



Social and Emotional Learning Implementation with Latinx Learners

Brief 4: Status Quo and Next Steps for Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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About the Study

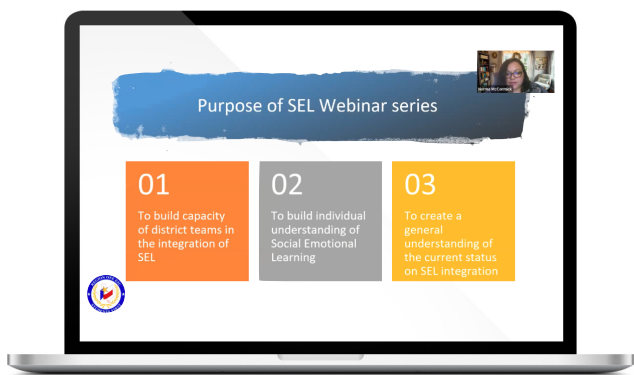
This issue brief is part of a five-part series that reports findings from research conducted by ACT in collaboration with Region One Education Service Center, a provider of educational services to over 430,000 students in South Texas who are primarily Latinx and from low-income communities. The research was funded by a NewSchools Venture Fund grant awarded to ACT's Center for Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning and ACT's Center for Equity in Learning. The overarching goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of factors related to social and emotional learning (SEL), including program efficacy, implementation, and family engagement. This brief focuses on establishing conditions for SEL implementation and includes results from a survey administered to educators who attended a professional development series on SEL. The goal of the study was to better understand participants' progress and areas of need in implementing schoolwide SEL.

So What?

The current study provides insight on how educators serving primarily Latinx students in low-income communities perceive their schools' progress toward schoolwide SEL implementation. Educators in the sample are, for the most part, in the early stages of schoolwide SEL implementation, and are in need of additional supports. While participants indicated they had the most access to foundational learning opportunities, they had made less progress in areas such as planning for implementation and building an SEL team.

Now What?

Overarching needs that emerged from all rubric areas include more professional development opportunities, including opportunities that involve parents and the broader community, a detailed plan for implementation, an SEL team that meets regularly, more time dedicated to SEL, and budget to make SEL resources available to students and teachers on a sustainable basis. By working to support these areas, districts can empower schools to implement schoolwide SEL and better prepare students for college, career, and life. Additionally, needs analyses can be performed in order to better support educators and serve students.



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Status Quo and Next Steps for Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning

Decades of research show that core academic skills are necessary but not sufficient for student success. Specifically, social and emotional (SE) skills have been shown to be key constituents of student success at school and in the workplace and are associated with a variety of desired outcomes, such as improved academic performance, improved school conduct, positive attitudes toward school, and higher levels of well-being (Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018). Because these skills can help students increase their college and career readiness, intentional efforts to develop them are important for all students. These skills are arguably even more pivotal for students who come from historically underserved groups, such as students of color and students from low-income communities, who often face systemic barriers to educational achievement and often experience lower college readiness than their more privileged peers (ACT, 2016). Further, students' SE skills may be more critical during the academic years disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, during the 2019–2020 school year and in the return to school in the fall of 2020, student social and emotional well-being rose to the forefront of schools' needs considering the ever-shifting school conditions, loss of in-person connection, and potential losses and trauma stemming from the pandemic. During that time, there was a high demand for social and emotional learning (SEL) programming in order to address students' needs, as well as the social and emotional needs of educators (e.g., EdWeek, 2021).

Current Study

Given the increased demand for student social and emotional support during the COVID-19 pandemic and the return to school for the 2020 school year, ACT and Region One Education Service Center (Region One ESC) collaborated to deliver a webinar series for educators focusing on supporting SEL within their schools. Teachers, principals, counselors, and other instructional staff from all districts within the region were invited to participate in the series, including a cohort of schools who received Gaining Early Awareness Readiness for Undergraduate Programming (GEAR UP) grant funding. Region One ESC is a long-time recipient of GEAR UP funding, and actively engages in SEL programming with their GEAR UP cohort. Schools from this cohort were included in the webinar series along with all of the other schools within the Region. The goal was to include as many schools and educators as possible within the Region One area, which spans from Laredo, TX to the Gulf of Mexico along the US-Mexico border.

