

Advance SEL in California  
Final Report and Recommendations  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

September 2020

# Our work comes at a critical time of change in American history, challenging us to seize the moment and make good on our promises to improve the lives of all students in California

## The Challenge: Unprecedented levels of trauma and social upheaval



Our children are facing **unprecedented levels of trauma and social upheaval** in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the national consciousness raising and civil unrest around the ongoing crisis of racism. **Necessary stay-at-home orders and social distancing practices are forcing educators, schools, districts and states to rethink fundamental structures of schooling, throwing into sharp relief the inequities already inherent in the way we educate our children.** Families are facing upheavals in childcare, needing to educate their children at home and **trying to negotiate an unclear landscape for returning to school in the fall.**

## The Opportunity: Prioritize SEL with a clear racial and social justice focus



California can lead the country by harnessing this challenge as an opportunity to **prioritize social and emotional learning (SEL)**, integrating SEL more fully into its education system and supports for all students. We have **leaders who support this work** and we have already taken some **steps towards implementation of SEL across the state.** But **more needs to be done to integrate SEL throughout the system** and build a coherent framework defined by clear goals, aligned funding and policies, equitable and diverse stakeholder engagement and adult capacity building. **SEL has always been important. The needs of the moment create urgency to advance it much further than we yet have.**

# Advance SEL in California launched to understand challenges related to SEL implementation and gather community-developed recommendations to address those challenges

## Project Goal

Education First and Beyond Differences, supported by a generous grant from the Marin Community Foundation, partnered to support widespread stakeholder engagement in conversations about how to spur action on social and emotional learning (SEL) in California. **Our goal was to hear perspectives on SEL from educators and other community stakeholders across the state, to provide leaders and the field with a clear picture of priorities and actionable recommendations for advancing SEL, building on an established foundation.**

## Project Partners



Office of Governor  
Office of the First Partner

# The project engaged nearly 800 diverse California education stakeholders to gather perspectives on SEL practices, needs and goals

## These sources informed the recommendations in this report

<i>Stakeholder Interviews</i> <i>January 2020</i>	<i>Community Partners</i> <i>January-May 2020</i>	<i>WikiWisdom Crowdsourcing</i> <i>May-June 2020</i>	<i>Convening Series</i> <i>July 2020</i>
We interviewed <b>10 state SEL leaders and SEL experts</b> to gather an overall sense of CA's SEL implementation challenges and opportunities.	<p>We interviewed <b>18 educators, district leaders and community partners in five districts/counties in California</b> to learn more about their SEL work.</p> <p>We identified <b>three district/county partners to co-design our convenings</b> and showcase their SEL work during the convenings.</p>	We launched a three-week crowdsourcing event and heard from <b>over 600 teachers, administrators, district leaders, board members, counselors and parents from across the state</b> who joined a conversation about the role of SEL in their work, best practices and implementation challenges – see that report <a href="#">here</a> .	We hosted a <a href="#">series of three convenings</a> for <b>over 100 teachers, parents, students, school and district administrators, County Education leaders, state leaders, community members and SEL experts</b> , to gather responses to the WikiWisdom report and additional thinking and ideas for how to advance SEL in California.

