



PROGRAM PLANNING GUIDE
**SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
LEARNING**



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INTRODUCTION

Even as U.S. school districts return to traditional modes of instruction, K-12 students continue to face deep social-emotional learning (SEL) challenges – a reality that’s seeping into their ability to reach expected academic progress.

Before students can recover academically, districts and schools must first address their social-emotional learning needs. But not all SEL programs are equal. Without high-quality SEL programming, your students are more likely to experience further harm and learning loss.

At such a pivotal moment, many district and school leaders are wondering how they can develop and sustain the strong SEL programs their students need. A critical first step is to develop a comprehensive approach to program evaluation – from planning to implementation to outcomes assessment. While this may sound time-intensive, there are simple, evidence-based practices every district and school can adopt right now.

This guide outlines a four-step program evaluation process that provides a framework for coordinating SEL programs that are feasible, appropriate, and effective. Following these steps can ensure that your SEL programs yield improved outcomes for all students. And when students' social-emotional needs are met, they are more resilient, ready to learn, and able to succeed academically.

Effective program evaluation can be conducted both during and after implementation. It helps to answer three core questions:

- Does the program meet the intended objectives?
- Does the program achieve the anticipated outcomes or results?
- If the program isn’t meeting anticipated outcomes, what needs to change for it to be successful?



The percent of school-aged youth experiencing a diagnosed mental health challenge prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
(Source: US Department of Education)



The number of children in the US who have lost a primary or secondary caregiver to COVID-19, as of May 2022.
(Source: Imperial College London)



The percent of educators who say student morale is lower than before the pandemic.
(Source: Education Week)



The percent of school districts in 2020-21 that met the ratio of one school counselor to 250 students that is recommended by the American School Counselor Association
(Source: Education Week)

ASSESS SEL NEEDS

Knowing which aspects of SEL programming to prioritize requires district and school leaders to recognize current needs, take stock of existing programming and resources, and identify gaps. With this information in hand, you can set goals for addressing those gaps in a coordinated way.

GATHER FEEDBACK

For SEL programming to be successful, school communities must start with a shared vision of what SEL is and why it matters. Solicit feedback from students, parents, and staff through school-wide surveys, interviews, and focus groups to uncover baseline perceptions of school climate and familiarity with SEL concepts. Collecting data and community input not only helps leaders discern the top priorities and needs, but it also builds community support for SEL initiatives.

REVIEW RESOURCES AND LOOK FOR GAPS

Investigate the funding, programming, services, and interventions that are already available or in place. Determine how well these existing resources are working (or not working) and document the challenges, needs, and improvement areas.

REFLECT ON FOUR FRAMING QUESTIONS

The Need for Social-Emotional Learning

SEL programs help schools establish a positive, safe, rigorous learning climate that is inclusive of all students. They can play a critical role in helping individual students develop resiliency and helping the larger school community deal with trauma. Core competencies associated with SEL are designed to improve skills in five areas:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

1 What are our district's priorities and goals related to SEL?

What do we hope students will achieve as a result of SEL programming? How does SEL fit into our district's current strategic priorities and overall vision and mission?

2 What specific and emerging needs does our district have related to SEL?

Are there any specific challenges to implementation or to student development that we need to address? Are there any government mandates or policies to which we must adhere?

3 What ongoing actions are we taking — and what future actions do we intend to take — to initiate, sustain, and improve our SEL programming?

Who is responsible for these actions? How do we intend to track the success and progress of those actions relative to our priorities and goals?

4 How will we ensure that SEL programming and resources are implemented and deployed equitably and reliably across school sites?

How will we ensure that the needs of all students across the district are addressed, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability status, or language status?

BUILD A PLAN

After assessing needs and priorities, it's time to set goals, build internal capacity, align resources, and select programs. Building a logic model for program evaluation will link program objectives to outcomes and enable you to better map out the resources, people, and activities needed to achieve desired results.

SET GOALS AND ALIGN RESOURCES

Using a shared understanding of SEL, district and school leaders should develop a vision statement or strategic plan that outlines SEL goals and learning standards. A sustainable funding strategy should also outline the staffing and resources needed to enact the plan.

Many districts are using ESSER funds to implement SEL programs or staffing. The **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**

recommends districts and agencies make systemic SEL investments by:

1. Promoting SEL for students
2. Supporting adult SEL competencies and capacity-building
3. Aligning SEL efforts across schools, families, and communities

BUILD STAFF CAPACITY

Without staff support, SEL programming won't be effective. Leaders can generate buy-in by engaging teachers and staff in the planning process and ensuring they have the necessary skills to effectively deliver SEL. Gather their input on what training they need to model and implement high-quality SEL initiatives. For example, in a **recent report** on the rise of school violence against educators by the American Psychological Association, teachers and staff overwhelmingly cited a need for more training on social-emotional learning and trauma-informed teaching, including topics such as inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, restorative justice, and de-escalation.

