

Curriculum and school design  
features that support inclusive  
and equitable learning  
environments

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# 1 Background & Methodology

# This report explores curriculum and school design features that support inclusive and equitable learning environments

We focused our research first on clarifying and identifying “design features,” and then explored what these features could teach the field about effectively embedding SEL

What are the desired outcomes of embedding SEL?

What do we mean by design features and what are the predominant design features curriculum providers and school designers use to embed SEL?

What can we learn from these design features as it relates to embedding SEL?

# To inform our findings, we conducted desk research and conducted interviews with staff and partners at four national curriculum and school design organizations



EL Education partners “with K12 educators to transform public schools and districts into hubs of opportunity” primarily through an SEL curriculum (i.e., Crew) that enables students to master knowledge and skills, build character and produce high-quality work.



Facing History and Ourselves provides “innovative professional development, powerful classroom resources and unique pedagogy” to support secondary school teachers “to promote students’ historical understanding, critical thinking and social-emotional learning.”



Impact FL is “focused in improving the quality of classroom instruction” by connecting, convening and catalyzing change with educational leaders and teachers.



Instruction Partners works with “schools, systems, regional service providers and state departments of education to support excellent instruction for all students” by helping implement new curricula, training coaches or offering leadership support.

## 2 Findings

# Throughout this deck, we use the following definition of design features

## A DESIGN FEATURE IS

An element of a product or program that is either **technical or adaptive** and that can be **isolated and included in materials or in provider solutions**

Connected to an **outcome(s)**

A **core element that supports or encourages a practice** (e.g., math curriculum materials are grounded in open-ended problem posing (Freirian) lesson structure)<sup>1</sup>

### Example

Provide a range of discussion prompts in curriculum, particularly for nuanced topics, such as identity

## A DESIGN FEATURE IS NOT

**A practice** itself, or a **pedagogical move**

Something that **cannot be readily scaled**

A practice that **cannot exist outside of a specific context or place, or outside of specific conditions** (e.g., utilizing gardening during science lessons)

### Non-example

Foster discussion about nuanced topics (e.g., identity) in class

# We found from previous research that embedding SEL effectively requires intentional shifts to focus on both system design and student well-being

## Move from this

SEL that places the onus of learning and development on only students themselves

Deficit-oriented focus on interpersonal skills and competencies (e.g., behavior, conflict management, self-regulation)

SEL implementation that is confined by the boundaries of a standalone program, is perceived as a separate initiative or has limited reach

## Toward this\*

Understanding the science of learning and development and changing the system-level conditions (e.g., adult behaviors and mindsets, system-level policies and the wider political and social context) in which students are being asked to learn

Asset-based focus on mutable, intrapersonal domains that can be influenced by shifts in the learning environment (e.g., growth mindset, sense of belonging)

Coherently integrating SEL throughout all aspects of the school, district and system including academics



# Integrating SEL into instruction can be particularly effective for creating an inclusive learning environment

## Why is integrating SEL into instruction and the school day important?

Embedding SEL into instruction can **maximize the benefits of SEL and create affirming, supportive and inclusive learning environments.**<sup>1</sup> Positive, safe and nurturing learning environments attend to the full scope of a child’s developmental needs: social, emotional, cognitive, physical, psychological and academic. Supportive learning environments—which are nurtured through not only curriculum, but professional development and school design—help students thrive, and positively affect their education and life outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

CASEL, for example, advocates for using SEL standards that are embedded within academic learning, providing opportunities for students to share how they view the connections between their SEL and academic competencies, supporting teachers to co-construct knowledge with students and empower teachers to foster student ownership over their own learning process.<sup>3</sup>

