

Supporting School Community Wellness with Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) During and After a Pandemic



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This issue brief, created by The Pennsylvania State University, is one of a series of briefs that addresses the future needs and challenges for research, practice, and policy on social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL is defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. This is the second series of briefs that address SEL, made possible through support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The first set synthesized current SEL research on early support for parent engagement and its effects on child outcomes; SEL in infancy/toddlerhood, the preschool years, the elementary school period, and the middle-high school timeframes; and how SEL influences teacher well-being, health equity, and school climate. Learn more at: www.prevention.psu.edu/sel

Executive Summary

When COVID-19 descended upon the nation in March 2020, schools across the country quickly turned to social and emotional learning (SEL) to seek guidance to support all school community members' efforts to thrive. School closures required a rapid transition to remote learning amid unprecedented and disproportionate experiences of loss that intensified existing educational inequities. Coinciding with the pandemic, the violent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, followed by tense nationwide protests, awakened a longstanding need to support racial justice, foster equity, and dismantle structural racism.

These social conditions and experiences of loss have presented challenges to wellness that continue to weigh heavily on the physical and mental health of educators, students, and families, especially for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities and among those with disabilities.

When implemented with fidelity, SEL provides a foundation for resilience that benefits all members of a school community, supporting greater student engagement, social-emotional health, and academic achievement in addition to increasing engagement and well-being among educators, school leaders, and families. What have we learned from high-quality SEL implementation and prior crises that can help prepare school communities for what's to come? And what have we learned from the disproportionate experiences of this pandemic in underserved and marginalized communities to chart our way forward? In this brief we explore the role of SEL in promoting wellness during the compounding traumas of a pandemic. We identify *Bright Spots*—examples of how SEL research and practice are being applied to support wellness during this crisis and that may be used in related crises moving forward, and *Ripe Spots*—opportunities for SEL to support the anticipated needs of schools toward the promotion of school community wellness.

Key Points

- Unprecedented and evolving challenges to wellness should be informed by attention to the research and systematic implementation of SEL.
- Educators are applying SEL strategies to address the pandemic's disproportionate impact and support students and teachers during distanced educational experiences.
- SEL can contribute to the system of support for a school community to acknowledge the compounding traumas of the pandemic and navigate the anticipated needs of school communities in the current school year.

In this brief, **the school community** refers to all stakeholders in the school, including school leaders, teachers, and support staff, students, their families, and community program partners. Further, **wellness** refers to the broader physical and psychosocial well-being of the school community and all of the individuals within it. We explore how SEL has the opportunity to promote the conditions for school communities to thrive as part of the broader ecosystem of supports and services necessary to mobilize and respond to inequities and promote wellness through the pandemic and thereafter.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Disrupted the School Year and Exacerbated Existing Inequities

Our school communities are in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic swept across our country swiftly and with little time for preparation in March 2020, requiring necessary and urgent closures of non-essential industry, including most institutions of education.¹ The emotional lives of students, educators, and families demonstrated the need for intervention and support for school community wellness. According to a national survey of 3,300 adolescents, since the closing of school buildings, nearly 33% had feelings of depression and anxiety, and more than 25% reported a lack of connection to peers, teachers, and school communities.² Just two weeks into the pandemic, more than 5,000 teachers reported feeling *anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad*, with anxiety by far the most frequently mentioned emotion.³ Relatedly, a survey of over 1,000 urban school leaders in late April revealed findings strikingly similar to those for educators.⁴ Not surprisingly, parents and caregivers reporting high levels of stress shared an elevated stress response. In response to another pandemic survey, families with young children reported a 67% increase in feeling anxious or depressed all day, a 42% increase in their children's externalizing behaviors, and a significant decline in family mental health from March to June 2020.⁵

The reasons given by students, educators, and families for these stress-related feelings fall largely into two domains. The first is health-related, including a general fear that they or someone in their family may contract COVID-19 or have their physical health jeopardized. The second is anxiety about the management of the day-to-day, including supporting their own and their families' needs while simultaneously working full-time from home and adapting to new technologies for teaching and learning.⁶ Leaders share the additional stress of knowing the gravity of their decisions and their impacts on the school community.⁴ Students further report anxieties that extend into concerns about their future education, college, and career plans.²

Although the ripples of the pandemic's impact continue to unfold while we prepared this brief,⁷ what is certain is that the effects are being felt differently across every household and school community in the nation.⁸ The pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), persons with disabilities, and the elderly, and its interface with income, education, and health infrastructures, has flashed a bright light on current and persistent systemic inequities in our society.^{9,10}