# We also reached out to the general public via social media campaign to gather input

## Social media engagement overview

Social media campaign overview: Followers and Engagement

Campaign Reach Facebook: 15,498

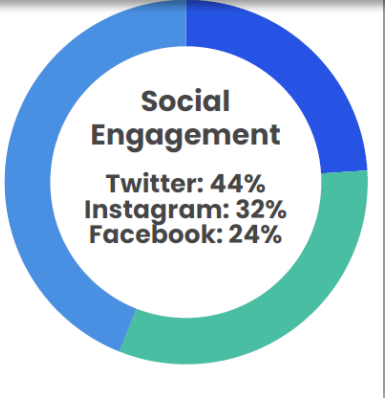
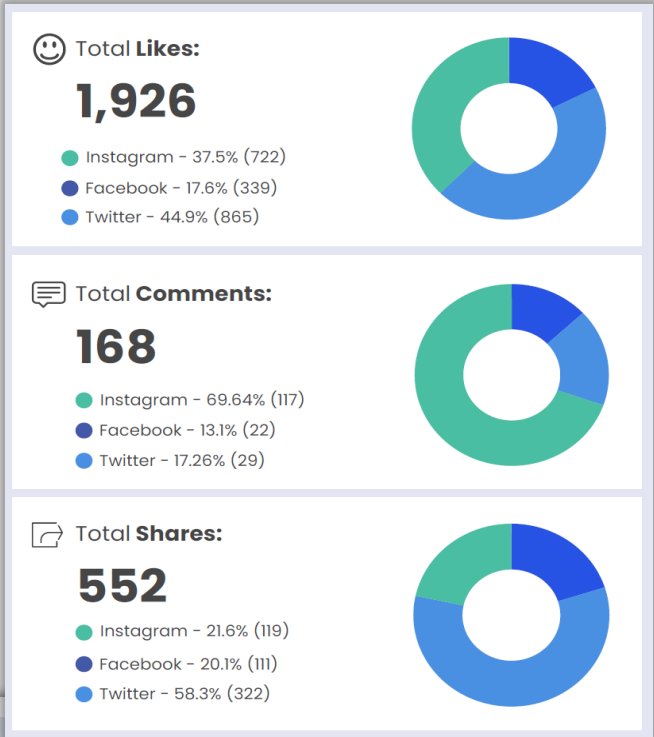
Campaign Impressions Twitter: 162,450

Campaign Reach Instagram: 10,187

Social Media Channel:	Followers	Engagement
Facebook	218	645 Likes, Comments, and Shares
Twitter	260	865 Likes 322 Retweets (w/o comments)
Instagram	263	722 Likes 138 Comments

### Social Media Campaign: Advance SEL in CA

Twitter is undoubtedly the best performer of engagement for the campaign. Instagram and Facebook served as spaces for WikiWisdom/Convening participants, and social media audience, to share meaningful stories and successes about personal/school/community efforts to advance Social and Emotional Learning in California.



# The resounding message we heard: SEL is more important than ever – and racial equity must be part of those SEL conversations

The findings in this report are grounded in what we heard from nearly 2,000 educators, students, parents, and other stakeholders throughout this project. As COVID unfolded, these voices spoke with increasing urgency: **SEL is more important than ever.**

“We will not be returning to “normal” and we shouldn’t. “Normal” was not accessible or equitable for everyone before COVID-19 and George Floyd’s death. Education systems have a responsibility to adapt to the changing society. Social emotional learning can lead the way to this new world of inclusivity and belonging for all.”

**We must seize this opportunity to improve the way we provide students with what they need on a daily basis to be successful, engaged learners in the new world that is unfolding before us.**

“How can we in California set the standard for educating every child to be “socially emotionally strong?”

The global COVID-19 pandemic and its ripple effects, and the national collective focus on eradicating systemic racism, are **changing the ways we think about education, race and economic/social justice across the country.**

“While we deplore the tragedies that have stemmed from both the virus and racism, we also see this time as a rare opportunity to seize this moment to promote the understanding of schools as more than academic institutions.”

# With new leaders championing education, California is well positioned to take action on SEL



**Tony Thurmond** was sworn in as the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction in January 2019. He took over a department filled with leaders in the Educator Excellence and Equity and the Expanded Learning Divisions committed to advancing SEL in the state.

With **Linda Darling-Hammond** as president of the State Board of Education, California has a leading national expert in the science of learning and development, and strong advocate for SEL, with a vision for creating equitable and empowering education for all of its children.