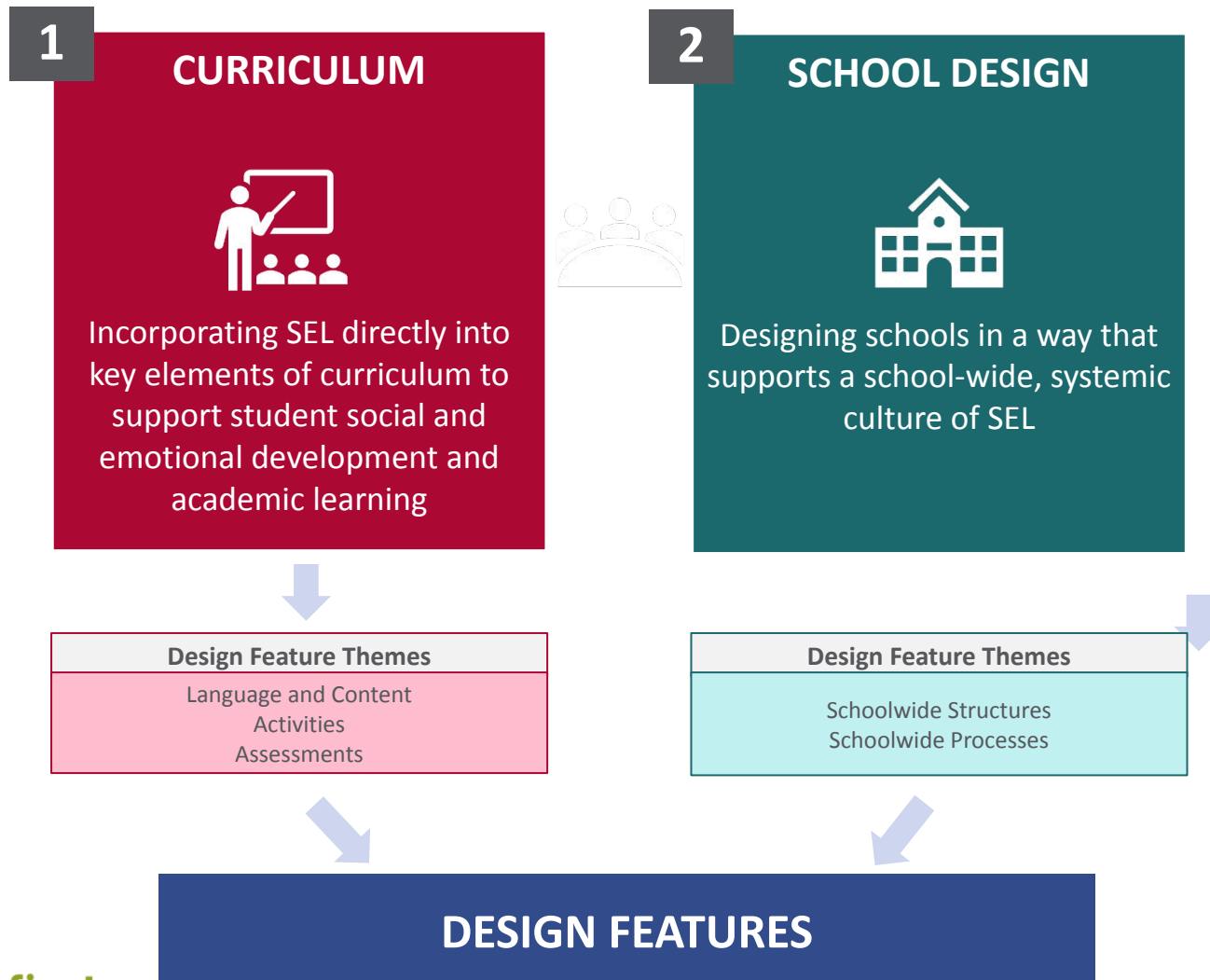
*“SEL can live separately from core content areas, but **we think that there is some magic missing when we aren't embedding core, racially-affirming SEL into core content areas.**”*

—Organizational leader

*“All learning is social and emotional...**how you teach science is also how you teach SEL.**”*

—Organizational leader

# We identified design features for effectively embedding SEL in two aspects of teaching and learning: curriculum and school design



# While we describe design features for each separately, as you review, keep in mind that effectively embedding SEL rests on interdependencies and cohesion of these design features

1

## CURRICULUM



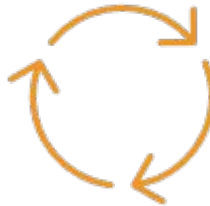
Design features that help students build relationships with each other and with adults, that integrate their interests, culture and community into learning, and that let them take ownership of their learning create an inclusive learning environment