Health

With regard to health, BIPOC have been more likely to report significant stressors than their White peers, namely in contracting coronavirus (71% vs. 59%, respectively), meeting basic needs of food and shelter (61% vs. 47%), and having access to health care (59% vs. 46%).¹¹ Of all racial groups, as of late July 2020, Black Americans continue to experience the highest overall COVID-19 mortality rates—about 2.3 times as high as the rate for White Americans.¹²

Social conditions, structural racism, confounding pre-existing comorbid conditions, and barriers to health insurance and care all elevate the risk for COVID-19 diagnoses and deaths in BIPOC communities.⁸ Further, although typically developing children have demonstrated resilience to the coronavirus, children with developmental disabilities under the age of 17 have the same death rate as people over age 75, who had the highest death rates of all populations.¹³

Learning

With regard to learning, parents from low-income homes are 10 times more likely to report little or no remote learning in their home, with 33% of parents feeling “very concerned” about children falling behind. Conversely, only 1 in 5 high-income families are concerned about learning loss. Moreover, students with disabilities are more likely to have their education services disrupted than general education students, with reports as staggering as 1 in 5 receiving the services they are entitled to under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and more than 33% doing little to no remote learning compared to about 10% of their general education peers. Further, 40% of parents of children with special education needs are concerned about their children’s mental health, compared with just over 20% of parents of neurotypical children.¹⁴

We know that prior to COVID-19, mental health issues were prevalent among Americans. Nearly half of all children are estimated to have experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE),¹⁵ more so among youth of color and those growing up in low-income households.¹⁵ And nearly half of all educators report high levels of daily stress prior to this pandemic, with 30–50% of educators leaving the profession in the first five years, citing stress and burnout as leading factors.¹⁶ It has been well established that confounding threats to safety, such as racism and community violence, as well as the absence of supportive relationships, create conditions that make people more susceptible to experiencing levels of toxic stress that can have pervasive, negative impacts on their bodies and brain.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are experiences such as physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence, that can contribute to poor developmental outcomes for children across their lifespan. Learn more at [Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child](#).

We also know that COVID-19 poses a significant threat to the mental health of school communities—now and in the long term. Although this pandemic experience is novel, when examining research on prior crises and health-related disasters, we learn that 25% of isolated or quarantined children and adults experienced post-traumatic stress disorder.¹⁷ Additionally, we know the mental health of parents and caregivers also has direct implications for their children’s well-being.¹⁸

The intersection of these evolving health, income, and education inequities is devastating, but not inevitable. In this brief we explore how SEL, when implemented systematically and as part of the broader and coordinated ecosystem of essential supports and services, can contribute to school community preparedness and promote conditions for thriving.^{19,20}

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the modeling and teaching of an interrelated set of cognitive, affective and behavioral competencies that underscore our capacity to learn, develop, and maintain mutually supportive relationships, and be both physically and psychologically healthy.²¹ According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL comprises five interrelated competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making. Learn more at www.casel.org.



From Reaction to Prevention: SEL as a Critical Component of School Community Preparedness

We are writing from a place of hope. The 2019 report, [From a nation at-risk to a nation at hope](#), released by the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, pointed to the importance of the school community as a whole in supporting healthy child development. In other words, it is the obligation of all adults in a student's life to creatively and effectively serve the education of every student. Relatedly, a 2019 study²¹ identified seven Protective Childhood Experiences (PCEs) that are connected to improved mental health and social connectedness in adulthood. These experiences rely on relationships within the school community and system-wide supports *and* can be promoted through systemic intervention and collective responsibility for the wellness of all in a school community.²²

Protective Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are categories of childhood and adolescent experiences that are connected to improved mental health and social connectedness in adulthood and can counter the traumatic experiences.²¹

As we transition from reactive to proactive actions on our journey to wellness during the pandemic, it has become abundantly clear that the compounding traumas of this crisis call for schools to rethink what it means to educate the whole child and invest deeply in SEL. At the national level, an overwhelming 83.8% of states reported that SEL has increased in priority since the pandemic began. As we prepare this brief, state leadership and districts are navigating these stressful and complex times to put forth plans to reopen safely—many include attention to SEL.^{23,24} Our challenge will be how to systematically build SEL as a critical component of “preparedness”: Fostering strong relationships and supporting children and adults in building core SEL skills can promote well-being and mitigate negative effects of trauma in both the short and long term.^{25,26}

SEL Bright and Ripe Spots to Support School Community Wellness



Bright Spots

Examples of how SEL practices are being applied to support school community wellness

- Checking in on how we are feeling
- Broader self- and social awareness of bias, discrimination, and oppression
- Navigating loss with empathy
- Transformed relationships
- Decision making involving stakeholders



Ripe Spots

Opportunities for SEL to support the anticipated needs and preparedness of school communities

- Take control—for self and community
- Focus on the emotional climate
- Leverage community partners
- Use SEL to promote equity

In the following sections we draw on CASEL’s [five core competencies model](#) to categorize SEL components in the context of the pandemic. We identify *Bright Spots*—examples of how SEL practices are being applied to support the wellness of the school community, and *Ripe Spots*—opportunities for SEL to support schools’ anticipated needs and preparedness for promoting school community wellness in the current school year and beyond.

