

A District-Wide Implementation of Social Emotional Learning During a Pandemic

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Social emotional learning (SEL) has shown significant positive effect on self-management and self-awareness; however, teachers have been skeptical of implementation due to the amount of extra time and resources. This article presents a case study of how a school district implemented SEL using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework through a trauma-informed lens during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) is gaining momentum across the nation as compelling evidence suggests that academic, social, and emotional skills are related and connected (Durlak, 2016) with the most significant positive effect on self-management and self-awareness (Van de Sande et al., 2019). Yet, over the last two decades, teachers have been skeptical of implementation due to the amount of extra time and resources (Buchanan et al., 2009) and their comfort level of being coached (Quraishi, 2019).

Evidence shows that SEL positively influences student academic growth and achievement (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). Current SEL implementation efforts focus on developing social emotional domains and measurable competencies that integrate developmental psychology, educational theory, and cultural relevance (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

While there are implementation recipes provided by Think Tanks, such as RULER, an acronym for Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, and Regulate Emotions (Durlak et al., 2015), and state and local policymakers have significant documentation for successful implementation, it is not as simple as having the printed formula on a recipe card. Nor does the implementation process guarantee that the outcome will occur as desired (Durlak, 2016).

This article focuses on a case study of how a school district implemented SEL using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework through a trauma-informed lens during the COVID-19 pandemic. We

start the article with the barriers to SEL implementation and the need for trauma-informed instruction. We then present a district-wide implementation of SEL through an exploratory single case study by sharing the methodology and the strategies used by the district for implementing SEL. We conclude with effective trauma-informed teaching practices and lessons learned.

Supporting Literature

Barriers to SEL Implementation

Studies show barriers and resistance to district-wide SEL implementation (Oberle et al., 2016). Two known barriers to implementation are resources (such as professional development), support, and time. Buchanan et al. (2009) examined teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL and revealed that while teachers feel that SEL is necessary, the resources required for implementation are lacking. Teachers report that they do not have the time for SEL implementation, with many expressing that it is "not feasible" to spend 30 minutes of prep time to prepare SEL teaching materials and that spending 15 minutes is only "somewhat feasible." Essentially, the "not feasible" position ranks higher than the "very feasible" position (Buchanan et al., 2009). A report from the Foundation for Young Adult Success questions the practicality of giving "another thing" for teachers to design and disseminate when they are often already overloaded (Blyth et al., 2019).

Another implementation barrier at the district level is a lack of SEL skills in the instructional staff, specifically in the competency of self-awareness. Wood (2018) states that SEL can promote the marginalization of some students' experiences if teachers lack self-awareness of their own bias or lack cultural literacy. Panayiotou et al. (2019) contends that a lack of teacher self-awareness is the highest limiting factor to SEL implementation. This might suggest that educators ought to frame their SEL experiences in a pluralistic context, thereby allowing students to apply multiple values to their experiences rather than assign meaning to the experience by the power structure operating in the district.

One common thread of inadequate implementation is the belief that SEL is just another fad in instruction, and the result is inconsistent implementation towards an embedded approach (Panayiotou et al., 2019). There are most likely several reasons why successful and sustained SEL implementation is challenging for schools and districts.

In addition to the known barriers to implementation, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the mental health of students. It created an adverse community environment. Within this environment, students experienced stressors that are known to increase the risk of toxic stress, defined by adverse experiences that lead to strong, frequent, and prolonged activation of the body's stress response system. For many students, the pandemic created feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and profound loss. For families already facing daily stressors such as poverty, illness, community violence, racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma, or family dysfunction, the challenges brought forth by the pandemic only increased the risk of psychological trauma (Imad, 2021).

The Need for Trauma-Informed Instruction

Starting around the 1980s, the field of psychology began to formally recognize psychological trauma as a medical diagnosis by naming "posttraumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) as a clinical diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) (Thomas et al., 2019). Since then, there has been an explosion of research on psychological trauma as well as enhanced definitions to inform the myriad of ways psychological trauma can impact both individuals and communities.

