different classes together.

In this school, this practice was intended to improve student behavior by preventing sixth graders from imitating the behaviors of eighth graders. Another school in the same district had a similar way of grouping students into smaller communities by grade, or *families*, but this

school also looped the same families together with the same teachers through seventh and eighth grades. These smaller school communities within a school were intended to strengthen the relationships between students and teachers as well as to provide a higher degree of adult support for students' social and emotional needs and learning.

Five schools in three districts also used various forms of a bridge program to bring incoming sixth graders into the school in the summer prior to the start of the academic year. In one school, the program reviewed behavior expectations, including respectful communication, in order to foster a sense of belonging and connectedness. At another, the school had a program that promoted belonging and connectedness among sixth graders while building mentoring and team-building skills for eighth graders. In this program, eighth-grade mentors did team-building with groups of 12 incoming sixth graders during the summer, then they continued to check in with their mentees during the year. The school also dismissed sixth graders to lunch ten minutes before the other students and provided organized activities for them in the auditorium in case they did not want to eat outside with all the other kids at this large school. Another school had a similar program, which the faculty advisor told us gave sixth graders a sense of belonging: "They come into a school of thirteen hundred, so we want them to know that they do have support, that if they need help, they have someone to go to."

1e. Inclusion strategies. Schools we visited promoted **inclusion** by reaching out to isolated or lonely students, by fostering racial integration and belonging for students in different racial groups, and by connecting Special Education and General Education students. As detailed in the section on extracurricular activities below, several schools across districts leveraged student leadership in this arena with clubs that promoted kindness among students, that specifically encouraged members to reach out to lonely students, or that mediated peer conflict. Another school planned to begin a peer mentoring program the following year. Six schools had clubs or other programs designed with African American or Latinx students in mind: This included, for example, Black Student Unions that emphasized college exposure, community service, and Black History, and similar clubs for Latinx students. Both schools in one district had Male and Female Leadership Academies that reached out to academically struggling African American students and paired them with mentors to learn about leadership and college.

Two schools in one district were particularly focused on a campus climate of racial equity and inclusion, and they approached this goal in different ways. One school intentionally hired many African American male non-teaching staff to act as role models and send a message of belonging and care to African American students. At the other school, an administrator explained how they turned a fire in the cafeteria into an opportunity to promote racial and socio-economic integration. With the cafeteria unusable, students ate their lunch in a makeshift courtyard around a portable classroom. When they set up the temporary lunch area, students who brought their lunch from home went to one area and students who had to get their lunch at school went to another area (only students eating school lunch had to go to the portable). This resulted in a situation where higher income students and lower income students were segregated. A school leader explained:

We have the haves and have-nots. We have kids from [the poor area of the district]. And so what would happen if we just let the kids that brought their lunch just eat where they wanted to? You'd have all the white kids, or the majority of the white kids, hanging out in the courtyard and the garden eating. And then the black and brown kids in line getting free lunch.

To promote integration, they made all students go to the courtyard around the portable. Staff reported seeing less segregation at lunch time. The same school leader told us:

The idea behind that is that we force everybody to go to the cafeteria so that they can develop different friend groups. And so it doesn't make sense to everybody, but I think at the foundation of the work that we're trying to do here is to have an equitable environment where everybody can reach their highest potential. And we have kids that are reading at the second-grade level, and we have kids that are reading at the 12th-grade level. And so how do we provide an engaging experience for all those kids?

Two schools in one district emphasized inclusion of Special Education students as a core feature of building a positive campus climate. Both schools had a Best Buddies program that paired Special Education and General Education students, who then spent time doing fun activities together. Special Education students also were integrated into mainstream Physical Education (PE) classes at both schools and, at one of the schools, into electives as well. A school leader at this school related their Best Buddies program to their school's overall perspective on SEL this way:

[I]t just teaches [students] how to be kind and thoughtful, that we're all people, and to help each other. So we also have a club that works on kindness and then there's a Kindness Challenge Week. And so, between that, we also have Lunch Buddies, where Gen Ed and Special Ed kids bond through lunch. So, it's the inclusion of everybody, and the joy that makes kids really want to come to school here. I mean, we have a 98% attendance rate last year.

Practice 2: Supporting Positive Behavior

Many schools discussed behavior management as central to their approach to SEL, and reported using variations of a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) in supporting students with varied needs. MTSS is defined as "the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions" (Batsche et al., 2005). In an MTSS framework, a school enacts supports and programs that are available to all students (Tier 1), targeted supports to groups (Tier 2), and individual supports to specific students with the need for a tailored approach (Tier 3). In this section we discuss the approaches schools took at the school level and in a targeted fashion to support positive behavior and SEL.

2a: Positive behavior management and restorative practices. Positive approaches to discipline and behavior management promoted several different conceptions of SEL that we found in schools. They were viewed as contributing to a **positive school climate,** and providing opportunities for students to learn and practice **social skills and appropriate behavior.** Restorative Justice (RJ) and restorative practices, in particular, were also seen as enabling students to learn **self-management** (particularly emotional and social skills) and providing spaces and staff to help students maintain **emotional well-being** and **build relationships.**

Seven of 10 schools had, as a school-level priority, some formal positive disciplinary approach such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (3), Restorative Justice/restorative practices (2), or Safe and Civil Schools (2). PBIS emphasizes clear expectations and rewards for positive behavior along with strategic interventions to support students who struggle to meet expectations. Restorative Justice/restorative practices address disciplinary issues with the goal of restoring damaged relationships by repairing harm, rebuilding trust, and strengthening the community (Karp & Conrad, 2005; Karp & Breslin, 2001). Both restorative practices and PBIS are aligned with the core principles of MTSS: Schools must provide varied supports to students to both encourage and enforce desired behavior.[15] One principal articulated the connection between PBIS and the SEL conception of **positive campus climate** in this way:

> We'd like to focus on the concept of school culture and school climate…. And when we brought PBIS on board several years back through the district, PBIS is all about social-emotional learning. But it doesn't speak specifically to social-emotional learning. It speaks to positive environments. And so I think as we develop a plan for a positive environment, the social-emotional has just kind of come along.

Typically, these approaches led teachers and school staff to focus on why a student acted out and how to help him or her develop more appropriate skills, to reward positive behavior and, in schools with Restorative Justice or restorative practices, to mend damaged relationships. One school administrator (who led a team on school culture-climate) explained the school's approach and its benefits:

> We have restorative responses to discipline. Instead of looking at a punitive approach for everything and also having a blanket zero tolerance policy, we have more case-by-case responses to students…. Sort of look at the *why* behind it and start to dig around that. That's what we do with restorative practice, to sort of disrupt our punitive ways that we were used to going about responding to discipline…. This year, I believe that we reduced our suspensions by maybe 60% at this point from last year…. We're talking probably like 40 to 50 kids that are in school longer and more often because of our Restorative Justice intervention. It's more so our mindset around responding to discipline as opposed to hardcore systematic change. Just shifting the way we see

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[15] https://www.pbis.org/school/mtss

students doing things and why they're doing it versus how we responded to why they're doing something or how someone responded to what they were doing.

In addition to adults trained in Restorative Justice, one school also had a Peer RJ program, which students applied to before being selected and trained as Restorative Justice peer facilitators. They took part in Restorative Justice circles and even led circles by themselves with their peers.

Three schools in two districts had designated locations on campus—with either a full-time or part-time staff person—that served as alternative spaces for emotional support or positive disciplinary practices. Two were focused on restorative practices, while the other emphasized emotional support and informal counseling. Two schools set aside rooms on campus that were used as more positive alternatives to suspension. Students could take time away from a conflict or get caught up on school work in these rooms, but more importantly the room—and the full-time staff person assigned to the space—provided the environment to "cool off" or get support. As the Restorative Justice coordinator at one such school told us:

[L]et's say a child's just having a bad day or something's not going right, that's a nice exhale room. It's set up to where the atmosphere is not punitive, constrictive. The atmosphere is more open, there's usually nice music on, sometimes students come there just to do work. If a child is having a difficult time at a certain point, they can go there, they can have a conversation with [the "out of class restoration" coordinator], get things back in order, get their mind right and then 5, 10 minutes they're back in class in a [...] better way.

A staff member at another school described the way the room at their school provided an opportunity for emotional regulation and support:

My role here in this work is to provide the alternative to suspension… it is to transition or restore the student back to the classroom environment, rather than immediately suspending for some offenses. Not in violation of ed code, not suspending, but providing another level of support to teach the students the particular skill sets that they may need, or communication sets that they need, in order to get their needs met appropriately.

In these settings, as well as in individual classrooms, teachers and school staff used conversation and check-ins to connect with students and influence student behavior without having to resort to punishment or suspension. In a related example, we observed one teacher as she kept an easily distracted student focused on a lesson. Periodically during the class period, she would redirect his attention or check in with him to keep him on task, always in a firm but kind manner. The first time the student was off task she told him, "[Student], your group's over here, Sweetie." Later, "[Student], please turn around, I don't want to do another strike 'cause then we're in detention." Later in the class session, as she was presenting information to the class, she noted this student seated across the room looking the other

direction. "[Student], we good?," she asked. "Yeah," the student replied. "All right, stay with me," she responded. And finally, when the student wanted to know, "Is that a gummy bear [on the ceiling]?" she responded, "We're going to continue with science. Stay after class and I'll be happy to show you." In each case she was clear in her expectations but always addressed the student in a calm and caring manner, and clearly made an effort to keep the student engaged without excessive disruption to the rest of the class, and without using punitive measures. The principal at this school described the faculty's approach this way:

> A popular message our faculty believes in here is ratios of interaction. If we're ever going to redirect or correct a behavior, we are constantly counting in our mind how many positive interactions we have had with a child before we actually correct a behavior or redirect a behavior.

2b. Setting and enforcing clear values and expectations. The successful implementation of PBIS or restorative practices relies on a clear and shared understanding of what behavior is expected. For this reason, the majority of schools (8 of 10) implemented specific programs or events that communicated clear values and behavior expectations for students. Schools promoted these values and expectations through direct instruction, through rewards systems, and through visuals (posters, murals). In five cases, schools articulated their values and expectations via a short philosophy, such as an acronym or catchy phrase that was featured on posters around the school and communicated verbally by teachers and staff. For example, one school emphasized having a positive attitude, respecting others, and rewarding resilience. At another school, the school values were connected to the school mascot. The assistant principal in this school reinforced these values by addressing students by the mascot name. "You know, 'Good morning, [Lion]. How are you?'" Sometimes the values themselves were connected to conceptions of SEL, such as mindfulness or social intelligence, or they promoted SEL-linked goals such as student engagement ("have fun learning") and a positive climate ("have compassion").

In one school, the administrators worked with a team of students and teachers to develop the school's goals: Kind, Mindful, and Safe (KMS). As part of this process, the team developed a set of behaviors that correspond with what it meant to "be KMS" in each setting. Guidelines were established for each classroom, the courtyard, hallways, and even bathrooms, by a team of faculty, staff, and students working together. The staff discussed this process as essential for monitoring behavior, because then everyone knew what was expected in every space. The KMS values (Figure 7) were discussed by one administrator in this way:

> Students don't like to be corrected around their behavior, but they also don't feel comfortable when there are no rules…. They like structure. I think the best way that we saw fit was to make it clear of what do we expect…. The students know ahead of time like okay, I'm not being [kind] right now. I'm definitely not being safe. Even when we correct those behaviors, it's more around, "Are you being KMS right now?" They can tell you. It makes for a better conversation, too. It's not nitpicking all the time, stop, stop, stop.