Emotional Awareness and Regulation for Resilience

The lived experience of the pandemic is replete with intense feelings surging within individuals across days, weeks, and months. Chronic, prolonged experiences of stress result in the excessive activation of the stress response system that can impede executive functioning and memory through the prolonged release of stress hormones like cortisol. If stress is not managed well, it can undermine our ability to be effective learners, teachers, and parents, and can result in burnout.³

The unpredictable, ambiguous, and evolving nature of the physical, financial, educational, and social demands of the pandemic require awareness and differentiation of various intense emotions and the skills to manage them. *Self-Awareness*, which includes the ability to recognize and label our emotions, is the first step toward understanding how emotions influence our thinking, decisions, and behavior.²⁷ This is key to *Self-Management*, the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively across situations. This skill includes the management of stress, impulses, motivation, and both setting and attaining goals.²⁷

Dysregulated emotions can inhibit healthy relationships—between teachers and their students, between teachers and their students’ families, and between family members.³ If we do not manage our emotions effectively, we will not be available to teach, learn, or parent. Thriving through a pandemic requires a healthy mental flexibility that is best accessed when we are experiencing on average more pleasant than unpleasant emotions, enabling resilience both during and after traumatic events.²⁸



Bright Spots

In this section we offer examples of how SEL practices are being applied to support school community wellness.



Bright Spot: Checking In on How We're Feeling

What: A commonly adopted strategy is checking in with students and asking them to self-reflect on how they are feeling during the pandemic.

Why: Reflecting on emotions supports the development of a range of SEL skills, helps to build deep interpersonal connections, and can provide relief from stress, making space for improved wellness and engagement in learning. These skills are important for both students and their teachers, administrators, and families to promote well-being, particularly during challenging times.²⁹

How: Use tools designed to help students understand the full range of pleasant and unpleasant emotions. Students first identify their feelings and their possible causes and then explore strategies to support them in managing their feelings effectively.

Considerations:

- Teachers can reconfigure instruction to use live-synchronous video for class-wide check-ins and discussion about feelings.
- Support students in identifying emotion by explicitly teaching feeling words. Help students understand the differences between related emotions like anxiety and stress or anger and disappointment. Accurately labeling emotions is a pathway to healthy emotion regulation.
- Support students in managing their emotions using helpful strategies like positive self-talk and practicing gratitude. The goal is to help students discover strategies that work best for them based on their personality, needs, and culture.
- This process works best when teachers and adults first check in on how they are feeling so they can be the best possible role models for children. These skills can likewise be taught to families to support building emotion skills together with their children.

Resources:

- [30-second digital survey / HowWeFeel.org](#)
Individual self-report of key demographics and health through a 30-second digital survey
- [Copilot-Elevate / Project for Education Research that Scales \(PERTS\)](#)
Data-driven learning program designed to elevate student voices through custom surveys
- [SEL Reflection Prompts / CASEL](#)
Opportunities for teachers to encourage and support students in reflecting on their own social and emotional development
- [Mood Meter App / Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#)
Self- and social awareness of how emotions change throughout the day
- [SEL Kernels / EASEL Lab, Harvard University](#)
SEL competencies in grades K–6 and growth and development of social and emotional skills through a variety of instructional methods

Social Awareness to Support Community Healing

The experience of the pandemic has disproportionately and differentially impacted schools in underserved communities. These varied experiences require *Social Awareness*, which includes empathy, a deep understanding of how others are feeling, and what is contributing to their feelings. It also includes the ability to understand others' perspectives, especially people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.²⁸



Bright Spot: Broader Self- and Social Awareness of Bias, Discrimination, and Oppression

What: Traumas in the form of racially motivated murders and police brutality are occurring within the context of a global pandemic that is disproportionately impacting the historically marginalized. Institutional policies and practices and cultural beliefs and values assert the inferiority of certain people on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, disability, or other labeled traits—in essence, the illusory rejection of another person's humanity.

