

A Broader Vision of Student Success:

Insights and Opportunities for Social and Emotional Learning in Delaware

June 2018

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Executive Summary

The process of learning is inherently social and emotional

What do we mean by “social and emotional learning”?

CASEL defines social and emotional learning as “the process through which students 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.**”¹

In schools and classrooms across the country, social and emotional learning (SEL) practices **take many forms**, ranging from **formal standalone lessons** to **integration with academics** to work on **school climate, relationship-building or social justice.**

Why is SEL important?

Research demonstrates, and educators agree, that social and emotional development is **critical to setting children up for success** in school and life.² As one Delaware principal put it, “**If we don’t meet these kids’ emotional and social needs, then all the math in the world and all the teaching from the best instructors isn’t going to matter.**”

The focus of this report

Social and emotional learning happens all the time, whether intentionally or not. This report focuses on **explicit and intentional efforts** on the part of actors across the education system to incorporate SEL into in- and out-of-school activities.

We conducted this research study to better understand SEL in Delaware and identify opportunities to improve supports for all students

Why this report

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a core part of students' education in many Delaware schools, and educators throughout the state believe deeply in the importance of this work. To advance the **quality and equity** of SEL policy and practice throughout the state, we wanted to better understand SEL practices currently in place and the areas of greatest need. We offer this report, based on our study of practices in the state and drawing on national research, to **shine a light on the current landscape of SEL** in Delaware and **help leaders, educators and partners across the state make decisions and investments** to strengthen students' social and emotional development.

Who we are



The Rodel Foundation of Delaware is dedicated to helping Delaware build one of the finest systems of public education in the world. We work with policymakers, researchers, educators, and business and community members to catalyze new ideas and drive impactful student outcomes. Rodel sponsored and oversaw this project and is grateful for the co-investment and leadership of the project's other sponsors and Steering Committee members (see slides 6–7).

Education First is a national, non-partisan, mission-driven strategy and policy organization with unique and deep expertise in education improvement. Our mission is to deliver exceptional ideas, experience-based solutions and results so all students—and particularly low-income students and students of color—are prepared for success in college, career and life. We conducted this research study, in partnership with the non-partisan Virginia-based research firm **Edge Research**, and wrote this report.



This study was sponsored by Rodel and a group of local funders...

Project Sponsors



The **Arsht-Cannon Fund** was created to preserve, support, protect, and defend the best interests of a civil society. The fund is currently focused on improving the quality of life for all Delawareans by increasing educational opportunities and access to healthcare for Hispanic Delawareans.

Christiana Care Health System, headquartered in Wilmington, Delaware, is one of the country's largest health care providers. Its mission is to serve its neighbors as a respectful, expert, caring partner in their health by creating innovative, effective, affordable systems of care that its neighbors value.



As a facilitator, information resource and manager of charitable funds, the **Delaware Community Foundation** helps communities and philanthropists focus charitable resources for the greatest community benefit statewide.

Nemours Children's Health Care System is committed to improving the health of children. Its mission is to provide leadership, institutions, and services to restore and improve the health of children through care and programs not readily available, with one high standard of quality and distinction, regardless of the recipient's financial status.



...and informed by a steering committee of practitioners and experts from across the state of Delaware

Steering Committee

- **Madeleine Bayard**, Senior Vice President, Rodel Foundation of Delaware
- **Dana Beckton**, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Christiana Care
- **Debby Boyer**, Director of K–12 Education and Delaware PBS Co-Project Director
- **Chris Cannon**, Executive Director, Arsht-Cannon Fund
- **Rachel Donaldson**, Social Emotional Learning Coordinator, Woodbridge School District
- **Dorrell Green**, Director of Innovation and Improvement, Delaware Department of Education
- **Sarah Grunewald**, Vice President of Community Engagement and Programs, Delaware Community Foundation
- **Eliza Hirst**, Deputy Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate
- **Meghan Lines**, Staff Psychologist, Department of Pediatric Behavioral Health, Nemours
- **Leslie Newman**, CEO, Children & Families First
- **Felicia Wennell**, Co-Head of School for Academic Support, Freire Charter School Wilmington

Through our research, we aimed to answer five high-level questions about SEL implementation in Delaware

1

What is the range of programs, interventions, measurement tools and policies to support SEL currently in use?

2

What is the range of implementation of SEL programs/interventions?

3

What and where are there major gaps in SEL implementation? Who is addressing these gaps?

4

How are schools and districts attempting to implement SEL with a focus on equity?

5

What resources and tools do schools, districts and their partners need to implement SEL and mitigate common challenges so that all students in Delaware develop the SEL skills they need to succeed?

To answer these questions, we administered surveys, conducted interviews and visited schools across the state

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADER SURVEYS



To get a broad sense of what SEL implementation looks like, we surveyed school and district leaders. We administered the survey statewide and received 55 responses.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH EDUCATORS AND SEL PARTNERS



We followed up by conducting interviews with more than 30 school and district leaders, SEL partners (in- and out-of-school-time service providers) and representatives from other community organizations that provide SEL supports.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT SITE VISITS



To get a closer look at SEL implementation across the state, we spent time in schools, where we observed instruction in classrooms and spoke with students, parents, teachers, school and district leaders, and community partners.

This report reflects data collected and visits to schools in **all three Delaware counties**; **all grade levels**; and **district, vo-tech and charter** schools. Our study focused primarily on schools that serve **higher-than-average populations of students of color**, students from **low-income households** and **English learners**. We also conducted **desk research** to supplement our findings. **Unless cited otherwise, all findings in this report are from our surveys, interviews and/or site visits.**

We organized the findings from our research into six key themes

Theme

Findings

EQUITY

- Delaware students of color face **significant achievement, discipline and access gaps**.
- Delaware educators are **committed to meeting the needs of all students**.
- But there are **risks** associated with implementing SEL without an **explicit and intentional** racial equity lens.

SHARED LEADERSHIP

- Schools are using resources from a **variety** of different SEL programs, frameworks and approaches.
- **Teachers frequently play a leadership role in SEL efforts**, supported by school and district leaders.
- Educators are eager for **support and statewide coherence**, but are wary of the potential for overreach.

COLLABORATION

- Educators and community partners value opportunities to **work together to support kids**.
- Promising **examples of collaboration abound** across the state, but more are needed.
- In particular, educators point to a statewide need for **additional social services**, including in mental health.

CAPACITY

- Schools and districts have experienced success by leading with **adult SEL skill development**.
- Schools with strong SEL programs **are implementing incrementally** with targeted goals.
- Still, educators and staff **need additional training** on how to implement SEL in the classroom.

ENGAGEMENT

- Family and student engagement is **critical to the success of SEL implementation**.
- Many schools and districts **struggle** with this work or have **not yet made it a priority**.
- SEL partners are helping to **bridge the gap** and engage families and students.

BALANCED MEASUREMENT

- Most schools currently use **“proxy data”** to gauge effectiveness of SEL efforts.
- Educators **value the ability to track SEL progress**, and some are eager for more targeted measures.
- Educators and experts in Delaware and across the country **urge caution** when measuring SEL.

This circle, with equity at the center, demonstrates the interconnectedness of our findings



The circle also demonstrates the connections across our recommendations

Balanced Measurement Recommendation

Support schools to prioritize SEL and measure it meaningfully, but stay away from mandating assessments or attaching “stakes.”

Example: Help schools set explicit, concrete goals for SEL implementation

Equity Recommendation

Move from working to meet all students’ needs to explicitly implementing SEL *for* equity.

Example: Advocate for discipline policies that minimize the time students are removed from the classroom

Shared Leadership Recommendation

Develop system-level coherence while maintaining a commitment to local flexibility and opportunities for school and teacher leadership.

Example: Develop culturally responsive competencies for SEL in Delaware

Engagement Recommendation

Engage students and families in the design, planning, rollout and evaluation of SEL initiatives and help families develop their own SEL skills.

Example: Be willing to work alongside families and students, rather than providing them with “the answers”



Capacity Recommendation

Prioritize SEL learning opportunities for teacher candidates, teachers, school leaders and other school-based staff.

Example: Create a cadre of SEL teacher leaders

Collaboration Recommendation

Facilitate coordination and knowledge sharing within and across schools, districts, states and sectors.

Example: Encourage school leaders to create and use “asset maps” of community organizations

A broader vision: The recommendations in this report are intended to bring Delaware to a place where *all* students receive the social, emotional and academic supports they need



EQUITY

- Teachers understand **implicit bias, dominant culture norms, cultural competency and asset-based approaches**, and incorporate these learnings into their instruction
- All students **receive the support they need** to succeed socially, emotionally and academically

SHARED LEADERSHIP

- Educators have a **shared understanding of what SEL is** and the SEL competencies students need
- Educators have **flexibility to choose SEL approaches** that work for their students, with support
- Schools are designed or have evolved so that **SEL is not an add-on but a common thread** in students' learning

COLLABORATION

- Educators **share SEL knowledge, resources and best practices**
- Community partners, employers and schools** ensure students have the **SEL skills needed for college and careers**
- Health care providers and schools work together to **meet students' mental health needs**

CAPACITY

- Educators understand how to teach **standalone SEL lessons and integrate SEL into academics**; all school staff **create learning environments where students thrive**
- Teacher and principal **preparation programs incorporate SEL**
- Educators receive **ongoing professional learning about SEL**

ENGAGEMENT

- Families, students and communities are **viewed as assets**, and are proactively engaged to **co-design, plan, roll out and evaluate** schools' SEL initiatives
- Schools address families' SEL needs** alongside those of their students

BALANCED MEASUREMENT

- Schools and districts have access to helpful **tools and data** to understand their students' social and emotional development and **use that data to improve SEL strategies**
- District and state leaders **encourage schools to prioritize SEL** but refrain from **issuing mandates or attaching "stakes"** to SEL outcomes

Other states can learn from these four overarching themes that emerged from Delaware's pioneering efforts to understand and deepen its SEL practices



Keep equity at the center

- Schools must become deeply inclusive communities in which educators understand and affirm families' backgrounds and cultural heritage
- Educators must acknowledge and address the impact of racism, privilege and implicit bias in education



Listen to communities, build on existing assets

- Engaging students, parents, educators, and community partners led us to nuanced insights
- Our recommendations build on Delaware's promising practices and respond to stakeholders' lived experiences



Harness the power of collaboration

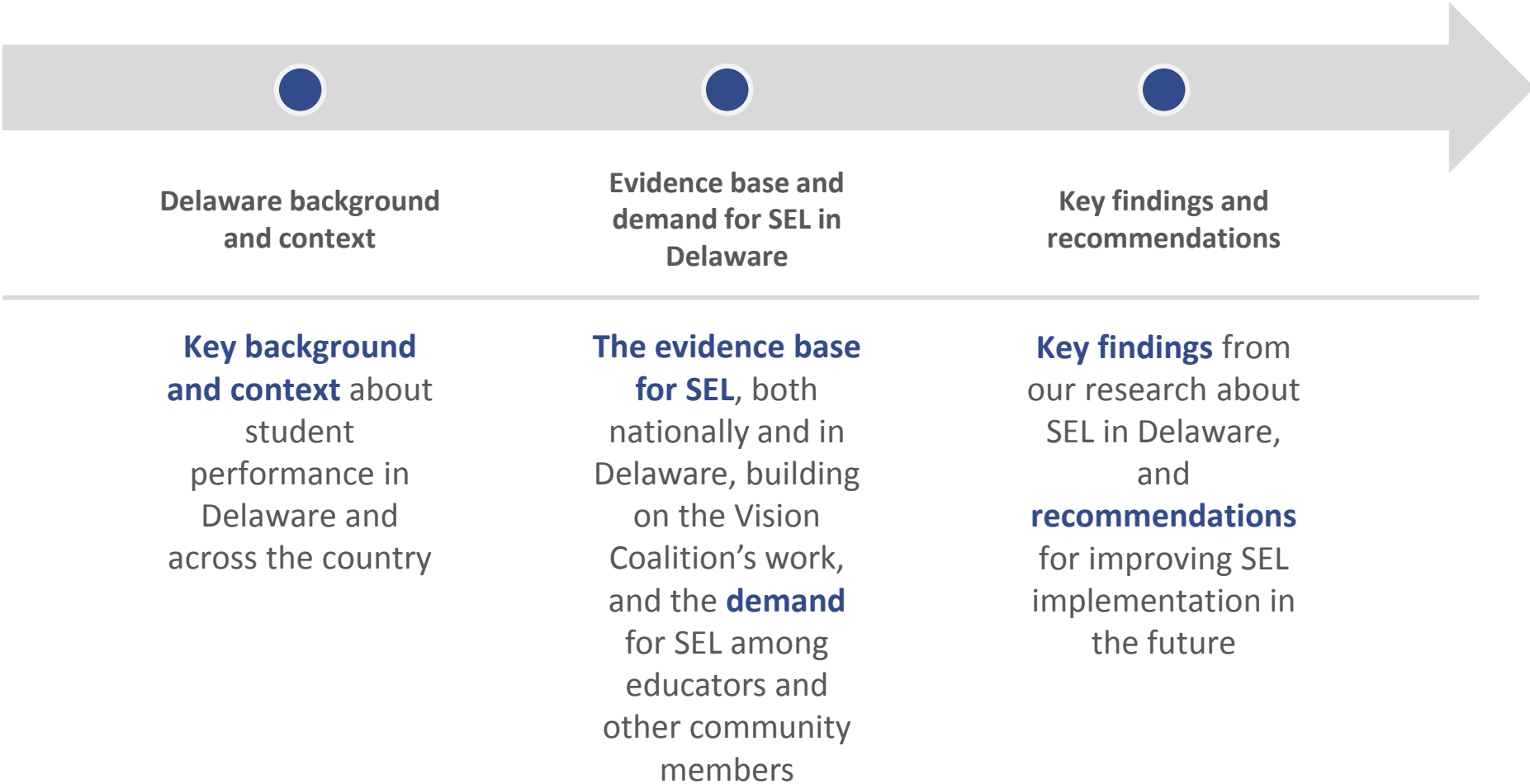
- Working together, policy makers, schools and community organizations can develop a more holistic understanding of students and their families, for a greater collective impact
- Deepening Delaware's connections between education and healthcare is particularly important



SEL is more than a program

- Evidence-based SEL frameworks and curricula are useful resources for schools, but SEL is more than just a program: SEL in schools is happening all the time
- *All* adults in schools are responsible for creating a learning environment that allows *all* students to feel safe and successful

In the following sections of this report, we share what we learned about SEL in Delaware and our recommendations to enhance implementation in the future

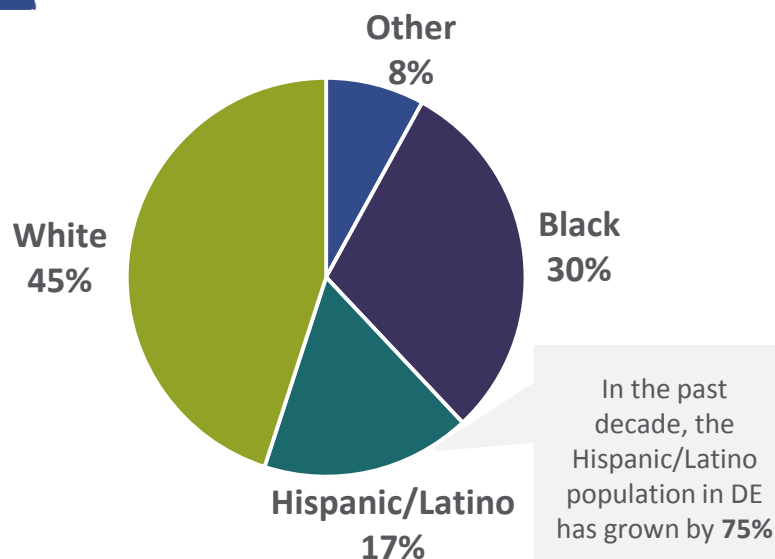


Delaware Background and Context

Delaware is a small state whose public school student population reflects the diversity of the United States



In 2017–18, approximately 130,000 students attended Delaware public schools¹...