Figure 7. The Kind, Mindful, and Safe (KMS) Values

School-wide

KIND	MINDFUL	SAFE
We consider other people's feelings. We speak and act in a way that allows/helps others to learn and feel good about themselves.	We think about the consequences of our actions before we act. We choose to act in a way that allows other people, our school, and ourselves to achieve success.	We do our best to protect others and ourselves from getting hurt physically or emotionally. When we see something unsafe happening, we tell adults.

Classroom

KIND	MINDFUL	SAFE
• Using Classroom appropriate language • Support peers to make positive decisions	• Raise hand to leave seat • Using 1 MIC	• Being in your seat Ready to work by the bell • Making sure your area is clean and organized.

Courtyard

KIND	MINDFUL	SAFE
Use kind words. Share. Offer help.	Put all trash in garbage. Eat, chill, and enjoy.	Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself. Walk.

Hallway

KIND	MINDFUL	SAFE
Be kind and respectful. Use kind words.	Go promptly to your next destination. Always have a pass during class time.	Walk on the right side. Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself. Watch where you are going.

When students enacted the values or did other positive acts (such as exhibiting kindness) aligned with these values, educators in 5 out of 10 schools rewarded this behavior with tokens or prizes. For example, in one school where values were communicated through the mascot (Compassion-Attentiveness-Tenacity), students "caught" demonstrating these behaviors, or just doing something kind, were given "CAT-cha" cards. Then once a week, an assistant principal drew a few cards out of a box and announced the winners, who could then go to his office to select a prize. A teacher at one of these schools aptly summarized how that school sets and reinforces values and behavior expectations for students:

> What does it mean to "be there"? That is one of our guidelines for success. And we do lessons so that they know what that is. And when we do those lessons and they take on those four Guidelines for Success, we reward that behavior throughout the year with these [School] Grams, which are our positive incentive plan. So we're trying to make sure that we're doing that positive reinforcement on different things that we're teaching them at the year. I think it's more behavior, but social-emotional, the connection for me is the idea that they come to school, they want to be here. One of our Guidelines for Success is "have fun learning." We talk about what that is and why we do that at [our school]. What do we do here that's fun? So that's why I think it ties in [to SEL].

This respondent's comments illustrate how staff and teachers at their school use positive incentives and guidelines for success. They also make evident how a given practice can support multiple conceptions of SEL- and CC-related goals, such as engagement in school (wanting to be there) and a positive school climate (doing fun things).

2c. Targeted supports for individuals or groups. In 7 of 10 schools we found targeted interventions existing under the broad umbrella of MTSS and counseling, with an explicit connection to SEL. MTSS-type interventions ranged from more low-stakes interventions, such as agenda checks for academically struggling students (**self-management**), to bringing in an outside therapist for a group of students struggling with a particular relationship or emotional issue (**mental/emotional well-being**, **relationship-building**, **social awareness**). A school leader explained:

> Yeah, they need just a little bit different dynamic than this tier one…. They [the students receiving the intervention] can be fluid. It's not a permanent thing. In the very, very beginning they recognized, "Hey, why am I not with my Advisory group?" Then we brought in another agency for these girls. It's a counseling group, where they are working on confidence building, anger management kinds of techniques.

Counseling was a common targeted intervention, mentioned in 6 of 10 schools we visited. The counselors and school social workers we interviewed consistently described their work as helping students **build social skills** and **relationships** in addition to processing crises (**mental/emotional well-being**). Counselors in one district felt that much of their schools' SEL work rested on them. Students were assigned or referred to counseling, and some self-referred, but we also heard about the importance of students referring one another to counselors for support, and the connection to trust. As a counselor explained, "[Students] come and self-refer all the time here. But I've been here for a while…. Trust is a huge thing. They have to know that you care and that they can trust you." At the same school, a teacher described the behavior ticket system, whereby he can fill out a form noting an issue and it will be routed to the appropriate person.

Restorative Justice was another opportunity for targeted intervention, enabling students—or students and staff—to step out of a classroom and resolve issues. If necessary, this intervention was coordinated with the counseling staff as well. "In the circle, you'll find a counselor and an RJ coordinator sometimes," said one assistant principal. "That way, information goes back and forth fluidly between the two teams."

In some cases, schools partnered with outside providers for targeted interventions. These providers could be counselors or therapists, or a community organization. For example, one school had a community organization come in and do a full 20-week program for students identified as at-risk. A counselor described the program, linking it to SEL for these students:

> That was a curriculum-based program where each student got a little curriculum journal…. Small groups. They had one to two community members meet with about 10 kids. They taught them about leadership, making positive choices…. Self-esteem. All of the social-emotional [constructs]. At the end, it culminated in a community service project that they did together as a group. That, I think, has helped as well with some of our students that were not motivated, that were making bad choices, things like that.

In this description we can see connections to the CORE competency of **self-management** (positive choices) and to common conceptions of SEL such as **mental/emotional well-being** (self-esteem).

One school has a dog, Coco, that provides emotional support to students. The dog's owner (one of the teachers) told us that she fosters dogs as a volunteer and had read about them being used to support students at schools on the East Coast. She approached the principal at her school, and they decided to try it. Coco comes to campus three days a week. She usually stays in a little bed in this teacher's classroom but can be requested for support elsewhere on campus. She is a small dog, with a hypo-allergenic coat. Over the years, students have even made outfits for Coco (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Student-Made Clothes for Foster Dog Coco

[Coco] can go into a kid's arms who is crying over a test and within 30 seconds, they've calmed down. Kids who have never had an animal before, they kind of get used to her by playing with her, and she just turns the mood like that. I've had her in parent meetings before, I've had her in the [Listening Room]. She's an all-access dog, she really is.

While there are clubs and programs to support students from different racial groups (see Practice 3), it is important to note that educators at all levels were reluctant to suggest that they directed their Tier 2 or Tier 3 efforts towards groups of students identified by race, saying that they focused on whomever demonstrated a need via academic, emotional, or behavioral struggles. For example, in one school, the principal noted that the school had a leadership academy for males, but described the students who participate as "at-risk" in terms of their academics. He did note, however, that most participating students were African American. (This program, which also existed at the other school in this district, engaged student agency by pairing at-risk students with those identified as having leadership potential in male and female academies.)

Practice 3: Promoting engagement, relationships, and SEL-related skills using elective courses and extracurricular activities. Many schools used elective courses, clubs, and afterschool programs to promote student engagement with school, a positive climate, and relationship-building. Some of these activities were explicitly focused on SEL or CC, and in other cases, educators said that participation in fields outside of academics (such as the arts) itself provided important opportunities for school engagement, self-expression, and the development of social-emotional skills.

3a. Elective courses. In 4 of 10 schools, educators reported using elective courses—particularly music, art, and PE—to promote SEL. In two of the schools, electives were viewed as promoting a **positive school climate** and fostering student engagement. In the other two, the elective courses themselves served as powerful vehicles for SEL. For example, respondents described the music program at one school as the crown jewel of the school and as key to promoting school community and developing students' social-emotional skills. The music ensemble provided modeling of a social group, in which all members have clear roles and contribute to the whole. The music teacher explained the value of the music performances this way:

> Say if I play my wrong note, makes us all look bad, makes us all sound bad, and if I work really hard at doing the right part and play my part well, then we can all really rise up. Which I think is a real analogy for how we work as human beings, that we have to pull each other up, we have to support each other.

Other educators described the music program as providing extensive training and opportunities to exercise peer feedback and a way to communicate to others how one feels about their performance and behavior. During a music class we observed, students were prompted with sentence starters such as, "I really like how you…" and were encouraged to respond in pairs and also with the whole group. Additionally, seventh- and eighth-grade students took on the roles of peer tutors with their younger or less experienced colleagues. In the words of the music program director and teacher, "We want you to grow as musicians, but more than that we want you to grow as citizens."

The PE program at another school provides a different example. School staff described PE as a place where students go to access adults who care about them in a safe place. "We have amazing athletes at the school, [and the coaches] are carrying at least 30 plus kids each where if something happens they're like, 'Can I just talk to [Coach] real quick?'" said a leader at the school. Once again, this strategy promoted respondents' conception that building relationships and positive school climate are key components of SEL.

In two other schools, faculty saw the availability of highly desired electives as promoting school engagement and a positive school climate. At one of these schools, many respondents believed the arts helped attract both students (this district had open enrollment) and faculty, and made the school a place where students could enjoy and express themselves. A school leader at this school saw electives, in which Special Education students were mainstreamed, as **promoting a culture of inclusion** at their school. At the other school, they had many electives, including visual arts, AVID,[16] and Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) electives. The principal saw this holistic approach to education as promoting a positive school climate overall, which he viewed as a broad term that included SEL.

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[16] https://avid.org/default.aspx

3b. Clubs to support leadership and inclusion. Seven of 10 schools offered clubs, either during lunch or after school, that addressed a range of interests. At one school, the presence and variety of the options was itself seen to promote relationships among students. As a staff member put it, students arrived at the beginning of the school year and staff were able to say to them, "We're going to help hook you up with the right people." Four of 10 schools in four districts had clubs through which students specifically promoted kindness, compassion, and positive behavior, with some clubs going further to support students facing trauma (e.g., one school had a club for girls that addressed issues of domestic violence).

Clubs at several schools sponsored Kindness Week, or other kindness activities, such as in several of the schools where students were encouraged to write public notes about what they appreciate about others (see Figure 9). In other schools, students focused on making sure no student ate alone during lunch. Members of a club at one school regularly went out at lunch and invited lonely or isolated students to join them (members would sometimes "argue" about who would get to sit next to the student to further boost their morale). One school organized "No One Eats Alone," a program to encourage students to seek out other students who are eating lunch alone (see Figure 10). Similarly, we heard from a couple of teachers at the school that if a student is having a "hard time" they will ask another student to check in. As one teacher at this school noted, "We have some really great kids here and there's always one or two that are willing to go in and check in."

Figure 9. Public Notes Between Students to Support Leadership and Inclusion

In several schools, respondents identified student leadership and agency as a key mechanism through which clubs promoted SEL. One of the schools that explicitly promoted kindness had a peer-leadership program, believed to promote kindness on campus, build teacher–student relationships through Friendship Lunches, raise awareness about the harms of drug use, and mediate conflicts among students. Referring to the peer leadership program, a counselor noted:

Figure 10. "No One Eats Alone" Campaign for Inclusion

> Our teacher that leads that is amazing at developing relationships with kids, not just teaching them. She has such a good relationship with them that she not only teaches them to be good models out in the campus but those kids are also her eyes and ears for cutting, suicide, drugs, anything that could be hurting kids. They will tell her about it and then she'll come tell us. Then we'll address the student and get the parent involved if necessary.

This same school also had a program in which the Associated Student Body and honors students mentored other students once a week at lunch, checking in and supporting them with binders and organization. Educators linked this practice to the SEL competency of **self-management**.