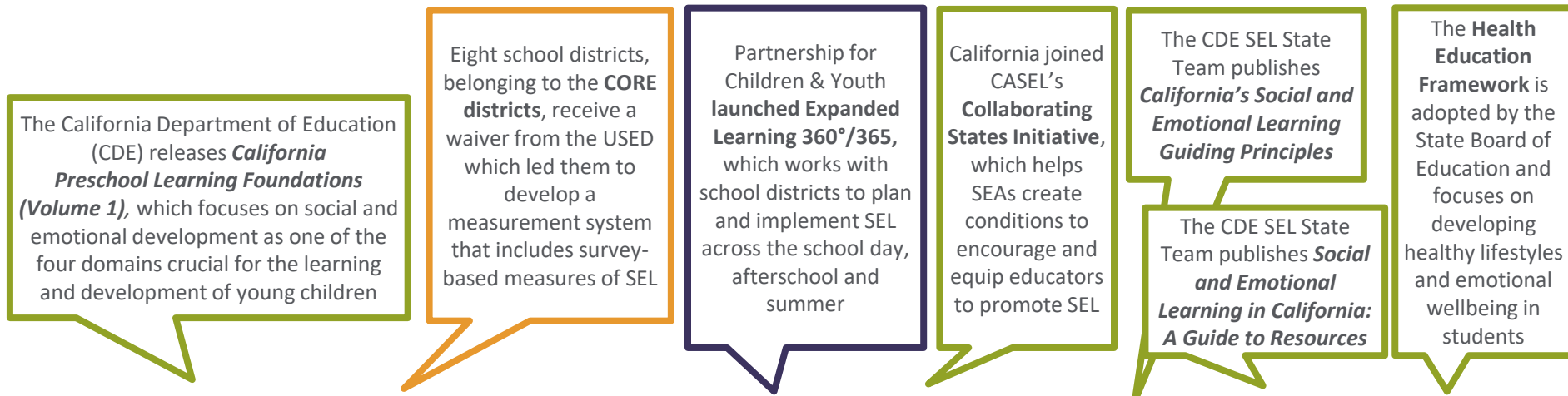
**Governor Gavin Newsom** was sworn as the 40<sup>th</sup> Governor of California in January 2019 and is publicly committed to addressing inequities in California’s public education system.

**First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom** is dedicated to breaking down barriers for our youth and supporting whole child development.

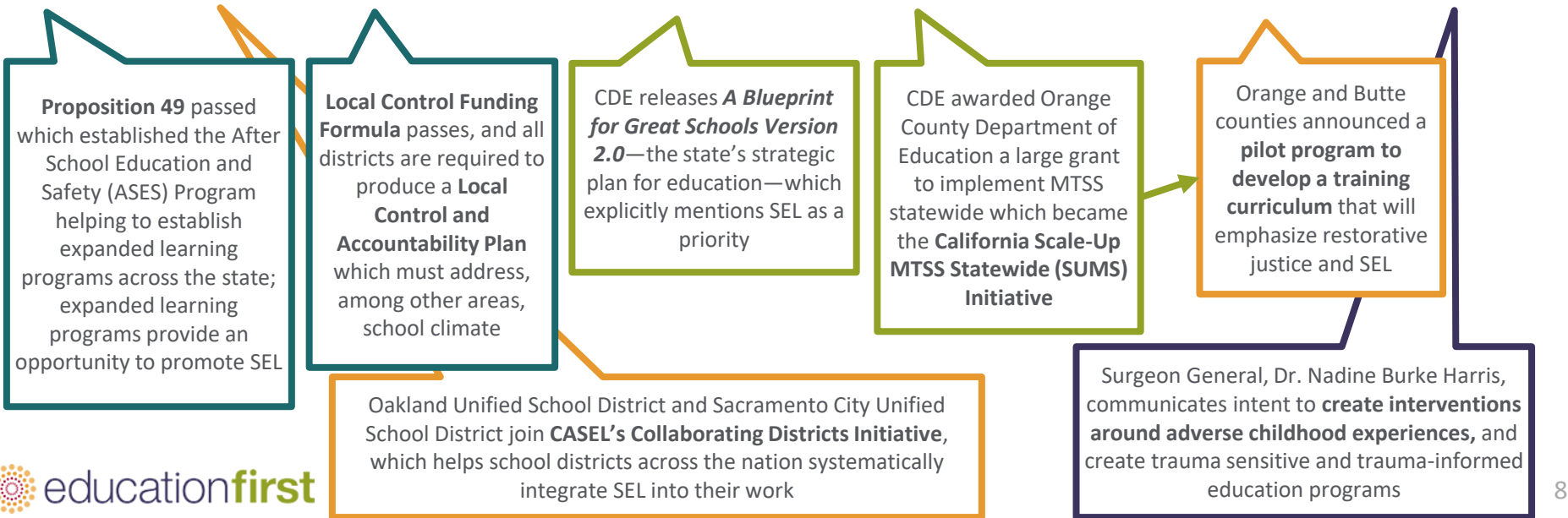
**There is an opportunity to build on the momentum of new leadership and further signal SEL as a priority for the state**