35%

Students from low-income households

14%

Students receiving special education services

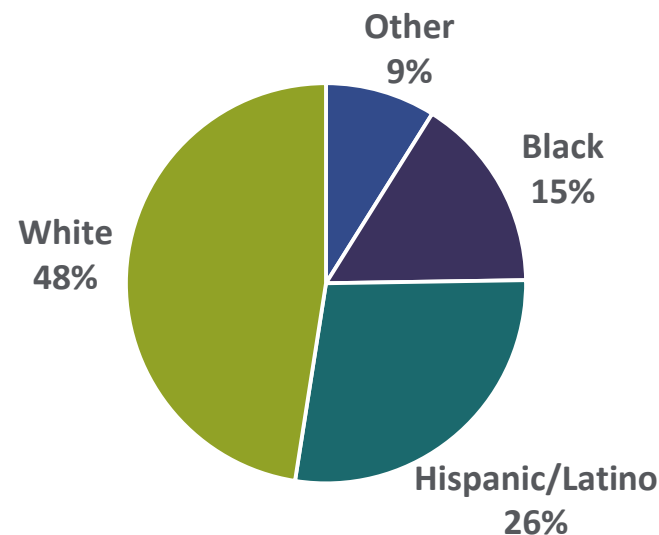
9%

English learners

Since 1997, the English learner population in DE has increased **428%**



...out of a total of 50 million students nationwide²



37%

Students from low-income households

13%

Students receiving special education services

9%

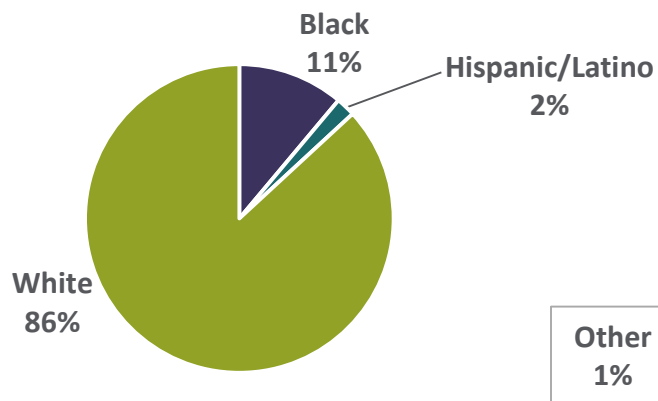
English learners

Despite the growing diversity of the student population, Delaware teachers and principals are overwhelmingly White

Nearly 9,000 teachers ¹



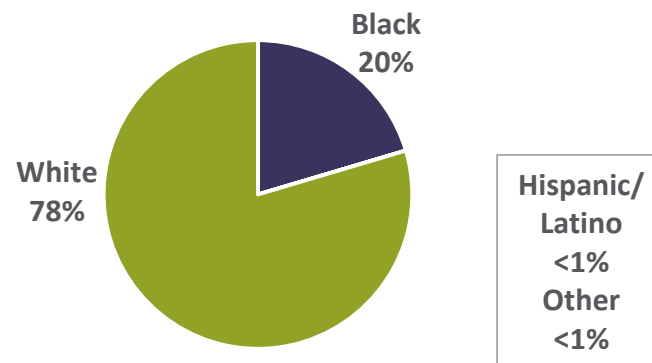
Teacher Demographics



200+ principals ¹



Principal Demographics

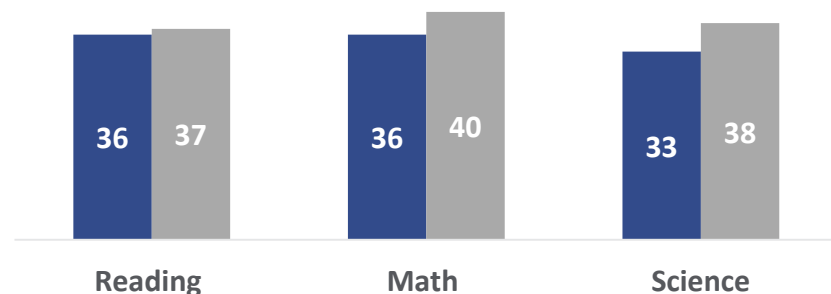


Research shows that students of color assigned to a teacher who shares their race perform better on standardized tests and other achievement outcomes.² Nationwide, less than one-fifth of public school teachers identify as people of color.³

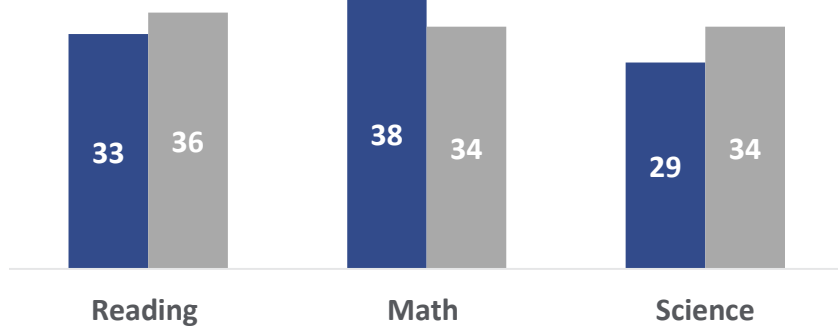
Today, student achievement in Delaware is comparable to national averages, and graduation rates continue to climb

Percentage of students performing on grade level¹

Grade 4

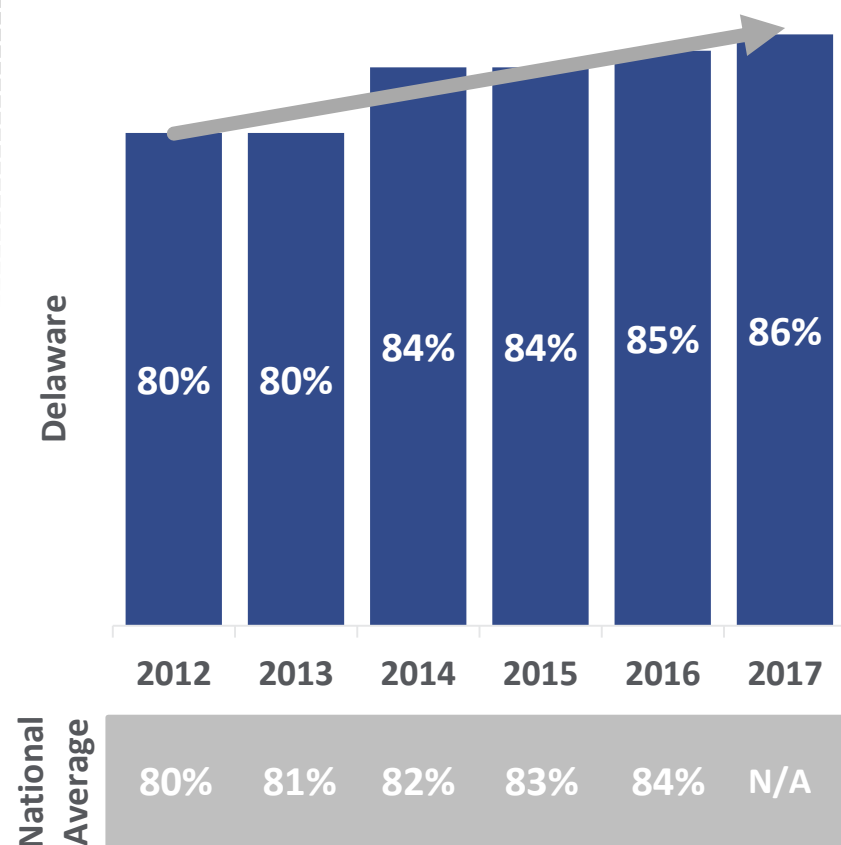


Grade 8



■ = Delaware ■ = National Average

Percentage of students graduating from high school in four years²



Still, pernicious achievement gaps persist, in both academics...

SEL factors, such as chronic absenteeism and family stressors, have an impact on third grade reading scores—a key predictor of future high school graduation.¹

OVERALL READING AND MATH LEVELS²



READING AND MATH LEVELS BY RACE



5 out of 10 **White** students



4 out of 10 **Hispanic/Latino** students



3 out of 10 **Black** students



5 out of 10 **White** students



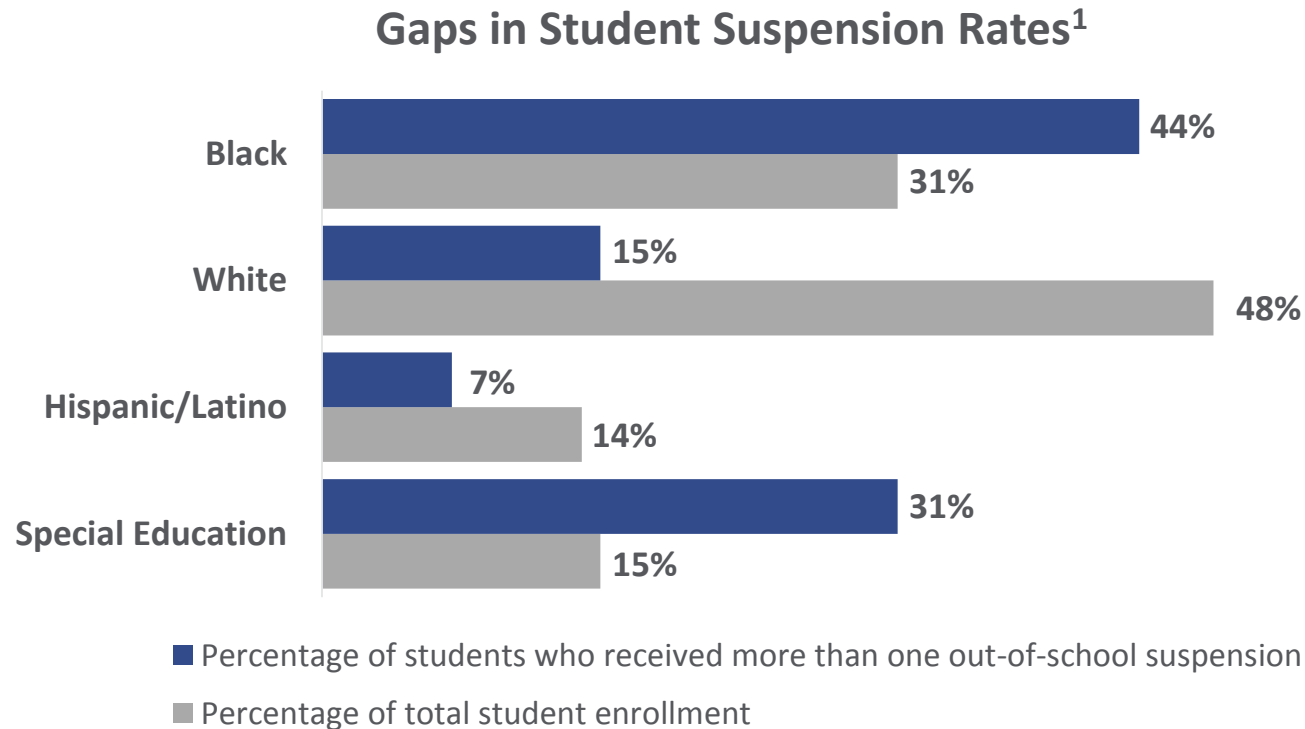
3 out of 10 **Hispanic/Latino** students



2 out of 10 **Black** students

Math (Grades 3–8) Reading (Grades 3–8)

...and school discipline: Black students—and students with disabilities—are disciplined at disproportionately high rates



*And this **trend starts early**: According to a study that looked at publicly funded early childhood programs—which primarily serve **low-income students and students of color**—Delaware **expelled more preschool students than all but five other states.**²*

According to the Delaware School Climate Survey, middle school students feel less safe in school compared to other age groups, and fewer older students are happy in school

Students who don't feel safe at school often experience challenges with attendance, academics and mental health. Safe, supportive school environments, where students have positive relationships with peers and adults and feel a true sense of belonging, strengthen student engagement.

Percentage of students who report feeling
safe at school

95%

Elementary
School

84%

Middle
School

91%

High School

Percentage of students who report feeling
happy at school

85%

Elementary
School

68%

Middle
School

61%

High School

- Even as school climate data shows **room for improvement with older students**, work on **SEL is more prevalent in the lower grade**
- While **9 in 10 elementary school students** report that they are **learning to solve conflicts** with others in school, that number **drops to under half** by high school

Source: [University of Delaware](#) (2018). Note: The [Delaware school climate survey](#), created by the University of Delaware, provides schools with information about “teacher-student relations, student relations and safety, clarity of expectations, fairness of rules, teacher-parent relations, and the use of positive, punitive and social emotional learning techniques.”

Additionally, close to one in four Delaware students have experienced multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

23%

of Delaware children have experienced
two or more ACEs¹

ACEs INCLUDE EXPERIENCES LIKE:²

- Physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Physical or emotional neglect
- Intimate partner violence
- Mother treated violently
- Substance misuse within household
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member

And ACEs are far more prevalent among low-income students and students of color, both in Delaware and across the country. Delaware rates are similar to the national level.

Schools that focus on creating a welcoming and inclusive climate and support students' social and emotional development can buffer the impacts of ACEs, turn around these negative trends, and set children up for long-term success and well-being.

Evidence Base and Demand for SEL in Delaware

Across the nation, parents, educators, employers, researchers and policymakers are now embracing a definition of student success that goes beyond academics



A meta-analysis of 210 studies of more than 270,000 students showed that students who participated in evidence-based SEL programs had an **11 percentage point gain in academic achievement** compared to students who did not participate.¹

Emerging evidence indicates that students who have stronger SEL skills in kindergarten are **more likely to have positive long-term life outcomes, including staying out of jail, avoiding substance abuse and having stronger mental health.**² Currently, nearly **half of Delaware children** enter kindergarten **without the SEL skills** they need to be successful.³



In several large school districts, schools that focused on SEL have experienced **reduced discipline rates**, particularly among African American and Latino male students, who are suspended and expelled at disproportionate rates nationwide compared to White students.⁴

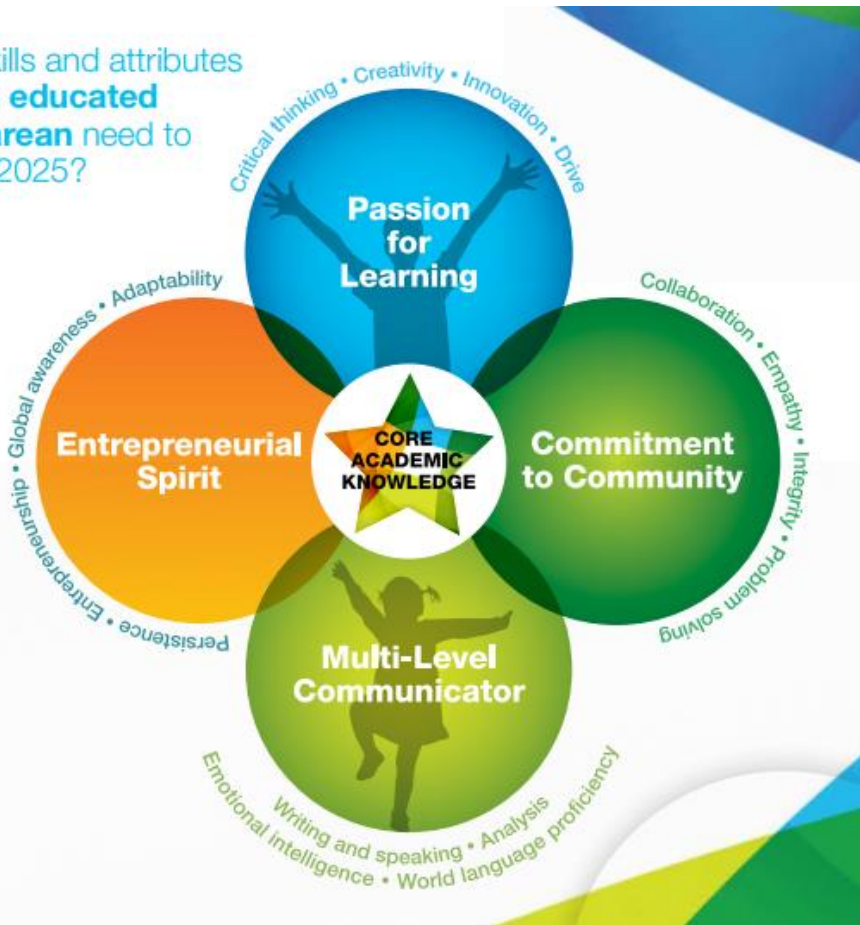
Recent conversations between the Vision Coalition of Delaware and over 4,000 Delawareans confirmed that citizens of the First State agree these attributes are vital...