In any given classroom across the U.S., it is estimated that two-thirds of all students will have experienced at least one traumatic event by age 16 (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). Aside from acute and single-incident experiences of trauma, the definition has broadened to address multiple and prolonged traumatic experiences in childhood that often disrupt primary attachment bonds. This is referred to as complex or developmental trauma. Research has also expanded to bring awareness to historical trauma, which is the cumulative effects of group or community trauma across generations, such as war, poverty, oppression, slavery, genocide, racism, and discrimination (Mohatt et al., 2014).

Research has also documented that microaggressions negatively affect the biological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral well-being of marginalized populations (Sue, 2010). What might appear to some as trivial or unintentional slights are often experienced as major stressors for persons of color, individuals from marginalized ethnic or religious backgrounds, and individuals in the LGBTQ+ community (Sue, 2010). There are other psychological challenges such as the digital age, where students face obstacles in terms of navigating their social worlds and their evolving ego identities among the constant stream of information and social influencing thrust upon them within their social media platforms. These experiences can lead to psychological trauma for students in significant numbers.

Research has demonstrated that psychological trauma impedes school performance, given its direct impact on social, emotional, and cognitive development (Perfect et al., 2016). With the primary goal of educational institutions to prepare children for their future, it is no wonder why the importance of trauma-informed practices in the classroom and school community has become a national movement.

District-Wide Implementation of SEL: An Exploratory Single Case Study

Teachers are the engine that drive SEL implementation (Ross & Tolan, 2018). Much is written in terms of implementation methodology. Almost every state has specific SEL implementation standards, and these SEL standards align with the Every School Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). However, the literature regarding how SEL is implemented in a district is sparse. Previous studies focus on the validity and benefits of SEL on students' social and emotional growth and academic achievement (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). The absence of comprehensive district-wide implementation in the literature suggests a need to understand how all the pieces of implementing SEL fit together. Therefore, an exploratory single case study looked at how a school district implemented an SEL framework.

The study focused on relationships that were interdependent in the phenomenon of SEL implementation (Yin, 2018). The intent was to investigate and capture complex action, perception, and interpretation of that implementation as applied to the synthesis of Greenberg's model of implementation (Greenberg et al., 2017) and how inner and outer contexts and factors affect that implementation (Moullin et al., 2019).

The case study focused on a medium-sized school district in the Midwest with a student population of 3,000–5,000 students. The data collection focused on the experience of administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of SEL using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework. While the district did receive a small implementation grant from the state, the district administrators have stated that money is not a limiting factor. The greatest limiting factors are personnel models with school counselors, counselors as SEL coaches, using a k-12 district language related to SEL competencies, professional development of staff for SEL instruction, and personal self-awareness and self-management.

Data Collection

The discovery of participants' constructivist understanding occurred through semi-structured open-ended interview questions, which allowed participants to share their views and researchers to understand the construction of their meaning of SEL implementation (see Appendix A: Interview Protocol Guide). This research afforded the opportunity to focus on the participant experience, including the historical and cultural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The degree of interconnectedness of resources and processes was unique to the district and across the levels of leadership and teachers, which allowed for the discovery of those resources and processes that occurred at the varying levels of leadership. Data collection consisted of 15 semi-structured interviews for a duration of 40-60 minutes each. Participants included district and school-level administration, including members of student services, SEL coaches, and teachers. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded with the permission of the participant during the pandemic. Table 1 shows details about the study participants: the first five are district-level administrators, the second

five are school-level administrators, including the SEL coaches, and the last five are teachers. Students were not interviewed in this case study.