In another school, leaders used student leadership via student council as a way to model positive behaviors for the student body, while also promoting the school's value of equity. The school adapted the process of nomination, when necessary, to allow a student who might not meet the GPA requirement, but who might have other relevant qualities, to participate. The assistant principal explained:

[We want to] identify eighth graders who maybe aren't the smartest kids at the school. Maybe not the most athletic, but there's something there. And having them be in student council…. When we think about equity… all you have to do is fill out an application. You have to get 25 peers to say that you would be a good person on student council. And then even if you initially don't have 2.0 [GPA], the idea is that each marking period your grades are improving…. We're like, "If you want to do it, fill out an application and then we'll help you meet those benchmarks."

In this way the school could promote its value of equity as well as the positive student behaviors desired.

Several schools had clubs designed to support students from specific racial groups. Three schools had Black Student Unions that offered college field trips, community service, and a social outlet for African American students. Two schools in one district explicitly mentioned **equity** as a goal in discussing programs and practices to support African American youth in particular. One school had a specific program focused on academic achievement of African American male students, as well as clubs to empower female students in areas such as computer coding. In the other school, the Restorative Justice lead had begun a club for African American male students who were getting suspended and having behavioral difficulties. This educator worked with the students on building relationships, handling personal difficulties, and developing character. We associate this focus on cultural responsiveness with SEL and **building a culture of inclusion and acceptance of difference**. Other schools had clubs for Latinx students or to empower female students interested in computer coding, which staff hoped would foster **self-efficacy** in a group typically underrepresented in the computer science field.

Activities sponsored by clubs were largely seen to promote positive school climate. At one school, respondents used terms like *school spirit*, *promoting joy*, and *belonging* to explain the SEL-connected benefits of lunch-time events and other activities sponsored by the Associated Student Body. The many CC and SEL benefits, from relationship-building to promoting joy, attributed to clubs and other extracurricular activities exemplifies some of the fluidity and range of language we heard from school- and classroom-level respondents about what constituted SEL.

3c. Afterschool programs and activities. In 7 of 10 schools, respondents linked afterschool programs or activities to SEL. These activities included some of the aforementioned clubs but also included classes such as music or yoga. (The latter was said to relieve student stress, promoting **emotional well-being**, at one high-achieving school.) In one school, the

afterschool program used lessons from a formal SEL curriculum and made efforts to connect with the activities occurring in the school day.

Many respondents also viewed student involvement in sports as an important aspect of the afterschool program. As with in-school sports, staff described the afterschool sports program as building relationships and promoting the integration of kids from different groups. As one teacher said:

> [The coaches] have been with this community for such a long time, they've fine-tuned their coaching practices. Their teams are GOOD. We have like a first string football team, a second string football team—they went to the championship, basketball, track, soccer, cross country. We have every sport here and so many of the kids participate. You'll go to the track meet and I'll see you know the black kid from [a targeted program] on the same team as the little white girl who was in the courtyard. And that's when they're coming together. So, I think that's important.

Staff at afterschool programs also enhanced connection to school by providing students with time for and help with homework and in three cases kept careful track of student academic performance during the school day.

Many respondents also viewed afterschool activities as an important SEL opportunity for students, as staff were able to build relationships with students and check in with their **well-being**. As the coordinator of the afterschool program at one school told us:

> So whether a student's having a bad day, or maybe they're having a good day. I want to connect with them on that social and emotional level. I want to be able to check in with them, I want to have a relationship with them that they know they can come to me or I know I can come to them, and it's a clear, open line. Just trust and honesty. Something just very open.

This individual prided herself on prioritizing relationship-building, and since she also worked in the school office during the day, she was able to really get to know students in her program in a variety of contexts.

Practice 4: SEL-specific classroom practices and curricula. Throughout our visits we found evidence of explicit SEL-related instructional practices, what might be thought of as school-wide strategies, or Tier 1 in an MTSS approach. In 8 of 10 schools, we also observed or heard about pedagogical strategies intended to promote SEL, which varied substantially in nature. They included physical arrangement of the classroom, routines, norms, modes of questioning, relationship-building/connection, helping students manage emotions, and providing choices about how to handle assignments and tests. We also heard about specific formal programs or curricula used in 8 of 10 schools (sometimes these were district-wide programs), though the programs varied widely as did their level of implementation.

4a. Creating a positive classroom environment. Many teachers discussed the ways that they organize the classroom to create a positive and welcoming environment. We observed three teachers in three different schools greeting students as they entered the classroom. Two of them stood at the door and shook students' hands, greeting them by name. A math teacher in one school explained that this practice helped him **build relationships** with students and also get a read on their emotional state, which was important to his efforts to **promote students' emotional well-being**.

In 11 classrooms we visited, we observed students seated in groups at tables or groups of desks, or were told by teachers we interviewed that they used this arrangement. We also saw desks arranged in this manner in other classrooms we did not specifically visit. These groupings were used to reinforce norms of requesting help from peers before approaching the teacher (**developing social skills and appropriate behavior**), to enable students to take on specific roles such as note taker, materials manager or facilitator (**self-management**), and in at least one case to promote social skills among high-achieving students who would often rather work alone. One teacher also used the group seating arrangement to keep track of how often she connected with students individually (**relationship-building**). Another teacher told us that group work provided students the opportunity to receive constructive criticism without defensiveness or anxiety, promoting **growth mindset**:

> Being able to talk to each other about it, being able to defend their answer, and it gets heated sometimes. Which is awesome, but they need to be able to communicate, they need to be able to share. They need to be—this is where they struggle—confident enough to share it and be wrong. Not being afraid to be wrong, and we try to keep this as safe as we can.

A school leader explained why group work was an important tool for promoting SEL:

> In order to independently do this in a group of four, and not need the teachers hovering over you... you really need very good **self-management** skills and you need very good **relationship skills**…. And you need to make **responsible decisions** so that the group can complete the lab or the task at hand and turn it in.

Two teachers played music as students entered the class or during their work time. One used upbeat music to promote a positive, engaging atmosphere (**promoting positive climate**), while a teacher at another school used an electronic classical medley (and dimmed the fluorescent lights) to provide a soothing atmosphere (**promoting mental/emotional well-being** and taking account of **adolescent** [brain] **development**).

4b. Strategies for managing emotions. Teachers also used multiple strategies to help students manage emotions stemming from academic anxiety, prior trauma, or emergent personal crises (**self-management**, **mental/emotional well-being**). Three teachers at one school stressed the importance of clear expectations for engagement in each class, and these teachers used posted, school-wide rules or class-specific C.H.A.M.P.S. to do this. (C.H.A.M.P.S. is

a mnemonic to remind teachers to provide students with clear, explicit expectations for each classroom activity in terms of Conversation, [obtaining] Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, and Success).[17] As one teacher said, keeping expectations clear was a matter of helping students cope with trauma, saying, "[G]uidelines up here, which are posted, which I feel helps students because they know what to expect especially dealing with students [who] have experienced previous trauma." Along similar lines, a math teacher explained that his practice of being very explicit about expectations for every activity built trust and reduced student anxiety:

> I try to use C.H.A.M.P.S. so the classroom structure's clear and set forth, so they know if they're allowed to talk, if not, how do they get help, what's the activity, when do I have to move around the classroom, all of those things. So that for the kids that have trouble with anxiety or stress, they know exactly what's expected of them the whole time, so it lowers their affective filter to focus on the math.

Two teachers permitted students, particularly younger students, to redo homework assignments and tests. They believed this strategy not only ensured content learning in foundational classes, but also helped students cope with anxiety (**promoting emotional/mental health**). One of the teachers, who taught at a gifted magnet school, told us that this strategy took some pressure off his students, who tended to be perfectionists. A math teacher in another school who also allowed students to retake tests linked the practice to promoting **growth mindset** by showing students that they could improve—and pass the class—through effort.

> I let [students] retake tests, and I sit with them at lunch, and I say, "You come in and I'll help you out. We'll go through it." We break it down. "You can do this."… I let them retake tests as many times as they need to. If they're going to sit down and do the work, then they'll pass my class.

Along these same lines, a Special Education teacher gave her students cool-down periods if they became very upset (**self-management**) and used pictures of emotions to help her students learn to identify and communicate their feelings (**self-awareness**).[18]

4c. Modeling appropriate language and mindsets. Additionally, teachers used language in key ways to advance SEL. We saw teachers **build relationships** with students and promote engagement by using humor with their students. The language of **growth mindset** was also common across schools and districts, where we heard statements like "mistakes make your brain grow," and "If I hear you say, 'I can't do it,' I want you to add three little letters to the end

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[17] https://www.dailyteachingtools.com/champs-classroom-management.html

[18] This district had added the CASEL construct of self-awareness to the four CORE constructs. CASEL defines self-awareness as "The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a 'growth mindset.'" (taken from CASEL, 2017. http://www.casel.org/core-competencies/)

of that: 'I can't do it YET.'" One math teacher explained that they promoted **growth mindset** with affirmations and a positive approach to mistakes:

> So we really put an emphasis on how making mistakes is the only way we can learn, how mistakes are really put in this special place where we applaud them, look at them…. So we go through all of that to talk about how these things make your brain grow, and that's a goal we have. We also do some affirmations work in the beginning. So in the front of their math journals some sort of affirmations about themselves, so every time they open their notebooks, those are right there. And every so often throughout the year we will pick our favorite "no," or our favorite mistake and have the students do error analysis on those mistakes. So what was the student thinking, what did they do wrong, what did they do well? Those kinds of things.

We also saw teachers providing students with concrete protocols for how to communicate with one another. In one science classroom, the teacher had posted guidelines on how students are expected to respectfully comment on and critique one another's ideas (see Figure 11). In a music classroom in this school, we found evidence of students using this conversational model, with a focus on appreciation. At the end of an activity, the teacher asked for student feedback. After talking about what they could do differently next time as a group, the teacher asked if anyone had a compliment for another student. Students responded with, "I appreciate the steady beat of the bass" and "I appreciate your energy." All students participated and it appeared that they had a clear structure for commenting on their peers' performances.

Figure 11. Modeling Respectful Communication in the Classroom
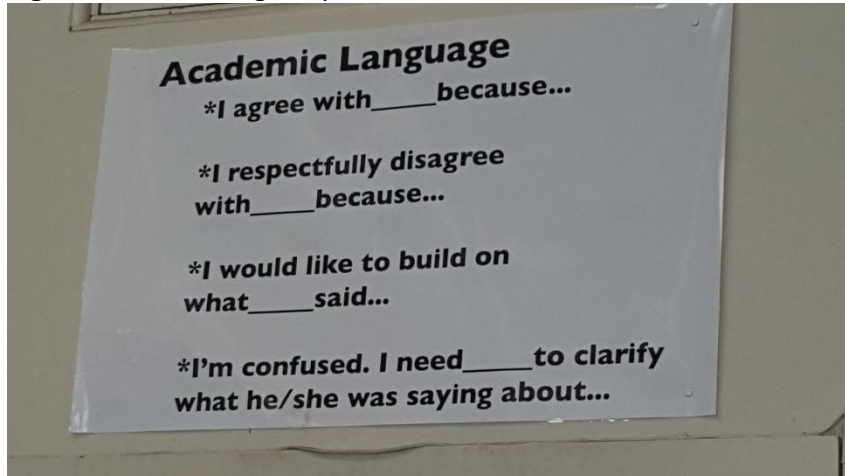
Another math teacher promoted **growth mindset** by sharing their own struggles with math as a student. This teacher shared with their class and with students' parents:

> I know when I was in junior high, I had a horrible time. I mean, [growth mindset is] my whole philosophy…. "I failed. I failed math." When we have Back to School [Night], that's what I start out with. I tell the parents, "I failed, and I took it in summer school,

and I passed. Then I took geometry, and I failed that too, and then I took it in summer school, and I found out I do really well with short, intense things," which worked out later when I was in college…. [Growth mindset has] been a recently coined term in education lately. I never had a word for it, and I was just, I really believe that I can do anything. I can. If I wanted to, I could study, especially now the YouTube, I could be a mechanic. It might take a while, but I can do it.