The webinar series consisted of three installments facilitated by staff from Region One ESC and ACT. The three-part, interactive series focused on (a) an introduction to SEL and its importance, (b) techniques to develop adult SEL, and (c) building schools' capacity to support SEL implementation. Throughout the webinar series, participants completed the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) [Guide to Schoolwide SEL rubric](#), which is designed to measure schools' readiness for SEL implementation. The rubric assesses schools' capacity for implementing SEL in four main focus areas: (1A) Build Foundational Support, (1B) Create a Plan, (2) Strengthen Adult SEL, (3) Promote SEL for Students, and (4) Practice Continuous Improvement. Given that the webinar series was only three sessions long and some participants were not yet focusing on SEL implementation, the series focused on assessing and improving Focus Areas 1A (Build Foundational Support) and 1B (Create a Plan). The purpose of this study was to evaluate webinar participants' progress toward SEL

implementation by having them respond to questions related to building foundational support and creating a plan for SEL implementation.

Participants

The SEL webinar series was open to all educators and administrators within Region One schools. Students in Region One schools are 96% Latinx, 85% economically disadvantaged, and 38% English language learners. Furthermore, they typically fall into the category of underserved students, meaning they are either first-generation college students, have a family income of less than \$36,000 per year, or whose race/ethnicity is African American, Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islander (ACT, 2018).

All attendees of the first session of the three-part webinar series were invited to participate in a survey. Of the 201 attendees, 112 responded to at least some portion of the survey, and 92 completed the entire survey. Partial responses were used in analyses for each survey area. Respondents came from 30 different school districts within the region and represented at least 59 separate schools spanning elementary (9 respondents), middle (8 respondents) and high school (91 respondents). In addition, 43% were school counselors, 20% were GEAR UP facilitators, 18% were teachers, 7% were assistant or school principals, 4% were district administrators, and 9% reported holding another role within their respective school. Other roles included that of an instructional dean, librarian, school social worker, and STEM coordinator.

Method

After the completion of the first webinar in the series, all participants were invited to participate in a survey containing questions from the CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL rubric in Focus Area 1A and 1B. Focus Area 1A focuses on building foundational support for SEL. This includes building an SEL team, having access to foundational SEL opportunities (e.g., professional development sessions on SEL, parent information sessions on SEL), and establishing two-way communication between an SEL team and all additional key stakeholders. Focus Area 1B focuses on creating a plan for SEL implementation. This includes creating a shared vision for schoolwide SEL, planning for implementation, and securing resources (e.g., funding, professional development, and learning materials). Each area had a one to four-point response scale, with higher values indicating more advanced stages of readiness for implementation. Figures 1 through 6 show the response anchors for each rubric category. Additionally, participants were asked to respond to two open-ended items in each respective area: *What is your school already doing to support this* and *What does your school need for further success?*

For each rubric category, we were interested in using descriptive statistics to gain an understanding of where schools were, on average, in the process of building foundational support and creating a plan for SEL implementation. Additionally, we used an inductive coding procedure to identify themes from the open-ended responses to shed light on effective strategies schools were already using, as well as expressed needs for further supports.

Results

We computed descriptive statistics for each rubric response category. All items were on a 1 to 4 scale, with a 4 representing the most advanced stage of SEL implementation in each respective category. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for each of the six rubric categories. Additionally,

we report frequencies for each response category. Last, we report a summary of the major themes that emerged from the open-ended responses in each area.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Each Rubric Area

