



As school districts systemically implement social and emotional learning (SEL) in all aspects of their operations, integrating SEL with instructional practices and academic content has become a growing priority. The integration is happening in several ways:

- **Fostering academic mindsets.** Helping students see themselves as learners, and feel like they have something to contribute to the learning.
- **Aligning SEL and academic content.** Embedding SEL objectives into the curriculum in reading, writing, social studies, mathematics, the arts, and the other content areas to build and reinforce students' experience of key SEL skills such as empathy, conflict resolution, and appreciating diversity.
- **Making learning interactive.** Using instructional practices and structures that encourage student-led discussions, interactions, and teamwork.
- **Elevating student voice.** Providing all students with opportunities to be leaders, problem-solvers, and decision-makers.

Integration efforts are driven by several factors. Educators are becoming more aware of the impact of SEL on all aspects of students' well-being, including academic achievement. Districts in the [Collaborating Districts Initiative](#) and others are committed to implementing SEL holistically throughout the school day, not limiting it to a specific class or activity. Teachers, principals, and others recognize that SEL, when implemented well and embedded in their work, can be the foundation for all learning and interaction, even in math class (see sidebar). In addition, districts are increasingly focused on college- and career-readiness standards, which place a premium on SEL competencies such as working with diverse teams, problem-solving, active student engagement, and honest self-reflection about one's strengths and weaknesses.

HOW MATHEMATICS AND SEL INTERSECT

Common Core Math Standard: When constructing viable arguments, students justify their conclusions, communicate them to others, and respond to the arguments of others.

Corresponding SEL “social awareness” and “relationship management” skills:

- Respect others (e.g., listen carefully and accurately)
- Understand others' points of view and perspectives
- Identify social cues (verbal, physical) to determine how others feel
- Predict others' feelings and reactions

- Manage and express emotions in relationships, respecting diverse viewpoints

Educators who build students' emotional literacy by teaching them how to identify emotions in themselves and others are giving students the tools to predict how others feel and then respond appropriately—all of which will lead to much more effective (not to mention fun and engaging) academic discussions.

--From *How to Integrate Social-Emotional Learning into Common Core*



Districts in DuPage County, Ill., Nashville, Tenn., and Sacramento, Calif., are among those that are breaking new ground and developing useful resources in this area.

DuPage County, Illinois

Naperville Community Unit School District 203

For Naperville 203 School District in DuPage County, Illinois, outside Chicago, SEL is not “one more thing on the plate. It *is* the plate,” says Director of Student Services Lisa Xagas. To that end, the district has been working on multiple fronts for the past several years to embed SEL into all of its work, including a major effort to infuse SEL into all academic content for its more than 16,000 students.

“We saw aligning content and SEL standards not as something additional. Teachers already are responsible for teaching these skills. We’re now giving them common language and tools,” Xagas says. She notes that some high school teachers initially saw SEL as “fluff” but now appreciate how difficult these skills are to master and how necessary they are. “We say a degree might get you a job, but social skills help you keep it.”

District leaders have created a detailed presentation, “[How to Start a Movement](#),” which maps how school leaders have methodically rolled out SEL over a number of years.

Detailed curriculum maps. Integrated curriculum development, one of four key work strands, began in 2014-15 with the selection of a curriculum team of classroom teachers and central office staff. The 18-month process culminated in the development of detailed year-long curriculum maps for each grade and multiple subjects. Every lesson now has an SEL objective and a content objective. The maps identify

priority benchmarks for each grade level, key vocabulary, general instructional practices such as morning meeting and collaborative techniques, and specific ideas for explicit instruction, opportunities for integration, and suggested reading lists.

Although SEL competencies are deeply intertwined, teachers have key focus areas throughout the year. In [Grade 4](#), for example, the first three weeks are focused on self-management and self-awareness, the second trimester on social awareness and interpersonal skills, and the third trimester on responsible decision-making.