In other classrooms we observed teachers directing students to continue to push through a challenging question in math (**self-efficacy** and **growth mindset**), and like the teacher above, others used themselves as models for students who were discouraged.

One teacher told us about promoting students' **self-efficacy** by designing lessons that progress in such a way that students' learning is well scaffolded. Another teacher used phrases such as "your answer/finding is accurate and important, can you move deeper and explain how you came to that understanding?" A math teacher in another school supported **self-efficacy** by giving students time to figure out a problem or coming back to them if they were called on but not able to immediately answer the question, making sure the student had the opportunity to end with success. One teacher used test scores to support **self-efficacy** and **growth mindset** by showing students how they had grown in math. Even if their overall score had not improved, she would show them areas of improvement. This teacher also made a "celebration of mistakes" in her classroom, often singing a song about "error analysis" to support **growth mindset**. She explained:

We have a lot of fun when [my student teacher or I] make mistakes, which we never do [sarcasm]. Not even once. The kids are cute, so I'm like, "Oh like I did something wrong," and they go, "That's the first time ever." I'm like, "Yeah." Just making sure that it's okay that everyone knows it's safe to be wrong. That's what I think is the best, and just that everyone's opinion is valuable.

Another teacher described working with students on impulse control and temper issues (related to **self-management** and **social awareness**) through one-on-one conversations:

[J]ust sitting down and talking to them and getting them to understand, 'Look, you can't do this next year. Because I'm your last ditch effort, basically.' I am, before they remove them from the school. Both of them [students with behavior struggles] are very, very, very bright, but nobody's ever bothered to tell them that.

Sometimes a teacher took time away from direct academic instruction to deal with a discipline or emotional issue and used it to help the whole class develop their social or **self-management** skills. One teacher reported:

And even if it's not one-on-one, it might be literally right in the middle of a lesson, but it's okay. I'll stop and say "okay, so how can we address this? How can we redirect?" I'll, you know, "Guys, what can we do to help these two out?" I include the whole class so it

doesn't feel like it's just me, picking on them, basically. It's like, "Okay, hey. How would you guys solve this?" And it goes quicker that way usually. 'Cause the kids are like "Okay, how about you do this?" And, "You sit over there, and you sit." Or, "Go outside and talk about it," or whatever. They come up with really good ideas.

In addition to the pedagogical techniques and interpersonal approaches described above, we found that respondents in 8 of 10 schools referenced various formal curricula or other pre-packaged programs used to promote SEL, such as Second Step, or Capturing Kids' Hearts, as an SEL-promoting curriculum in their school and district. In some cases, the curricula involved lessons, and in others, set behavioral expectations. Elsewhere staff used these materials as resources to develop Advisory lessons on a variety of topics related to SEL and culture-climate. A school leader at one school, for example, pulled from AVID, Class Meetings That Matter, Olweus bullying prevention program,[19] and other sources to create her own Advisory lessons for teachers to use. A teacher and the principal in another school in a different district reported that a computer-adaptive math program used at the school built "confidence" (**math self-efficacy**) because it was designed for individual students and gave them choice about what to work on. In all schools, posters and visual representations of SEL-related messages were used to share specific SEL concepts in classrooms and in the hallways, as in the poster depicted in the photo at right. Our field work, of course, could not discern the quality of these materials nor the consistency in their use. In fact, in the schools we visited, curriculum was not referenced as central to any school's strategy around SEL. Rather, they mentioned SEL curricula only when directly asked, suggesting that they do not perceive these materials as being as important as other school-wide approaches.

Practice 5: Marshalling human capital resources in support of SEL. As is clear in the examples above, adults in schools are responsible for implementing SEL, and as such, staff roles, capacities, and mindsets are critical. For this reason, most schools discussed human capital approaches to SEL. These efforts fell into two major categories: (a) hiring or mobilizing personnel explicitly focused on SEL (staff leadership teams and non-instructional roles) and (b) promoting adult SEL and strategies to teach it.

5a. Staff leadership teams focused on school culture-climate and SEL. Respondents at 6 of 10 schools mentioned using school-based teams to oversee the behavior and school climate approaches at the school. This was often where educators analyzed CORE's SEL and CC data (see Practice 6). In some cases, these teams built on structures in place for earlier programs. In particular, some schools (or their districts) had previously implemented Safe and Civil Schools,[20] and the current iteration of these teams built on what had come before. Below, we discuss additional strategies for building strong and supportive climates. The point here is that

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[19] http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/olweus_bullying_prevention_program.page

[20] Safe and Civil Schools is a program and consulting practice, developed by Randy Sprick, to help schools create positive school climates, reduce referrals and behavior problems, and improve classroom management. http://www.safeandcivilschools.com/index.php

respondents at several schools identified these formal bodies as important sites for promoting SEL and positive climate at their school sites.

5b. Non-instructional roles. In general, schools used staffing decisions to support SEL in one or more of four ways: hiring or directing counseling or paraprofessional counseling staff to support SEL; hiring or re-directing full- or part-time school staff brought in specifically to address issues of SEL, climate, and discipline; promoting equity and role models through staff presence; or partnering with outside organizations, usually to provide targeted interventions to troubled students.

All 10 schools had counselors and/or social workers on site, but five schools had made particularly creative use of staffing to promote SEL. One school also had a social-emotional paraprofessional who was assigned to the Listening Room, a room on campus where students could come at lunch—or even during class—if they needed a trusted adult to listen. One school had an RJ coordinator as well as two RJ facilitators, one specifically dedicated to sixth grade. Another school had a restorative practices coordinator, and yet another had a teacher who worked full-time in their dedicated room for alternatives to suspension, and who also conducted restorative circles with students and staff during the school day, as needed. Finally, the principal at a different school responded to a shortage of substitute teachers by hiring two full-time subs who rotated among the classes, thus providing consistency for students and faculty, and ensuring that when a substitute was needed, they were familiar with the school's students, values, and ways of doing things.

In some cases, schools found it necessary to reassign staff or reconfigure staff teams to better align with SEL goals. Two schools put together school-wide, multidisciplinary teams to coordinate the many internal and external services they provided their students. At one such school, one assistant principal per grade was specifically responsible for SEL at that grade. At another school in this district, a teacher on special assignment was given responsibilities for SEL. At a school in a different district, the PE teachers were trained in trauma-informed practices and assigned 10 frequently truant students each, for whom they were to act as life coaches. These coaches would see their mentees on Mondays, then have them as part of their regular PE classes the rest of the week, enabling check-ins and relationship-building. The principal described the program as follows:

> Because of our special schedule, our PE teachers on Mondays, instead of teaching PE they're life coaches. Because a coach naturally has that reminder, "you can do it" kind of attitude, we've trained our coaches around trauma-informed behaviors…. On Monday they check in purposefully, one on one, and then small groups if it works that way. Then they picked their PE students, so they see them Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. It's kind of a natural connector. The life coaches, that's something that we also have.

Administrators in several schools tied their staff recruitment and retention efforts to SEL. In one school, an administrator who leads the school's culture-climate efforts emphasized "culture/fit, culture/fit, culture/fit" in hiring. Expanding on this idea, she said, "Definitely, it's

great that you have this experience maybe 15, 20 years in the classroom, but if you can't partner with the teachers around you and partner with the students around this learning, then it's not a great fit."

Leaders in one school made a point to hire African American (especially African American male) non-instructional staff, which at least one staff member viewed as an important part of equity, and a source of caring and role modeling for African American boys. This perspective is aligned with emerging research showing that teacher–student race-matching can be very beneficial for students of color (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). He explained his school's strategy:

> You don't see a lot of black men on school campuses. Other than janitors or security, that's usually where you see black men on school campuses. [This school] has quite a few black men, not as teachers but support staff. Solid, very well-rounded black men and all of us hit different youngsters in different ways. I get a lot of support here from just being here on this campus…. I think it's something that's intentional. Definitely with the principal that hired me it was intentional, we discussed it…. We want to have a certain perspective, we want to try to look like [the city] in our demographic as the staff and that's hard to do, particularly when you get to teachers…. .002% of teachers in America are African American and less than that [are] male.

Finally, respondents at 5 of 10 schools mentioned bringing in external partners such as therapists, group facilitators, local non-profit organizations, and trainers on SEL topics. In one such case, a group of men who were formerly involved in gangs spent time at one school a few days a week, reaching out to troubled students. A teacher at the school explained how helpful these individuals could be in **supporting student emotional health** and positive behavior:

> They are now serving the community by coming into our school and being here as support for these students, who are facing similar issues. A lot of the students, I can't really relate to a lot of the problems the students are having at home because I've never faced that issue…. Because like I said, I can't relate to a lot of the issues the students have at home or in their neighborhoods, but those gentlemen can, and they're a huge help. They're very encouraging, they're very positive and they bring a good atmosphere. A good resource to our campus.

5c. Supporting adult SEL. Respondents at 3 of 10 schools reported that schools supported adult learning of SEL via school-based professional development (PD) on topics such as growth mindset, restorative practices, or PBIS. (See District Supports for information on district-led PD.)

Two schools used staff meetings to reinforce school values by modeling the kinds of behaviors and language they expected of their students. At one school, faculty reviewed the school's philosophy at every faculty meeting and started meetings with a fun activity to promote the school value of "have fun learning." The assistant principal at another school

explained that rewarding positive (student) behavior within the school's PBIS approach became part of the school culture via modeling and explicit instruction in staff meetings:

> [How do you do that?] By example. A lot by example. Even from teacher to teacher or administrator to administrator. Just try to go by example. We'll talk about it at staff meetings, sandwich it. Compliment, constructive criticism, end it with a compliment. We talk about positive to negative ratios. You know, it's anywhere from three to five positives to one negative ratio should be the interaction between teacher and student.

One school infused SEL as "part of the conversation" every month in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In this school, teachers who were in their first year would receive coaching from a more experienced colleague, with expertise in restorative practices. One teacher interviewed strongly believed this coaching was paramount for his development as a facilitator of students' SEL:

> [T]there are quite a few [SEL] experts in this school. One of the best practices shared during coaching was that of "code-switching".… He [colleague teacher] explicitly teaches them [students] what code-switching looks like, why it's [not] okay to say certain things to a teacher when class is in session and why it is okay outside of class.