As teachers and staff build their own SEL-related skills, it will be easier for them to tackle other professional learning activities that address the specifics of SEL programs, including:

- The theory and core components of the SEL program or intervention
- The degree of flexibility permissible in implementing the program
- Strategies to overcome common implementation challenges

Looking for guidance about using ESSER funds for SEL investments?

Learn more about how Hanover Research can assist with data-informed planning, decision-making, and data analysis.

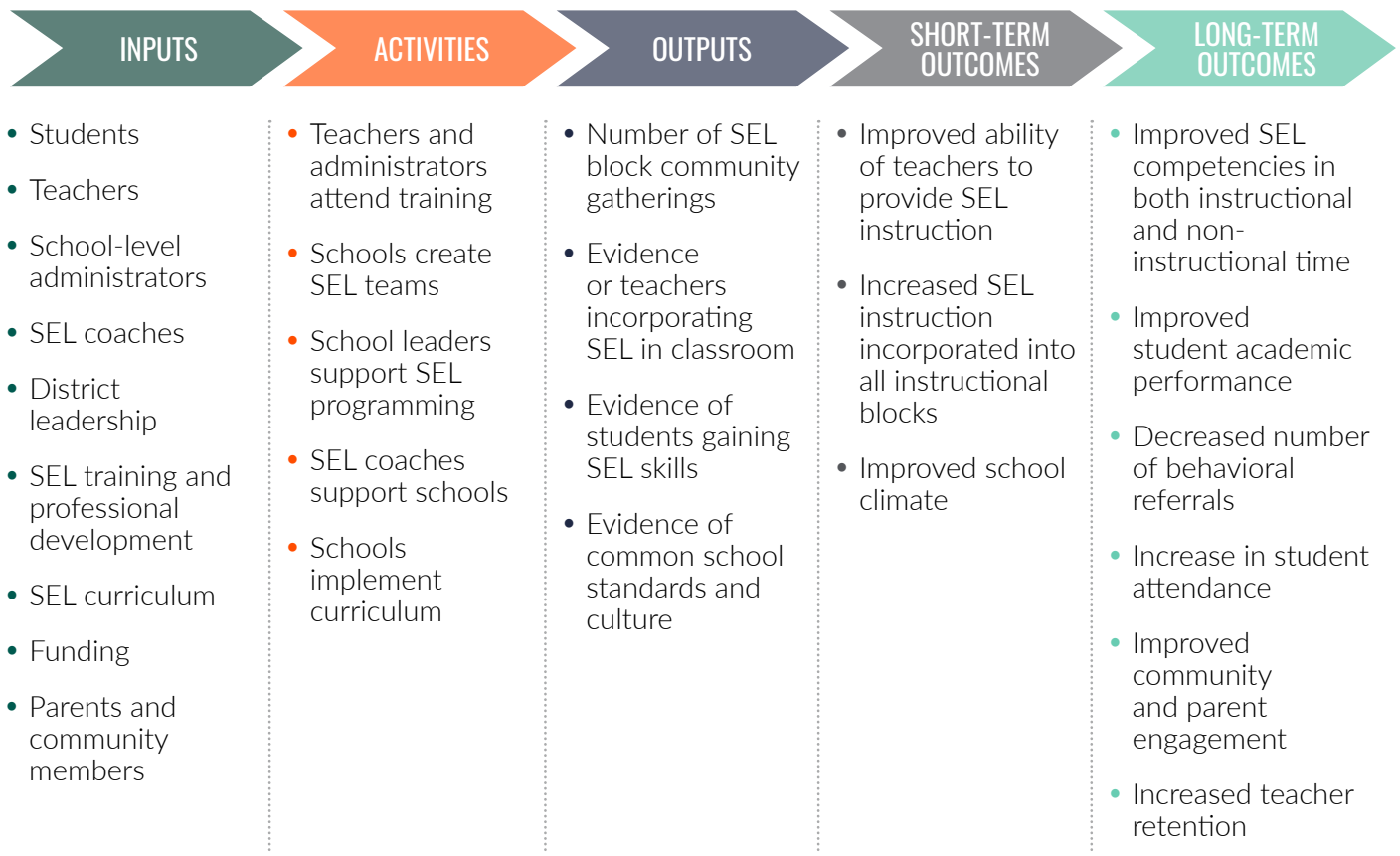


BUILD A PLAN CONTINUED

VISUALIZE SUCCESS WITH A LOGIC MODEL

Complete a logic model to organize your planning and describe expected outcomes. A logic model can help groups prioritize goals, plan strategy, and gather crucial insights. It helps district leaders visualize their intended results and clarify the design of a program. [Learn more](#) about logic models.