# Recognizing the importance of SEL, California has worked to expand and prioritize SEL in schools

CDE Initiatives & Guidance
CA Policy
District Initiative(s)
Field Initiative(s)



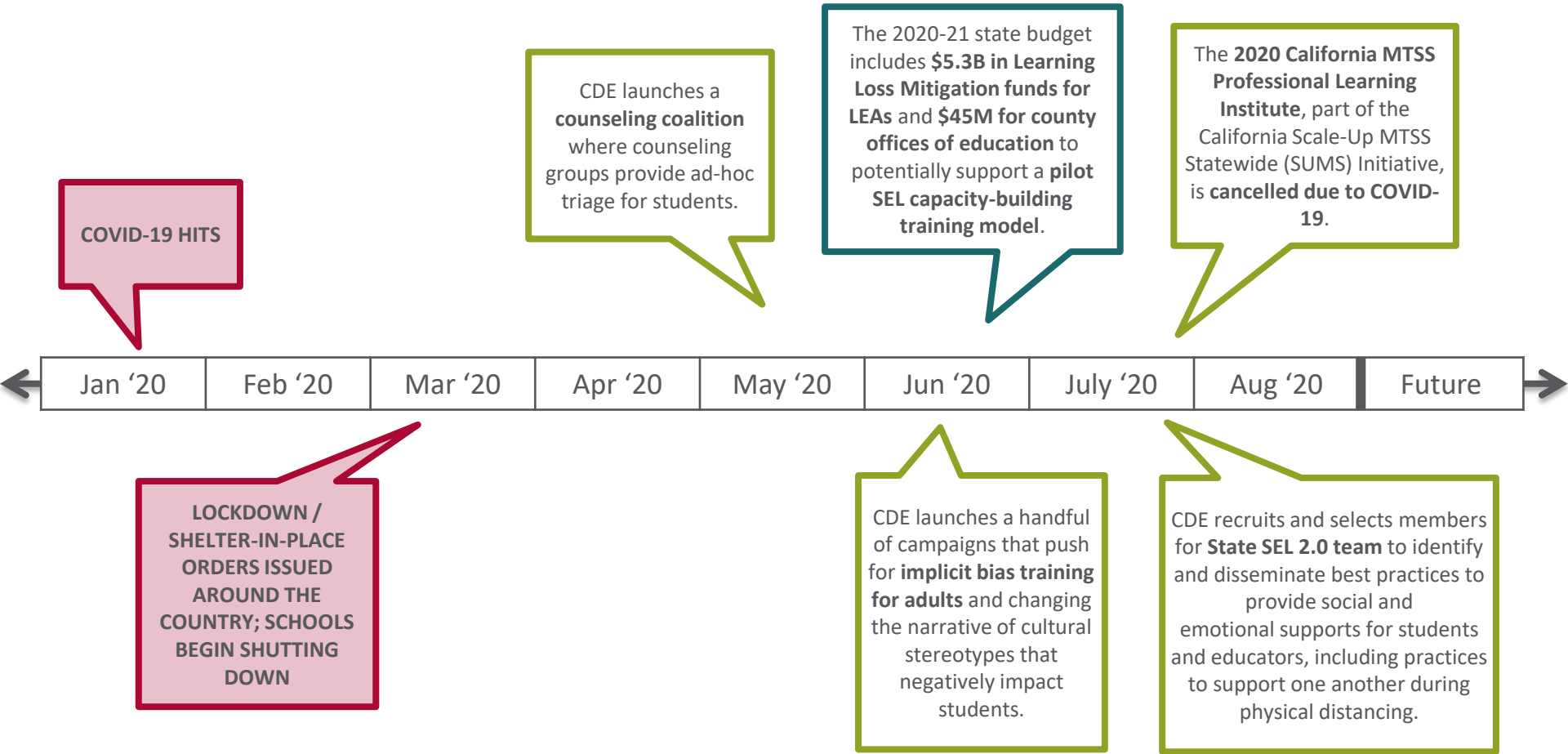
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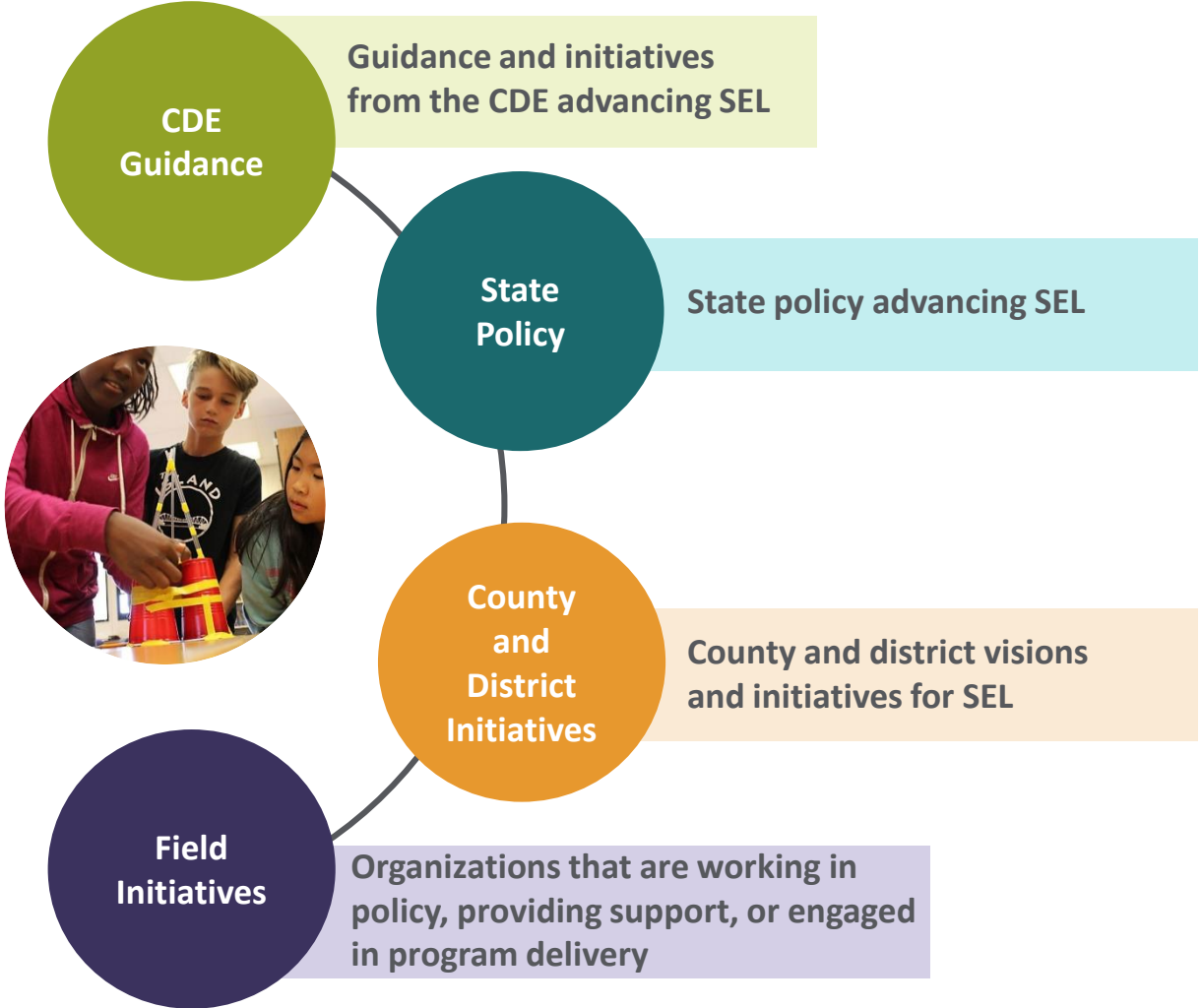