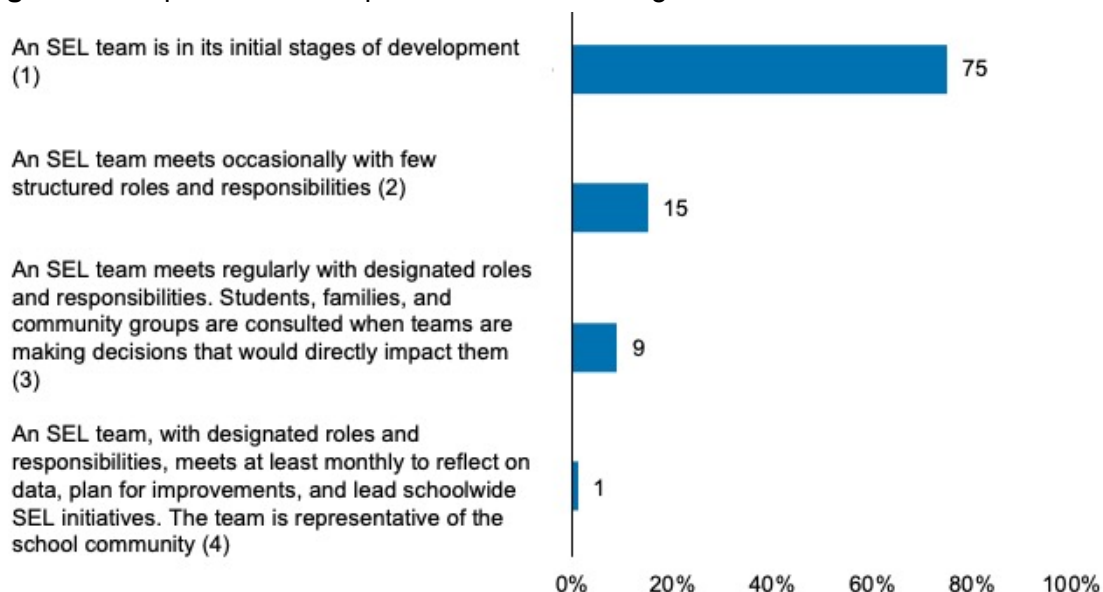
Area	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Establishing an SEL Team	112	1	4	1.36	0.68
Foundational SEL Learning Opportunities	107	1	4	1.75	0.80
Two-Way Communication	97	1	4	1.65	0.87
Creating a Shared Vision	96	1	4	1.69	0.90
Planning	93	1	4	1.37	0.81
Resources	92	1	4	1.42	0.77

Focus Area 1A: Build Foundational Support

Establishing an SEL Team

A total of 112 participants responded to the item assessing progress on establishing a schoolwide SEL team. Figure 1 reports frequencies for each possible response category. In response to the open-ended question asking schools what they were already doing to support this, respondents most commonly reported that they were involving potential SEL team members in professional development sessions, arranging meetings to discuss SEL programming, and in schools involved in GEAR UP programming, collaborating with facilitators to deliver SEL lessons. When asked what schools needed to facilitate further success, some respondents reported that an SEL team was not yet in existence. Respondents also reported needing more buy-in from key stakeholders, as well as more devoted time for an SEL team to meet in order to support this type of initiative. Additionally, respondents reported needing additional professional development opportunities, additional materials for students (e.g., activities and lessons), as well as additional training and guidance on how to establish a working SEL team.

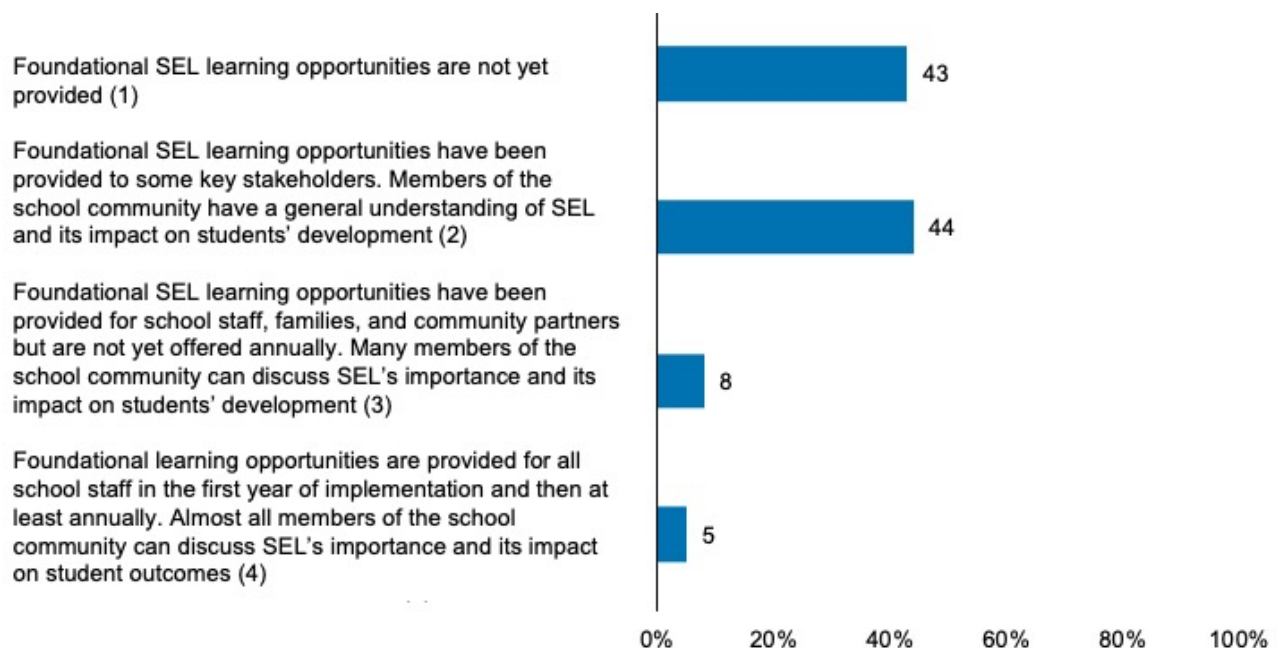
Figure 1. Frequencies of Responses for Establishing an SEL Team