Table 1

Study Participants

Admin/Teacher Level	Gender	Experience	Years of Experience
High-Level Administrator	M	Elem teacher, administration	21
Director of Student Services	F	Teacher, SWD, CESA, more than two districts admin	28
Program Director	F	Elem teacher, college & career readiness org, administration	20
Multilevel System Support Specialist	F	Licensed psychologist, school psych	10
Program Coordinator	M	Business teacher, admin	21
Elementary School Principal	F	Science teacher, admin	21
Middle School Principal	F	Teacher, admin	21
SEL Coach Elementary School	F	Social worker, MSW, counselor	15+
SEL Coach Middle School	F	Rehabilitation specialist, SWD, university professor, international experience	15+
School Psychologist	F	School psychologist	7
Teacher Elementary 1	F	Elem teacher	27
Teacher Elementary 2	F	Elem teacher	4
Teacher Middle School 1	F	Middle-level teacher, several states	31
Teacher Middle School 2	M	Middle school teacher	30
Teacher Middle School 3	F	Middle school teacher	5

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Elemental methodology, using descriptive and process coding, and the Affective methodology, using evaluative and values coding (Miles et al., 2014). Elemental methods are a type of first cycle coding that provides both the description and detail of the process (descriptive and process coding) (Miles et al., 2014). Effective methods allow for the coding of the participants' subjective experiences. This includes the values, attitudes, and beliefs associated with implementation (values coding) and the judgment and value that the participants have for the process, policies, and organizational structures associated with implementation (evaluation coding) (Miles et al., 2014). Subcodes of first cycle codes were developed after interviews were transcribed and provided more specific qualitative analysis of the data. Analysis of the subcodes led to the development of patterns, second cycle coding, that emerged from cross-referencing values and evaluative codes with descriptive and process codes. As an example, data that were coded as chronological dynamics, or a process that was needed at a specific place and time, were also coded with a values code. This allowed for the identification of how teachers and administrators felt or valued certain processes or the value of certain resources. An example of coded data can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Examples of Coded Data

Code	Examples of Coded Data with Subcode Distinction
Descriptive	District Level Administrator: "To develop our SEL framework, there are components of AVID and ACP. [They] both mesh with social, emotional learning of CASEL. Those are skills that students need to be college and career ready." Coded as Informational Resource (R.I.)
Process	School-level Administrator: We looked at restructuring our staffing. At that time, we had school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. The idea was to combine the role of the school counselor and the social worker and create a new role, which was a social emotional coach. Coded as an Implementation Process statement (I.P.)
Evaluation	Administrator: "SEL is becoming more important in this district, with the state moving in the direction of, and providing support for, a comprehensive school counseling model." Coded as an Evaluative statement (E)
Value	SEL Coach: "My first impression [of the implementation plan] was thank goodness! We are finally going over the concepts and really able to teach those concepts to all, to all students!" Coded as a Values statement (V)
Pattern	Allowed for Values coding to be applied to Process and Descriptive coding. The theme of high value being placed on SEL coaching emerged from the data

Data Triangulation

The study used three forms of data triangulation to increase the accuracy of the findings: 1.) interview data with different district and school leadership and teachers (themes were built on converging data and perspectives given by participants. The coding of the interview transcripts validated the reviewer's lens), 2.) colleague coding of transcripts to check for consistency, and 3.) study participant feedback (three participants responded to the coded data with a sense of affirmation. There was no disagreement from participants with the coded data) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Strategies for Implementing SEL in a School District

The case study sheds light on important strategies for implementing SEL in a school district. The first step in implementing SEL was to select a framework. The school district had four existing programs at various grade levels for improving behavior and preparing students for their futures (Zones of Regulation, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS], Advancement via Individual Determination [AVID], and Academic and Career Planning [ACP]). The district in the case study chose the CASEL framework for two reasons: 1.) the district's existing programs were flexible enough to be integrated into the SEL framework, and 2.) the SEL framework was adopted by the state and aligned well with existing programs. The school district used human resource strategies to implement the SEL framework in the classroom. While the teachers were not involved in the framework decision-making process, teachers were highly engaged in the SEL implementation process with SEL coaches by participating in professional development and professional learning communities.

Following the selection of the framework was how the district's organizational structure managed resources for implementation. Three human resource strategies with curricular and instructional integration were used for the successful implementation of SEL: 1.) creation of dedicated SEL coaches, 2.) professional development for instructional staff, and 3.) support for professional learning communities.