Why: We are coming to grips with our individual and collective roles in perpetuating the structural, historical drivers of inequity and systems of oppression maintained through systematic discrimination. The majority must do this work. How can we create sustainable change towards eradicating systemic inequities and racism, while controlling pandemics?

How: Many educators unconsciously adopt bias and deficit-based thinking embedded in our systems. We must interrogate our position and build self- and social awareness of racism and ableism and their links to Whiteness, privilege, and dehumanizing perceptions of others.

Considerations:

- Learn how discrimination, bias, and racism shape lives. Analyze policies and practices in your school to examine who has power and consider why. Consider who gets to define what is “best” for students and teachers, and which students and teachers are held up as the “best” in your school community.
- Actively listen to understand and honor all feelings. When we give ourselves permission to feel the full depth and range of our emotions, we can understand more about ourselves and others, including what we fear, tend to avoid, value, and hold dear. Teachers and parents can support students in processing current events, and the personal impacts of trauma related to pandemics, and systemic racism, ableism, discrimination, and bias, more broadly.
- Discuss the challenges facing your school community. We must create a space for discourse about a range of challenging topics to foster school community resilience. Conversations about challenging topics can help young people learn that they can come to the adults around them or take direct action against injustice,² and learn about skills needed to navigate adversity. Even without direct experience, exploring challenging topics can foster empathy.

Resources:

- [Educational equity webinar on pandemic and effect on existing inequities / Forum for Youth Investment](#)
Educational inequity and how the ongoing pandemic and tragic events highlighted and exacerbated existing inequities
- [Overview of mindful reflection process / Greater Good in Education](#)
Overview of the mindful reflection process designed by Dray and Wisneski (2011) to support teachers in examining their own biases and assumptions
- [Action planning guide / National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)
Action planning guide to assess and address disparities in school discipline
- [National Opportunity to Learn Campaign / Schott Foundation](#)
Toolkit for educators to integrate restorative practices into everyday classroom routines, with actionable steps toward schoolwide implementation
- [Step-by-Step Implementation Guide / San Francisco Unified School District](#)
Step-by-step implementation guide to enhance whole-school climate with methods for sustainable change through evidence-based restorative practices
- [Webinars supporting educators' instruction on racism / Teaching Matters](#)
Series of webinars designed to support educators in talking about racism in the classroom
- [Definitions handout on power and privilege / Vanderbilt University](#)
Reader-friendly handout with definitions relating to power and privilege that can support the teaching and understanding of social identities and systems of oppression





Bright Spot: Navigating Loss with Empathy

What: To respond to the tsunami of loss that has overwhelmed schools during this time, many leaders have leveraged SEL to acknowledge loss, collectively grieve, and support healing through understanding the varied perspectives of their families, staff, and students.

Why: Differential experiences of loss, including death, illness, services, experiences, and income, must be attended to in promoting community healing, renewal, and thriving.

How: Leaders have engaged educators and parents to collaboratively create a supportive strategy for the entire school community and implemented it virtually.

Considerations:

- Many families have not been able to grieve their experiences of loss in familiar and traditional ways as a result of underlying health and safety concerns.
- Showing empathy and expressing compassion require perspective taking and effort to understand the experiences and feelings of others. Actively listening to other people's stories with the intent to understand, rather than for the sole purpose of marshalling a response makes all the difference. This work is essential to moving forward.
- In working to empathize, emotion can act as your best formative assessment in teaching and learning. Student emotion provides in-the-moment information about how they are experiencing the designed instructional environment. Anxiety, for example, can indicate that demands are too high, and resources are too low.

Resources:

- [Grief and loss tool kit for school leaders and educators / Brooklyn Lab Charter School](#)
Grief and loss tool kit for school leaders and educators
- [Fact sheet on trauma-informed strategies / National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
Fact sheet on trauma-informed school strategies during COVID-19
- [Feedback process for school communities / CASEL](#)
Process for gaining feedback from the school community, with sample letters and survey templates that can be used to assess current successes and identify areas for growth and additional support needed to move forward
- [Social development instructional resources / Kansas Department of Education](#)
Examples of modifiable and specific teacher activities aligned to the state's social development goals and indicators of the SEL framework by grade bands
- [Trauma-sensitive learning environment video / Trauma Sensitive Schools](#)
Video on the process of crafting a trauma-sensitive learning environment in a Brockton, MA school as part of a district-wide effort to facilitate success for all children

Relationship Skills to Renew

Awareness of others is crucial for the development and maintenance of *Relationship Skills*, the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.²⁷ Relationships among members of the school community look and feel differently as a result of remote instruction and social distance guidelines. While teachers are given more intimate windows into students' home lives and direct access to parents and caregivers in ways that were previously unavailable, interactions with students are limited and restricted to planned encounters, and students' engagement with their peers has required reimagining. Simultaneously, shifting household pressures, loss, and spending more time together require careful attention to healthy relationship management, especially for households with limited interactions with educators and limited opportunities for social support and intervention.