# Although the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the SEL landscape in California, with a focus on immediate needs

CDE Initiatives & Guidance
CA Policy
District Initiative(s)
Field Initiative(s)



# California has also enacted policies and initiatives that impact SEL at the state and local levels and the non-profit sector provides substantial support for policy, advocacy and programs



# By deeply integrating SEL into the student experience statewide, California could raise student performance and reduce risk for failure

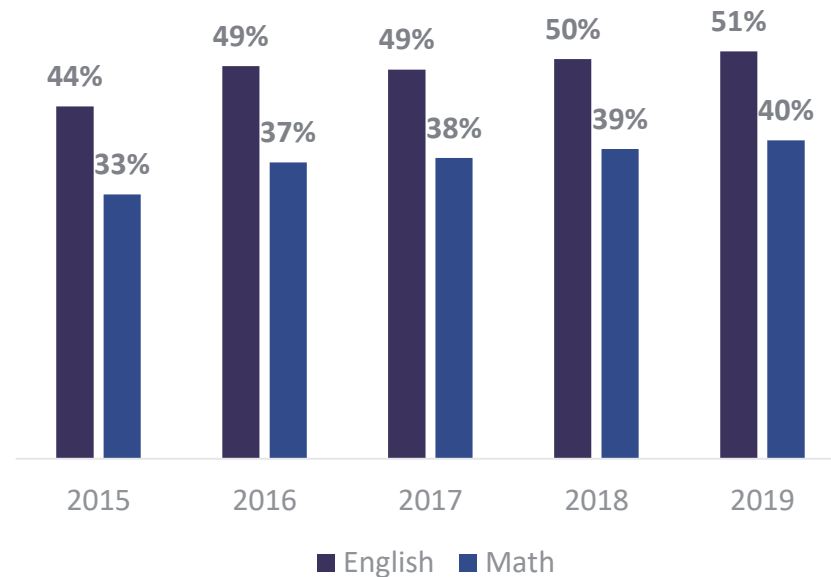
When SEL programming is implemented well, it raises student performance and reduces risk for failure. It leads to higher academic achievement, better social-emotional skills, improved attitudes about self, others and school, and positive classroom behavior.

“Social, emotional, and academic development is an essential part of pre-K-12 education that can transform schools into places that foster academic excellence, collaboration and communication, creativity and innovation, empathy and respect, civic engagement, and other skills and dispositions needed for success in the 21st Century.”

—Council of Distinguished Scientists

The majority of California’s students taking assessments are **falling behind state standards**—about half of students are behind in reading and only 4 in 10 students are proficient in math.

Percentage of California students who met state standards



\*Note: The chart above shows how well students are meeting grade-level standards on the English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments. The assessments are taken annually by students in grades 3–8 and grade 11, and therefore, only account for how ~three million students are doing on the standards. Source(s): [CalMatters](#) (2019), [Durlack, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger](#) (2011), [The Aspen Institute](#) (2017).

# Unprecedented challenges demand bold action now, even though we are without perfect blueprints for the best next steps

Research suggests we are at risk for unprecedented levels of trauma and ongoing social and emotional problems

- A [national survey](#), fielded by America's Promise Alliance and released in June 2020, suggested that only weeks into the pandemic **"students are experiencing a collective trauma."**
- We know from research on trauma and from the science of learning and development that **failure to attend to the wellbeing of children—and adults—will put children at wide scale risk for immediate and long term social, emotional and psychological harm**, and will inhibit learning and development.
- Educators, parents and students across the state told us that **SEL is more important than ever to their well-being and their ability to learn and thrive**, even through these difficult times.