Dedicated SEL Coaches

The first key resource management decision to implement SEL in the classroom was to create new positions, dedicated SEL coaches. SEL coaches in this case study had backgrounds in psychology and counseling. The SEL coaching position was a realignment of the school counselor role and integrated with student services. One innovative component of the role was to work with both students and teachers. The traditional school counselor role would be limited to only working with students. The SEL coach position was an innovative move in human resources allocation for the district. One administrator described the position: "It was important that we develop these positions as social emotional coaches. Those individuals can support individual student needs as they're determined, and they would help develop and grow the skillset of teachers, that can help our students grow their social emotional competence."

Professional Development for Instructional Staff

Professional development was a large component of the SEL coaching position and included providing professional development for both instructional practice and teachers' self-management and self-awareness. Coaches were asked to analyze local survey data, specifically for school perceptions, and were also asked to co-teach with teachers in the classroom.

Professional development started with the coaches' training. Following their own training, the coaches provided professional development for the teaching staff. This process allowed teachers to integrate the SEL framework into the classroom, collaborate with other peers, and develop their own SEL self-awareness and self-management.

One district administrator described the SEL coach development: "We have relied on our SEL coaches for professional development who then would turn around and be the facilitators for their staff at their school building." She continued with details of efficiency, "They provide lesson facilitation at minimal costs compared to professional development from CASEL, who would put the curriculum together in a sequenced manner. That makes sense to the SEL coaches." This process provided personalization with coaching teachers.

SEL coaches co-taught with content teachers in the classroom. This practice solidified previous professional development of scope and sequence integration, common language use among teachers and students, and teachers developing their own self-awareness and self-management. Coaches as co-teachers helped the classroom teachers perfect their craft of SEL integration into classroom instruction and ultimately implement SEL in the district. One principal described how co-teaching enhanced her professional development:

Having [a coach] come in the class allowed the teacher to work through [SEL] with the students. I think SEL implementation [requires the teacher to] build a lot of empathy for the child. [Co-teaching] builds that relationship between the teacher and the child and the teacher and the coach as well.

The co-teaching model included working with students in large group instruction, problem-solving with students in the classroom, and working and planning with staff. One SEL coach said, "co-teachers have a more proactive role with students and in SEL implementation in the classroom." One school-level administrator spoke to the development of co-teaching for SEL implementation, saying, "I think our universal system wasn't totally yet designed for [SEL coaches as co-teachers]. Classroom teachers really valued it. They made it happen and continue to make it happen. But it's been a long road for sure."

Professional Learning Communities

Part of the district's organizational structure for managing resources for implementation was the development of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The PLC had a focus on data assessment and support for implementation improvement.

Teachers and administrators referred to data assessment as a core function in their PLC. They spoke about their experience with an SEL-centered data assessment team, which included their SEL coach. Those teams and PLC meetings helped increase the productivity of SEL implementation of teachers by developing learner profiles from the data analysis of grade-level data and culture and climate surveys.

Some study participants mentioned that the pandemic had increased their level of awareness of the importance of SEL. Another teacher spoke candidly of his increased productivity while working with a data team. Learner profiles were a product of the data assessment teams. Students had a learner profile that was composed by the team from academic and SEL data. The profile had an action plan for the student. Learner profiles travel with the student, and as the student moves onto the next grade level, the new grade-level teacher receives the learner profile. This process increases the productivity of implementing SEL.

The culture and climate surveys provided data for the PLC data teams. These data sets are used to assess the growth of the program at grade levels. These data allow PLCs to determine the growth areas and areas of success that can be

used across the district. Learner profiles and survey data added to the culture of continuous improvement.

The staff that stays in the district develops self-awareness and self-management that promotes continuous improvement. That process focuses on the data, the assessment of the data, and the quality of instruction. That focus allows for the successful management of resources required for SEL implementation. Implementation is viewed through the lens of inner and outer contexts of conditions, resources (Greenberg et al., 2017), and limitations. From this perspective, bridging factors (Moullin et al., 2019) could be analyzed and become key components of implementation. One key factor was COVID-19, which became a catalyst for implementation, meaning the pandemic highlighted the need for SEL support for students.