Bright Spot: Transformed Relationships

What: Educators, students, and caregivers have used SEL strategies to transform their relationships during the pandemic. Remote instruction necessitates intentional communication between home and school and among educators and leaders.

Why: All relationships “look and feel” different. Teachers are more reliant on families as partners in instruction, especially for younger learners and those with learning differences.

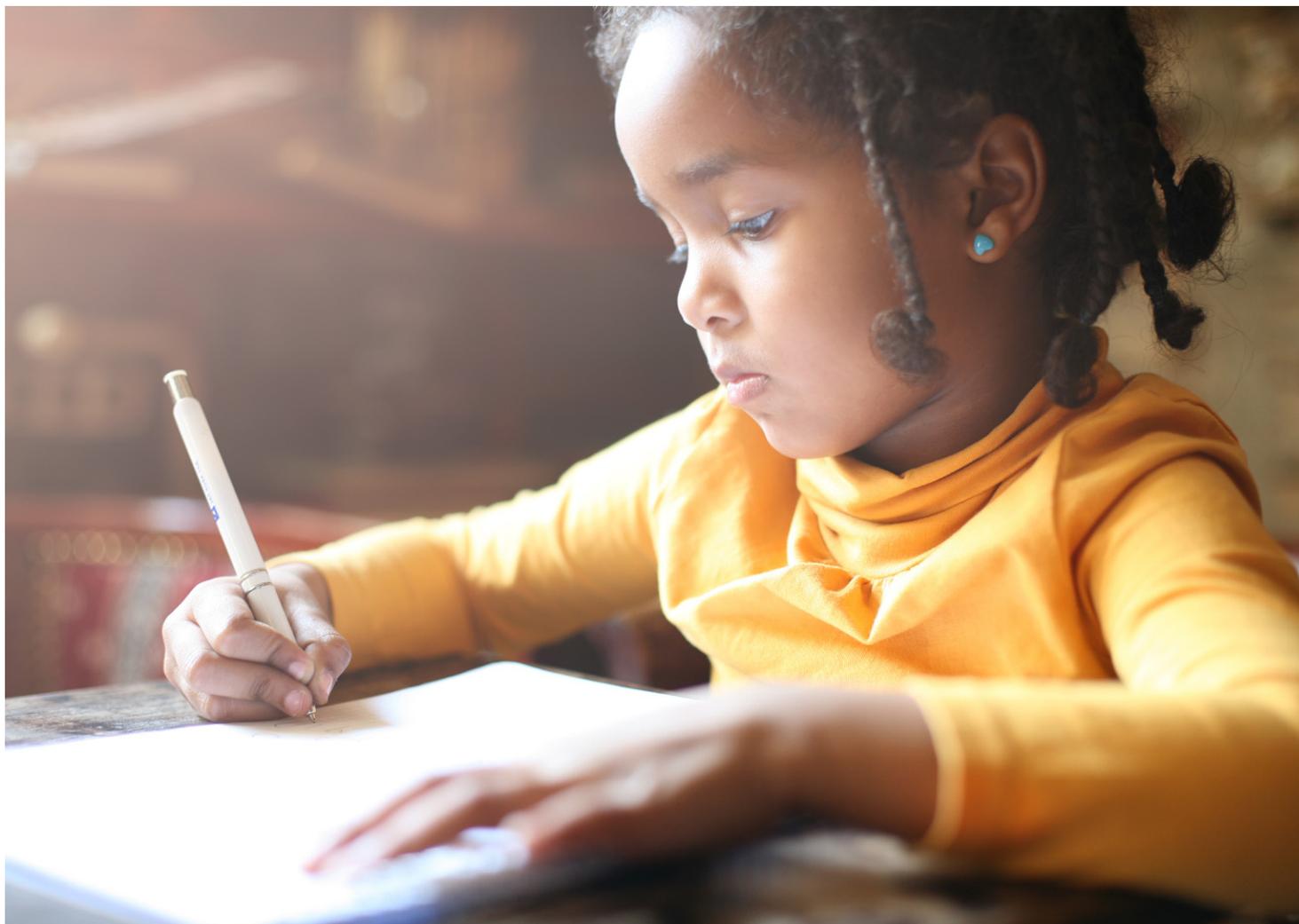
How: Coordination among educators, students, and families that leverages technology and resources to maximize opportunities for connection, shared learning experiences, and growth.