“To truly **succeed in the future**, students will need **more than just core academic knowledge**... To **tackle tomorrow’s problems** and excel in the jobs of the future, students will need skills and attributes like **creativity, flexibility, and curiosity**... As the **social and environmental challenges** in our communities grow, our children will need to be more **empathetic and innovative** in their problem-solving.”

—Student Success 2025, Vision Coalition of Delaware

...and while core academic knowledge remains the “North Star,” the *Student Success 2025* articulation of an educated Delawarean highlights the importance of “soft skills” as well

What skills and attributes does an **educated Delawarean** need to have in 2025?



Questions about how best to **support educators** across the state to **understand SEL**, foster **supportive school learning environments**, and **develop these skills in students** have prompted efforts to better understand the growing science of cognitive and social and emotional development in young people

Moreover, in our survey, educators across Delaware identified SEL as a top priority...

Two-thirds

of school and district leaders responded that **developing emotional intelligence, positive attitudes and social skills in students** is one of their **top education priorities**

*...ahead of **all other categories**, including “program and instructional quality” (62%), “student engagement” (62%) and “gaps in academic achievement” (53%)*

...and emphasized their understanding that social and emotional development equips students to succeed in academics and beyond

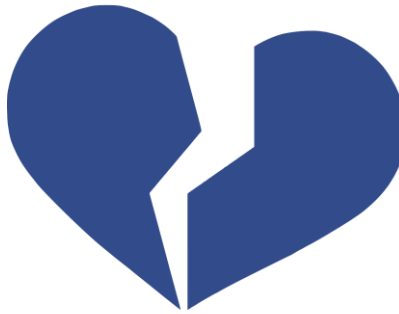
Why does your school engage in social and emotional learning?

% of respondents who ranked response in top three



76%

To help students better manage their emotions



50%

To help students dealing with trauma



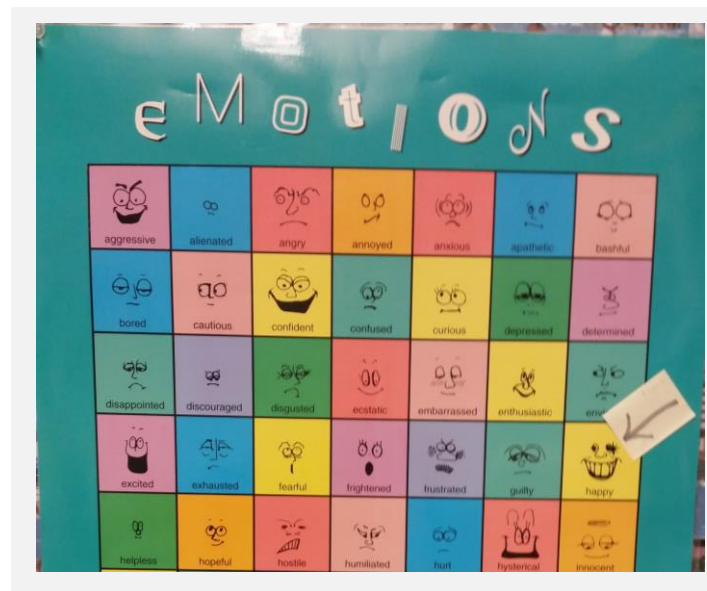
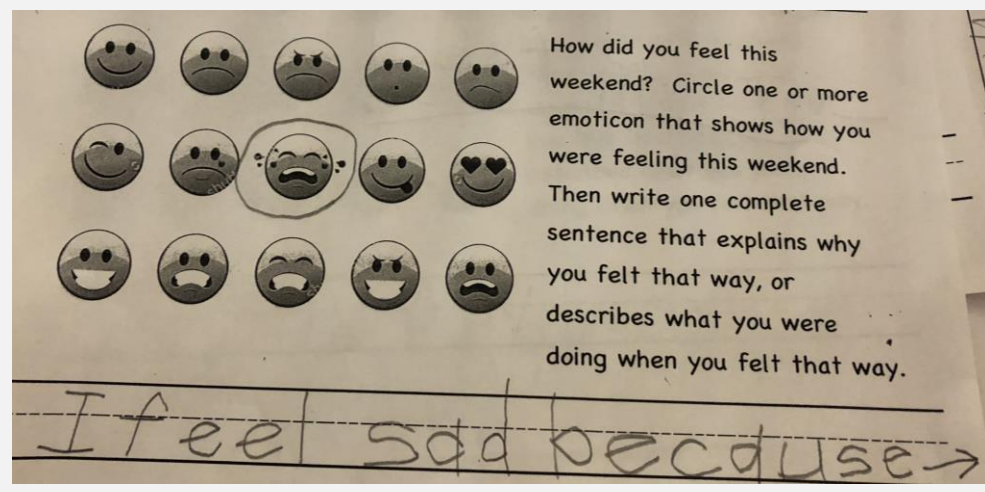
33%

To build skills and attitudes to be successful in work

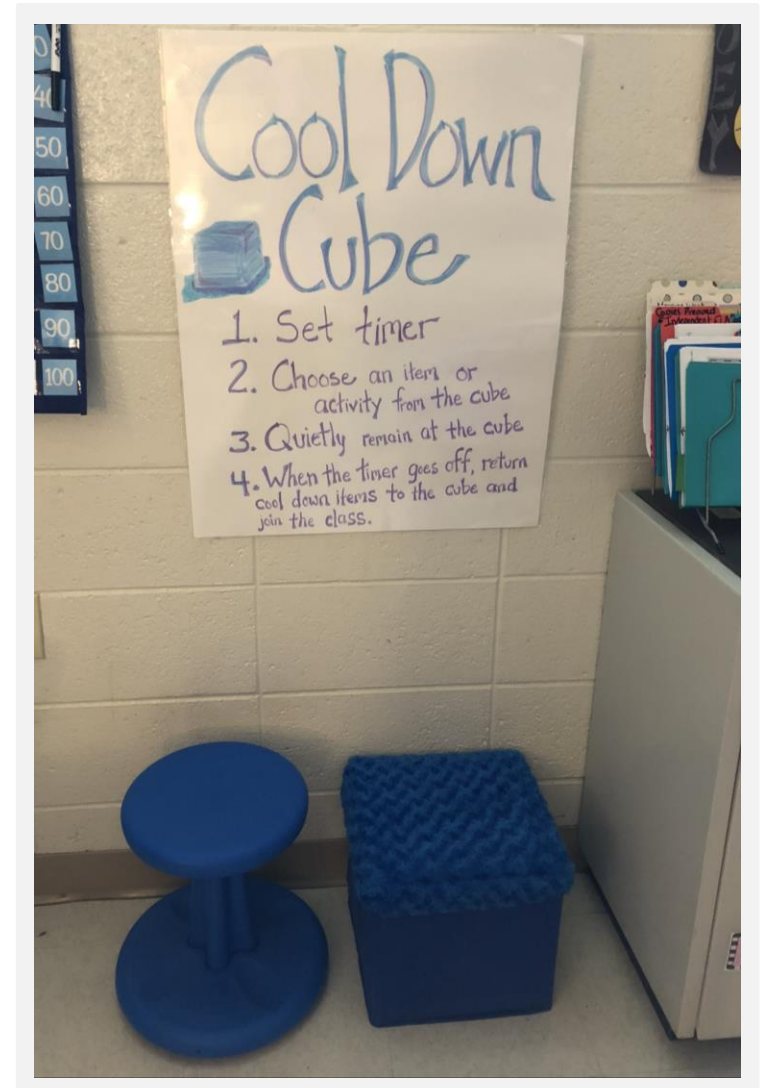
Research Findings and Recommendations

As we spent time in public schools across Delaware, we observed a variety of rich social and emotional learning in action.

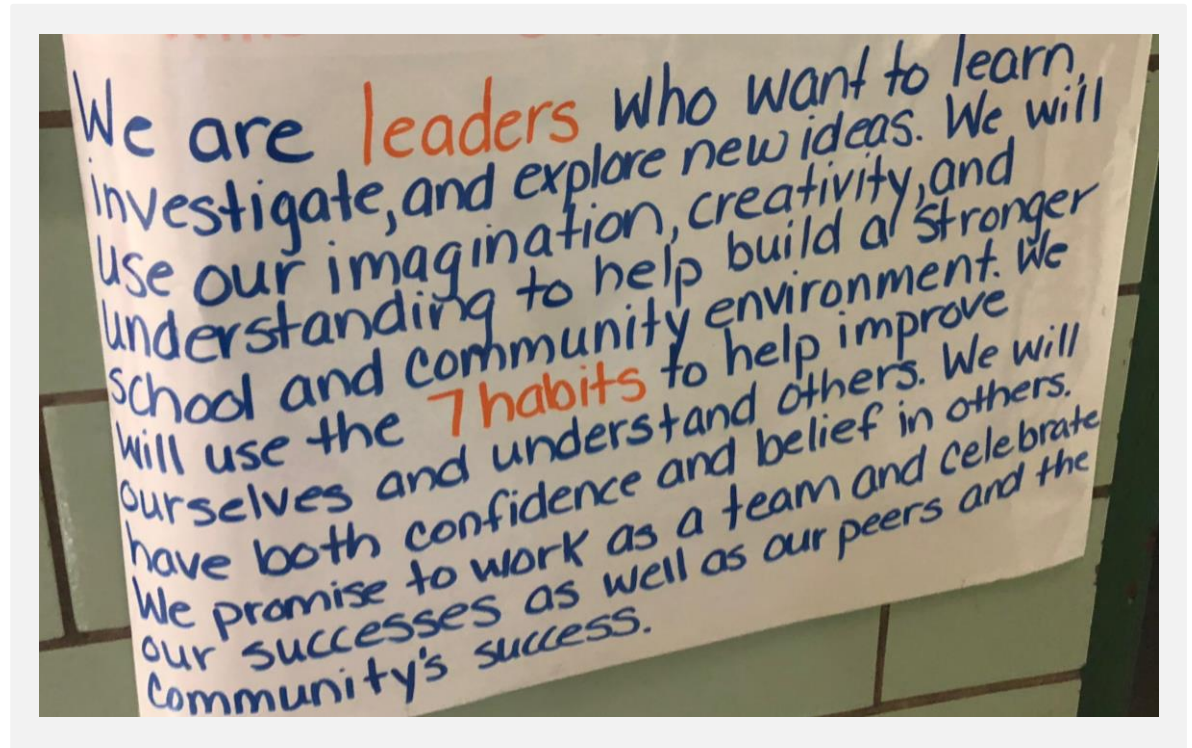
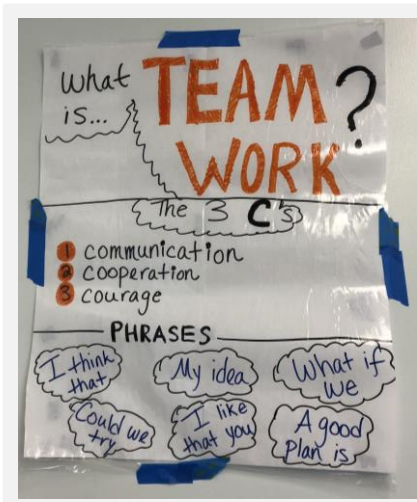
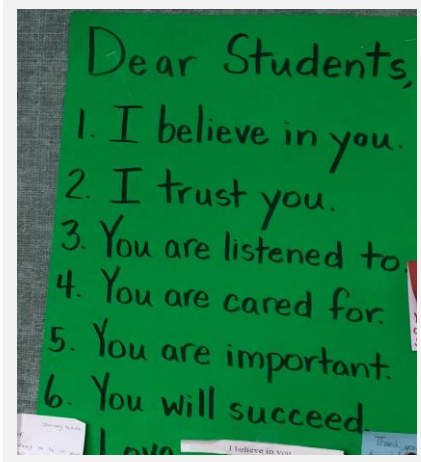
We saw educators helping students recognize, understand and express their emotions...



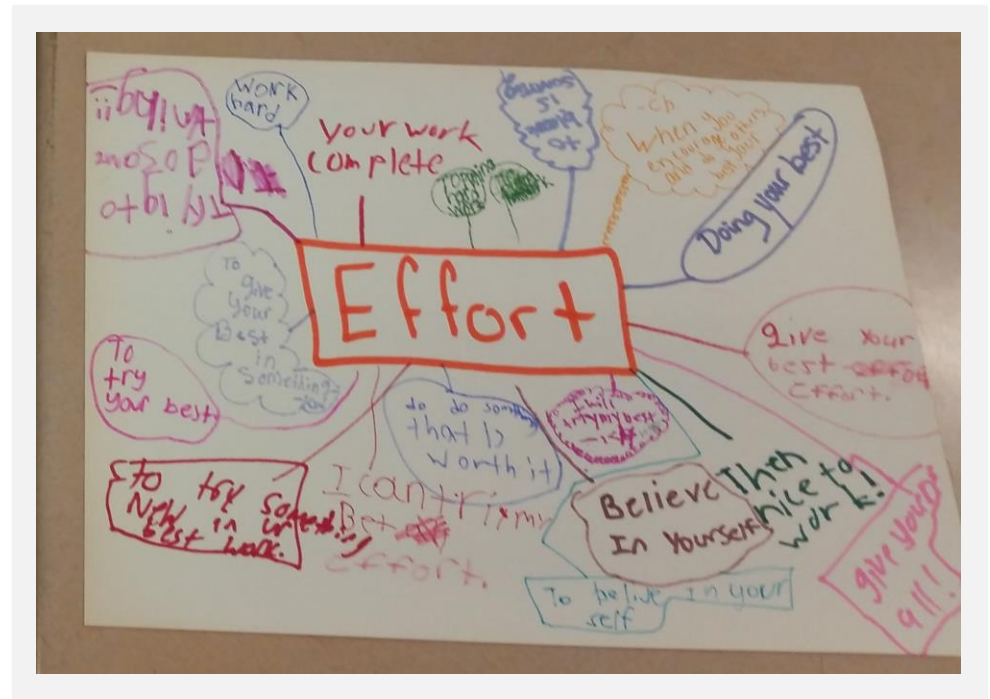
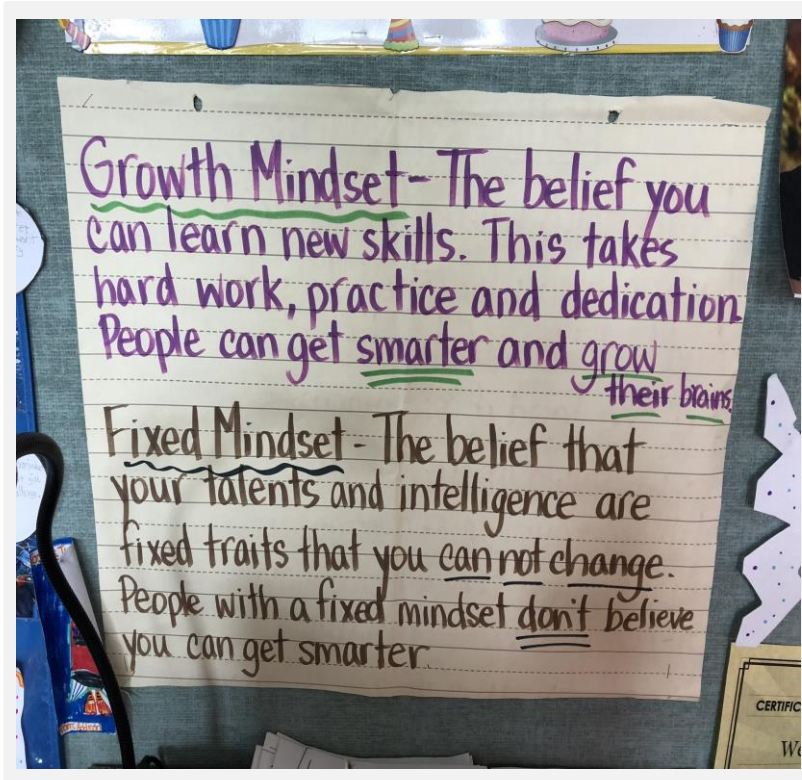
...and develop and practice strategies to regulate those emotions when needed, independently and with support



We saw teachers focused on building strong relationships and helping students develop strategies to work together...