LOGIC MODEL TEMPLATE FOR SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM EVALUATION



RELATED READING

- ▶ [A Systematic Approach to Social Emotional Learning and Well-Being](#)
A webinar about system-level approaches to student and staff well-being.
- ▶ [District Leaders' Guide to Developing a Professional Learning Plan](#)
A research brief on developing an engaging professional learning plan for teachers.
- ▶ [Educator Learning Center](#)
A suite of virtual and culturally responsive professional learning modules for teachers and principals.

IMPLEMENT PROGRAMMING

Implementing SEL is not a solitary endeavor by a single district or school administrator. To succeed, SEL programs need stakeholder support, from administrators to teachers, support staff, and parents. Seek early input on selecting an appropriate SEL framework and communicate clearly about anticipated outcomes to build confidence and buy-in across all community members.

SELECT AN APPROACH TO SEL INSTRUCTION

Districts can implement a mix of different approaches to SEL that are instructional and organization-wide, depending on needs and goals. Those approaches include:

- **Standalone, Explicit Instruction:** Free-standing lessons that explicitly teach SEL competencies
- **General Instructional Practices:** Using practices, such as project-based learning and cooperative learning, that allow students to develop and practice SEL skills
- **Academic Curriculum Integration:** Incorporating SEL instruction into academic subjects such as English and language arts, math, social studies, and health and physical education
- **Positive Climate and Culture:** Creating school climates that support SEL development and ensuring that staff model SEL competencies both in and out of the classroom

ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Families play a significant role in supporting student SEL development, however some parents may not understand the value of addressing SEL in schools or may have misconceptions of what it means. According to a **Fordham Institute** survey, 49% of parents somewhat or strongly agree that schools should focus on academics and leave SEL to parents and others.

While some parents are **pushing back against SEL**, district and school leaders can take steps to dispel myths and illustrate its academic importance by bringing families into the SEL conversation early. According to the Fordham Institute's survey, many parents were more receptive to SEL concepts when they were categorized under another name such "life skills" or "behavioral skills," suggesting the label itself is causing concern for parents.

To give parents a better understanding of SEL programming, employ a broad communication strategy and share strategies they can use to support their children's development outside of the classroom. To maximize connections between the classroom and the home, survey families for input about which communication channels they prefer (and how often).

IMPLEMENT PROGRAMMING CONTINUED

OPTING FOR PRE-PACKAGED CURRICULA

If districts are considering pre-packaged SEL interventions, leaders should engage a team of key district- and school-level stakeholders to gather and evaluate information such as sample curricula, technical specifications, third-party quality review guidance, and interviews with other educators using that program. The team should also develop clear criteria that consider:

- Alignment with student needs
- Fit with current initiatives, priorities, structures, and values
- Costs and resources required for training, staffing, technology support, assessment, and administration
- Evidence of quality and research studies indicating the curricula results in measurable changes and positive outcomes

Successful SEL programs often share common instructional approaches, which can include:

- Student-centered discipline
- Teacher language
- Responsibility and choice
- Warmth and support
- Cooperative learning
- Classroom discussions
- Self-reflection and self-assessment
- Balanced instruction
- Academic press and expectations
- Competence building
- Positive and predictable classrooms
- Positive student-teacher relationships
- Professional development for teachers

RELATED READING

- ▶ **Implementing Social-Emotional Learning in K-12 Schools**
A workbook with checklists and reflection questions to guide SEL implementation.
- ▶ **Critical Steps to Successful Program Implementation**
A guide to investing ESSER funds in successful new programs.

MONITOR AND ADJUST

Launching a well-planned SEL program takes effort, but it's equally important to track and evaluate it once it's in place to ensure it produces the intended results. Reliable SEL outcomes for students come when educators use evidence-based strategies to continuously measure and improve their efforts.