Considerations:

- Parents and caregivers have now been granted access to technology-mediated direct lines for communication with their children's teachers, support staff, and administrators.
- Teachers report that some students who previously were less responsive in class discussions, increased their involvement through the use of chat boxes and polls.
- These enriched modalities for communication have increased parent and student engagement and suggest hopeful opportunities for inclusivity and community building using these technologically enhanced practices once school doors reopen.

Resources:

- [Educator checklist on relationship-building with students / Search Institute](#)
Checklist of strategies for educators and school staff to build on their relationships with students during the COVID-19 crisis
- [COVID-19 check-in survey / Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)
COVID-19 check-in survey about the experiences faced by students and what can be done to better support them during this time
- [Article on responsive circles use during COVID-19 / International Institute for Restorative Practices](#)
- [Educator techniques for listening to parent concerns about children during pandemic / New York University](#)
Suite of techniques aiding educators in listening to and learning from families during this pandemic to best support children’s academic, social, and emotional needs
- [Educator strategies for adjusting instruction in light of student concerns / CASEL](#)
Resource that includes strategies for educators to use in learning from students and improving instruction to better meet their needs





Bright Spot: Decision Making Involving Stakeholders

What: Faced with many decisions, schools have leveraged their SEL strategies to inform the process, evaluate the consequences of decisions, and consider the well-being of all.

Why: Making decisions during this time feels overwhelming at a time for schools and parents, when the pace and gravity of each decision is amplified.

How: Leverage a challenge-centered approach to decision making. In challenge-centered approaches,³⁰ decision makers identify a goal with stakeholders, empathize to better define the barriers to the goal, develop solutions, implement solutions, and revisit and refine.

Considerations:

- Frame challenges in the form of a question to engage and acknowledge the multiple systems and functions that might need to work together to succeed.
- Using active listening sessions with all stakeholders can provide context for decisions, increase community engagement, and examine the root cause of current gaps. Use both data and stakeholder input to create more enabling systems to meet needs.
- In order to prioritize the necessary public health prevention protocols, alongside student learning and emotional well-being, educators and support staff will need training and support for their own well-being and the welfare of their students.¹⁹ This training and resource should reflect the diverse needs of all school community stakeholders.

Resources:

- [Distance learning surveys on learning climate during a pandemic / Panorama Education](#)
Downloadable distance learning surveys for students, families, and staff, designed to elevate each stakeholder's voice in this new learning climate surrounding COVID-19
- [Resource-mapping tool for crisis planning / Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)
Use of resource mapping to identify and analyze programs, people, services, and other school resources to aid leaders in better assessing needs and making informed decisions about foci
- [Student leader worksheet for schoolwide SEL vision / CASEL](#)
Worksheet for school leaders to recruit school community members, including students, families, staff, and community partners to contribute to a schoolwide vision for SEL that meets learners' needs
- [District recommendations on state SEL support / CASEL](#)
- [Rubric for guiding youth-adult relationships in school / Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning](#)
Youth-adult relationships in learning and decisionmaking as tools to promote student agency and sense of personal control within educational settings
- [Sustainable competency-based remote education / South Bronx Community Charter High School](#)
Structures and strategies implemented by the South Bronx Community Charter High School to support sustainable competency-based remote education

Ripe Spots

We now transition to *Ripe Spots*—opportunities for SEL to support the anticipated needs of schools in promoting school community wellness in the upcoming school year.



Ripe Spot: Take Control—for Self and Community

What: For most school communities, more about the upcoming school year appears to be out of our control than within it. However, we do have the ability to control how we react and respond to it as individuals and as a collective community.

Why: Managing ambiguous and evolving demands requires healthy emotion management by each member of the school community.³¹ Employing a range of emotion regulation strategies can help create the conditions for effective teaching and learning.

How: Practice self-care as a community. Strategies include practicing mindfulness, adequate sleep, choosing healthy foods, and exercise. Many educators are now embedding some strategies (e.g., taking “brain breaks”) to support students’ well-being and learning.

Considerations:

- Take control of your emotions by managing your life, including building and maintaining routines, setting boundaries on work hours, and making time for leisure activities.
- Manage your thoughts through positive self-talk and expressing and receiving gratitude. Have self-compassion and give yourself permission to fail and forgive.