...and solve problems, including by persisting through challenges and learning from failure



In addition to observing and hearing about the exciting work already taking place, we listened to students, parents, teachers, school and district leaders, and SEL partners share their thoughts about what could deepen and strengthen this work across the state.

This circle, with equity at the center, demonstrates the interconnectedness of our findings and recommendations



Our findings and recommendations highlight promising practices and opportunities for the SEL field in Delaware

Category

Finding

Recommendation



Equity

In addition to achievement gaps, Delaware students of color face significant gaps in discipline rates and access to effective teachers. Delaware educators are committed to meeting the needs of all students, but there are risks associated with implementing SEL without an explicit and intentional racial equity lens.

Move from working to meet all students' needs to explicitly implementing SEL *for* equity.



Shared Leadership

Schools are using, combining and customizing resources from many different SEL programs, frameworks and approaches. In many schools, the choice of SEL strategy is the result of teacher-led efforts, supported by school and district leadership. Educators are eager for support, resources and statewide coherence, but are wary of the potential for overreach.

Develop system-level coherence while maintaining a commitment to local flexibility and opportunities for school and teacher leadership.



Collaboration

Educators and community partners value opportunities to work together to support kids. Promising examples of collaboration abound across the state, but more is needed. In particular, educators point to a statewide need for additional social services, including for mental health.

Facilitate coordination and knowledge sharing within and across schools, districts, states and sectors.

Our findings and recommendations highlight promising practices and opportunities for the SEL field in Delaware

Category

Finding

Recommendation



Capacity

Schools and districts have experienced success by leading with adult SEL skill development, and schools with strong SEL programs are implementing incrementally with targeted goals. Still, educators (and other school staff) need additional training on how to integrate SEL in the classroom, building on trauma-informed instructional strategies.

Prioritize SEL learning opportunities for teacher candidates, teachers, school leaders and other school-based staff, and help teachers integrate SEL into their practice.



Engagement

Family and student engagement is critical to the success of SEL implementation, but many schools and districts struggle with this work or have not yet made it a priority. SEL partners are helping to bridge the gap and engage families and students in ways schools and districts cannot do alone.

Engage students and families in the design, planning, rollout and evaluation of SEL initiatives and help families develop their own SEL skills.



Balanced Measurement

Most schools currently use “proxy data” to gauge the effectiveness of their SEL efforts. Educators value the ability to track SEL progress, and some are eager for, or already using, more targeted measures. But educators and experts in Delaware and across the country urge caution when measuring SEL.

Support schools to prioritize SEL and measure it meaningfully, but stay away from mandating assessments or attaching “stakes.”



Equity:

Findings and Recommendations

What is equity?



A definition of racial equity:

Racial equity is **an outcome and a process**. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race **no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes**; when everyone has what they need to thrive... As a process, we apply racial equity when **those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved** in the creation and implementation of the policies that impact their lives.

—Center for Social Inclusion

A definition of an equitable education system:

An equitable education system is one in which **every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need**, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, disability, family background or income, citizenship or tribal status.

*—Aspen Institute Education & Society Program
and Council of Chief State School Officers*

In addition to racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps, Delaware students face significant equity gaps

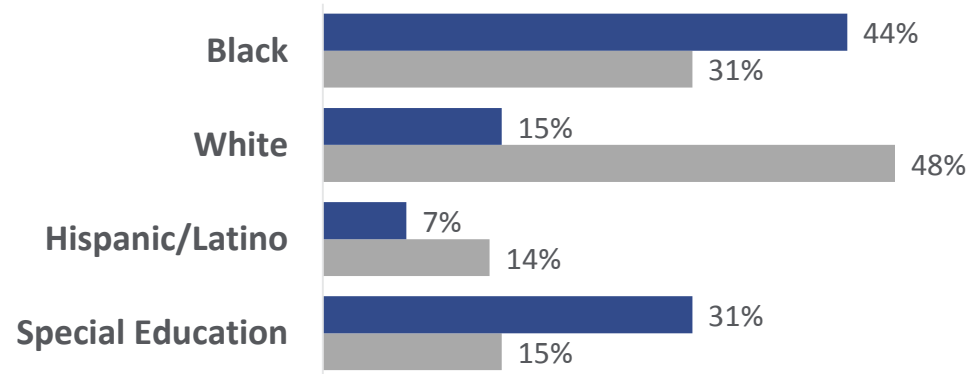
Equity gaps in Delaware

Commitment to equitable implementation

Racial equity lens

- Delaware schools that serve students of color and students from low-income households have numerous resource gaps, including **less access** to the state's **best teachers**¹
- Black students and students receiving special education services are also suspended at **disproportionate rates**, causing them to miss valuable instructional time²

Student Suspension Rates (2013–14)



■ Percentage of students who received more than one out-of-school suspension

■ Percentage of total student enrollment

Delaware educators are committed to meeting the needs of all students

Equity gaps in Delaware

Commitment to equitable implementation

Racial equity lens

- School and district leaders emphasize that their SEL programs are **available to everyone** as a “Tier 1” strategy and designed to meet **students’ individual needs**

Which best describes the SEL programming in your school/district?

46%



Targeted at the overall student body

17%



Targeted at the majority of students

31%



Targeted at a few specific groups

“Some kids have high expectations for themselves and tend to present with anxiety. Some kids may be more disruptive, so I have to teach them about breathing. SEL is about identifying a gap in a skill and helping them bridge that gap and teach them the skill. **All kids present with those needs, and you have to read them and help them individually.**”

—Delaware School Leader

At the same time, there are risks associated with implementing SEL without an explicit racial equity lens

Equity gaps in Delaware

Commitment to equitable implementation

Racial equity lens

- Many Delaware educators were **skeptical or unaware** of how SEL can advance an equity agenda
- Supporting **all students'** social and emotional development is certainly crucial
- Still, without an intentional focus on equity—improving learning environments, understanding race and privilege, reducing bias, and building asset-based mindsets in educators—SEL efforts may be **ineffective or even harmful**, especially for marginalized students

“[Our school] **does not have SEL efforts that address equity issues.** We don’t think of it in that way... [SEL] is **available to everyone.**”
—Delaware School Leader

“Public schools reflect dominant culture norms and were not designed for students of color. That raises concerns about **SEL being used as an intervention to “fix” African American and Latino kids.**”
—Danielle Gonzales, Managing Director, Aspen Institute Education and Society Program

“When SEL does not result in equity, it can become **weaponized**, and more focused on making students **compliant or easier to have in the classroom.**”
—Heron Russell, Teacher, Boston Public Schools

Recommendation: Move from working to meet all students' needs to explicitly implementing SEL *for equity*

PURPOSE

Implementing SEL *for equity* means truly understanding and meeting the social, emotional and academic learning needs of all students, with a focus on students of color. For this work to take place, Delaware educators need to understand and affirm students' and families' backgrounds and cultural heritage, and acknowledge and address the impact of race, racism, privilege and implicit bias in education.

HOW TO GET THERE

1. Schoolwide learning environment:

- a. Provide training for teachers, principals, school staff and others on culturally responsive education and how to pursue SEL work through a racial equity lens
- b. Collect disaggregated academic and other data on students and schools, and support schools to develop equity plans to close persistent student opportunity and achievement gaps
- c. Advocate for school and district discipline policies that minimize the time students are removed from the classroom, including in early childhood settings; in tandem, support educators to create inclusive and supportive learning environments, develop resilient learners and build student agency

2. Convening, communications and engagement:

- a. Create forums for parents as well as local and national experts to speak with educators and system leaders about the importance of "SEL for equity"; incorporate messages about equity into ongoing communications about SEL
- b. Involve students and families in the co-creation, development, implementation, measurement and evaluation of school and district SEL strategies

3. State policy:

- a. Create state policies that give students with the greatest needs access to the most effective teachers, building on the [Delaware Dept. of Education's 2015 Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators for All Students](#)
- b. Support equitable school funding that provides additional, flexible resources to high-needs schools *and* support schools to more effectively use existing resources

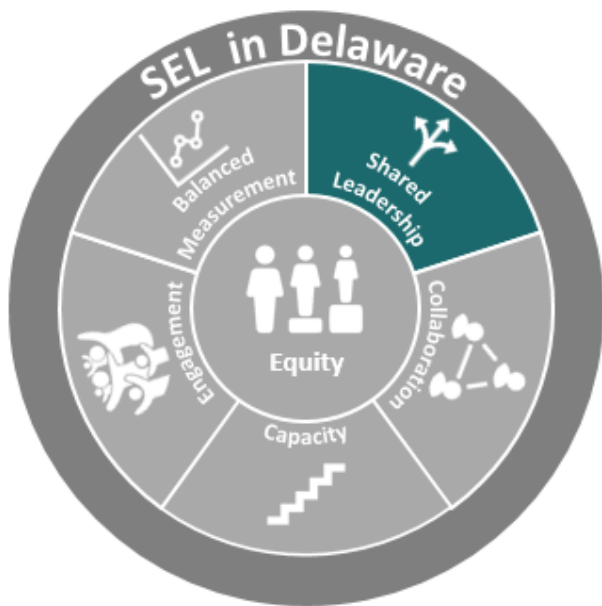
Equity: Organizations and Promising Practices to Learn From

Organized efforts to pursue SEL through a racial equity lens are still relatively new. By drawing on these resources and promising practices, Delaware has the opportunity to be a field leader in this area.

- [CASEL](#) recently highlighted the efforts of two districts in its Equity Work Group: **Tulsa Public Schools** incorporated SEL and equity into the district's strategic plan and fosters collaboration between the district's SEL and equity offices; **Chicago Public Schools** applies a race and equity lens to new district policies, curriculum selection and resource allocations.
- **Oakland Unified School District** created the [Office of African American Male Achievement](#) to address the specific needs of Black male students in the district. By analyzing the patterns and processes that are producing systemic inequities and transforming systems, structures and spaces, the office aims to “dramatically improve academic and ultimately life outcomes for African American male students in Oakland.”
- The [Native American Community Academy \(NACA\)](#), a charter school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, incorporates students' culture, wellness, language, community, family and a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum into the school's instructional model.
- The Aspen Institute's [National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development](#) recently released a report with concrete strategies for educators and policymakers to implement SEL with a racial equity lens.
- **Harvard University's** [Center for the Developing Child](#) and the [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) at Delaware's Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families, offer supports for the field around discipline strategies that reduce suspensions and expulsions in early learning settings.

“It's not up to us to redefine equity. **It's our job to fiercely implement it.**”

—Heron Russell, Teacher, Boston Public Schools



Shared Leadership:

Findings and Recommendations



Delaware schools draw from many different SEL frameworks, approaches, programs and curricula

Schools use a variety of SEL approaches

Teachers are leading the way

Support from leadership is key

State can provide system-wide coherence

- Educators in DE are using a variety of tools, **often combining pieces of several different tools** within a school or district

Most common programs and approaches:



THE QUIET TIME PROGRAM



- In a survey administered by the Rodel Teacher Council, educators identified **40 SEL initiatives being implemented in their schools**; they reported using Responsive Classroom, Compassionate Schools and the Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project most often¹
- The **evidence base** for these SEL approaches varies²



Delaware schools draw from many different SEL frameworks, approaches, programs and curricula, cont'd.

Schools use a variety of SEL approaches

Teachers are leading the way

Support from leadership is key

State can provide system-wide coherence

- Schools that are generating momentum on SEL have done so by **creating a strategy that fits well with their culture and needs**, whether by adopting or adapting a research-based framework or combining components of several

“It has to be **true to who we are** as a school.”
—Delaware Principal

- Adapting and combining SEL approaches raises questions about fidelity of implementation, but it's not necessarily poor practice: Researchers have found that implementing “**SEL kernels**”—i.e., the most essential components of an evidence-based program—is an **effective (and manageable) way to spread SEL practices**¹



Many schools have found that teacher passion for and ownership of SEL work is essential...

Schools use a variety of SEL approaches

Teachers are leading the way

Support from leadership is key

State can provide system-wide coherence

87%

of schools report using SEL materials that are **created or customized by teachers**

- At many schools, **teachers** are **customizing or developing** SEL materials and taking a **lead role** in implementation
- In some schools, **teacher leaders** serve as models and coaches for other staff, while in others **teacher-led committees** review and revise school policies

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE

A school where teachers and students partner as a “**lighthouse team**” that sets an example for and supports others in implementing their school’s SEL strategy

A school where the principal **pivoted to a new SEL framework** because a group of teachers believed in and were ready to **champion that approach** throughout the school



...and that leaders need to set the tone for SEL implementation at both the school and district levels

Schools use a variety of SEL approaches

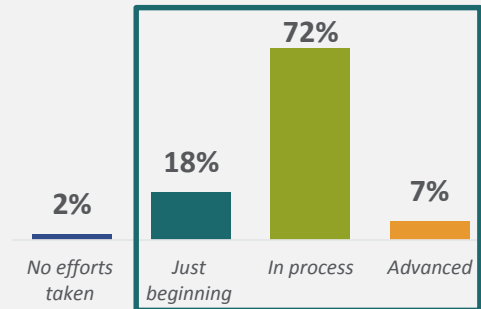
Teachers are leading the way

Support from leadership is key

State can provide system-wide coherence

- The majority of school leaders agree that **SEL is a top priority**, and **nearly all schools** have begun implementing SEL initiatives

How would you describe SEL efforts underway in your school/district today?



- School leaders are supporting this work by partnering with teachers to **identify a school SEL strategy, modeling adult SEL** with staff, and offering **professional learning opportunities**
- Most districts are providing at least some **resources and training**, and some have gone the next step to **include SEL in their district priorities**

“If a superintendent doesn’t want it, it’s not happening. If a superintendent does want it, but a principal doesn’t, it’s not happening.”

—Delaware SEL Partner



Educators believe it is important for the state to create coherence—but are wary of the potential for overreach

Schools use a variety of SEL approaches

Teachers are leading the way

Support from leadership is key

State can provide system-wide coherence

- The Delaware Department of Education has partnered with the University of Delaware to make SEL resources available to all schools
- Teachers, school and district leaders repeatedly emphasized the need to **create a common SEL language for Delaware**
- However, educators expressed concern that state-led support could lead to **unwelcome new mandates**



9 out of 10

teachers want Delaware to adopt **common student expectations** for SEL¹

“Having a common SEL language is essential because it helps a child see that the way they are responded to is **the same across all staff members.**”

—*Delaware School Leader*




Recommendation: Develop system-level coherence while maintaining a commitment to local flexibility and opportunities for school and teacher leadership

PURPOSE


In many Delaware schools, SEL has gained momentum because of teacher leadership, and that “ground-up” approach is strongly favored by educators, many of whom are wary of “top-down” approaches. However, the proliferation of SEL approaches makes the field fragmented, confuses educators and creates risk that some students may receive lower-quality SEL instruction.

HOW TO GET THERE

1. At the state level, build system-wide coherence:

- a. [Build on the recommendations of the Rodel Teacher Council](#) to establish a common definition for SEL in Delaware
- b. Develop a culturally-responsive framework and set of SEL competencies for use statewide 
- c. Create a central resource repository to codify effective, evidence-based practices (or “kernels”) and resources for SEL instruction and policy implementation, curated by expert practitioners
- d. Provide schools and districts with encouragement and support to design and test innovative SEL approaches
- e. Encourage teacher and principal prep programs to incorporate SEL in teacher candidate training (see Capacity section)
- f. Use federal funds in Title II and Title IV to support SEL implementation
- g. Build momentum for new SEL initiatives by working with a “coalition of the willing” (teachers, district staff and school leaders)

2. At the district and school levels, preserve flexibilities and leadership opportunities:

- a. Let schools continue to select and combine evidence-based SEL approaches that meet their students’ needs, in consultation with families and students, and without putting too much burden on classroom teachers 
- b. Create roles for teacher leaders to champion SEL, design and lead SEL-related professional learning opportunities and pilot new SEL strategies



Shared Leadership: Organizations and Promising Practices to Learn From



Shared
Leadership

Balancing the need for system-wide coherence with local flexibility is a challenge. Delaware can draw from these resources and promising practices:

- **Boston Public Schools** developed the [Essentials for Instructional Equity](#) to provide a common language describing what teaching and learning should look like, especially for marginalized students
- **CASEL** tracks [states with SEL standards and competencies](#); as of February 2018, eight states had SEL standards for grades K–12, and all states had SEL standards or goals for preschool; the Delaware Department of Education has considered developing SEL standards for grades K-2¹
- **Austin Independent School District** identified a cohort of “seed” school campuses that will codify SEL implementation best practices and become districtwide models
- **Metro Nashville Public Schools** developed an [SEL walkthrough tool](#) that provides educators with a common language about what high-quality SEL implementation looks like in classrooms and schoolwide

“When you roll out a new strategy, you need to make sure you’re doing that with students, parents, teachers, principals, central office and through policy.