The Restorative Justice coordinator in this school also coached every teacher in RJ practices. Respondents noted that one of the most important aspects of this coaching was helping teachers, especially "young" ones, learn how to build relationships with their students. (The importance of teacher–student relationships is well documented: e.g., Cornelius-White, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Roorda et al., 2011; Quin, 2017). In this school, once per week, the RJ coordinator stayed with a teacher for the whole day and developed joint RJ-subject activities with students and the teacher. This coordinator spoke of the way he commonly helped new teachers better understand how to build relationships with students:

> New teachers come in and they're overwhelmed and they just start teaching or just start throwing the prompts out that they've been given through their training without really creating a relationship space. One teacher for instance, he was a musician. I went in his room in September and when I prepped with him, we came in here and we talked about it and I asked him some questions and he told me about he was in a band and this and that. When I went to his room, I said, "I don't see one thing about your life, about you in this room. I see all this history stuff, the normal classroom stuff, it's textbook, good job, but your students don't know who you are and you don't show them that. He admitted, he was like, "Yeah I keep that separate." I was like, "You might want to let them see a little, that's a cool thing. You might want to let them see a little bit, maybe, I said, maybe put an old guitar." He said, "I have so many guitars, I could do that." I was like, yeah, have it up and they're going to ask what it is and that's a story and stories make relationships.

While many respondents cited learning about SEL from these school activities, one teacher told us that most of her knowledge about SEL had come from her own reading and online research, motivated by personal interest. Along these same lines, two schools tried to facilitate this personal learning through reading about new ideas together (see Figure 12), or engaging in "book clubs." We found two schools that did this: In one school, educators had read Carol Dweck's book on growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). One school worked with Zaretta Hammond's book "Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain" (Hammond & Jackson, 2015), which respondents connected to SEL, in local professional development workshops. One school leader explained how different teachers at the school had used what they learned from this book to support development of students' SEL-related skills and constructs:

> Our different academic departments took parts of this book and developed a focus area. [In] Chapter 8 where Dr. Hammond describes the cognitive routine,... the special education department took it apart to help write student-centered goals for students to self-manage, have **self-awareness**, have **self-management** and **social awareness**, and be able to respond to questions about their progress on their self reflection and their goals.

In this way, educators explicitly connected the ideas of culturally responsive pedagogy and SEL.

Practice 6: Measurement and data use. From the outset, CORE leaders designed surveys to measure student SEL and school CC and believed that these data could help focus attention and guide improvement. Overall, we found some districts used these and other SEL data to guide and improve their efforts, but there was considerable variation in the awareness and use of these data.

Awareness of the CORE survey data was high among administrators in 7 out of 10 schools we visited. Principals in particular at these seven schools referenced using the CORE data or indicated that it had added a sense of importance to the focus on SEL or CC. While we found a high level of awareness and support for the surveys at the administrative level, however, we found limited awareness of the CORE data among faculty and other staff.

Figure 12. Visual About Growth vs. Fixed Mindset
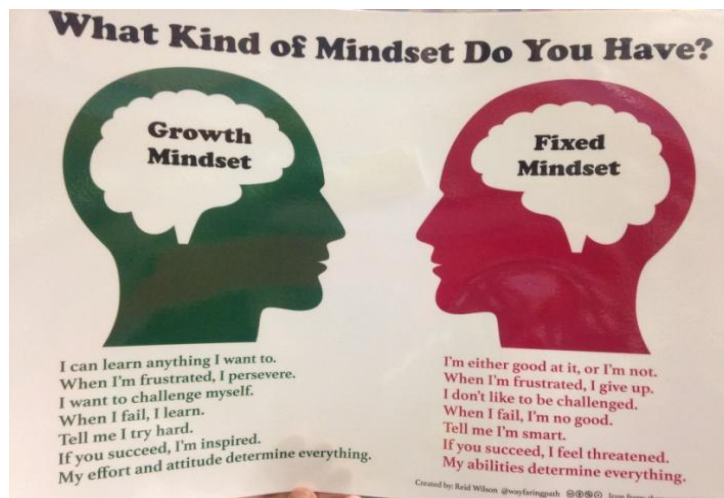
Nonetheless, leaders in 7 of 10 schools reported using the CORE data in some way at their sites. School-level educators generally used SEL data to plan and identify areas of need in annual cycles. For example, faculty at one school used the CORE data to plan activities for the following year. The principal reported that their climate team had already looked at the data the week before our visit:

… To take a look at how our parents, students, and teachers ranked certain questions…. They're already planning the first 10 days of school on how can we structure things differently so that students rank themselves higher or there's better results. That's one way that our whole school has looked at that data.

This principal also noted that their administrative team would be looking at the survey data at the end of the year to "do a cycle of continuous improvement, saying where did we rank, what can we do to improve participation and such." In another school, the CORE survey results prompted a school-wide effort to include culturally relevant practices in professional development for the 2016–2017 school year. A school in another district used the CORE data to identify goals on which to focus—growth mindset, in this case.

In some schools, however, individuals cited challenges to using the CORE SEL and CC data. Some believed that the survey data were not actionable. The most commonly voiced reason was that, since the data were only released annually at the end of the year, the results were not timely enough to make real-time changes during the school year. Respondents felt that there was too little time to fit in all the many initiatives and reforms, including SEL but ranging from textbook adoption to Common Core and beyond, suggesting that the measures were not helpful because they did not have time to adequately respond to them.

To generate real-time, more actionable data, in two schools educators devised their own smaller, monthly surveys on SEL and CC topics of concern to them. In one school, a school leadership team was using their own monthly survey to track progress on campus climate. The survey, designed to be completed in about 10 minutes, was administered to all teachers and students, and results were reviewed in monthly staff meetings to track progress and refine approaches. Responses to questions such as, "Do you feel safe, do you have friends, do you feel like there's an adult you can go to to have a conversation?" were paired with discipline referral, suspension, and attendance data in order to identify trends and to highlight students for intervention. Another school in a different district administered a bullying survey, and one school leader there expressed a plan to use Google Docs to get more information about their sixth graders. Other schools used behavior and attendance data, grades, and other achievement data to devise programs and target interventions. For example, at one school, administrators looked at truancy data and chose to assign frequently truant students to "life coaches" who were PE teachers trained in trauma-informed behaviors. The school then tracked attendance and found a significant reduction in truancy. "This semester we have five PE teachers," the principal explained. "We gave them 10 chronically truant students. We've had a decrease in truancy as a result of them checking in and mentoring them." In this way, collecting more frequent student feedback and reviewing behavioral indicators on a regular basis helped schools develop approaches that help students right away.

District Supports for School-Level SEL

In some districts, central office administrators played important roles in supporting school SEL efforts. These supports fell into five categories (Figure 13):

Figure 13. The Five Categories of Support for School-Level SEL

Priorities and Frameworks · Staffing · Programs and Curricula · Training · Measurement and Data Use

Support 1: Priorities and frameworks. In some districts, administrators conveyed priorities and provided frameworks to guide schools' focus on, conceptions of, and implementation of SEL. One of these five districts, which participated in CASEL's collaborating districts initiative, established a formal definition of SEL, which we saw taken up at the school level, though classroom teachers varied in their awareness and understanding of this definition. This same district established SEL standards for both students and adults. The framework was used by the Human Resources department and incorporated into both principal and teacher evaluations.

The standards also established three SEL *signature practices*. These were rituals and activities to be enacted in every district office and school meeting, to help adults develop their social and emotional skills. The first practice is an opening ritual for meeting that includes an opportunity for attendants to express themselves openly. The second practice creates opportunities during the meeting to pause, reflect, and share thoughts and feelings about the issue being addressed in the meeting. The third practice, in closing, is a moment for participants to identify and express a positive outcome of the meeting.

This district also included SEL into the framework used to evaluate schools. Collectively, these efforts conveyed to educators that SEL was a priority. In contrast to most other districts, the inclusion of SEL in evaluations provided an added incentive to hold educators accountable for developing these competencies in themselves and in their students. Not surprisingly, school-based educators in this district demonstrated a much better understanding of SEL and how to approach it than did their peers in other districts. A second district communicated a clear priority to focus on the growth mindset competency, a priority we saw reflected at the school and classroom levels during our visits. This district also included SEL in principal evaluations.

In addition to these broad priorities and frameworks, districts set other, more targeted priorities. Two districts set priorities around equity and incorporated SEL into district efforts to realize those goals. Two other districts prioritized positive approaches to discipline (both PBIS and Restorative Justice). One of these districts, for example, had designated certain high schools and their feeder schools as Restorative Justice regions, and made resources available to other schools who wished to use these practices as well. In the other district, they prioritized PBIS and were piloting a Restorative Justice program (viewed as part of that effort).

Support 2: Staffing. Several districts strategically staffed the central office to support SEL implementation in schools. Four districts had departments or administrators fully or partially tasked with responsibility for SEL. One district employed three people dedicated exclusively to SEL. Another had a department focused on culture and climate, which included SEL, and they also hired a consultant to help build district capacity in SEL. Yet another had a district coordinator position that included SEL among its responsibilities. In addition to district-level personnel, these districts made varying uses of school-level leaders trained in SEL, PBIS, or Restorative Justice, to disseminate these practices in schools or regions. Crucially in one district, the district matched school dollars to pay half of the cost of hiring non-instructional staff focused on SEL—particularly staff responsible for implementing Restorative Justice and culture-climate initiatives. Additionally, the district provided PBIS and Restorative Justice coaches who were utilized in each of the schools we visited in this district.

Support 3: Programs and curricula. Several districts provided programs and curricula designed to promote SEL or positive campus climate, or that contained elements to support these goals. One district had a math curriculum that emphasized collaboration and perseverance, and an English Language Arts curriculum adopted in all middle schools in the 2016–2017 academic year that was explicitly infused with SEL opportunities. Another district was piloting a program in most of their middle schools to promote college- and career-readiness, but the program also contained SEL components such as growth mindset, self-regulation, and relationship-building. Yet another district offered several different SEL curricula for schools to choose from, though school-level respondents we spoke to did not indicate that they used SEL curricula, other than PBIS. Another had a curriculum for African American learners of Standard English that incorporated SEL. Across all districts, some SEL- or climate-related programs were made available through but not created by the district, such as Where Everybody Belongs, PBIS, Safe and Civil Schools, and Peer Restorative Justice. Other programs were being developed specifically by the district, such as scope and sequence for SEL work and SEL standards linked to approaches in improving school culture-climate.

Support 4: Training and adult learning. All districts provided some form of professional development training or resources to schools and teachers around SEL topics. In some cases, districts also worked with outside partners to provide some of this training. One teacher told us that his district gave new teachers 80 hours of PD, including some SEL topics, and that more was available for those interested. An administrator in another district explained the district's approach to making PD relevant for teachers: "They're telling us, based on their data in partnership with their principal, what they want to focus on, and then we offer them a menu of

resources." A different district administrator used a similar approach to developing SEL-related PD:

> The way we cracked our PDs, we approached [teachers] like the experts that they are, the professionals they are and say, this is what the research is saying, this is what the science says. It's not just a fact they were coming up with. This is what the science says works best for this particular age group. I find that those conversations have had a large impact on our educators and their view point and then hints, how they interact and implement in their classrooms.

Two districts had professional learning communities at the district level to promote teachers' knowledge of SEL and to spread this information to schools. In another, the district built on the existing Safe and Civil Schools Initiative and used their data collection, tracking, and reporting infrastructure to expand the data that schools and teachers received in district trainings, thus increasing school site attention to SEL.

In another district, the central office distributed Carol Dweck's book on growth mindset to principals and provided regular growth mindset trainings at principals' meetings. The district also offered PBIS training for school-level teams and conducted school visits to monitor PBIS implementation, emphasizing positive discipline practices and school culture-building. The district also trained afterschool staff on SEL concepts and curricula.