This study was limited to a medium-sized school district and participant selection in the Midwest. A further limitation was that the participants were selected from schools in a district that had been identified as having implemented SEL. A further limitation was that the selected district might not include a diverse group of communities with diverse student populations or diverse staff members.

Effective Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices

Two types of intervention that have been identified as effective means for teachers to utilize in their classrooms to meet the needs of students impacted by trauma are 1.) teacher assistance of student self-regulation followed by 2.) teacher engagement in a positive connection. Both interventions were supported in the case study through professional learning for staff, addressing and increasing their own self-awareness and self-management skills, as well as professional development for student development of self-awareness and self-management. SEL coaches were instrumental in this professional learning and development.

It has been established in trauma-informed literature that when students increase self-regulation and develop teacher and peer relationships based on positive regard, new learning is enhanced (Brunzell et al., 2016). These two interventions have been found crucial to meet the challenges of classroom learning (Herndon & Bembunty, 2017).

Brunzell et al. (2016) explored how teachers implemented a practice pedagogy model referred to as Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE) (Brunzell et al., 2016). TIPE was outlined as an evidence-informed model synthesizing current research derived from trauma-informed education models (Wolpov et al., 2009) and positive education models (Waters et al., 2017). TIPE presents a tri-consecutive method of teacher practice to engage their trauma-impacted students in the classroom. The first two phases of this intervention, outlined above, increased student self-regulation through teacher assistance and teacher engagement in positive connection. The third phase involves increasing student agency in accessing psychological resources. This final step is a part of wellbeing-informed education models (Waters et al., 2017).

The literature provides evidence of the success of increasing student access to psychological resources with the integration of well-being interventions in the classroom (Waters et al., 2017). The ability to be open to new learning and new skills is inherent in the strategies required for students to increase psychological resources. This third phase in the TIPE model supports both student well-being and academic growth (Brunzell et al., 2016). This model was designed to help teachers understand the academic and social emotional challenges of their students and to help teachers create goals for student learning based on this understanding. The case study outlined in this article demonstrated the success of using SEL coaches to assist teachers throughout the school year by incorporating a TIPE model way of engaging students, encapsulating the struggles of trauma-impacted students, as well as the student body as a whole.

Lessons Learned: Bridging Factors

SEL implementation hinges on SEL coaches. Without the coaches, the professional development of teachers and the development of learning communities would not occur. Durlak et al. (2015) explain the need for SEL coaches to have a

background in the mental health field. Coaches became a bridging factor (Moullin et al., 2019) for the learning community and the informational resources in the school district.

Gorski and Dalton (2020) and Wiglesworth et al. (2016) agree that one limiting factor for SEL implementation is the limited self-awareness and self-management of teachers. The root problem lies in the teachers' inability to address ways to develop the self-awareness of students if teachers do not have their own self-awareness (Gorski & Dalton, 2020). This case study offers options for professional development for teachers by working with the SEL coaches who have backgrounds in clinical psychology. This shows that SEL coaches with a background in psychology are more successful (Durlak et al., 2015).

While professional development is often difficult for teachers (Durlak, 2016), the SEL coaches in the school district provided professional development to the teachers in a non-threatening and personalized manner. Though the process was stressful for some teachers, there was no evidence of long-term stress on teachers. The experience of the pandemic increased the openness and receptivity of professional development for teachers. One teacher stated, "I feel like COVID might have helped us with respect to understanding that kids' needs are beyond the four walls. I feel like educators might be able to ask now, what are our social and emotional learning responses to kids? This pandemic provided a catalyst for professional development." This statement highlights the increased understanding that teachers developed as the pandemic affected students.