The integration effort has been deliberately phased in over four years, starting by building broad-based understanding about what SEL is and why it is important. Each year, professional learning is organized around a handful of learning modules:

- 2015-16: Why SEL, what is SEL, and relevant instructional practices such as Socratic seminars and “fishbowls.”
- 2016-17: Adult SEL competencies, climate and culture, and curriculum maps.



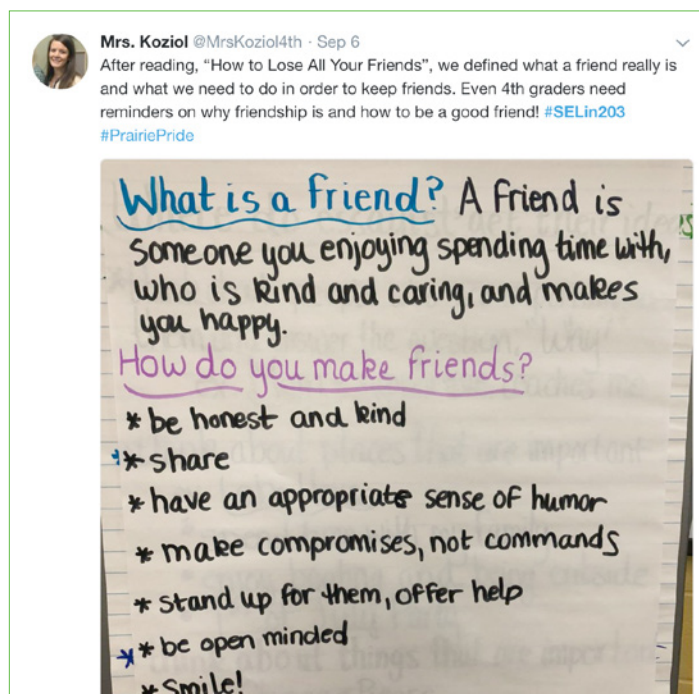
“SEL is not one more thing on the plate.
It *is* the plate.”

— Lisa Xagas, Naperville 203 School District, Illinois



- 2017-18: Explicit instruction, content integration, and reflection/feedback.
- 2018-19: SEL assessment and reporting.

Teacher leaders, between two and four per school, are central to delivering the instruction to and building understanding among their colleagues. Xagas points to the active Twitter feed (#SELin203) as a tipping point, through which classroom teachers are regularly sharing their work with their peers.



In addition, grade-level [Parent Snapshots](#) offer one-page overviews of SEL by grade, focusing on priority benchmarks, key vocabulary, typical skills, helping at home, warning signs (trouble sleeping, temper tantrums, etc.), and links to other resources. Parents have been among the main supporters of the expanded attention to SEL, Xagas says.

Her advice to other districts. Don't underestimate how long it will take to fully implement with buy-in—four years in Naperville's case. Don't shortchange adult SEL. "Teachers need these skills, too. They need to learn good self-care

and build their emotional resilience," Xagas says. Focus on building relationships with students, especially those who are the hardest to reach—"We didn't do enough of that early on." And provide professional learning to all adults in the building—"bus drivers and secretaries, too."

District 89, DuPage County, Illinois

In nearby District 89 (with 2,400 students), general education teachers and social workers co-teach a lesson every two weeks to all elementary students. "Teachers crosswalk their content with our I Can SEL standards, identifying areas for integration," says Director of Student Services Gene Olsen. Classrooms feature posters with both learning targets and SEL targets.

In middle school, the district has focused more on integrating SEL with related efforts to strengthen climate and culture, such as PBIS, culturally responsive instruction, trauma-informed instruction, and relationship building.

Aligning with English Language Arts, mathematics, and science standards. A major focus at both levels has been to strengthen instructional practices to align with the higher demands of the Common Core State Standards in ELA and mathematics and the Next-Generation Science Standards. That means encouraging more student engagement and infusing culturally responsive teaching into all classrooms, working closely with the Responsive Classroom model.