Support 5: Measurement and data use. Unsurprisingly, we found high levels of awareness of the CORE survey data among district administrators. We also found that district administrators saw value in CORE's choice to measure SEL and CC, reporting that this decision increased awareness of and incentive to focus on SEL and CC in schools. As one administrator put it, the survey results brought an "awareness" and "willingness to do a more robust job, that had been present previously, but had been kind of a pro forma." Another administrator in this same district echoed these sentiments, explaining that the inclusion of the SEL survey results in their district's performance for schools was quite powerful: "Suddenly it showed up on the performance framework for schools, and that was huge. It was like, 'Oh, so this really matters.'"

District administrators in all five districts reported that they reviewed the CORE data and shared it with school leaders or school site teams. Administrators in four of the five districts reported using additional data sources to understand SEL and climate, though to varying extents. In one district, they used the California Healthy Kids Survey, suspension/expulsion data, the PBIS Self-Assessment Survey, and the PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory to sort schools into cohorts. These cohorts would then receive differentiated district trainings and support for their implementation of PBIS, which district leaders associated with SEL outcomes. In another district, central office personnel also evaluated some of their own programs meant to foster SEL, using measures beyond the CORE survey data. Overall, districts reported using the CORE SEL data in two primary ways: (a) accountability and performance monitoring or (b) providing targeted supports or interventions to schools, which we turn to next.

5a. Accountability and performance monitoring. Two districts incorporated the SEL measures into their evaluation or accountability systems: One district put the data into its school performance framework and educator evaluation systems, and another included it in principal evaluations. The latter district also made the data publicly available on its website, enabling parents or other interested parties to view and compare CORE SEL data across district schools.[21]

5b. Providing targeted supports or interventions. Two districts reported using the CORE SEL measures to focus school-level interventions. In one, central office staff combined CORE data with other sources to group schools into cohorts and differentiate district trainings to implement PBIS (which district leaders viewed as connected to SEL). In the other, the CORE data, including outcomes specific to that district, were shared district-wide. Respondents at all levels in this district expressed concern over findings of subgroup gaps in SEL outcomes and, as a result, the district instituted PD around improving adult–student interactions broadly. One administrator explained:

> We had on the list of our PD what we call the Improvement Institute where we bring the teachers in and we say this is what we're seeing through the data and anecdotally as well and share that with them and say now how…. And put it back on them as the experts. These are the tools that we think we can use to impact this piece that we think we're still missing even though again it's early in our pilot program in terms of the indicators that we're seeing, but what we did have we shared with them. Then we look for ways to refocus and figure out best practices for moving forward. That's how we're using CORE data and the data that we're pulling for our own program.

Cross-Cutting Themes Related to SEL Practices and Supports

Looking across the case study schools and districts we observe a set of five overarching themes regarding their approaches to supporting SEL: building on existing assets; intentionality in designing approaches to SEL; leveraging student agency and leadership to promote SEL; ensuring coherence and alignment among programs at district, school, and classroom levels; and addressing SEL as part of a school's larger improvement approach.

Theme 1: Building on existing assets. Within schools, particular SEL approaches were often selected and developed in ways that built upon existing assets in the schools. As an example, we contrast two schools within the same district that separately described sports and music as central to the school's SEL approach, and for many of the same reasons. These programs were designed or repurposed to build confidence, promote teamwork, build positive relationships with peers and adults, and improve student attendance and motivation for school. Interestingly, the content of these programs seemed to be far less important than the fact that they were authentic to the individual school's strengths and needs, that they were deeply embedded, and that the teachers who ran them did so with a concerted, intentional focus on

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[21] Note: Some districts make their data public on the *CORE Districts* website: reports.coredistricts.org

using the program to develop relationships and social skills for students. For example, in the sports-focused school, the PE program was run by a mother-and-son team. This family knew the school and the students well. Both teachers were well respected and a collective force at the school and had well-established relationships with students and staff. With this foundation, the PE/sports program in the school became a central part of the school's focus on relationship-building with and among students and promoting pro-social behavior and positive attitudes.

The music-focused school built on the existing asset of its music program to promote SEL. The lead teacher in this program was a passionate working musician who had a long-standing interest "in music as it relates to culture and people and social action and social justice." He used the music program to teach students how to function as part of a group, how to mentor their less experienced colleagues, and how to provide constructive feedback. All of these efforts were designed to communicate to students the goal that "we want you to grow as musicians, but more than that, we want you to grow as citizens." His longevity in his position likely played a role in embedding this program at the school, as did the fact that the school put resources (in the form of an additional teacher) into the program.

Theme 2: Intentionality in implementation. Broadly speaking, we saw that programs, structures, and practices that foster SEL and positive campus climate were implemented intentionally, not in a casual, spontaneous, or ad hoc manner.

In two districts, we found additional evidence that intentionality is important for implementing SEL-related structures and programs, and that SEL promotion can be derailed, or its effectiveness diminished, by lack of intentionality. For example, in one school, the Advisory period was the time set aside to explicitly teach SEL. One school leader told us, however, that previous iterations of Advisory were conducted ad hoc, according to the interest of individual teachers. This meant that implementation varied widely and often did not focus on SEL as intended. Advisory also provided a powerful opportunity for explicit SEL in another school but, given academic pressures, half the period was being used for academics instead. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Fronius et al., 2016), these findings suggest that having a structure or a program in place does not necessarily mean that the program will be well implemented or meet the intended goals.

Theme 3: Promoting student agency and leadership. As illustrated in the previous sections, many strategies used across schools to promote SEL also included developing or leveraging student agency and leadership. Educators and school leaders believed that efforts led by students—from kindness promotion to Advisory lessons on respect—not only helped other students to buy in and engage but also promoted positive behaviors and a school culture of trust and inclusion.

In some cases, it seemed that educators were intentionally developing student leadership in a way that also happened to advance SEL or campus climate goals. Student Council is an example of this approach. In one district, members of Student Council were tasked with, among other things, improving campus climate with school pride rallies, or promoting acts

of kindness at the school. In another district, the decision of one school to create a pathway into Student Council for students who did not meet the GPA requirements, but who had other positive attributes, enabled the school to advance its goal of equity while also promoting role models of positive student behavior.

In other cases, the desire to promote SEL or positive campus climate appeared to be the impetus to leverage student leadership to meet those goals. Several schools used student pairing or "buddy" programs to promote inclusion of Special Education students, connect lonely students to friends, or mentor students who struggled with personal issues or with being prepared for class. In two cases, school leaders enlisted students with leadership potential to improve Advisory, a class period where social skills, student well-being, bullying, and other SEL-related topics were addressed explicitly.

Theme 4: Ensuring coherence and alignment. A large body of research demonstrates the importance of coherence to successful program implementation in schools (Fullan, 2015). Although we found a wide array of programs and practices in and across districts, coherence between SEL constructs and strategies was not yet fully realized in any school or district, and the programs, practices, and curricula we found were not always consistently present or implemented across an entire school or district. We found the strongest evidence of coherence in one district, which had a long history of implementing SEL via CASEL. This district had an official SEL definition and had incorporated SEL into principal and teacher evaluation. In addition, we saw significant coherence in one district specifically around the concept of growth mindset, which was known and used at all levels.

We also found examples of schools attempting to improve program coherence. For example, one school had been attempting to improve in this area by creating a "Coordination of Services Team" (COST) to make sure that services and service providers were aligned. School leaders believed this was necessary because they employed many third-party providers and wanted to be sure that the different individuals were working to support students and the school in an aligned way. As one leader explained, the COST team coordinates "a variety of providers, community partners, all of our mental health therapists, and key teachers and administrators on-site that are working with the students closely around their social-emotional needs." In other schools, the lack of coherence may have been due to the fact that observed SEL practices were driven by individuals and not part of a school-wide strategy with broad buy-in.

Theme 5: Addressing SEL as part of a school's larger improvement approach. The experience of one district suggests that implementing or improving SEL is a multi-stage process, and that schools would do well to attend to how their particular needs affect improvement, as well as how those needs may change over time. Two schools within one district appeared to be at different points along a trajectory: One was a pioneer in SEL within the district and had embedded it throughout the school at a deep level. The other was on a path of transition and improvement, enabling us to get a glimpse of how schools with different histories and at different points along a path might approach implementation and improvement of SEL. The

school just beginning its journey had once had a reputation for a chaotic environment, and so a key first step to implementing SEL was to stabilize student behavior and school climate. One leader at the school described the campus when they arrived and how making a fundamental change laid a foundation for later work.

> When I first got here, we had 20 kids in the hallway roaming, did not go to class, all day. A lot of people came on campus without permission. It was an open campus in some ways. There was no collective messaging. It was just this is the place where I can go and that I can probably see my friends, but it wasn't a learning environment.

The school began by putting in place some very basic rules for hallway passes, which, staff reported, made a big difference right from the start. After this change, the principal recalled thinking, "Oh my god, kids are in class!" As another school leader told us:

> I feel like kids come to school to learn, and to socially interact. I think that is a positive change that I've seen, and kids seem happier. They seem like they're enjoying the process, they feel [as though] adults like them, that they want them here, they feel welcomed. It's a very different place than what it was.

Thus, this school laid a foundation for fostering a positive climate (and teaching SEL) by addressing basic needs particular to the site, which enabled them to begin explicit efforts around SEL.

Our observations suggest that meeting these basic, school-specific needs to create a stable environment may be an important first step to implementing SEL. Addressing basic needs may enable staff to then build structures that support SEL. With structures in place, school leaders may be better able to train students and staff on the new systems and build initial buy-in. Of course, even with well-established structures and training, schools will almost certainly need to ensure consistency across classrooms, events, and people; doing so likely requires building trust in enforcement and communication with staff, students, and parents. Eventually, this work may lead to authenticity and depth of implementation, which we saw at the schools further along in their journey.

Conclusions and Implications

In this report, we explored the SEL practices in one network of California school districts—the CORE districts—that are working together to measure and improve SEL outcomes. We investigated how district and school leaders and educators interpreted SEL, supported it in and outside of the school day, and used data to guide these efforts.

We found that respondents across the CORE districts and schools varied widely in their conceptions of SEL. Although district administrators we interviewed were generally familiar with the four CORE competencies and used them when defining SEL, we found significant variation in the extent to which school and classroom level respondents embedded these competencies into their definitions of SEL. Instead, respondents framed SEL in broad terms such as supporting student mental and emotional well-being, developing social skills and appropriate behavior, supporting adolescent development, and addressing the needs of the whole child. In many instances, educators' definitions extended beyond the traditional domain of SEL to include aspects of school culture-climate, such as building a culture of inclusion and creating a safe and supportive school environment. Most respondents described SEL as a means to ensuring academic learning; however, some described SEL as an end in and of itself. In addition, while most respondents saw SEL as beneficial for all students, a few suggested that SEL is particularly important for certain groups of students, such as those with special needs or from challenging home environments.

This varied and broad understanding of SEL informed educators' reports of how they support students' social-emotional development. Overall, educators reported using multiple practices to advance SEL. Some of these were formal or institutionally driven, while others were more informal or driven by the interests and concerns of individual faculty and staff.

At the school level, educators commonly reported advancing SEL via strategies to:

1. develop positive campus climate and relationships;
2. support positive behavior;
3. promote engagement, relationships, and SEL-related skills using elective courses and extracurricular activities;
4. use SEL-oriented classroom practices and curricula;
5. marshal human capital in support of SEL; and
6. employ campus-level data to track and improve SEL and CC.