Resources:

- [Brain breaks for self-regulation / Pure Edge](#)
One- to three-minute strategies that help learners reset and recharge to support self-regulation
- [Teacher compassion fatigue toolkit / Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination](#)
Toolkit that addresses teacher compassion fatigue and provides guidance on building resilience
- [Educator Context and Stress Spectrum Tool / Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, AIR](#)
Educator Context and Stress Spectrum tool that increases educator awareness of how their personal and professional context influences their stress during the COVID-19 pandemic
- [Educator guide on handling stress/challenges of pandemic / WestEd](#)
Practical guidance for educators facing challenges and stresses of the coronavirus crisis, aimed at helping educators attend to self-care in order to effectively continue to educate and support students
- [Online curriculum for teacher self-care and risk / Support for Teachers Affected by Trauma](#)
Online curriculum with five modules that explore risk factors associated with susceptibility to secondary trauma stress, the impact of STS across multiple life domains, and tangible self-care skills
- [Online Psychological First Aid Course / National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
Online Psychological First Aid course featuring innovative activities, video demonstrations, and mentor tips from trauma experts

- [Self-care strategies for pandemic use / Trails to Wellness](#)
Resource on self-care strategies that are widely applicable for general use during COVID-19
- [Educator self-assessment and planning tool for pandemics / Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, AIR](#)
Self-assessment and planning tool for educators in the face of the collective trauma of COVID-19



Ripe Spot: Focus on Emotional Climate

What: Many of us experience high rates of anxiety and worry and feel trauma. A survey of over 1,000 educators in July 2020 revealed that educators want to feel excited, safe, supported, and calm. This gap provides an opportunity to improve the emotional climate.

Why: When school community members are sensitive to each other's emotional needs and perspectives, it creates a more positive emotional climate for learning and thriving.

How: Consider building a faculty or staff "Charter". Information at [this link](#)³² will show you how to do so.

Considerations:

- School staff might first create a Charter for their whole school community. Families can create Charters to promote more positive home environments.
- Remember the Charter is a living document. For this reason, it's important to check in regularly with staff and students once the Charter has been created.

Resources:

- [Self-reflection tool for school leaders, staff, and adults / CASEL](#)
Self-reflection tool for school leaders, staff, and adults to assess their personal strengths and identify how they can model these strengths in their interactions with others
- [Affirming relationships in positive school climate brief / Learning Policy Institute](#)
Brief on the importance of affirming relationships in a positive school climate for student learning and development
- [School climate and SEL brief / Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)
Brief on the mutually beneficial relationship between school climate and SEL as supportive structures within both elementary and secondary schools
- [Review of 15 resources for school climate and culture promotion / Southeast Comprehensive Center, AIR](#)
Findings from a review of 15 resources that provides strategies, best practices, and recommendations for promoting school climate and culture
- [Ten key ideas for supporting children's social emotional development and healthy school climates / Education Policy Center, AIR](#)
Key ideas for how schools and communities can best support the social and emotional development of children and youth and create healthy school climates
- [Insight brief on school reopening and educators' support of student needs / New Schools](#)
Insight brief on how educators can meet students' social, emotional, and academic needs when schools reopen



Ripe Spot: Leverage Community Resources

What: There is a strong movement around how the entire school community can support whole child education, including the active engagement of community partners to support thriving schools.

Why: Schools do not operate in isolation of the community and are navigating the overwhelming logistics of re-opening and need community collaboration support to prioritize conditions for student, family, and community wellness.

How: Community partners can forge and maintain meaningful relationships with schools, including to connect directly with families and provide them with needed resources, and be open to supporting school communities in navigating essential work schedule demands.

Considerations:

- School reopening plans must consider the unique contributions of all community stakeholders to craft new sustainable learning environments that simultaneously promote student success and actively address educational inequity.
- Build cohesive and collaborative communities that are inclusive of all families for developing healthy and successful students.

Resources:

- [Resource on afterschool and summer programs and child development / AIR](#)
Resource on important role of afterschool and summer programs in supporting child development, with recommendations to scaffold students' transition back to school
- [Guidelines, activities for aligning full school-day with SEL practices / CASEL](#)
Guidelines and activities for aligning SEL practices across the whole school day, emphasizing a collaborative approach to SEL between schools and community partners
- [Guidelines on collective school community well-being during pandemic / Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety](#)
Practical guidance for ensuring the well-being of the collective school community while facing new educational challenges in the time of COVID-19
- [Guidelines on learning acceleration during pandemic / New Teacher Project](#)
Guidance for school leaders and district stakeholders to prioritize learning acceleration in the aftermath of COVID-19
- [Blueprint for learning day aligning afterschool programs with community partners to address education inequities / Afterschool Alliance](#)
Blueprint for envisioning the learning day as leveraging the influence of afterschool programs and community partners to fill opportunity gaps that have advanced inequities in education
- [Lessons learned blog on addressing educational inequity during pandemic / Forum for Youth Investment](#)
How and why school communities must move forward with embracing and acting upon lessons learned during the time of COVID-19 to mitigate educational inequity



Ripe Spot: Use SEL to Promote Equity

What: With increased awareness of systems that perpetuate unconscious bias, ableism, and White supremacy comes the opportunity to dismantle, rebuild, and restore our collective humanity and commitments to each other.³³ What are we learning about these disproportionate experiences and effects across communities? How can these differences inform policies and practices at the classroom, school, district, family, and community levels?