2

## SCHOOL DESIGN



Design features that bake adult SEL structures into school culture and dedicate time at the start of the school year for building foundational SEL and relationships, as well as utilize structures to incorporate student, staff and community voice create a culture that allows for vulnerability, authenticity and willingness to make mistakes



### WHY ARE THESE INTERDEPENDENT?

- Even with a high-quality curriculum that incorporates design features embedding SEL, implementation could be stunted by, for example, adults who have themselves not engaged in SEL, or a school that does not prioritize SEL in its systems and structures
- Similarly, even within a school that supports SEL activities and relationship formation, it can be difficult for adults to put these values into practice without access to relevant curriculum

# Throughout this report we offer connections between the design features and key elements of SEL using the ARCS model as a reference

## ARCS Model of Motivation

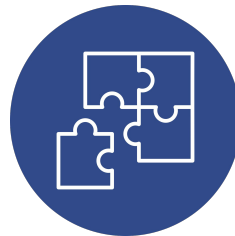
### Attention

“An element of motivation and is also a prerequisite for learning. The motivational concern is for getting and sustaining attention.”



### Relevance

“Refers to making the learning experience personally relevant or meaningful” whether it be through the perceived relevance of the content itself or from the way or process in which it is taught.”



### Confidence

“Differences in confidence can influence a student's persistence and accomplishment...[Confidence building strategies] help the learner form the impression that some level of success is possible if effort is exerted.”



### Satisfaction

“Concerns learner's continued motivation to learn. If they experience satisfying outcomes, students are likely to develop a persistent desire to learn. Satisfying or positive consequences of instruction can result from both extrinsic and intrinsic matters.”



# Curriculum that effectively embeds SEL should...

## Language and Content

Be culturally dynamic and flexible enough to include local content and context

Include SEL-related language for teachers to use with students throughout the day

## Activities

Incorporate connectors between students and between students and adults to foster relationship-building

Support students to share their experiences so that they can thrive in their personal and academic identities

Include service components and opportunities to promote engagement and take action

## Assessments

Center critical thinking and incorporate students' interests, culture and community to further engage students

Engage students in their own progress monitoring and reflection to provide them with ownership and agency over their learning

## DESIGN FEATURES

- Curriculum leaves room for teachers to choose relevant readings and use multimedia approaches, or at least provides guidance for bringing cultural relevance to prescribed readings
  - Curriculum incorporates current events into instruction
  - Curriculum caters to different class sizes, student backgrounds and learning styles
  - Curriculum includes terms and language that directly connects content to SEL (e.g., "mathematical courage")
  - Curriculum specifies sentence stems that encourages productive criticism during collaborative work
  - Curriculum provides language for teachers to refer to students in a way that explicitly affirms and uplifts
- Curriculum includes connecting, opening activities prompted by teacher curiosity
  - Curriculum provides facilitation techniques for cooperative learning
  - Curriculum provides facilitation techniques that allow students the space to bring their personal lives into school
  - Curriculum provides intentional pauses for students to express how their day is going
  - Curriculum provides debriefing discussion points at the end of a class
  - Curriculum includes service components and a focus on justice
  - Curriculum includes opportunities for students to take active roles in the classroom
- Curriculum includes assessments that allow students to explore a topic aligned to their interests and that are rigorous and community-oriented, like a graduate capstone project
  - Curriculum includes assessments that capture critical thinking, creativity and communication
  - Curriculum includes a preview step for teachers to have students identify learning targets before a lesson and reflect after
  - Curriculum includes exit tickets that prompt students to reflect on the day and consider tomorrow