It takes leadership at every level.”

—Chris Chatham, Director of OUSD’s Office of African American Male Achievement



Collaboration:

Findings and Recommendations



Educators and SEL partners (in- and out-of-school service providers) value opportunities to work together

Educators and partners
want to collaborate

Existing collaboration
shows promise

More explicit
connections are needed

Social services need to be
a priority

- Educators frequently expressed a desire to coordinate and collaborate across **schools, districts, partners and sectors**



45%

of teachers want **more connections** between schools and available resources and support for students¹



44%

of school and district leaders believe that **SEL efforts are siloed and uncoordinated**

and

68%

of school leaders believe that SEL will continue to become **more and more of a priority** over time

“It takes a village, so let’s have that village come together.”

—Delaware Principal



Promising examples of collaboration abound across the state

Educators and partners want to collaborate

Existing collaboration shows promise

More explicit connections are needed

Social services need to be a priority

- Educators cited working with a **rich variety of partners**, from community centers to religious institutions to state agencies

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE

The [Compassionate Schools Learning Collaborative](#), which has trained **over 2,000 Delaware educators** on SEL practices

A district that partners with a **summer program** and **community organizations** to **maintain continuity of SEL instruction** and follow up on students throughout the year

A school that partners with the **church next door** to allow families to use its washer and dryer and benefit from donated clothes and book bags

An [open Facebook group](#) for educators, community organizations, parents and families **to connect and share resources on SEL**

Mental health organizations that partner with schools to **provide services on school campuses**

The Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children, which received a [grant](#) from the Kellogg Foundation to place **Family Service Advocates** in early learning centers



However, there is still a need for more opportunities to connect

Educators and partners
want to collaborate

Existing collaboration
shows promise

More explicit
connections are needed

Social services need to be
a priority

- Community partners are eager and willing to collaborate with schools, but are sometimes **constricted by red tape** and **willingness to collaborate**

“Often schools aren’t able to partner with us if we aren’t on the list of district or state **approved vendors**. That requires jumping through hoops and **takes away from providing services to children.**”

—Delaware SEL Partner

- School leaders and SEL partners pointed to **missed opportunities** where SEL initiatives could be better aligned

“There is some coordination that we haven’t been able to take advantage of. For example, lots of our students participate in an after-school program, but **I don’t know what they do in terms of SEL.**”

—Delaware Principal

“There’s a big opportunity for better **collaboration among schools and districts** about why SEL is important. As an outsider looking in, I see a lot of implementation fatigue, but I don’t see people **asking what we can do to get there together.**”

—Delaware SEL Partner



Despite efforts to collaborate, a statewide lack of resources is leading to an unmet need for social services

Educators and partners
want to collaborate

Existing collaboration
shows promise

More explicit
connections are needed

**Social services need to be
a priority**

- Delaware is experiencing a capacity crunch in mental health services, particularly for students whose **needs exceed what school systems can provide**

Between 2013 and 2015,
the population of Delaware
students who reported
feeling sad or hopeless
almost every day for two
weeks

increased by 5%¹

Only **one mental health
facility in the state
admits adolescents**,
forcing many families to
choose between **ill-
equipped local public
schools** and **out-of-state
residential facilities** for
services

“The concern is what happens to the students who **exceed the parameters** of what our programs can provide to them. We’ve lost out by not having day treatment centers. **It’s analogous to a serious physical issue.**”

—Delaware District Leader





Recommendation: Facilitate increased coordination and knowledge sharing within and across schools, districts, states and sectors

PURPOSE

Students are typically in school for 6–8 hours a day and spend the remainder of their time at home or in their communities. Schools operate within a broad system of supports that are part of students’ lives, and connecting those supports can magnify their collective impact. Delaware educators crave opportunities to collaborate with their peers, district and school leaders, and SEL partners.

HOW TO GET THERE

1. Connections between schools and their communities:

- a. Encourage and support school leaders to create and use “asset maps,” or inventories, of in-school and out-of-school resources 
- b. Build on existing successful partnerships with organizations that serve families and students by bringing outside resources into schools 
- c. Identify barriers to effective partnerships and offer collaboration support to both schools and community organizations
- d. Build partnerships between high schools and local businesses to reinforce SEL skills needed in the workplace; connect this work to development of statewide SEL competencies (see Shared Leadership section)

2. Connections within and across states:

- a. Sponsor statewide or regional conferences that bring educators from district and charter schools together with partners and policymakers to discuss SEL implementation and practice, building on the success of the [Western Sussex Summit](#) led by Woodbridge School District
- b. Follow the Rodel Teacher Council’s recommendation to join CASEL’s [Collaborating States Initiative](#) (CSI), and access the ongoing technical assistance and partnership that the CSI provides, e.g., support to develop SEL competencies for the state (see Shared Leadership section)

3. Healthcare connections:

- a. Work with Delaware’s leading healthcare providers to strengthen connections between the education and healthcare sectors
- b. Invest in bringing more mental health services to schools through building on existing partnerships and establishing new partnerships with providers in the state
- c. Expand Wellness Centers to more schools

Collaboration: Organizations and Promising Practices to Learn From



Collaboration

To facilitate stronger collaboration among schools and other partners, Delaware can learn from the following organizations:

CASEL:

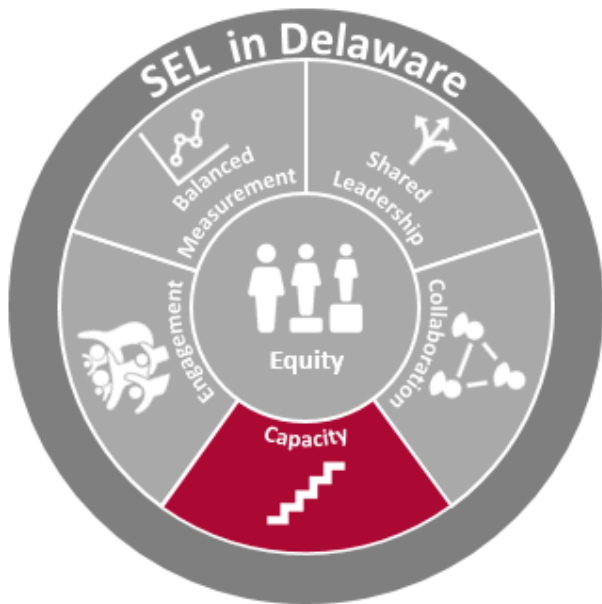
- The [Collaborating Districts Initiative](#) is a network of eight large urban school systems across the country working to develop their capacity to plan and implement SEL strategies and share lessons learned with the field
- The [Collaborating States Initiative](#) is a learning community of state education agency teams and experts partnering to develop SEL policies and guidance to support the implementation of SEL at the state level

Other organizations:

- The [Wallace Foundation](#) awarded grants to nine urban school districts and their out-of-school time partners to align and improve SEL practices across school and out-of-school settings
- The [exSEL network](#)—supported by the Rennie Center and comprised of teachers, school leaders and district administrators from districts across Massachusetts—seeks to raise awareness about SEL and advocates for policies that promote the social, emotional and academic needs of Massachusetts students
- As noted in the Equity section, Tulsa Public Schools and Chicago Public Schools have broken down internal silos by incorporating SEL and equity into district-wide strategic plans

“There are **more similarities across our state than actual differences**, and the more we collaborate, the better opportunity we’ll have to leverage the **richness that is Delaware.**”

—Delaware State Leader



Capacity:

Findings and Recommendations



Educators need additional SEL professional learning, including opportunities to build their own SEL skills

Starting with the adults

Making it tangible

Going slow to go fast

61%

of schools have provided some **professional development or training** to staff to advance their SEL efforts



However, the vast majority of school and district leaders agree that **staff will need more training** to adequately implement SEL

82%

- Several school leaders shared that they are beginning to realize they must **first address adult SEL needs** to help teachers successfully implement SEL for students

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE

A district that incorporated adult SEL into their **summer administrators' retreat**

A school that made **SEL the primary focus** of their PD for teachers this year, including helping teachers **build relationships** with each other and **understand their own SEL strengths and needs**

"Most of our **staff never learned about SEL** in preservice programs. We need to **start with them** to be successful with the kids."

—Delaware District Leader



Educators also want additional training on what SEL looks like in the classroom

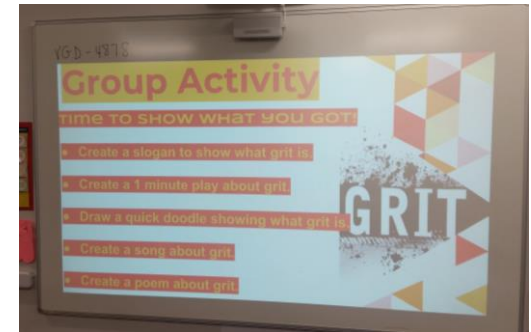
Starting with the adults

Making it tangible

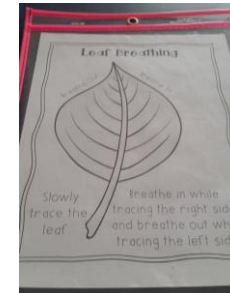
Going slow to go fast

- Much training to date has focused on **ACEs and trauma-informed instruction**, which, if over-emphasized, **can lead to a deficit-based view** of the role of SEL
- Many educators are looking for professional learning on **how to implement SEL successfully** in all classrooms through:
 - + **Explicit lessons** on SEL competencies
 - + **Integration of SEL** into academic lessons
 - + **Learning environments** where students feel safe and successful

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE



An explicit SEL lesson in a DE school



“Leaf breathing,” an independent activity students can complete when they need to manage strong emotions

“All the training we have done so far is on **what SEL means** and **why it is important**. I want to know **how do I make this real for my students...** How do I make it **part of my practice** so that it stops being ‘just another thing?’”

—Delaware Teacher



Schools with strong SEL programs are implementing incrementally with targeted goals

Starting with the adults

Making it tangible

Going slow to go fast

- The idea of addressing all of students' SEL needs **can be overwhelming**; picking one or two concrete goals per year can help

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE

A school that spent a year developing an **SEL-focused reintegration strategy** for students involved in conflicts

A K–8 school that highlights a **single, school-wide SEL competency** each month that all students and staff work on together

A school leader who has developed a **multi-year school SEL implementation plan** with established goals for each year

“[I think about] how do I get **the most buy-in possible** from the teachers, so that they truly believe in this and want to take themselves to the next level? **It's a slower process.** I can't do this top down.”

—Delaware School Leader





Recommendation: Prioritize SEL learning opportunities for teacher candidates, teachers, principals and other staff

PURPOSE

Many teacher preparation programs do not include SEL competencies or instructional strategies in their curriculum for teacher candidates. Since many new Delaware teachers are trained in-state, incorporating SEL into teacher preparation programs has the potential to have a significant impact. All school staff members—including support staff like cafeteria workers and bus drivers—need professional learning, beginning with opportunities to develop their own SEL skills. The need for educator professional learning is more pronounced among the early childhood workforce, many of whom have only a high school diploma and some basic credits.

HOW TO GET THERE

1. **Teacher and principal preparation:** Review preparation requirements and curricula in Delaware and find ways to include SEL, with an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching practices, integration of SEL and academic content, adult SEL skills, and asset-based approaches to student and family engagement 
2. **Ongoing professional learning:**
 - a. Provide school leaders with professional learning that:
 - Emphasizes the benefits and impact of SEL for students
 - Helps teachers build their own SEL skills and cultural competency 
 - Helps principals provide feedback to teachers on SEL and instructional practices
 - Supports schools to prioritize and build in time for SEL
 - b. Approve microcredentials as a professional development avenue for educators in Delaware to support SEL skill development
 - c. Ensure Delaware institutes of higher education are involved in conversations about SEL
3. **Teacher leadership and coaching:**
 - a. Create and train a cadre of teacher leaders to provide their peers (and other school staff) with job-embedded, practice-based SEL professional learning opportunities and coaching focused on using specific instructional strategies to build students' SEL skills and integrating SEL instruction into academic content
 - b. Provide SEL teacher leaders with release time from classroom responsibilities so they can observe, coach and give feedback to their peers
4. **Integrate SEL into new school models** and redesigns of existing schools

Capacity: Organizations and Promising Practices to Learn From



To provide teachers and school leaders with the knowledge and skills they need to implement SEL effectively, Delaware can learn from the following organizations and resources:

- **Compassionate Schools Learning Collaborative** convenes school teams (including teachers, coaches, nurses and psychologists) from across Delaware quarterly to share effective SEL practices and engage in workshops on topics ranging from self-care strategies to mindfulness to asset mapping; the Collaborative also published a [start-up guide](#) to help schools launch SEL initiatives
- The **[Center for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child](#)** at **San Jose State University** supports pre-service teacher preparation programs to incorporate SEL and culturally responsive teaching instruction into their curriculum
- **[Digital Promise](#)** provides experienced educators with “microcredentials” that they can earn by demonstrating of mastery of certain skills, including SEL instruction
- **[Community Consolidated School District 59](#)** in **Arlington Heights, Illinois**, rolled out SEL programming by first providing training to educators about growth mindset and other SEL skills, and then training to help with SEL instruction

“Social and emotional learning happens all the time. **Are we being intentional about the environment we’re creating for learning all the time?** Evidence-based practices help optimize conditions.”

—Linda Dusenbury, Senior Research Scientist, CASEL



Engagement:

Findings and Recommendations



Many schools have not prioritized family engagement, even though families believe SEL is important

Families are undervalued partners

Engagement is an equity issue

Students also play a role

Partners are taking the lead

- There is a clear need for a shift in the **mindset of many educators** about the role of families in SEL

Fewer than

1 in 3

school and district leaders believe **family engagement is one of the most important** factors in successful implementation of SEL

AND

61%

of school and district leaders rate their efforts to date to **engage families** in their SEL efforts as either **fair or poor**

- However, Delaware parents believe that **SEL benefits their children** and **support schools' efforts** to develop these skills

"My child is in kindergarten, and I tell her teacher that I care less about whether she can read and **more about whether she plays nicely with others and is a good friend.** Academic skills will come, but **SEL is the foundation for being a good person.**"

—Delaware Parent



Family engagement is key to pursuing SEL through an equity lens

Families are undervalued partners

Engagement is an equity issue

Students also play a role

Partners are taking the lead

- Historically, many Black, Hispanic/Latino and low-income families **have not experienced schools as supportive learning environments**, so they can be reluctant to engage with school staff and more likely to view SEL as outside the purview of schools
- At the same time, **many families have SEL needs** that can be similar to those of their children

“We forget the parents. For all of those kids who have experienced trauma, it is highly likely that their parents have had **the same experiences** of trauma and have seen the same developmental impacts that our kids are seeing.”

—Delaware SEL Partner

- District and school leaders are often new to SEL too, and may feel **discomfort** about communicating to parents about SEL **when they don't have all the answers**



Family engagement is key to pursuing SEL through an equity lens, cont'd.

Families are undervalued partners

Engagement is an equity issue

Students also play a role

Partners are taking the lead

- Some schools and partners have begun to provide or connect families to **SEL and mental health supports**

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE

A school that invited **families and community members** for a screening and discussion of [*Resilience*](#), a new documentary about the science of ACEs

A school that used **Opportunity Grant funds** to hire two staff members, through a partnership with Children & Families First, to **bridge the gap between the school's SEL initiative and the community**. They host a minimum of **two family activities per month** and have facilitated **three SEL trainings for families** this year.