**Our recommendations are designed to help California move on the opportunity and the challenge of advancing transformative SEL for all students starting now.**

**"Disasters last a really long time in the lives of children."**  
- Alice Fothergill, *The Children of Katrina*

# Stakeholders agreed on four high-priority recommendations to advance SEL across the state

## Recommendation #1

*5 strategies*

Support recovery *now* and success in the *future* by making Transformative SEL the cornerstone of California's education system.

## Recommendation #2

*3 strategies*

Emphasize training, support and development of the adults in the system from the beginning.

## Recommendation #3

*2 strategies*

Work together coherently both within and between systems;  
Align SEL efforts at and between the state-, county-, and district-levels.

## Recommendation #4

*4 strategies*

Invite, listen and lift-up.

# Recommendation #1: Support recovery *now* and success in the *future* by making Transformative SEL the cornerstone of California's education system

Rec #1
Rec #2
Rec #3
Rec #4

Our students, educators and families are experiencing **unprecedented challenges** – pandemic, historic racial inequities, increased economic pressure and social isolation – all at one time. When schools reopen – regardless of whether they are virtual or in-person – **reconnection, belonging, understanding and support will be even more critical** to helping them **recover now and to ensuring their success as learners this year and well into the future.**



“Why would we think students will thrive if their social and emotional needs aren't met? As an adult, I don't thrive if my social and emotional needs aren't met.” – *WikiWisdom report*

“The death of George Floyd reminds us of the critical importance of having an SEL framework that leans into students' experiences, affirms students' identities and looks to build environments of trust and belonging that support inquiry, equity, problem solving, advocacy and curiosity. Our children and youth have the blueprint. They bring cultural richness and valuable experiences into our classrooms that can help us build positive school environments and school conditions for all. In fact, they show us time and time again tremendous examples of brilliance, resilience, determination, critical problem solving and the consideration of multiple perspectives.” – *WikiWisdom report*



# Recommendation #2: Emphasize training, support and development of the adults in the system from the beginning

Rec #1

Rec #2

Rec #3

Rec #4

A hard-learned lesson learned from SEL efforts over the past 30 years: **developing adult SEL skills in those responsible for supporting students is crucial.** The path to student wellbeing and readiness to learn is through the adults who interact with them. Counties, districts and schools **must support and invest in adult health and well-being**, and the development of **adult social and emotional competencies, bias awareness**, and understanding of **trauma-informed and culturally-responsive practices**, in order to create the culture, climate and relationships that **enable effective learning and development for all students.**

“[We should] support educator growth and capacity as their own understanding of SEL evolves so that, SEL becomes more and more the “how” we engage in content standards. Highlighting that the SEL competencies are the skills required to attain the content standards.” – *Convening Participant*

“I am most excited about the professional development on SEL for all staff admin, teachers and classified. I think it would be great if it is a requirement statewide.”  
– *Convening Participant*

“SEL is not just for students. It is for adults as well. We must first focus on adult wellbeing so that the adults can focus on student wellbeing.” – *Convening Participant*

# Recommendation #3: Work together coherently: Align SEL efforts at the state-, county-, and district-levels

Rec #1

Rec #2

Rec #3

Rec #4

Too often, an alphabet soup of programs, frameworks and approaches exist in parallel, often duplicating efforts or working at cross purposes. In a time of crisis and scarce resources, and to drive long term sustainability, **greater coherence can help focus communication and systems integration**, reduce redundancies, and **create stronger alignment across programs and funding streams**. This can **increase capacity and to scale SEL across the state** without imposing a “one size fits all” approach.

Explore working with the state MTSS lead (Orange County Office of Education) to implement this recommendation.

“[It’s important] to work to ensure that SEL is reflected in our policies and practices and that it is clearly called out.” – *Convening Participant*

“[We need] districtwide coherence – horizontally and vertically – a common language, approaches, etc.” – *Convening Participant*

“SEL standards that are developmentally appropriate to complement academic standards would support full integration.” – *Convening Participant*



# Recommendation #4: Invite, listen and lift-up

Rec #1

Rec #2

Rec #3

Rec #4

Engage students, families, educators and community partners - with particular attention to **empowering underrepresented voices** - earlier in the process to identify challenges and **co-design SEL solutions** in their schools.