We also found a set of district-level practices intended to support school-level SEL efforts, including:

1. developing SEL frameworks and priorities;
2. hiring staff or providing funds to schools to staff SEL-related positions;
3. providing programs and curricula;
4. providing training and adult learning around SEL; and

5. measuring SEL and using the resulting data.

Across these school and district efforts, the approach taken to supporting SEL often reflected a common emphasis on:

1. building on existing assets within one's school (e.g., a talented individual, a well-established program);
2. fostering SEL and positive culture-climate intentionally, rather than in an ad hoc manner;
3. promoting student agency and leadership;
4. ensuring coherence among all the various strategies within a school; and
5. addressing SEL as part of a school's larger improvement approach.

The experiences of the CORE districts and case study schools have the potential to inform the ongoing work of educators and leaders within the CORE districts and in other schools, districts, and states around the country. This research is particularly important given the changing accountability policy context and the federal ESSA call for states to include non-academic outcome measures in their accountability systems. In addition to states already focused on SEL (e.g., Illinois, Kansas, and Pennsylvania have adopted SEL standards), states across the country are likely to begin shining a light on some of the same SEL and CC domains highlighted by the CORE districts. In addition to these changes surrounding accountability, re-emerging concerns around school violence and safety are simultaneously drawing public attention to the importance of campus climate and student well-being. As a result, state, district, and school educators and leaders may gain important insights and learning from the experiences of the CORE districts and schools studied.

Implications for Policy

This study suggests several important implications for CORE district leaders and state and district policymakers nationally.

Build common understandings and alignment regarding SEL. Given the wide variation in SEL conceptions surfaced in our research, it may behoove leaders to develop common understandings of SEL in their systems and organizations. While survey measures and domains defined in the CORE surveys identify a discrete and well-defined set of SEL constructs, not all educators and leaders within the CORE districts and schools were aware of and understood them. Much like our earlier work (Marsh et al., 2016), we found misunderstandings and misconceptions about the meaning of SEL and the relationship between SEL and CC constructs. While the concept of "growth mindset" had permeated most of the sites we studied, the other competencies were less well known and understood. The conflating of culture-climate and SEL domains also suggests room for greater clarity and attention. While clearly related to and influential on SEL, improving the school environment is not the same as promoting individuals' social-emotional learning.

Literature on cognition suggests that educators and other policy implementers interpret new policy ideas through the lens of their prior experiences, and individuals are likely to mistake new ideas for familiar ones, at times impeding change (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). In fact, they often believe they are implementing a particular approach or policy as intended when in fact they have reinterpreted and possibly misinterpreted the goals and underlying beliefs. In the absence of a common conception of SEL, educators may misinterpret directives to focus on students' social-emotional development, creating challenges for the implementation of focused, organizational strategies. If SEL is viewed as a broad and ambiguous concept encompassing all of educational practice, it is unclear how a school or district might pursue specific SEL-related goals.

If in fact leaders want to support particular constructs such as self-efficacy, social awareness, growth mindset, and self-management, more support may be needed around understanding the particular meaning of these ideas. Given that most schools have implemented past programs that touch on many of the same or related goals and ideas, working directly with school and district leaders could help increase understanding of what is new or different in the call to support SEL of this particular type.

One district highlighted throughout our report appeared to achieve a relatively more consistent understanding of SEL, on its own and as something separate from CC, among individuals interviewed and schools visited. Some of this consistency may have resulted from the district's work with an external partner (CASEL) over a long period and an explicit set of SEL standards for educators and students with a clear definition of SEL embedded within. While classroom teachers still varied in their awareness and understanding of this district definition, administrators conveyed common definitions in ways not observed elsewhere.

This same district also highlights the potential value of creating aligned policy instruments to reinforce system-level understandings of and priorities on SEL. By creating standards and linking them to frameworks used to evaluate schools and the formal personnel evaluation process, this district advanced a common understanding of SEL and created incentives for individuals throughout the system to attend to these competencies. Alignment is also an important consideration for building programs that occur within and outside of the regular school day. Leaders building SEL strategies may want to examine the conceptions and approaches taken in the before- and afterschool settings to ensure that they reinforce the SEL efforts occurring during the regular school day. A related implication for policy is that improving SEL should be coordinated with other areas of school improvement. That is to say, SEL is connected to academic learning and vice versa, and it should be addressed as part of a whole-school improvement approach.

Invest in building adult understanding of SEL. Most district and school leaders reported that without strong investments in adult learning around SEL, even formal and aligned system-level structures or clear definitions were not likely to succeed. All of the CORE districts invested in professional development of some form around SEL topics, and several schools followed suit. Strategic staffing of individuals tasked with SEL further supported capacity-building efforts in

many schools and may provide additional means for building understanding around SEL and practices to support it.

Critically examine the measurement of SEL and the use of these data. The CORE districts have invested significant resources into the development and administration of surveys to measure SEL. These data appear to be useful to system-level leaders, who reported using them to hold schools and individuals accountable and for targeting PD and other interventions. Individuals at a school level reported using the results primarily for planning. Nevertheless, some respondents found these data to be less useful because they did not see them, did not receive them in time to make real-time changes in response, or did not have time to thoroughly make sense of them. CORE leaders, and policymakers more generally, may to want to consider ways to make the data more "actionable," as many respondents requested. This supplementation may include providing different types of data in a more timely fashion, providing greater assistance with analyzing data, and building in time to interpret the data. Additional support may be needed to help educators and leaders understand how to respond to the results should they show room for improvement or gaps among particular student subgroups.

Another set of questions arise with the future of the SEL survey measures within CORE. Without the federal accountability waiver and with the emerging new state accountability system, it is not clear how the survey results will be used in a formal sense. Upon their inception, the survey results were intended to be part of a formal accountability system—one that measured school performance in part based on SEL outcomes and then identified schools needing additional support based on these overall assessments of performance. In theory, this system would provide greater incentive for educators to support student SEL. If, in the new context, the measures are meant to be used in a more formative sense, then are the current end-of-year surveys the right approach? Or if they are intended to be used summatively, how are these messages conveyed and to what effect?

Make the connection between SEL and racial equity intentional and explicit. CORE's initial aim as an emerging network improvement community (NIC) is to raise math achievement among African American and Latinx students in Grades 4–8, closing gaps between these students and their White peers. CORE leaders have suggested that support for these students' social-emotional learning may further these racial equity goals. Not surprisingly, given that this work was just beginning at the time of our visits, the evidence of attention to a relationship between SEL/CC efforts and racial equity varied across districts and schools. While the NIC is still new and thus educators and leaders are still feeling their way through the early phases of developing this learning community, it may behoove CORE leaders to attend more explicitly to these issues and help each other consider additional opportunities to connect the SEL efforts to the social context of the students and educators in these districts and schools. Research suggests that "colorblind" approaches, in which individuals avoid or talk around the subject of race, often perpetuate racial inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Pollock, 2009); thus it may be helpful for CORE leaders to articulate explicitly how SEL/CC efforts relate to racial equity goals. While many educators and leaders we interviewed approached their work with a strong equity

orientation, not all connected the specific SEL programs and strategies with their equity goals per se.

Develop frameworks for embedding SEL in academic content areas. While we initially designed our study to focus on SEL in the context of mathematics, we ultimately learned more about general SEL efforts. Several respondents suggested that they were not yet ready to embed SEL into content areas, but viewed it as an important next step for their district. One district leader told us, "As a district, I would say that they're just beginning to be informed what SEL looks like in math, what it looks like in English, what it looks like in science and that's the work we're doing right now." In a few cases we found SEL work deeply embedded in district-level departments, such as efforts to infuse SEL into the district's GATE program. One district notably integrated SEL into content standards. In another district, three teachers argued that SEL should be considered a pedagogical approach rather than a component of course curricula: in the words of one teacher, "[SEL is] an overall environment that you have to create. You have to be pretty purposeful about it…. It's just sort of habit now for me. It's not like a program, or something I read, or something I write down a list of things I need to do. It's inherent." CORE leaders and policymakers broadly could now consider what content-specific SEL practice looks like and how to support it at scale. In many ways embedding SEL into academic content areas may be the next frontier in the field.

Implications for Practice

This study also suggests implications for practitioners in schools and classrooms. As noted, the purpose of this report is to identify practice-based evidence of what educators in a set of districts and schools believe they are doing to advance students' development of social-emotional skills.

Build common understanding and coherence regarding SEL. Much like the implication for policy, the findings herein suggest that arriving at a common understanding of SEL goals and conceptions may help anchor school efforts to improve SEL. Schools that reported more coherent approaches tried to not only share common definitions but also align in- and out-of-school activities around these definitions and goals. Again, practitioners would benefit from thinking of SEL holistically, as connected to academic learning and not simply an add-on or discrete program.

Consider the full range of strategies. The ideas and broad categories of practice that surfaced in our research may provide a framework for faculty to consider when developing plans to support SEL and a positive school climate. Per the implication above, however, we recognize that the collection of strategies chosen should strive for coherence by aligning efforts and anchoring them in common conceptions of SEL. Additionally, any strategies selected for use in a particular school or district should be carefully adapted to meet the needs of the students and teachers in that context. Notably, the practices we encountered included strategies focused on:

- **School climate**. These efforts focus at the school level and could start temporally by considering the start of the school year and transitions for students joining the school for the first time. What can be done at the beginning of the year or in the weeks prior to build a positive environment and positive interactions among faculty, between faculty and students, and among students? This area of work could then consider ongoing efforts throughout the year. One could also explore these strategies from the perspective of the school day. What might be done to support a more positive climate as students enter the school? As they start the day (e.g., Advisory)? During lunch?

- **Setting values and expectations, including disciplinary practice.** These strategies focus on guiding frameworks, values, expectations, and approaches. One set of frameworks guides broad values and behavioral expectations. Another focuses on disciplinary practices. This set of strategies calls for an investigation of how the school communicates what it values and expects from the students and adults in the building. It also asks for discipline policies that utilize positive rather than punitive approaches. What are the values and expectations? How do members of the school community know what is expected? How are these values and behaviors reinforced or rewarded? How does the community facilitate learning from behavioral mistakes and healing in cases of harm?

- **Classroom practices.** Another common focus of this work occurs in the classroom, ranging from the physical arrangement of the space, routines, norms, modes of questioning, building relationships, managing emotions, and providing choice. While much of this expertise likely resides among teachers already in the building, there may be ways to better cultivate and share this knowledge throughout the school, align practices across classrooms, and supplement with external partners. One might ask, who does an effective job of promoting SEL and how might we help others learn from them?

- **Elective and SEL-specific courses**. Elective courses are one commonly reported way to promote positive school climate and SEL. In many cases educators view the electives as an important avenue for team building. Another approach is to develop curriculum and courses with an explicit focus on SEL, be they standalone or integrated into existing courses. One might consider ways to more explicitly connect SEL to existing courses already offered and opportunities to develop new courses.

- **Extracurricular activities.** Similarly, clubs and afterschool programs are seen as offering opportunities to build relationships, a positive climate, and promote student engagement. These activities may offer opportunities to build on the goals and values being promoted within the regular coursework and school day and to provide new opportunities to build SEL skills and mindsets. One might ask how existing extracurriculars can be expanded and more explicitly linked to SEL and to the other efforts occurring during regular school hours.