“Even if we don’t have all the answers, we shouldn’t wait to communicate with families about SEL. **Allow families to tell us how to engage them** rather than coming to them with polished presentations and all the answers.”

—Delaware State Leader



Some schools are also making an effort to explicitly increase student buy-in and advocacy of SEL

Families are undervalued partners

Engagement is an equity issue

Students also play a role

Partners are taking the lead

- Some schools are taking intentional steps to ensure that students **understand the value** of SEL skills and competencies

“School is **practice for the rest of my life**. Getting along with others and **working with others is just life**.”
—*Delaware Student*

- Some schools **prioritize developing student agency and incorporate student voice** into SEL implementation

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE

A school with a peer-to-peer **mediation program** where students are trained to help each other address conflict using SEL competencies

A school with **student-led assemblies** featuring particular SEL competencies

A school with a peer **group mentoring program** where older students teach SEL skills to their younger peers



Partners have taken a strong stance on addressing the SEL needs and competencies of families

Families are undervalued partners

Engagement is an equity issue

Students also play a role

Partners are taking the lead

- **Over half of the SEL partners** that we interviewed see a strong need for schools and districts to partner with families **to reinforce SEL skills**
- Community organizations are finding innovative ways to **provide services to families in community school models**

“We’re working on how to train parents... **How do we equip parents to model SEL at home?** How can we support them to reinforce what is happening in school?”
—Delaware SEL Partner

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE



Provide integrated supports and resources for students and families at partner schools



Operates 15 school-based health centers that provide a variety of health services to students



Provides mental health services to children and families including some on-site services






Recommendation: Engage families as true partners and help them develop their own SEL skills alongside their children

PURPOSE

Social and emotional learning doesn't end with the school day—it is happening all the time, including when students are home with their families and other caretakers. Also, engaging families helps schools build on assets within the community, makes schools a welcoming environment for everyone, and fosters a sense of belonging that is crucial for student success.

HOW TO GET THERE

- 1. Proactively engage families** 
 - a. Expand mental health and/or other needed services to families by building on existing partnerships, such as the Christiana Care [school-based health centers](#); prioritize services based on what families say they need
 - b. Create a dedicated parent coordinator role to proactively engage families in a two-way relationship
 - c. Talk with community organizations partnering successfully with families to understand and build on their work
- 2. Treat families like the assets they are** 
 - a. Engage students and families as true partners—first, to deeply understand their SEL needs and concerns; then, in the co-creation, development, implementation, measurement and evaluation of school and district SEL strategies
 - b. Be willing to learn alongside families and students, rather than feeling obligated to provide all the answers
- 3. Communicate effectively with families** 
 - a. In communications about SEL, convey accurate and positive messages and address concerns openly; for example, be clear that SEL efforts are designed to build student agency and resiliency—not to encourage students of color to “act white”—and that SEL is important for all students, not only those with mental health or behavior challenges
 - b. Use “peer messengers” when appropriate to emphasize the importance of SEL from a shared perspective
 - c. Publish SEL communications and resources in families’ home languages



Engagement: Organizations and Promising Practices to Learn From

Delaware can strengthen family engagement by building on promising practices in the state and across the nation:

- Build on existing family engagement practices in Delaware:
 - + [Project LAUNCH](#) serves students and families in the City of Wilmington and Red Clay Consolidated School District by promoting positive social and emotional development; among other strategies, Project LAUNCH provides families and early learning programs with books and activities that promote SEL
 - + Some schools are using funds from [2017 Opportunity Grants](#) to engage families in SEL
 - + Others use the [Class Dojo](#) app to share information with parents on their students' social, emotional and academic development
 - + [Prevent Child Abuse Delaware](#) provides families and students with supports aligned to the [Protective Factors Framework](#)
- [Anchorage Public Schools](#) and [Austin Independent School District](#) include SEL resources for parents and tips on how they can reinforce SEL lessons learned at school
- Every **New York City public school** has a dedicated [parent coordinator](#) responsible for creating a welcoming school environment, working with school leaders to address parent concerns, conducting parent outreach, and strengthening parent involvement

“SEL is about developing a sense of identity and self, and **families are a huge part of students' identities.**”

—Danielle Gonzales, Managing Director, Aspen Institute Education and Society Program



Balanced Measurement: *Findings and Recommendations*



Most schools currently use a variety of proxy data to gauge effectiveness of SEL efforts

Using proxy data

Metrics are important

Words of caution

65%

of school and district leaders report using **data from the Delaware School Climate Survey** to assess how well their students are doing in SEL

Nearly half

report looking at **academic achievement** and **student suspensions**

- Still, nearly a **quarter** of school and district leaders report having **no formal means** to measure SEL
- **Half** of teachers who completed the Rodel Teacher Council's SEL survey reported the same¹

"We look at **increased attendance**, academic performance, graduation rates, dropout rates, **school climate surveys**, drug and alcohol surveys, and **discipline data**."

—Delaware District Leader

"When I hear students use **certain language**—'We are going to have to collaborate because we need to learn to get along if we disagree'—**that's how I know** they've internalized those practices."

—Delaware School Leader



Educators value the ability to track SEL progress; some are eager for, or already using, more targeted measures

Using proxy data

Metrics are important

Words of caution

- School leaders use proxy metrics to **track results** and **make the case for SEL**

EXAMPLES FROM DELAWARE

A school that attributed a **dip in discipline referrals**, particularly for students with **high ACE scores**, to extensive work on SEL in recent years

A school that has seen steady improvements in state test scores corresponding with a **school-wide focus on SEL**

A school that looks at pre- and post-data on **mindfulness scales** for students and teachers

- However, educators and partners alike are eager for **more and better tools** to measure SEL:

“I would like a **strength-based universal screener** showing how students view their own SEL skills.”
—Delaware District Leader

“I would like **more frequent climate survey** data.”
—Delaware School Leader



But educators and experts in Delaware and across the country urge caution when measuring SEL

Using proxy data

Metrics are important

Words of caution

- While exciting innovation in SEL measurement is in the works, experts agree that existing SEL instruments are **not yet valid and reliable enough to be used for accountability purposes**
- **No states** are currently using **explicit SEL metrics for accountability** under ESSA
- The 20 states in CASEL's Collaborating States Initiative generally **let their districts choose their own SEL measures** to align with district strategies

30%

of school and district leaders **worry about the difficulty of measuring** the impact of SEL work and believe such attempts could have **negative ramifications**

"First and foremost, measurements have got to be **meaningful to the teachers and the kids and families.**"

—Roger Weissberg, Chief Knowledge Officer, CASEL¹





Recommendation: Support schools to prioritize SEL and measure it meaningfully, but stay away from mandating assessments or attaching “stakes.”

Purpose

Given the importance of SEL, having—and regularly using—strong data on school-level implementation and student skills is crucial for educators and policymakers. Educators need to be able to understand their students’ social and emotional development to ensure equitable outcomes. District and state leaders want to encourage schools to prioritize SEL and the track the progress and impact of that work. At the same time, district and state leaders should refrain from adopting any required assessments that might even feel to schools like a new high-stakes test or accountability tool, and instead focus efforts on related policies and support.

HOW TO GET THERE

1. **Support districts and schools to prioritize SEL and measure progress in a way that makes sense for them:**
 - a. Help school leaders set explicit, concrete goals for SEL implementation and assessment
 - b. Support educators to review and formatively use SEL data
 - c. Hold districts/schools accountable for implementation—*not* for achieving certain test results
 - d. Highlight national research showing the connection between SEL, academic achievement, discipline, and school climate, so schools don’t see “proxy” measures as low-quality
 - e. Invite more advanced schools to share the SEL measures they are using so others can learn from them
 - f. Over time, support schools to pilot innovative SEL measures
2. **Build on the success of the DE School Climate Survey, which contains SEL-specific questions:**
 - a. Incent participation: Only 2/3 of DE schools currently participate, down from a high of nearly 3/4 five years ago.¹
 - b. Support teachers and school leaders to review data from the School Climate Survey and other sources and engage in action planning, in partnership with students and families; explicitly connect these conversations to SEL
 - c. Consider adding a measure to Delaware’s accountability system focused on school climate data:
 - With only six states across the country currently using school climate surveys this way, this could be an opportunity for DE to lead
 - Adding this measure would build on Delaware’s inclusion of chronic absenteeism as a measure of school climate



Balanced Measurement: Organizations and Promising Practices to Learn From



Balanced
Measurement

Delaware can strengthen the way it measures SEL by building on promising practices in the state and across the nation:

- The [Measuring SEL](#) initiative plans to release an interactive tool to support SEL assessment selection and use this summer
- The [Funders Collaborative for Innovative Measurement](#), a group of 15 private foundations—including Rodel—is working to advance the state and appropriate use of assessments for “hard-to-measure” interpersonal and intrapersonal skills
- [RAND](#), with support from **FCIM**, is developing a repository of high-quality SEL measures, so that schools don’t have to reinvent the wheel, or develop home-grown instruments, when measuring students’ SEL skills
- [The CORE districts in CA are prioritizing and assessing SEL](#); recent research points to the accuracy and consistency of their SEL measures as compared to others
- To avoid creating misplaced incentives, [Nevada’s ESSA plan](#) provides a 2% score “bonus” to schools that hit climate survey participation benchmarks, rather than tracking survey results themselves for accountability
- The **New York City Department of Education** creates parent-friendly [school “snapshots”](#) based on school survey results and other data to help with both school choice and family-school communication

Conclusion

A broader vision: The recommendations in this report are intended to bring Delaware to a place where *all* students receive the social, emotional and academic supports they need



EQUITY

- Teachers understand **implicit bias, dominant culture norms, cultural competency and asset-based approaches**, and incorporate these learnings into their instruction
- All students **receive the support they need** to succeed socially, emotionally and academically

SHARED LEADERSHIP

- Educators have a **shared understanding of what SEL is** and the SEL competencies students need
- Educators have **flexibility to choose SEL approaches** that work for their students, with support
- Schools are designed or have evolved so that **SEL is not an add-on but a common thread** in students' learning

COLLABORATION

- Educators **share SEL knowledge, resources and best practices**
- Community partners, employers and schools** ensure students have the **SEL skills needed for college and careers**
- Health care providers and schools work together to **meet students' mental health needs**

CAPACITY

- Educators understand how to teach **standalone SEL lessons and integrate SEL into academics**; all school staff **create learning environments where students thrive**
- Teacher and principal **preparation programs incorporate SEL**
- Educators receive **ongoing professional learning about SEL**

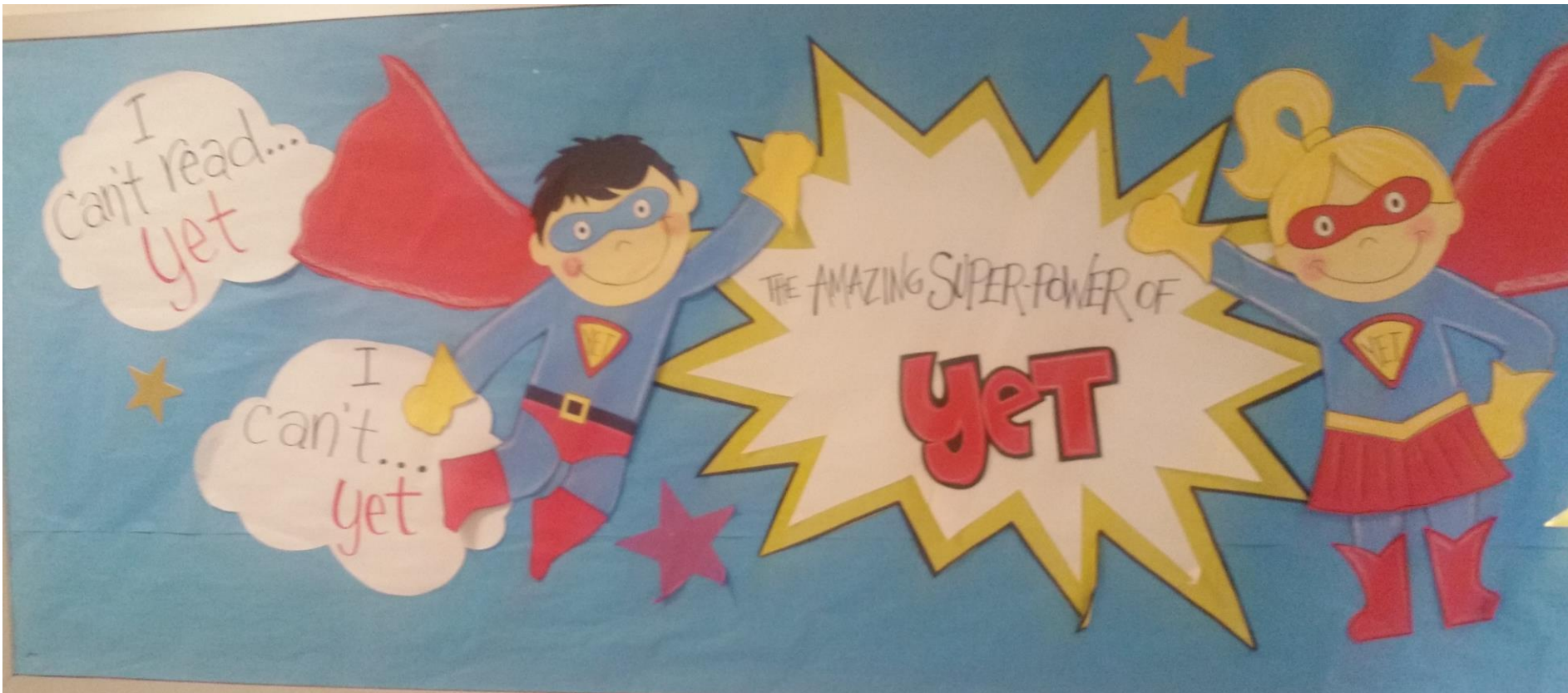
ENGAGEMENT

- Families, students and communities are **viewed as assets**, and are proactively engaged to **co-design, plan, roll out and evaluate** schools' SEL initiatives
- Schools address families' SEL needs** alongside those of their students

BALANCED MEASUREMENT

- Schools and districts have access to helpful **tools and data** to understand their students' social and emotional development and **use that data to improve SEL strategies**
- District and state leaders **encourage schools to prioritize SEL** but refrain from **issuing mandates or attaching "stakes"** to SEL outcomes

We're not there... yet: Looking to the future



“Who does this **ultimately impact**? A **child** is counting on us to get this right. A **mom** is counting on this to get this right. A **community** is **counting on us to get this right.**”

—Delaware State Leader

Contact us to learn more



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Appendix



Acknowledgements and Works Cited

Acknowledgements

Participants in SEL Roundtable Discussion, April 25, 2018

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- Dana Beckton, Director, Diversity and Inclusion, Christiana Care
- LaWanda Burgoyne, District School Improvement Specialist, Capital School District
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- Margie López-Waite, Head of School, Las Americas ASPIRA Academy
- Kirsten Olson, Chief Strategy Officer, Children & Families First of Delaware
- Nicole Roberts, PBS (Positive Behavior Support) Project Coach, University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies
- Heron Russell, Music Teacher, George H. Conley School, Boston Public Schools
- Wendy Turner, Second Grade Teacher and 2017 Delaware Teacher of the Year, Mt. Pleasant Elementary School, Brandywine School District
- Andrea Valentine, Executive Director, Strive Leadership
- Felicia Wennell, Co-Head of School for Academic Support, Freire Charter School of Wilmington

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- Gina Castelli, Responsive Classroom Consulting Teacher, University of Delaware
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- Catherine Lindroth, President and CEO, SummerCollab
- Meghan Lines, Staff Psychologist, Department of Pediatric Behavioral Health, Nemours Children's Health Care System
- Leslie Newman, CEO, Children & Families First of Delaware
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School and District Leader Interviewees

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- LaWanda Burgoyne, District School Improvement Specialist, Capital School District
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- Julie Giangiulio, Principal, East Dover Elementary School, Capital School District
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- Jesus Urdiales, Assistant Head of School, Las Americas ASPIRA Academy
- Courtney Voshell, Principal, Dover High School, Capital School District
- Felicia Wennell, Co-Head of School for Academic Support, Freire Charter School of Wilmington
- Aisha S. Word, School Counselor, Howard High School of Technology, New Castle County Vocational-Technical School District