“Elevating student voice and agency as well as taking an asset-based approach on their experiences during the twin crises.” – *Convening Participant*

“Partnering with parents is the key. We also held parent classes to teach the parents the same curriculum that we are teaching the students. This way everyone is using the same language and is aware of what the signs or signals mean. This also bridges the home to school connection.” – *WikiWisdom report*

“Listening to the students’ perspective more, including them in the conversation about their own experiences.”  
– *Convening Participant*

# Our Advance SEL partners strongly support this work and plan to embed these recommendations into their ongoing conversations and planning at the state level

- We recognize that our state and nation are in a moment of economic recession and dwindling budgets. However, **the state's 2020-21 budget does include \$5.3B for LEAs and \$45M for County Offices of Education to potentially support much of the work outlined in these recommendations.**
- **The California Department of Education's State SEL Team 2.0, a cross-section of stakeholders and practitioners tasked with amplifying SEL best practices, will examine these recommendations over the coming year and identify an implementation timeline.**

**These recommendations represent a commitment among leaders across the system to an ongoing, collaborative process on behalf of California's 6.2 million students - to continue seeking and identifying new or existing resources that support this work in the months and years ahead, and to seize opportunities that can be implemented now.**

Our recommendations come at a **moment of unparalleled challenges for all school communities** across the state.

The **strategies and suggested actions target every level of the system** and include suggestions that can **inspire action now and over the long-term.**

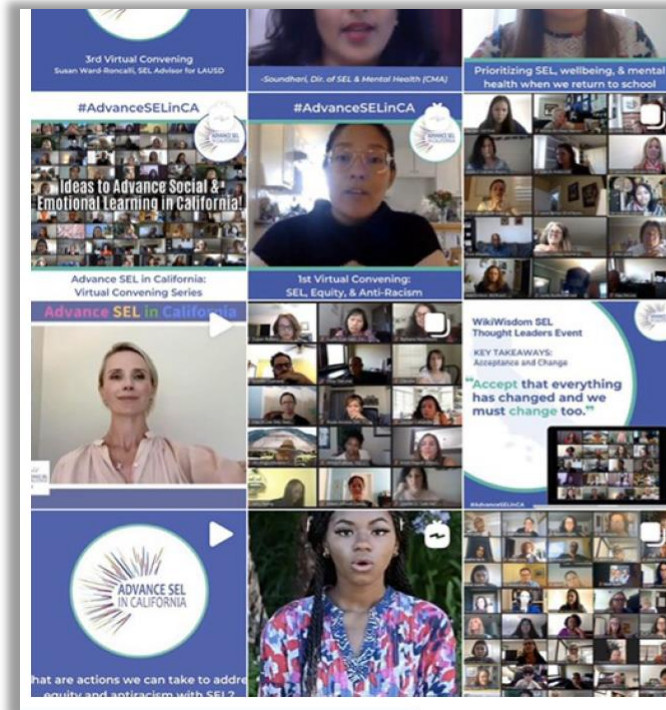
We hope that educators, parents and students will **take up these suggestions in whatever way you can,** using what is available to you to benefit students the most.



**We must do it now.  
We owe it to our students.**

# This is a beginning, not the end

**Beyond Differences** and the **SEL Alliance for CA** will take over the **#AdvanceSELinCA social media accounts** to continue the conversations and highlight student, parent and educator voices in this work.



**Visit Advance SEL in California on Social Media!**

[Twitter: @AdvanceSELinCA](https://twitter.com/AdvanceSELinCA)

[Instagram: @AdvanceSELinCA](https://www.instagram.com/AdvanceSELinCA)

[Facebook: @Advance Social Emotional Learning in California](https://www.facebook.com/AdvanceSocialEmotionalLearninginCalifornia)

Thank you!  
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