- **Targeted interventions.** Strategies in this domain focus on individuals or small groups, often those identified as struggling in some way or comprising a particular subgroup. The idea of multi-tiered support systems was quite popular and could be one avenue to consider or expand on if already in place at one's school. Other considerations are opportunities for students to receive individual counseling, to have a space dedicated to

receive support or simply "cool down," or to form clubs dedicated to empowering students in particular subgroups.

- **Human capital resources.** Another set of strategies focuses on adults, including strategic staffing to explicitly attend to SEL and structured opportunities for developing SEL and learning how to support it among students. To consider these approaches one might take stock of the adults in the building and the alignment of their job responsibilities with the school's SEL goals. It could, in turn, direct attention to recruitment, hiring, and induction practices, to ensure all adults in the building have the skills and knowledge to promote SEL. In the context of SEL as a means for promoting equity, one might consider questions of student–staff match and efforts to hire and retain staff of color. Given that teacher turnover may affect SEL efforts, it may behoove leaders to consider ways in which improvements in school climate contribute to retention. One might also consider opportunities for partnerships with external organizations to bolster support and learning.

- **Measurement and data use.** A final set of strategies pertained to measuring and using data on SEL and CC to inform and refine practices. What are some ways to measure student SEL and CC, and how can these data be used to help plan and improve school climate and SEL supports for students? Are there opportunities to partner with others to help interpret these data and figure out new ways to respond to these results?

In some cases, these efforts will require formal structural changes, such as adding a period in the school schedule or restructuring student grouping. In other cases, strategies may involve expanding on or adjusting existing programs and activities. Seeking external partners may be another consideration for building capacity to take on these efforts.

Consider promoting student agency and leadership. As noted, one common thread among the various strategies implemented in classrooms, school programs, and afterschool venues was an emphasis on student agency and leadership. Respondents believed that engaging students in the design and enactment of SEL and CC strategies contributed to their success. School leaders and educators may want to consider ways to expand opportunities for students to play substantive roles in developing and leading SEL-focused activities.

Build on assets. Another common theme that surfaced in our research was a conviction that schools build on the existing assets on their campus. For some, this translated to capitalizing on a well-established program such as music. For others, this meant drawing on the talents of an individual who understood SEL and who was committed to expanding efforts. One implication is to conduct an assets assessment and identify opportunities to build on these strengths to further advance SEL.

Implications for Future Research

Interestingly, we initiated this study to understand SEL practices (a) in the context of mathematics and (b) with a focus on African American and Latinx students. As noted, in the course of our data collection, however, we tended not to hear about SEL specific to one

discipline or particular groups (there were exceptions, as highlighted in the section on "clubs to support leadership and inclusion"). Rather, we surfaced a set of broader approaches and strategies that educators believed were important for advancing learning generally for all students. Future studies could examine emerging efforts that are more tailored to particular disciplines or subgroups to understand if in fact these strategies differ from those that are not targeted, and what outcomes result. For example, researchers could investigate efforts to promote culturally relevant pedagogy, how they are being implemented, and their impact on student social-emotional and academic learning.

Given our study's focus on middle schools, it may behoove researchers to also examine SEL practices within the elementary and high school contexts. While many of the conceptions and strategies may be applicable to other settings, we cannot say for certain these ideas and findings generalize beyond the middle school context. Individual level-specific studies as well as comparative studies of conceptions and practices across levels would contribute greatly to the field.

Broadly speaking, future research might seek to evaluate the direct link between strategies and outcomes. As noted, we did not measure the impact of the practices or strategies identified herein, and we cannot attribute the schools' SEL outcomes to these practices or strategies. Future studies could be designed to pursue causal analyses, with a particular focus on identifying interventions, programs, and strategies that not only yield positive SEL outcomes but also help narrow gaps between students from different racial groups in reported SEL. Researchers could pursue additional measures of SEL such as teacher reports and student performance assessments that go beyond student self-reports to further examine the validity of survey measures.[22] It might also help the field to distinguish between (a) schools with high student-reported SEL due to the strategies they employ and the value added by school activities and (b) schools that might obtain high SEL outcomes due to the types of students and families who selectively enroll in these schools.

An important next step for research is to begin to develop a causal understanding of practices and approaches that improve SEL, with an eye towards how to evaluate context-specific approaches in a way that helps us learn what works and under what conditions. While the focus on evidence-based practice in SEL promoted by some studies (e.g., Grant et al., 2017) can provide useful information about potential approaches a school or district can try, isolated interventions were not the way that practitioners in our study thought about effective approaches in their context. Our research suggests that local leaders want to introduce changes tailored to the specific needs of their students and that they could benefit from support in evaluating their impact. Measurement of SEL can help here, moving us towards a framework for rigorous evaluation in this space. Similarly, a practical knowledge base about how and why to introduce specific SEL practices can help us move to improving SEL outcomes at scale.

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[22] Much of this work is currently in progress, such as the Funder's Collaborative for Innovative Measurement (http://www.innovativemeasurement.org/) and the CASEL Assessment Workgroup (http://www.casel.org/assessment-work-group/)

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Appendix A. School Sampling

Our school sampling plan was developed in partnership with the five CORE districts that chose to participate in the study. Together, we decided that the following considerations were important for selecting schools for this study: (a) that researchers felt confident that student reports of SEL were meaningfully high for selected schools; (b) that the schools selected served large proportions of African American or Latinx youth and that those students reported high levels of SEL; (c) that selected schools also were performing relatively well in mathematics; and (d) that schools were selected in each of the participating CORE districts. Along these lines, we selected middle schools using the following method:

- To be able to identify high performers on SEL in each district, we used CORE's method of scoring to create school-level SEL surveys. For the whole school and each subgroup, student responses on the SEL surveys are translated into the percentage of positive responses in each school; for example, a school with a score of 80 would indicate that 80 percent of the survey questions were answered positively by students. Based on these scores, schools were ranked in 2014–15 and 2015–16 by their performance on SEL measures with African American students and Latinx students. School indicators were excluded if there were fewer than 20 responses in the subgroup.
- We then identified middle schools that were in the top quartile of SEL scores within the district across both years for each subgroup. By eliminating schools that had high scores in one year but not the other, we are isolating schools where the high SEL reports are more consistent across time (two years) and thus more likely to represent "true" SEL for students (rather than being the result of measurement error or an anomaly). The number of schools identified in each district using this method is detailed in Figure A1 below. We then applied additional restrictions to further ensure that we were meeting the design principles developed by the group. This created several tiers of selection:
  - o Tier 1 (basic identification): Schools that are in the top quartile for both years for African American or Latinx students.
  - o Tier 2 (more restrictive identification): We identified Title 1 schools and schools that have a concentration of student subgroup greater than schools in that district at the 25th percentile. For example, in one district, middle schools at the 25th percentile for the proportion of Latinx students in 2014–15 have 59% Latinx students, so we identified schools in Tier 2 for Latinx subgroup if they had more than or equal to 59% of that student group in the school.
  - o Tier 3 (most restrictive identification): We identified schools in Tier 3 if they also have math growth scores higher than 3 in 2015–16 for the specified subgroup. The metric we used here is the CORE-developed **academic growth** metric in mathematics, which is measured as the extent to which students in a given school have improved their performance standardized test from one year to the next relative to demographically similar students who started the school year with similar prior achievement. The result is a growth percentile (rank from 0 to 100) comparing schools' contribution to student growth on math test scores.

CORE assigns these scores into 10 levels, and we selected schools with growth scores that are considered "average" or "above average."

- In every district, we select the schools sampled with the "most restrictive" criteria first, then schools with the "restrictive" criteria, and then schools with basic identification. This results in 5 "most restrictive," 3 "restrictive," and 2 "basic" schools identified for the study. In any situation where we had a larger number of potential schools than could be selected, we selected the schools that had high SEL for **both** African American and Latinx subgroups or schools with high SEL for African American subgroups. This sample selection results in 5 schools selected for high SEL for both African American and Latinx students, 3 for just Latinx students, and 2 for just African American students.

- Our final sample differs slightly from our sample design, since schools can voluntarily decide whether or not to participate. Of our initially sampled schools (10), 7 opted into the study after being invited. Three of the initially sampled schools declined and were replaced. In one case, we selected the next school in the list based on our sampling method; the school was in the most selective group. The other two replacement schools would not have been selected in any of the tiers of our method; one of them was suggested by the central office as a place with positive SEL practices, and the other was chosen as the school next in the list with the highest SEL scores. Ultimately we visited 2 schools per participating district. While the majority of these schools were traditional schools drawing from neighborhood attendance zones (6), two are in a district with a district-wide choice model, and two are magnet/selective enrollment schools. In these schools, this information was not immediately apparent and only discovered upon our visit.

- Table A1 illustrates the demographics of the initial sample, the final sample, and CORE districts as a whole. (Asterisks indicate whether the final sample is different from other CORE schools at $p < .001$ [***], $p < .01$ [**] or $p < .05$ [*]). The demographics in our sample are slightly different from CORE schools overall, with a slightly smaller percentage of Latinx students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch in our sample than in CORE schools overall. As expected given our sampling plan, our final sample has higher math performance than CORE middle schools overall (with a school average of 39.8% proficient in selected schools compared to 21.9%). Similarly, the percent of positive responses reported by African American and Latinx students is higher in our sample than overall; 67.4% of African American students and 66.8% of Latinx students reported positive SEL, compared to only 61.7% and 62.2%, respectively, overall.

Table A1. Average School Demographics of Actual and Initially Sampled Schools, Compared to All CORE Middle Schools

	Initial Sample	Actual Sample	All CORE	
African American	15.0%	15.9%	11.7%	
Hispanic/Latino	51.6%	50.6%	67.8%	*
Free and Reduced Price Lunch	66.1%	62.0%	78.9%	**
English Learner	29.0%	29.0%	39.1%	
Proficient in Math	41.8%	39.8%	21.9%	***
SEL positive responses (AA)	67.3%	67.4%	61.7%	*
SEL positive responses (HL)	68.5%	66.8%	62.2%	**
CC positive responses (AA)	68.1%	66.7%	63.9%	
CC positive responses (HL)	74.4%	72.1%	69.8%	
N	10	10	152	

Appendix B: Detailed Interview Information

Table B1. Number of Interviews by School and District

	District A			District B			District C			District D			District E			TOTAL
		School			School			School			School			School			
	Dist	A	B	Dist	A	B	Dist	A	B	Dist	A	B	Dist	A	B	
District Administrators	2			1			3			3			3			12
School leaders		2	1		2	1		1	2		1	2		3	0	15
Other (e.g., afterschool coordinators, counselors)		3	3		2	0		0	0		1	1		1	2	13
Teachers		2	2		2	4		2	2		3	4		2	3	26
Totals	2	7	6	1	6	5	3	3	4	3	5	7	3	6	5	66

Acknowledgements

About the CORE-PACE Research Partnership

In October 2015, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and the CORE Districts launched the CORE-PACE Research Partnership. This research partnership is focused on producing research that informs continuous improvement in the CORE districts and policy and practice in California and beyond. The CORE districts (Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento City, San Francisco, and Santa Ana Unified School Districts) together serve nearly one million students and utilize a unique multiple-measures data system to work together to improve student outcomes. Our research aims to deepen their learning, while sharing lessons more broadly to accelerate improvement across the state.

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