Foundational SEL Learning Opportunities

A total of 107 participants responded to the item assessing the availability of foundational SEL learning opportunities. Figure 2 reports frequencies for each possible response category. When asked what schools were already doing to support this, many respondents reported that professional development workshops and training sessions, including those offered through GEAR UP, were available. Respondents also reported access to SEL resources and programming for students. These resources included existing SEL curriculum that were reviewed and implemented in addition to resources that were developed in-house. When asked about what is needed to facilitate further success, respondents most commonly reported needing more professional development opportunities, training opportunities for the larger school community, including trainings geared toward families, and additional instructional time dedicated to implementing available SEL resources.

Figure 2. Frequencies of Responses for Foundational SEL Learning Opportunities

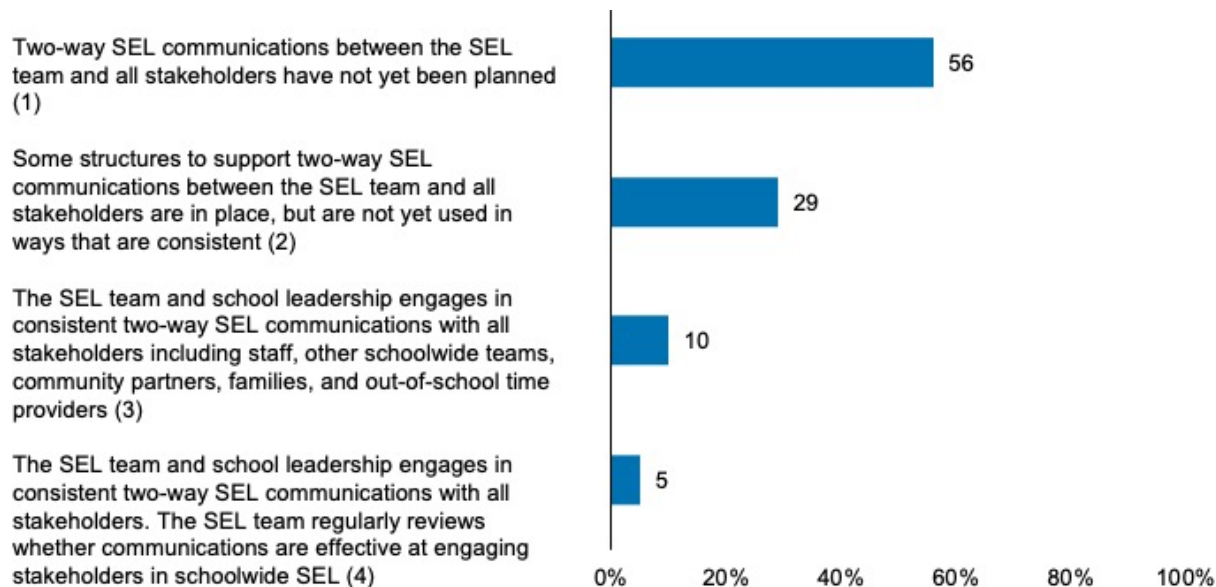


Two-Way Communication

A total of 97 participants responded to the item assessing communication between the schoolwide SEL team and other key stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers). Figure 3 reports frequencies for each possible response category. When asked what schools were already doing to support communication, many schools mentioned organized meetings with an SEL team. The role of counselors also emerged from responses. Respondents reported that counselors were pivotal in sending out SEL activities and communicating with parents, in addition to communicating with teachers from all departments. When asked about what is needed to facilitate further success, respondents most commonly reported needing more collaboration between all stakeholders, including parents and the broader school community. Additional needs included more time in general and scheduled meetings at a regular cadence during which

regular communication can occur. Last, participants mentioned the need to measure outcomes and monitor progress toward SEL implementation as a means of communicating progress to all stakeholders.