# School design that effectively embeds SEL should...

## Schoolwide Structures

Protect time for SEL-related activities for students and staff

### DESIGN FEATURES

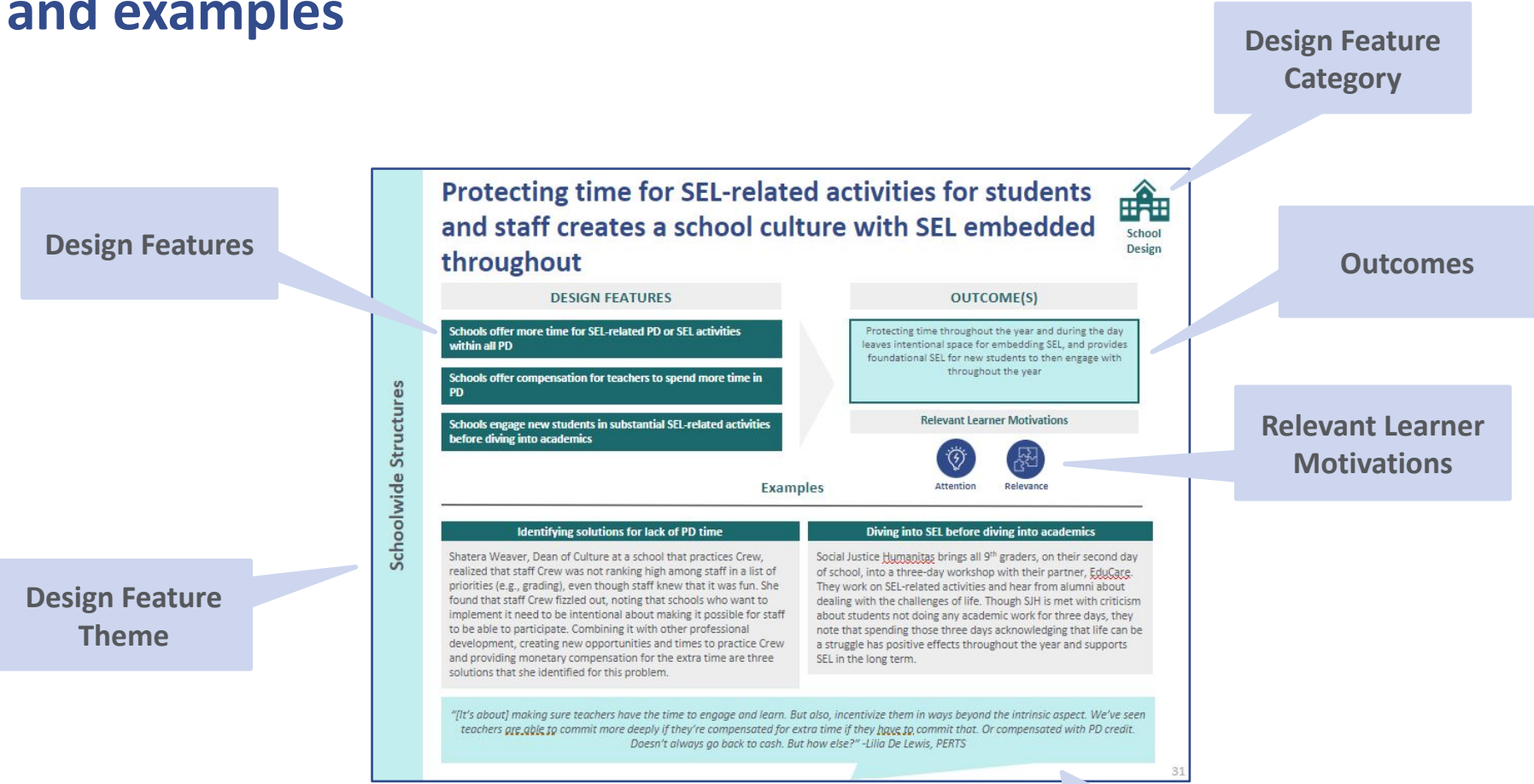
- Schools engage new students in substantial SEL-related activities before diving into academics
- Schools offer more time for adult SEL and SEL-related activities
- Schools offer compensation for teachers to spend more time working on SEL

## Schoolwide Practices

Incorporate student, staff and community voice into the school day and school culture

- Schools have design teams, advisory boards and steering committees made up of students
- Schools host community dialogues
- Schools do "empathy tours" of the community
- Schools bring alumni back to talk to students

# On the slides that follow, we describe these design features by looking at their outcomes, their relevant learner motivations and examples



**Protecting time for SEL-related activities for students and staff creates a school culture with SEL embedded throughout**