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Phase Two Findings

We organized survey and interview results into four overarching themes

Perceptions of SEL

- The extent to which schools and districts value SEL
- Why schools and districts are focusing on SEL
- How schools and districts select SEL programs and interventions and direct resources to support SEL

Current State of SEL Implementation

- The range of programs, interventions, tools and policies to support SEL currently in use
- How schools and districts are measuring impact of SEL work
- Bright spots, promising practices and implementation gaps

Actions to Support SEL

- District policies and other system-wide factors designed to enable high-quality implementation
- Training, communication and professional learning opportunities

Opportunities for Support

- Identified challenges and needs
- Resources, tools and other ideas that could mitigate common challenges and help other schools and districts succeed



1

Perceptions of SEL

Nearly 70% of school and district leaders rated SEL among their top priorities

Perceptions

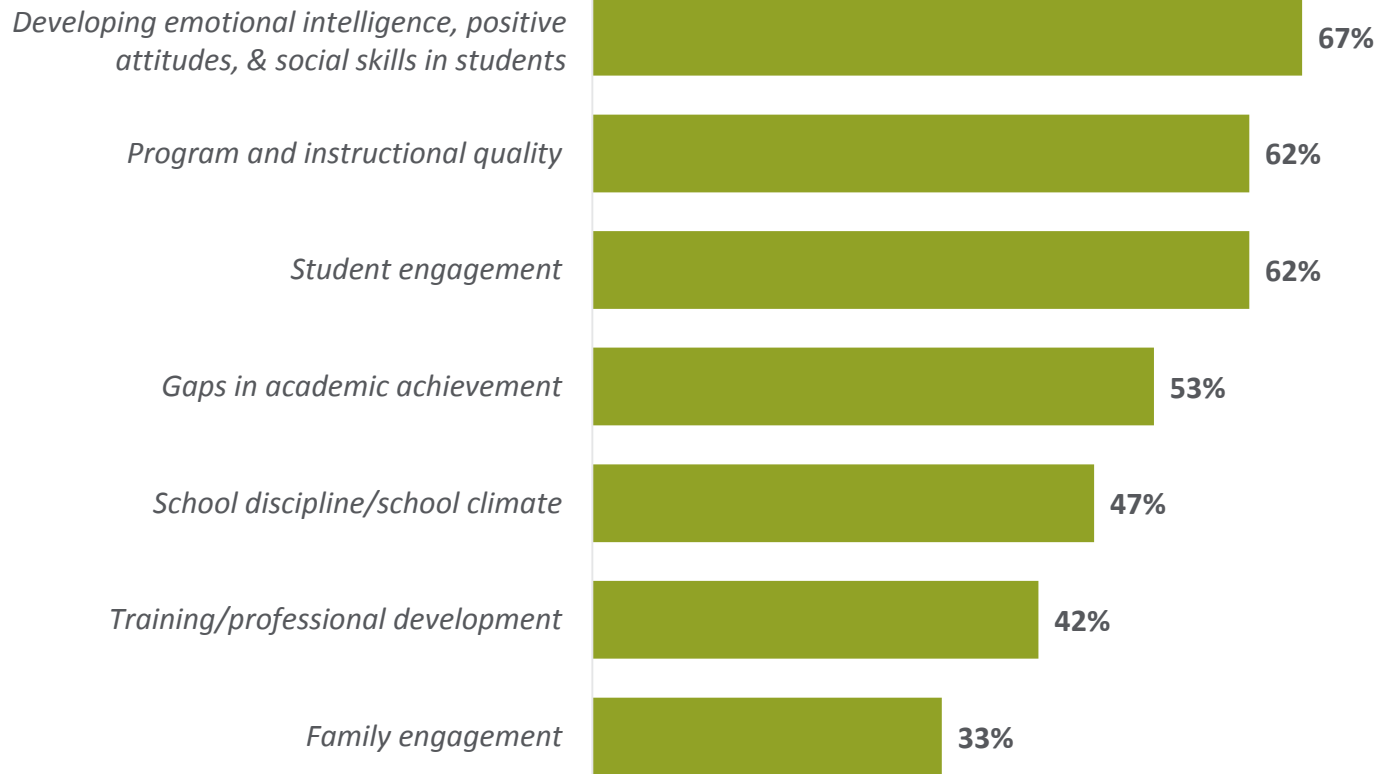
Current State

Actions

Opportunities

Q: From your perspective, how important are each of the following education priorities for your school/district right now?

% of school leaders who rate each category as “One of the Most Important” priorities



School and district leaders engage in SEL work to help students develop a range of skills and competencies

Q: Why does your school engage in social and emotional learning?
% of respondents who ranked response in top three

To help students better manage their emotions

To help students dealing with trauma

To help build skills and attitudes to be successful in work

To help students establish positive goals

76%

50%

33%

24%

(n=54)

Other Response Options

- To address problems in school climate (24%)
- To increase academic achievement (20%)
- To address students' sense of belonging (20%)
- To help students who are disengaged and at risk of dropping out (6%)
- To improve adult interactions with students and with one another (22%)

Educators and service providers believe SEL helps students build skills that are critical to future success

Perceptions

State of SEL

Actions

Opportunities

*“SEL helps students learn non-academic skills that are essential for life and success: **coping, grit, perseverance, dealing with adversity, working through challenges, getting along with others, citizenship, real life problem-solving.**”*

—District Leader

*“If we can provide quality SEL supports, that’s going to actually **help you drive your academic outcomes**, improve your behavioral outcomes, improve attendance and decrease tardiness... [SEL and academics] **have to be seen as connected**, and can’t be seen as something different with different intended outcomes.”*

—SEL Provider

*“In order for students to be successful academically, they need to **feel safe emotionally and socially**. They need to feel valued and respected and **have strategies to interact with peers, family, and other adults.**”*

—School Leader (District)

*“Students who are more centered and well-adjusted are **ready for the academic content they're exposed to and have better academic outcomes**. Students have to make so many decisions; **SEL helps them make smart decisions.**”*

—District Leader

Service providers described how SEL is changing educators' practices and perceptions of students

Perceptions

State of SEL

Actions

Opportunities

*"People have been **doing SEL for years** but did not have a word for it... We now have the **language to talk** about these issues."*

—SEL Provider

*"There is a **shift in how they look at kids:** instead of asking kids 'What's wrong with you?' they ask 'What happened to you?'"*

—SEL Provider

*"There has been a shift in educator **understanding of trauma.** Now educators are more likely to teach resilience, look at their own mindsets, and reflect on how they look at kids."*

—SEL Provider

Educators believe SEL should be implemented equitably and meet the needs of all students, but don't necessarily view SEL as a strategy to advance an equity agenda

Perceptions

State of SEL

Actions

Opportunities

*"Kids that are at risk present with different challenges than other kids. [Some] kids, for example, have high expectations for themselves and tend to present with anxiety. Some kids may be more disruptive, so I have to teach them about breathing. SEL is about **identifying a gap in a skill and helping them bridge that gap and teach them the skill**. All kids present with needs, and you have to read them and **help them individually**."*

—School Leader (District)

*"Students **demonstrate what they need**. Teachers, nurses, and counselors might say, 'These kids are demonstrating X.' We'll put them in a **group to improve strategies**."*

—District Leader

*"Responsive classrooms **create community**, [which] **implicitly supports equity** in the classroom."*

—District Leader

Still, some service providers are pushing educators to be more intentional about connecting SEL and equity

*“The beauty of SEL programming is that, **when it is done right, [equity] is a part of it.** You talk about building community and identify that we all come with assumptions, prejudices and biases that lead to our actions.”*

—SEL Provider

*“[Our SEL work] addresses [equity] as well. Are the kids **who don’t look the same or have the same background talking to each other?** We work on how to get kids to talk to each other and have real conversations during things like turn-and-talks.”*

—SEL Provider

*“There’s an issue of **assumptions** that adults approach the interaction with. We need to rethink how we approach the student: It’s **not the student who is the problem, but a student who needs support.** What are the missing skills/needs? What are we doing to contribute? We try **to reframe how we approach discipline:** to teach, not to punish.”*

—SEL Provider



2

Current State of SEL Implementation

Most school leaders characterized their SEL implementation as “in process”

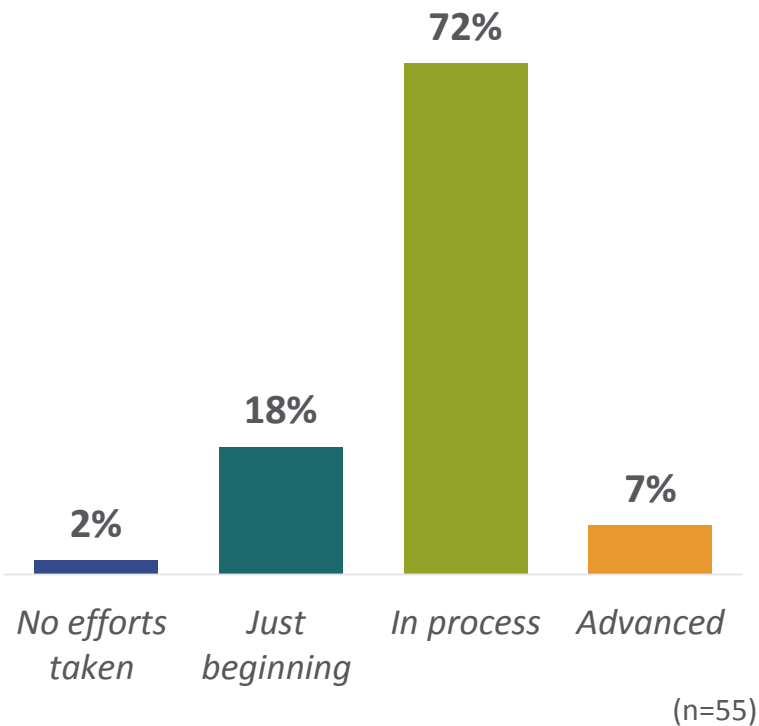
Perceptions

State of SEL

Actions

Opportunities

Q: How would you describe SEL efforts underway in your school/district today?



Sample Response (In Process)

*“Our **district's philosophy is evolving**: you must educate the whole child and have a comprehensive approach that starts in kindergarten and engages the community, parents, and afterschool providers. But we're still not currently where we want to be with SEL.”*

—District Leader

Sample Response (Advanced)

*“SEL was **totally lacking** in the middle school I was at previously. We had an assembly about bullying once in a while, or just me as a teacher demonstrating it.*

*“At the school I'm at now, we promote growth mindset, use morning meetings to create a community in the classroom or share on a topic, and it **all works well for students of all ages**. Our school counselor does daily classroom visits, talks to younger grades about interacting with peers and social graces, and talks with older kids about peer pressure.”*

—School Leader (District)

More than 60% of school and district leaders said they extend SEL programming to all or most students...

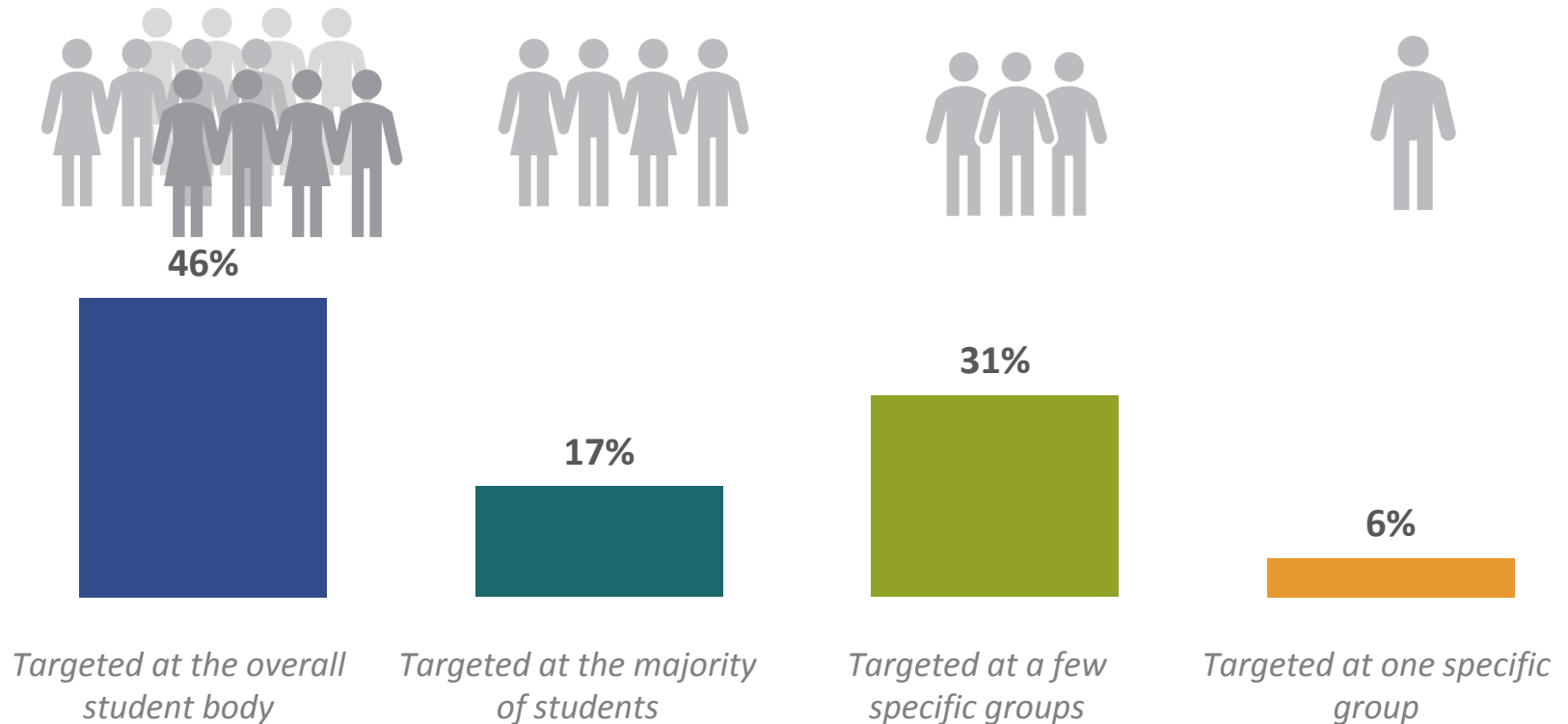
Perceptions

State of SEL

Actions

Opportunities

Q: Which best describes the SEL programming in your school/district?



(n=54)

...but some schools focus SEL supports on students with special needs and those experiencing trauma

Sample Responses (Targeted at a few groups of students)



“Students at risk, students **experiencing deaths in the family**, students **experiencing difficult home lives**”

—School Leader (Charter)

“Students who have **504s**, receive **special education** services, students in **B and C setting**, students **identified by teachers** as needing SEL services”

—School Leader (District)

“Behaviorally or **emotionally challenged** students”

—District Leader

Sample Responses (Targeted at one group of students)



“Only students referred to the **problem-solving team** by a teacher. Our guidance counselor only provides this support at this time **one-on-one** or with a **small group**.”

—School Leader (District)

“Mostly they use [SEL supports] for the **students who are misbehaving**. Not one group [of students] or another.”