Co-teaching coaches allowed for real-time coaching in the classroom and provided teachers the opportunity to use the language and integrate the scope and sequence with grade-level specifics. The co-teaching model included working with students in large group instruction, problem-solving with students in the classroom, and working and planning with staff. This practice gave teachers confidence. Developing a co-teaching structure increases caring student-teacher relationships and provides a foundation for increased self-management (Rabin, 2020). Professional development of scope and sequence integration and common language development happened in real-time as SEL coaches co-taught with content teachers. An added benefit was discovered that teachers developed their own self-awareness and self-management. One principal described how co-teaching enhanced her professional development, "Having [a coach] come in the class allowed the teacher to work through [SEL] with the students. I think SEL implementation [requires the teacher to] build a lot of empathy for the child. [Co-teaching] builds that relationship between the teacher and the child and the teacher and the coach as well. Coaches as co-teachers helped the classroom teachers perfect their craft of SEL integration into classroom instruction and, ultimately, implement SEL in the district.

Professional learning communities (PLC) have been in the literature for decades, and many of the PLCs focus on social awareness (Durlak et al., 2015). Social awareness and responsible decision-making competencies of CASEL aligned well as the district worked through the challenges presented by the pandemic. PLC in the district addressed student needs associated with social awareness by developing empathy for students in their socially restricted lives. Coaching occurred in the PLC as teachers recognized the increasing needs of students. COVID-19 quarantines and isolations heightened the need for developing social awareness among students. This case study shows the organic development of the PLC with an SEL focus, and at the center of that development is the SEL coach. The SEL coach position provides the bridging factor between the professional development of teachers and the teaching and learning of informational resources.

Conclusion

The effect of COVID-19 led to an increased awareness of the need for SEL implementation. This case study revealed that the level of awareness increased for teachers and school- and district-level administrators. The pandemic was a catalyst for teachers to develop self-awareness and self-management. Both coaches and teachers spoke to the pandemic as a factor that allowed the acceptance of professional development. The adjustment from face-to-face instruction to virtual learning increased the potential for social isolation. Increased isolation during the pandemic promoted the manifestation of stress and anxiety (Kamei & Harriott, 2021). SEL needs will increase even with schools returning to normal, which suggests that the educational system has experienced considerable stress and anxiety, and

K-12 education will experience long-term negative effects (Rosanbalm, 2021). Teachers in this case study reported that student isolation was common, which highlighted the need for SEL integration into daily instruction. SEL instruction and coaching is the most likely process that could equalize the setbacks to students due to COVID-19 (Summers, 2020). In this case study, teachers became more focused on the necessity of implementation as the need became more evident.

Meaningful progress in district initiatives requires commitment and effort from many moving parts. Coordinated programs in the context of the systemic district and school-wide programming can provide the most significant benefit for students (Alexander & Vermette, 2019). Administrative and policy support is necessary for teachers to effectively provide SEL programming (Weissberg et al., 2015). Without coordination between teachers, administrators, policymakers, district leaders, and support staff, a district may not realize the benefits promised by SEL implementation.

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Appendix A – Interview Protocol Guide

For District Level Administration

Introduction and Demographics

1. How long have you been in Education?
2. What positions have you had over that time?
3. How long have you been in your current position?

Deciding on a Framework

1. What was your first impression of SEL, and how important is it for student development?
2. Can you tell me about the process of how you decided to implement SEL in the district?
3. What were your initial thoughts regarding barriers to implementation?
4. Who was involved in the process of choosing a framework?
5. If a district decided to implement SEL, who should be at the table for framework selection?

Allocating Resources

1. What resources did you allocate for embedded SEL implementation?
2. Looking back, what turned out to be the most critical resources?
3. How much time does it take to implement SEL?
4. What would you have done differently, or did it go as planned?
5. I'm assuming there are implementation costs. Could you elaborate on the district cost?
6. Some research suggests that there is an 11:1 return on every dollar invested. What are your thoughts on that?
7. What are some examples of professional development for the staff?
8. Do you feel that the professional development was sufficient? Implementation:
9. If a visitor walked into the school, what would SEL look like to them?
10. Were there times you feel like you were stuck as a district?
11. Did you ever wonder if it was too difficult to implement?
12. Who are the key stakeholders that make-or-break implementation?
13. How important is the expertise afforded by guidance counselors or other professional groups?
14. Can you share a story of the positive impact that SEL has had?
15. How did you know when you implemented SEL or when you achieved the goal? Wrap up and concluding thoughts:
16. Thank you very much for your time, is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered?