Figure 3. Frequencies of Responses for Two-Way Communication

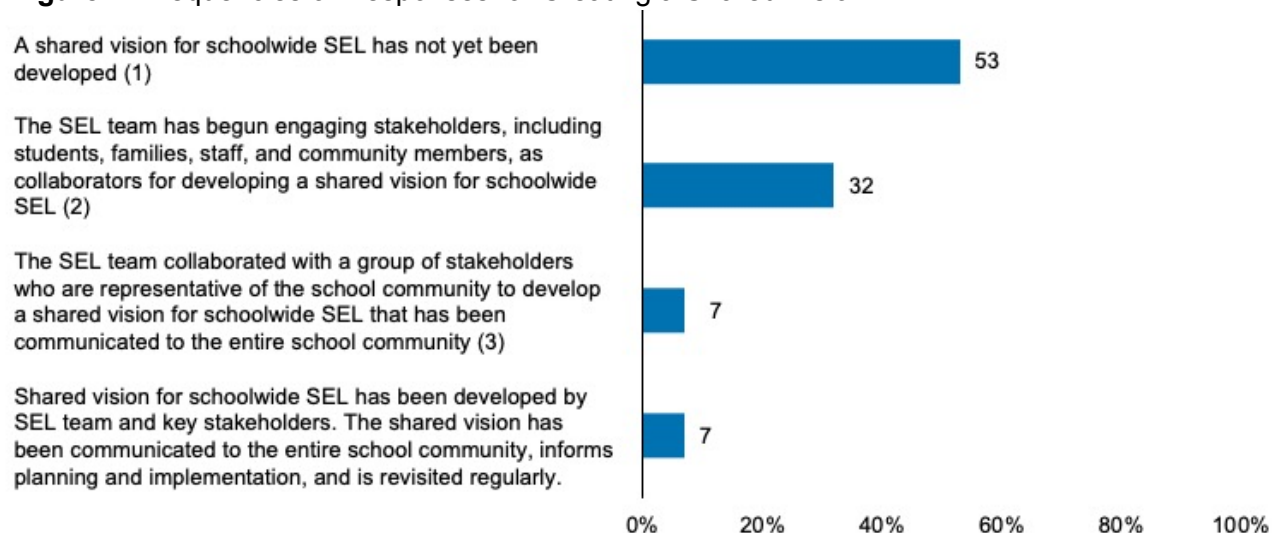


Focus Area 1B: Create A Plan

Creating a Shared Vision

A total of 96 participants responded to the item assessing whether there was a well-established shared vision for schoolwide SEL. Figure 4 reports frequencies for each possible response category. When asked what schools were already doing to support this, respondents reported that counselors were providing interventions to students and trainings to educators to support SEL. Additionally, schools were structuring SEL teams in order to create shared visions and also involving educators in professional development sessions in order to establish the value of SEL. When asked about what is needed to facilitate further success, many respondents reported still needing to establish a shared vision and/or were unsure of supports needed to establish one. Additionally, respondents reported needing to establish a shared vision with all staff members, including non-instructional staff, in order to promote SEL throughout the entire school. Last, participants noted that establishing many other areas of SEL implementation, including an SEL team, professional opportunities, communication between stakeholders, and an implementation plan, would all contribute to the development of a shared vision for SEL.