DECIDE WHICH EVALUATION METHOD TO USE

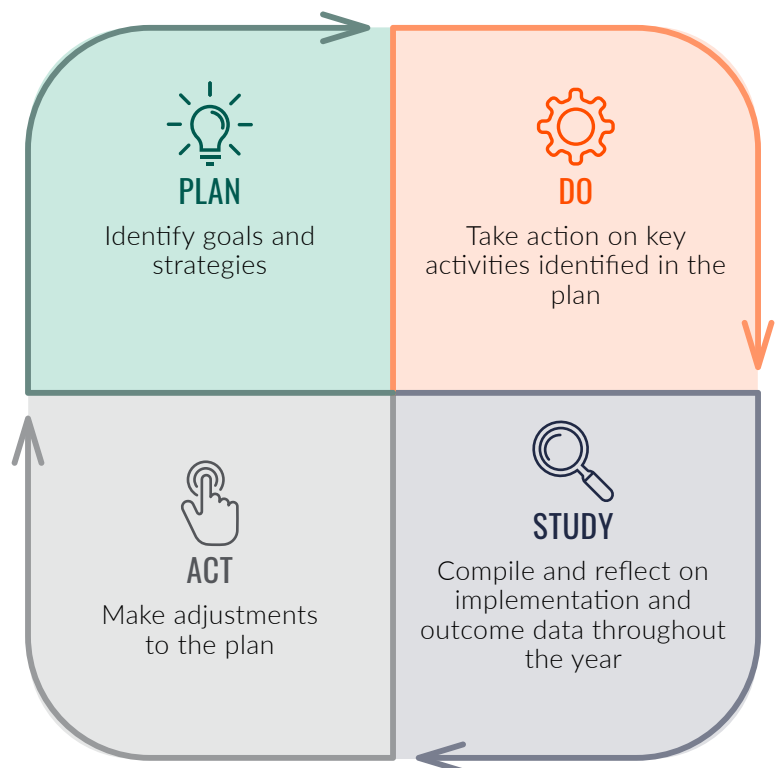
Process evaluation assesses how a program has been implemented. This type of evaluation can inform continuous improvement efforts and help to explain why a program may or may not be reaching its goals. In addition to assessing stakeholder perceptions and context, this evaluation considers:

- **Fidelity:** The extent to which the curriculum follows a program model
- **Dose:** The extent to which a participant engages with the materials
- **Reach:** The extent to which the target audience encounters the program

Outcome evaluation assesses whether a program has achieved its intended objectives or outcomes. With SEL initiatives, this means assessing whether a program has achieved the desired student outcomes or goals identified in the planning process.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

School districts should implement a structured continuous improvement process such as the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle to support SEL initiatives. Continuous improvement ensures that schools quickly make necessary adjustments to SEL programs and that programming supports strategic district goals for SEL. Implementing a PDSA cycle includes developing formal processes for collecting, aggregating, and analyzing data related to SEL implementation and outcomes.



MONITOR AND ADJUST CONTINUED

EVALUATION REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The **Education Development Center** recommends collecting and sharing the following details to support evaluations:

- Is the program being implemented with fidelity?
- Is the program an appropriate fit for the community?
- Is there adequate buy-in from staff and partners?
- Do adaptations compromise the program's core elements?
- Are the identified challenges and needs being successfully addressed by ongoing professional development and support?
- Does the site effectively use grant-provided supports?
- Does the program outcome data meet the objectives identified in the logic model?
- Are there processes in place to sustain the program (e.g., reducing staff turnover, promoting professional development, generating policymaker support)?

RELATED READING

- ▶ **Best Practices for Measuring Social-Emotional Learning**
A collection of tips and checklists for assessing meaningful SEL outcomes.
- ▶ **2022 Trends in K-12 Education**
A report on the top trends emerging for districts, including supporting social, emotional, and academic recovery, and using relief funds to advance goals.

The Current State of Social and Emotional Learning in Public Schools

Download Hanover's latest report to see how district leaders across the country are evaluating the state of SEL in their schools.

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ABOUT HANOVER RESEARCH

Hanover guides K-12 leaders in tackling academic and administrative challenges to ensure that students, parents, and staff have the tools they need to ensure all students succeed.

OUR K-12 EDUCATION SOLUTIONS

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

Determine the true effectiveness of your district operations and identify opportunities to improve.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Identify areas for improvement in your district to help all students feel supported.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Build your strategic plan to achieve organizational alignment, engage stakeholders, and address improvement areas.

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PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluate performance, measure outcomes, and determine ROI to make evidence-based investments in the highest-performing programs.

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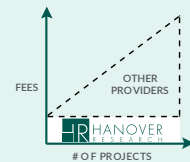
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Headquarters

4401 Wilson
Boulevard
9th Floor
Arlington, VA 22203

Charlottesville

609 E Market Street,
Suite 302
Charlottesville, VA 22902