Why: Those who benefit from systemic oppression need to take responsibility for and commit to its dismantling.

How: To move forward, we must be willing to reflect on and act against the systems of bias, ableism, and White supremacy and take a strengths-based approach to change. How we can actively work to create systems and schools that reflect everyone? SEL training and skills are critical for holding space for safe, difficult, constructive conversations to promote real action.

Considerations:

- Acknowledge the trauma related to the pandemic specifically (the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BIPOC and people with disabilities), and systemic racism and ableism, deportations, discrimination, and bias more broadly. Recognize the impact of protests in response to racial injustice within BIPOC communities. Acknowledge the role individuals and school communities have played in perpetuating such traumas.
- Deeply examine the curriculum. What stories and histories are we teaching, and whose stories are missing or misrepresented? How can we address current events to increase feelings of personal relevance, interest, and autonomy to support engagement and motivation for self- and community development?
- Model the behavior and skills we want to see. As adults we can look at every interaction with young people as an opportunity to teach empathy, compassion, and hope, and to work toward positive change and meaningful connections.
- Consider integrating SEL practice with antiracist and anti-ableist frameworks for curriculum design and instruction that prioritize inclusion and diversity.
- Place students and teachers at the center of decision making about solutions that more equitably address and support the wellness of those we are trying to serve. Reflection is critical to supporting re-evaluation and adjustment as conditions change.

Resources:

- [Five-part webinar series on SEL and equity and social justice / CASEL](#)
Importance of SEL as a lever for promoting equity and social justice
- [Toolkit on equity and mindsets / National Equity Project](#)
Downloadable toolkit designed to center equity and mindsets that should underlie all work
- [Equity and social, emotional, and academic development brief / Aspen Institute](#)
Identifying how equity and social, emotional, and academic development can be mutually reinforcing
- [Teaching guide on racial injustice and community violence / Facing History and Ourselves](#)
Teaching guide designed to guide educators in beginning conversations with students around the death of George Floyd and police violence towards Black Americans, promoting teacher self-reflection
- [Core SEL competencies and student agency for social change / Greater Good in Education](#)
Strategies that cultivate student SEL skills and develop their sense of agency for social change
- [Paper on thriving, equity, and transformative learning and development / Readiness Projects](#)



Moving School Community Wellness Forward with SEL

SEL has played an important role in promoting wellness during the current COVID-19 pandemic. When implemented systemically and equitably, and as part of a broader system of supports, SEL can positively impact the evolving needs of schools in the upcoming school year and beyond.³⁴ The ambiguity of a pandemic's trajectory and the structural inequities it continues to emphasize, alongside the mounting socio-political unrest and deepening divisiveness across our nation, require immediate, intentional, and preventive action.

We must be both systemic and systematic with quality SEL implementation and use our creativity and learning in real time to apply SEL to remote teaching and learning.

We must invest in the training and ongoing support of educators, leaders, and administrators in partnership with families and community partners.

We must harness our social awareness to dismantle pervasive racism and ableism and restore our commitments to each other.

We must make the responsible decision to learn through this reality and interrogate and evolve SEL towards the meaningful inclusion of all learners and towards a truly responsive support for all school communities hereafter.

Our teachers' and students' ability to thrive personally, socially, and academically depends on it.

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Marc Brackett, Ph.D., is the founding director, [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#), and professor, Child Study Center, Yale University. His research focuses on the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in learning, decision making, creativity, relationships, health, and both academic and workplace performance. He is the lead developer of [RULER](#), a pre-K to high school evidence-based, whole-school approach to social and emotional learning that has been adopted by over 2,500 schools across the United States and in other countries. He has published 150 scholarly articles, received numerous awards, and is on the board of directors for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). He consults regularly with corporations including Facebook, Microsoft, and Google on integrating emotional intelligence principles into employee training and product design, and is co-founder of Oji Life Lab, a digital emotional intelligence learning system for businesses. His research has been featured in popular media outlets such as the *New York Times*, "Good Morning America", and "The Today Show". He is the author of *Permission to feel: Unlocking the power of emotions to help our kids, ourselves, and our society thrive*.

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