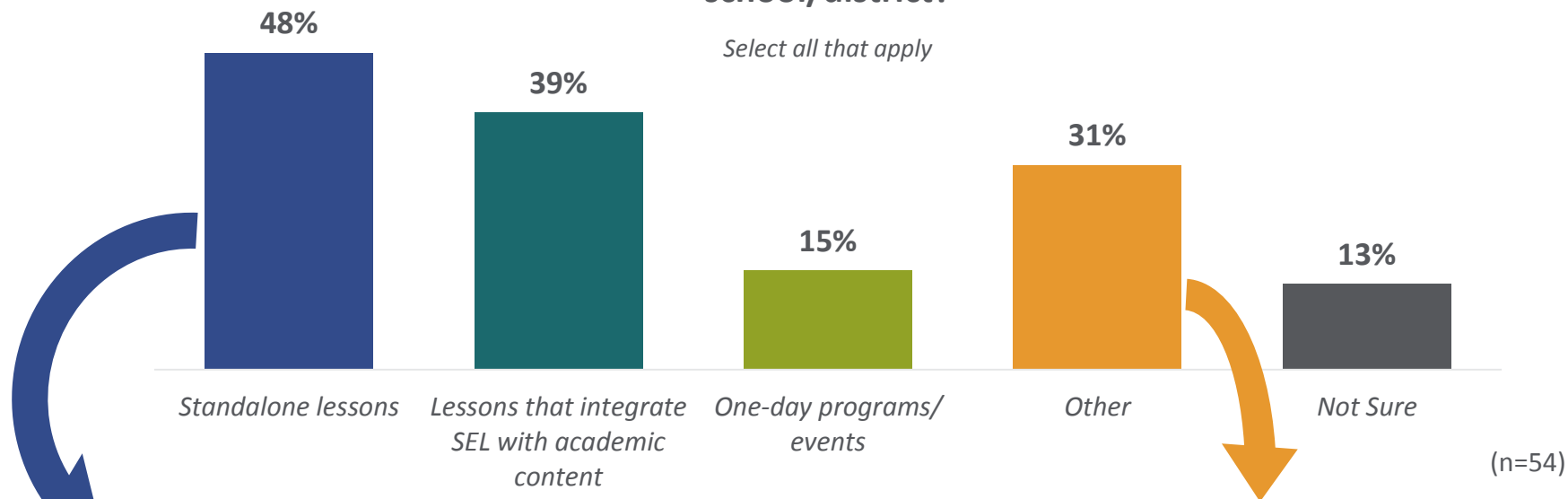
—School Leader (Charter)

“**Special education students** who have SEL in their IEPs”

—School Leader (Charter)

Teachers typically focus on SEL skills in standalone lessons, though many schools are working to integrate SEL into academics and school culture

Q: How do teachers and/or other staff members typically deliver SEL instruction in your school/district?



Sample Response (Standalone)

*"Teachers focus on the 7 Habits in the classroom for the **first 4–6 weeks of the year** and then **throughout the year** in the leadership block each week."*

–School Leader (District)

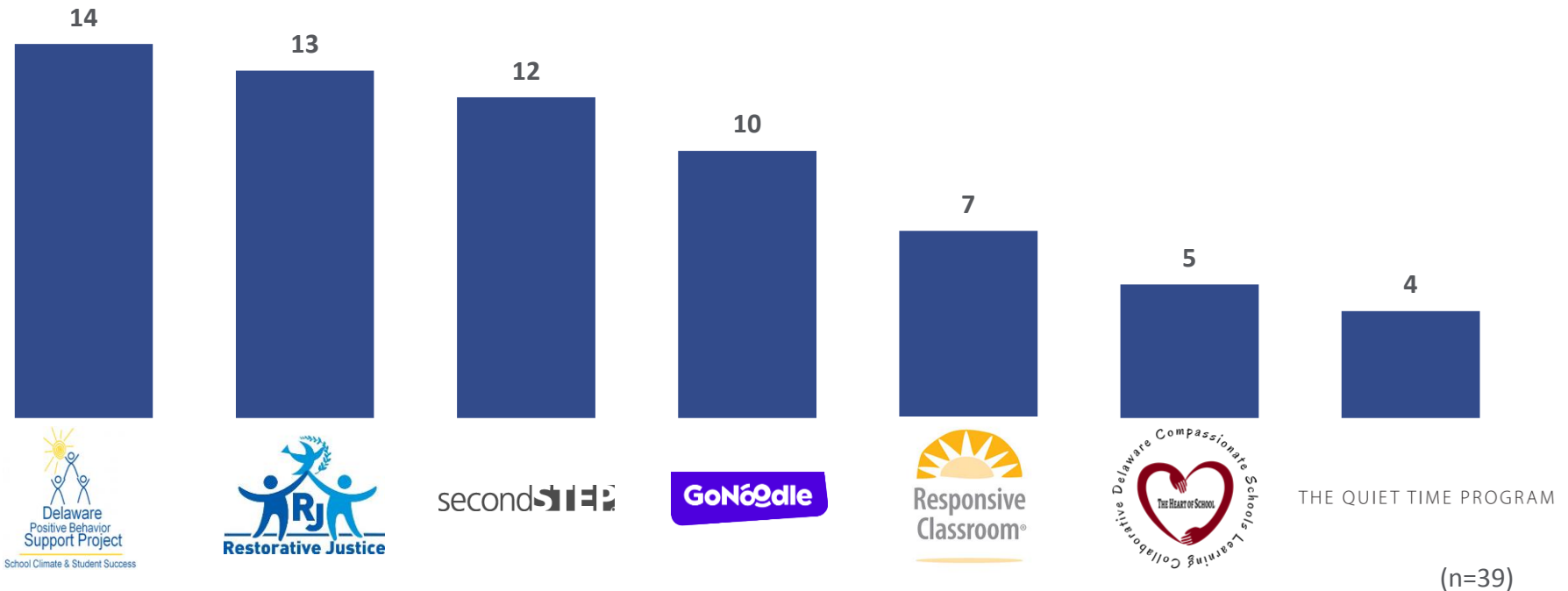
Sample Response (Other)

*"It's about **changing the culture of the schools**, raising adult awareness, not necessarily a curriculum."*

–District Leader

Educators use a variety of SEL program and tools, often combining several within one school or district

Q: What specific programs or interventions are currently in place at your school/district to advance SEL?



Others include:





3 Actions to Support SEL

While most school and district leaders reported training teachers and teaching SEL to students, just a quarter said they have engaged parents and families about SEL

Q: Which steps has your school/district taken to advance SEL?



(n=54)

Service providers were vehement about the importance of including students' families in SEL work...

Perceptions

State of SEL

Actions

Opportunities

*"We forget the parents. For all of those kids who have experienced trauma, it is highly likely that their parents have had **the same experiences** of trauma and have seen the same developmental impacts that our kids are seeing."
—SEL Provider*

*"Because we serve a predominantly low-income subset of families, we know that they are **facing higher stressors** on a regular basis... Parents are typically younger (in their 20s), and they are **dealing with their own development** at the same time as they are managing the development of their children."
—SEL Provider*

*"We're working on how to train parents... **How do we equip parents to model SEL at home?** How can we support them to reinforce their parenting?"
—SEL Provider*

*"The kids we serve that were born here have some coverage through Medicaid, but the **parents have often experienced trauma and are uninsured**. We start seeing the kid, identify the parent, and **meet the families where they are**."
—SEL Provider*

This focus on **addressing the SEL needs of the entire family** was not limited to medical or mental health providers and was a **concern for more than half of the providers** we spoke with.

...and some service providers have begun developing resources to help adults build their own SEL skills

Perceptions

State of SEL

Actions

Opportunities

12 of 17 service providers we spoke to include **SEL training for adults** as a **critical element** of their programming.

*“The biggest issue is the inability for educators to **empathize with our target audience**. They unknowingly **compartmentalize young people** and limit their ability to grow.”*

–SEL Provider

*We are focusing on “how [teachers] present and interact with their students. Are [teachers] **modeling good practices** of SEL? A lot of the success from SEL comes from the modeling that goes on and **students seeing it day in and day out.**”*

–SEL Provider

Four service providers also specifically highlighted **educator self-care** as a priority.

*“Going through **mindfulness training** actually helps school staff respond to stressors and trauma in school and in their own lives in a more **mindful, non-judgmental way.**”*

–SEL Provider



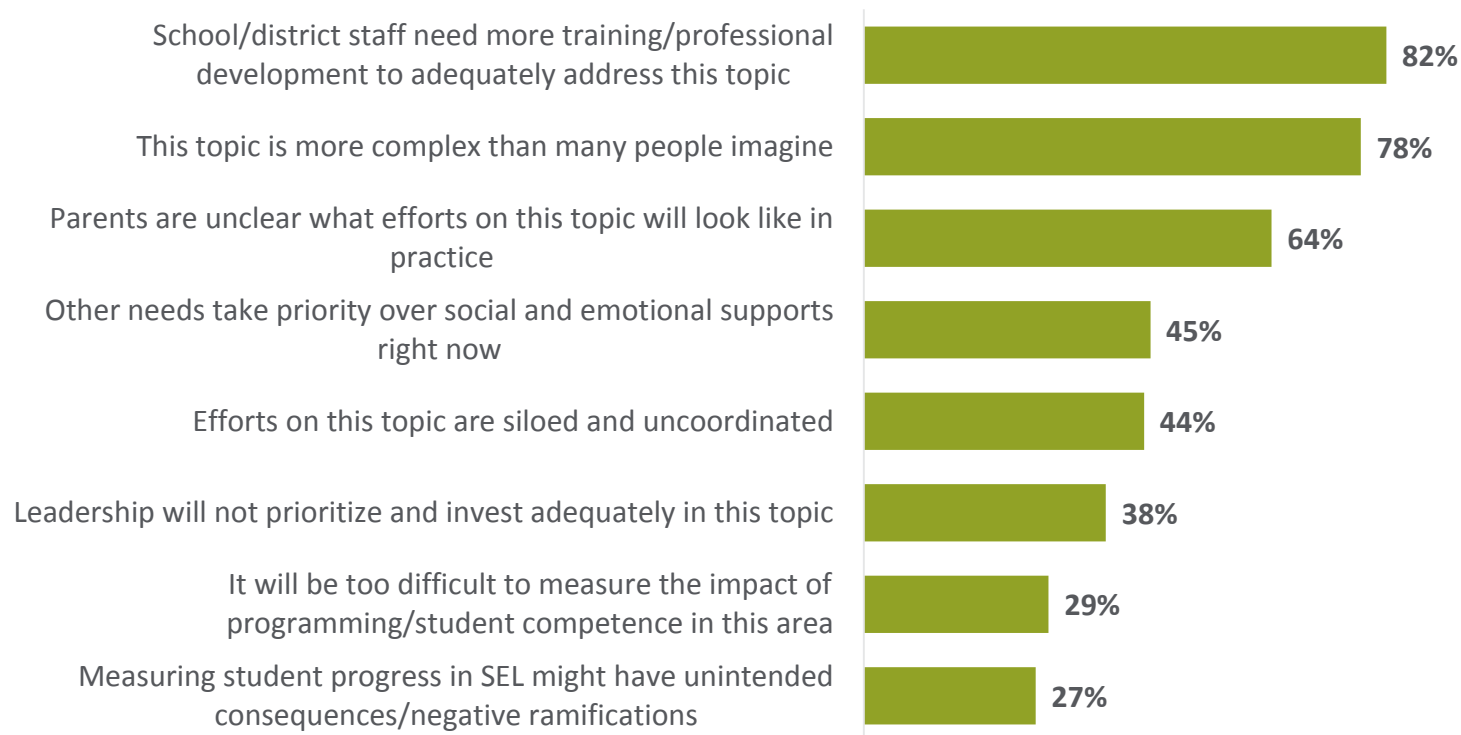
4

Opportunities for Support

There are many opportunities to improve SEL implementation, beginning with educator PD and family engagement

Some people are concerned about how efforts related to social and emotional learning will actually work. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this topic?

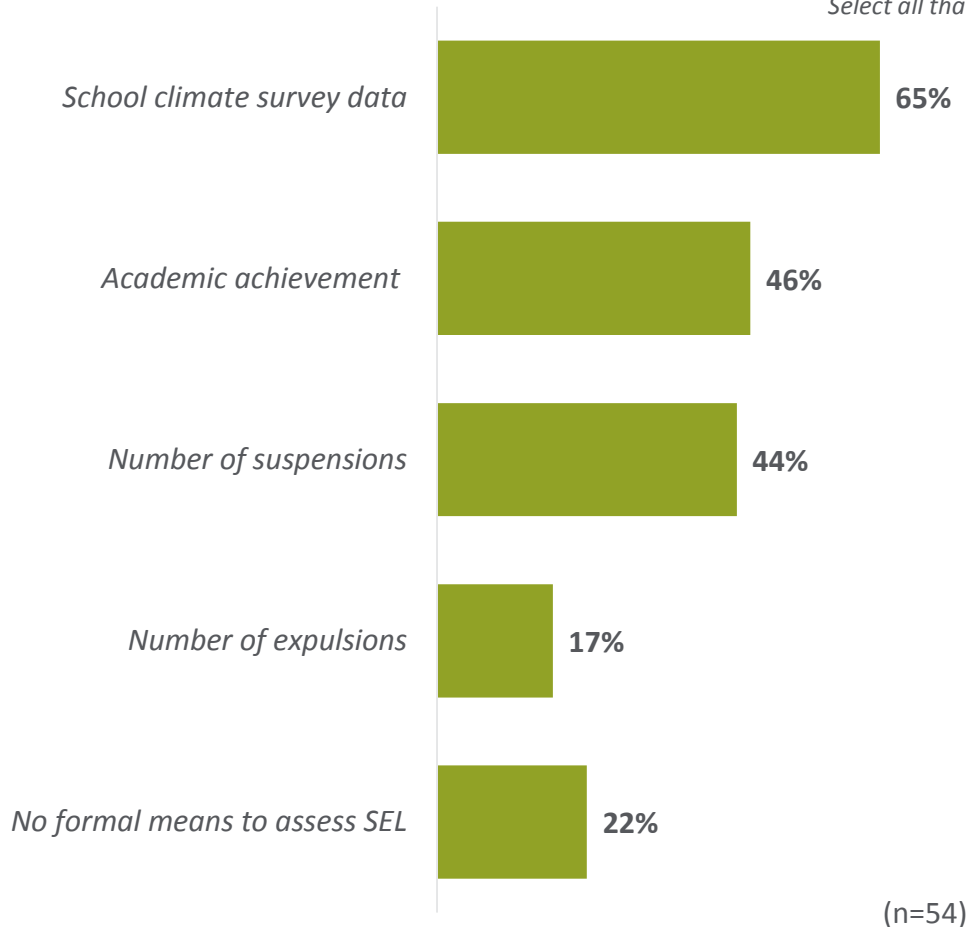
% agree (strongly/somewhat)



Many school leaders are interested in more targeted SEL measures to replace the use of proxy data

Q: Which of the following does your school/district review to assess how well your students are doing in SEL?

Select all that apply



*"We look at increased attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, dropout rates, school climate surveys, drug and alcohol surveys, and discipline data. I would like a **strength-based universal screener showing how students view their own SEL skills**. We have a lot of external measures, but I want to know what kids **know and think**."*

—District Leader

"I know the [SEL focus is] working when I hear students use certain language: 'We are going to have to collaborate because we need to learn to get along if we disagree.' That's how I know they've internalized those practices."

—School Leader (District)

Educators identified their top needs as PD and support to connect SEL with academics...

More training on SEL



*“Time for teachers to learn. We have started having presentations during our staff meetings, but there is **so much going on** that we have not quite been able to do enough.”*

—School Leader (District)

“Professional development time, resource staff and time [during the school day] to implement the [SEL] curriculum.”

—School Leader (District)

Stronger links between SEL and academics



*“There is so much for everyone to do and learn academically that SEL is unfortunately **addressed on an as-needed basis.**”*

—School Leader (District)

*“Ensuring that the staff realize the importance of SEL and how to **implement it into the academic day** without **jeopardizing DeSSA performance**”*

—School Leader (District)

...While service providers identified time, coordination and collaboration, and district/school leadership as key factors that contribute to successful SEL implementation

Time to implement SEL properly



*"The biggest problem I see is that **we don't pick something and stick through it**. When I work with principals, I tell them to pick one thing and do it well."*
—SEL Provider

*"The first day you implement [SEL] modules, there will not be significant change. **It takes a while** for people to reach a comfortable point in implementation."*
—SEL Provider

More coordination and collaboration



*"The work is **being done in pockets**, and it is hard to know what the players are doing. It's **hard to form a core [group] of people** who want to move SEL forward as a state."*
—SEL Provider

*"There are **more similarities across our state** than actual differences, and the more that we engage, **the better opportunity** we'll have to leverage the richness that is Delaware."*
—SEL Provider

District and school leaders need the **skill and will** to support SEL



*"If a superintendent does not want it, **it's not happening**. If a superintendent does want it, but a principal does not, **it's not happening**."*
—SEL Provider

*"DDOE should **empower school leaders** to make the choice that is right for their school, **follow up with them to find the data**, and then **give them time** to work on it."*
—SEL Provider

Thank you!
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