For School Level Administration

Introduction and demographics

1. How long have you been in Education?
2. What positions have you had over that time?

Deciding on an SEL Framework

1. Tell me about the first time you heard about SEL, and what were your impressions of the idea?
2. What would a staff discussion look like when discussing frameworks or competencies?
3. Were there any outside influences or factors which affected the decision to go with a particular framework?
4. Did you have initial concerns about implementing Social emotional learning?
5. What advice would you give a school leader regarding the implementation process? Implementation process:
6. What resources would you say are required for implementation?
7. Was there a perception of "building the plan while you were flying?"
8. What did the professional development look like for the staff?
9. Was the staff compensated?
10. Some research suggests that one limiting factor with implementation is the self- management and self-awareness of the staff. What are your thoughts on this?
11. Was there professional development to assist teachers with their SEL development?
12. All SEL frameworks have competencies. Can you tell me how you track student advancement?
13. What are your thoughts on students assessing and tracking their progress? Interacting human resources:
14. Did you ever think that SEL implementation was too difficult? If yes, what kept you moving? If no, would your staff agree?
15. Can you tell me if one particular thing led you to believe that you arrived at implementation?
16. Who were the key stakeholders that make-or-break implementation?
17. Can you tell me if teachers had concerns about additional work and responsibility, and if so, how was that addressed?
18. Many teachers talk about adding things to their plate, yet the research suggests that teachers find greater satisfaction in their job after implementing SEL. What would you say about that?

Instructional Staff

Leadoff and demographics

1. How long have you been in Education?
2. What positions have you had over that time?

Deciding on an SEL Framework

1. Tell me about the first time you heard about SEL, and what were your impressions of the idea?
2. What was the discussion like among staff regarding the framework options?
3. Can you tell me about the process of selecting a framework?
4. To what degree were teachers involved in the planning and framework selection?
5. If another district were to start the SEL implementation process, what should they know about framework selection?
6. Who are the key stakeholders when selecting a framework? Allocating resources:
7. Did the teaching staff have all the resources initially, or was it a “build the plane while you are flying” situation?
8. What were the key resources that allowed the teachers to implement SEL? Can you tell me how SEL planning is different from content area planning?
9. How much time were staff allowed for development? Was the staff compensated for their implementation work?
10. Can you tell me about the technology resources such as the learning management system software (LMS) specific for SEL?
11. Would you suggest something specific for tracking and reporting competency progress?
12. Some research suggests that one limiting factor with implementation is the teachers’ self- management and self-awareness. What are your thoughts on that?
13. Was there any professional development to assist teachers with their SEL development? Implementation:
14. If a visitor, or an outside teacher, walked into your Classroom, what would they see?
15. Were there times when you thought there was too much on your plate? If so, what helped you make it through those times?
16. How did you know when you had implemented SEL in the Classroom?
17. If you were to advise a teacher just starting out with SEL, what would you tell them?
18. How important is the support of other leadership or counselors in the implementation process?
19. Can you share a story about the positive impact of SEL on students?





Steve Plum

Kettle Moraine School District

Steve Plum, PhD, has been a science teacher and administrator for 30 years. He currently serves as Superintendent of the Kettle Moraine School District in Wisconsin. He holds Bachelors degrees in philosophy and biology, Masters degrees in biology and administrative leadership, and a PhD in Education.



Amy Plum

Amy Plum, MS, LPC, has been working as a mental health therapist since 1996. Amy specializes in working primarily with children using sand tray therapy and Internal Family Systems to help clients work through attachment wounds, trauma events, school and family conflict, and challenges related to high sensitivity and neurodiversity.



Simone C. O. Conceição

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Simone C. O. Conceição, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita in the Department of Administrative Leadership at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She received her doctorate in Adult and Distance Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research interests include online education, adult learning, learning design, and staff development and training.



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