His advice. Make sure to have a strong foundation in and broad support for SEL. Show the close alignment with similar efforts, from the Common Core and culturally responsive teaching to PBIS and trauma-informed practice. Engage parents, who have become the biggest champions for SEL in District 89. "During a recent district meeting to review our strategic plan, parents were adamant that our SEL work was impacting their kids at home," Olsen says. Most important, "Do the work. There are no shortcuts. You have to unpack the SEL standards, create your own I Can statements for each grade, and show how children can demonstrate mastery," he says.

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— Gene Olsen, District 89, Illinois

Metro Nashville Public Schools, Tennessee

In Nashville, integrating SEL into academic instruction is one of the three cornerstones of the district's approach to instruction, along with "ambitious pedagogy" and "equitable pedagogy." The integration began in the central office, starting with senior staff. They used data from their school walkthroughs to jumpstart the effort and help colleagues see the importance of stronger alignment. "The data showed that SEL-academic integration was our lowest-rated area," says Kyla Kregel, director of social and emotional learning. "Once David Williams [executive officer of curriculum and instruction] took over, we started collaborating based on this information."

After senior leaders established a vision of what integration would look like, much of the early work involved getting everyone on the same page around basic concepts and a common language. "To support true collaboration, we wanted ELA coaches, math coaches, and SEL coaches speaking the same language," says Williams. The coaches reviewed each other's tools and explored what it would look like to share their work to help students.

Lead SEL coaches, who support multiple schools, and representatives from the Equity and Diversity Department began working with the curriculum and instruction team. From there, the entire SEL Department was brought on board: SEL specialists, trauma directors, behavior analysts, and restorative specialists. From the instructional side, ELL and exceptional education leaders were also engaged to help promote equity.

"We didn't have to convince anyone. All teams saw the value of collaboration and the need to build relationships and develop the whole child," says Williams. Attendance and behavioral data reinforced the need, as did feedback from students. "Kids are so hungry for relationships and connections with adults," Williams says.

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— David Williams, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Tennessee



Three guiding questions, three signature practices. To ensure that integration happens all day in every subject for all students, Kregel and Williams encouraged educators to center on three guiding questions:

- How do we get all learners to do the thinking and heavy lifting first before teachers weigh in with their thoughts?
- How do we get the voices of all learners to exceed teacher talk?
- How do we get all learners to regularly reflect on SEL and academic skills?

Staff also were encouraged to use the district's three signature practices, adopted from Oakland Unified School District, to create the conditions for student learning:

KEY INTEGRATION INDICATORS

- Learning environment is warm and inclusive.
- Academic and SEL lesson goals are explicit and interdependent.
- All students are engaged, active, and participating.
- Instruction is both accessible and rigorous for everyone.
- Students are doing the thinking first.
- Student talk balances or exceeds teacher talk.
- Students regularly reflect on both academic learning and SEL.
- Teaching method is appropriate for the content being learned.

- *Welcoming Ritual (2-10 minutes):* Activities for inclusion, establish safety and predictability, allow students to connect with one another and create a sense of belonging. Activities are connected to the learning objectives of the day.
- *Engaging Practices:* Academic integration, sense-making, cooperative learning, transitions and “brain breaks” fostering relationships, cultural humility, empowerment, and collaboration.
- *Optimistic Closure (3-5 minutes):* Reflections and looking forward, providing closure by asking students to name something that helps them transition on a positive note.

The two offices also collaborated to develop indicators of powerful integrated instruction (see sidebar, page 4).

During the summer of 2018, Kregel and Williams shared the integrated approach with all 165 principals. They analyzed and discussed a lesson plan which centered on a Langston Hughes book, *Thank You, M'am*. “They loved it. They said, ‘If we can get our students to do this, we will have succeeded,’” Williams recalls.

The district has produced two dozen training videos and a template for a unit plan. Next steps include developing a bank of similar lesson plans.

Their advice. Start small to ensure SEL and curriculum and instructional staff fully understand the work. Solidifying the collaboration at the department levels helps reinforce for principals that the integration is seamless and supported from the top. Make time for the work amid all the many competing initiatives. Take advantage of peer networks such as CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative to learn from peers.