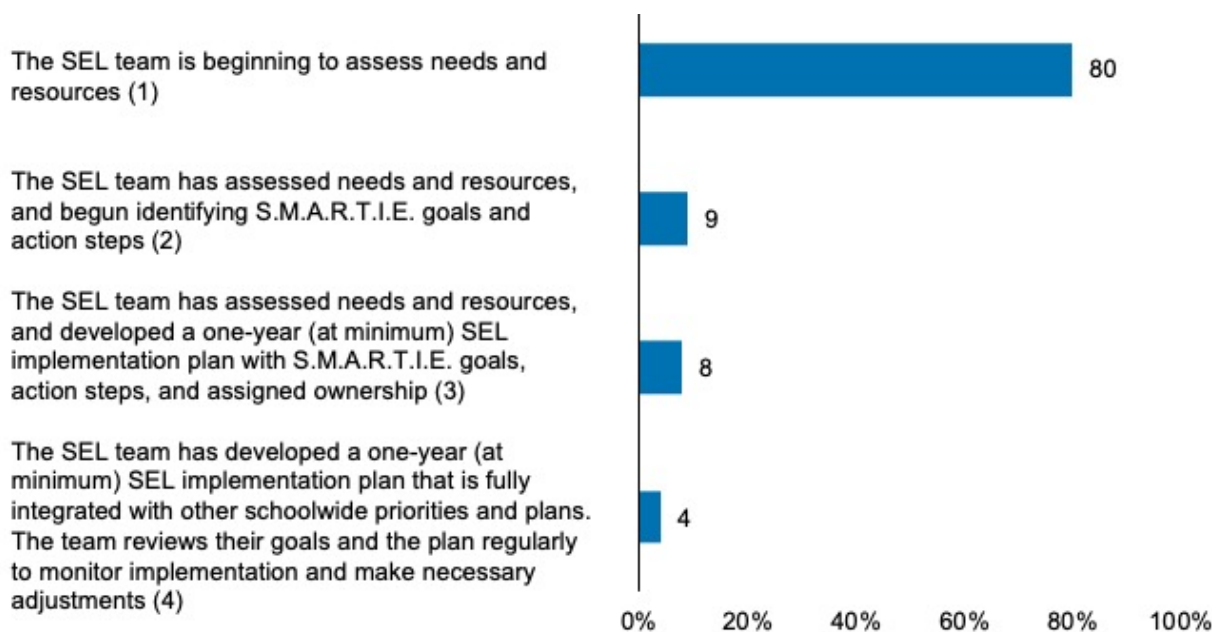
Figure 4. Frequencies of Responses for Creating a Shared Vision



Planning

A total of 93 participants responded to the item assessing how far into the planning stages teams were regarding SEL implementation. Figure 5 reports frequencies for each possible response category. When asked what schools were already doing to support this, most respondents reported that they did not have any supports in place or that they were unsure of any existing supports. For those engaging in planning already, they reported that attending professional development was helpful in supporting plans for SEL implementation. Additionally, identifying needs and resources already in existence was mentioned by several participants as a helpful stage in the planning process. When asked what is needed to facilitate further success, a detailed plan for implementation emerged as a need. Additionally, participants reported needing additional time and additional resources in supporting planning efforts.

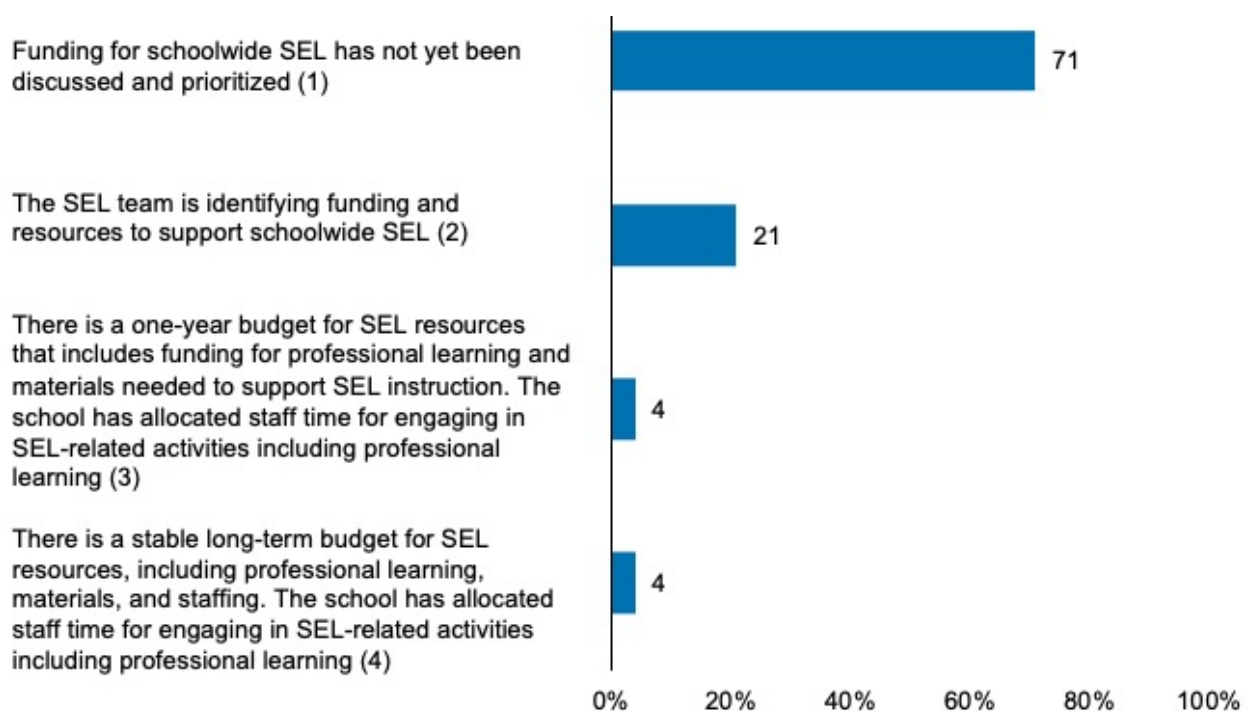
Figure 5. Frequencies of Responses for Planning



Resources

A total of 92 participants responded to the item assessing how many resources (e.g., budget funds, curriculum materials, access to professional development) schools had available for SEL implementation. Figure 6 reports frequencies for each possible response category. When asked what schools were already doing to support this, the most common response was that schools did not have resources of which participants were aware to support SEL. For those who did have access to resources, GEAR UP resources such as training sessions, curriculum and activities, and SEL assessments were commonly cited. When asked about what is needed to facilitate further success, respondents reported needing more training opportunities, additional funding, additional curriculum resources, and sustainable funding for those who already had access to SEL resources.

Figure 6. Frequencies of Responses for Resources



Conclusions and Implications

From this study, we can conclude that schools in this sample are, for the most part, in the early stages of schoolwide SEL implementation. A caveat is that most respondents in this sample came from high schools. Future studies with greater representation of elementary and middle school staff could examine differences in implementation readiness across school levels, as differences are likely plausible. Of the six areas, the area with the highest mean score, indicating schools were furthest along, was the area of *Foundational SEL Learning Opportunities*. This signifies that programming such as this webinar series, as well as other professional development opportunities, are emerging in schools within the region. The second highest scoring area was *Establishing a Shared Vision*. While schools have an idea of what they

would like their SEL team and plan to look like, they are still in the visioning stages, rather than execution of these initiatives.

The two areas that emerged as having the lowest means, signifying schools are in the earliest stages of these areas, were *Planning* and *Building an SEL Team*. This suggests that schools wishing to advance SEL implementation could do so by designating time, space, and places in the school day in which groups could meet to focus on planning for SEL. It could also be helpful to identify key stakeholders who could constitute a school's SEL team, which would be tasked with achieving specific objectives regarding school implementation of SEL. Of note, the *Resources* score also fell in the bottom half of all rubric areas. Only 4% of participants reported having a stable, long-term budget for resources such as SEL curriculum materials, professional development, and allocated staff time, and 4% reported having a one-year budget for these SEL resources. The remaining participants either reported that funding resources were still being identified (21%) or had not yet been discussed or prioritized (71%).

In summary, webinar attendees reported that they are in the early stages of SEL implementation and articulated additional needs that should be met in order to successfully implement schoolwide SEL. Overarching needs that emerged from all rubric areas include more professional development opportunities, including opportunities that involve parents and the broader community, a detailed plan for implementation, an SEL team that meets regularly, more time dedicated to SEL—especially given the challenges of the 2020–2021 school year—and more—as well as dedicated—budget to make SEL resources available to students and teachers on a sustainable basis. By working to support these areas, districts can empower schools to implement schoolwide SEL and better prepare students for college, career, and life.

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The Region One Education Service Center is part of a state-wide system of 20 regional education service centers created in 1965 by the 59th Texas Legislature to assist school districts across the state. Originally slated to work with school districts as a media center, the role of the education service center has expanded to work alongside school districts to carry out the three main objectives as stipulated in the TEC §8.002: to assist school districts in improving student performance in each region of the system; enable school districts to operate more efficiently and economically; and implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or commissioner. Located in South Texas on the United States/Mexico border, Region One ESC serves 38 school districts and 10 charter school systems in the eight county areas of Brooks County, Cameron County, Hidalgo County, Jim Hogg County, Starr County, Webb County, Willacy County, and Zapata County.

For more information, visit www.esc1.net/domain/3