Sacramento City Unified School District, California

Since Sacramento reorganized its central office in 2017–18 and placed the SEL staff within the Curriculum and Instruction Department, integration efforts have accelerated significantly. “It has been instrumental in us working closely on true integration. We’re continually collaborating, sharing time and space all day,” says Mai Xi Lee, director of social and emotional learning.

Two years ago, Sacramento City launched a districtwide mathematics campaign (With Math I Can) centered on growth mindset. The math team integrates SEL by emphasizing academic discourse and high-quality tasks through the intentional practice of collaboration, communication, and growth mindset. The math team, the SEL team, and the parent engagement team collaborated to develop a toolkit to help parents understand core concepts of math through the lens of growth mindset. Lee says SEL has been a critical “throughline” for professional learning for paraprofessionals,

such as instructional and bilingual aides, to access core content in math, ELA, and science. “A lot of the work is about reminding people that SEL is not an end in itself, but how we think, process, and create conditions to support student learning,” Lee says.

The district adopted a new English Language Arts/ English Language Development (ELA/ELD) curriculum in 2017–18, and coaches now work closely to integrate SEL training for all ELA/ELD teachers and their students. SEL skills now are being integrated into ELA/ELD professional learning and literacy instruction. Coaches are in schools regularly, modeling and supporting teachers. The teachers are designing exemplar lessons focused on elevating the skills needed for high-quality academic tasks, as well as leveraging the power of reflection related to the skills. These lessons will be shared with all teachers upon completion in 2019.

“It’s not just about teaching Second Step in every class. But when planning an English lesson on character analysis, for instance, look at the skills needed to meet the more challenging college- and career-ready standards.”

— Mai Xi Lee, Sacramento City Unified School District, California



Equity and social justice. At the same time, the district has stepped up efforts to infuse equity and social justice into its curricula, using “SEL as a lever for equitable outcomes,” Lee says. For instance, all ninth-graders must take a course on ethnic studies, which focuses on identity analysis, cultural heritage, and deepening self-awareness and social awareness. After being piloted at three high schools, it is now standard in all five comprehensive high schools and four smaller high schools.

In addition, elective courses for Men’s Leadership Academy and Women’s Leadership Academy are being offered at two large comprehensive high schools, as well as in 10 other middle and elementary schools. The courses focus on culturally relevant instruction, leadership development, character development, college and career readiness, social justice, and youth voice.

As in other districts, time is always a challenge, convincing staff that SEL is not just one more thing but can—and should—

be embedded into everyday instruction. “It’s not just about teaching Second Step in every class,” Lee says. “But when planning an English lesson on character analysis, for instance, we want them to look at the skills needed to meet the more challenging college- and career-ready standards—SEL skills such as collaboration, communication, focus, and a growth mindset.”

Her advice. Building school leadership is key. Support principals in helping to integrate SEL throughout the school day. Provide practical tools that help teachers and staff see how SEL aligns with the content standards and core frameworks. Communicate constantly and intentionally. “Keep working to make SEL part of the school’s DNA—infused into academics, expanded learning, student supports, parent engagement, and communications.”

RESOURCES

CASEL

[District Resource Center—Integration section](#) has guidance and multiple tools for integrating SEL with academics and other efforts.

Naperville 203

- [4th grade SEL map](#)
- [SEL Parent Snapshots](#)
- [Tools for Building Sustainable SEL presentation](#)
- [Activity for helping staff to see the connection to standards](#)
- [Crosswalk of CCSS/State Standards and SEL](#)

District 89

- [SEL lesson plan](#)
- [5th grade SEL rubric](#)
- [SEL facets graphic](#)
- [End-of-year progressions, K–8](#)

Nashville

- [Principal meeting presentation](#)
- [Instructional framework](#)
- [SEL and academic integration best practices](#)
- [SEL I Can statements](#)
- [Thank You Ma’am teacher plan](#)

Sacramento

- [Relationships and math presentation](#)
- [Growth mindset and science presentation](#)
- [ELA/ELD and SEL presentation](#)
- [Integrating SEL and academics tool](#)
- [SEL-ELA integration visual](#)
- [Academic integration visual](#)
- [SEL skill-based learning](#)