School Design

DESIGN FEATURES	OUTCOME(S)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools offer more time for SEL-related PD or SEL activities within all PD</li> <li>Schools offer compensation for teachers to spend more time in PD</li> <li>Schools engage new students in substantial SEL-related activities before diving into academics</li> </ul>	<p>Protecting time throughout the year and during the day leaves intentional space for embedding SEL, and provides foundational SEL for new students to then engage with throughout the year</p>
<p>Relevant Learner Motivations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attention</li> <li>Relevance</li> </ul>	

**Examples**

Identifying solutions for lack of PD time	Diving into SEL before diving into academics
<p>Shatera Weaver, Dean of Culture at a school that practices Crew, realized that staff Crew was not ranking high among staff in a list of priorities (e.g., grading), even though staff knew that it was fun. She found that staff Crew fizzled out, noting that schools who want to implement it need to be intentional about making it possible for staff to be able to participate. Combining it with other professional development, creating new opportunities and times to practice Crew and providing monetary compensation for the extra time are three solutions that she identified for this problem.</p>	<p>Social Justice <i>Humanitas</i> brings all 9<sup>th</sup> graders, on their second day of school, into a three-day workshop with their partner, <i>EduCares</i>. They work on SEL-related activities and hear from alumni about dealing with the challenges of life. Though SJH is met with criticism about students not doing any academic work for three days, they note that spending those three days acknowledging that life can be a struggle has positive effects throughout the year and supports SEL in the long term.</p>

*"[It's about] making sure teachers have the time to engage and learn. But also, incentivize them in ways beyond the intrinsic aspect. We've seen teachers able to commit more deeply if they're compensated for extra time if they have to commit that. Or compensated with PD credit. Doesn't always go back to cash. But how else?" -Lilia De Lewis, PERTS*

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**Examples**  
Examples of how districts, schools, and school support organizations use the design features

# Curriculum should be culturally dynamic and flexible enough to include local content and context



Curriculum

## DESIGN FEATURES

Curriculum leaves room for teachers to choose relevant readings and use multimedia approaches, or at least provides guidance for bringing cultural relevance to prescribed readings

Curriculum incorporates current events into instruction

Curriculum caters to different class sizes, student backgrounds and learning styles



## OUTCOME(S)

Encouraging students to learn about and wrestle with content that is relevant and catered towards them fosters agency, engagement and a sense of belonging. Curriculum that is culturally dynamic and flexible leaves room for more students to engage in discussions

### Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Relevance

## Examples

### Processing current events

The [New York State Education Department](#) encourages providing the space to process current events, even if controversial, in traditional instruction, through prompting discussion questions, Socratic seminars and implementing conversation protocols.

### Cultural relevance through guidance

When it is not available for teachers to use culturally-relevant texts, [Learning For Justice](#) guides teachers through using canonical texts to start critical conversations, suggesting questions like “What don’t we hear from Black characters in the story?” or “Why does the author create distinctions between Black characters, and what are they pointing the reader to?” when reading canonical texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

### Processing current events in flex lessons

Crew curriculum includes flex lessons—for conversations such as processing difficult events that might happen in the world, community, or school—so that teachers can pivot to these conversations without worrying about what else they had planned.

### Cultural relevance through choice

Facing History and Ourselves offers “a lot of agency with the structure [of the curriculum],” through letting teachers adapt or choose relevant readings, using different videos and even changing reading strategies depending on the context of their students.

*“Providing opportunities for all types of modalities and learning styles to really see some success...it’s important to take a break from the standard and rigid content requirements of class structure. Give students who don’t always thrive in that setting the opportunity to thrive.”*

—Shatera Weaver, Crew curriculum user



# Curriculum should include SEL-related language for teachers to use with students throughout the day



Curriculum

## DESIGN FEATURES

Curriculum includes terms and language that directly connects content to SEL (e.g., "mathematical courage")

Curriculum specifies sentence stems that encourages productive criticism during collaborative work

Curriculum provides language for teachers to refer to students in a way that explicitly affirms and uplifts

## OUTCOME(S)

Creating SEL-related language norms can allow students to see themselves as worthy and capable of what might be challenging content work, thus building their confidence. It also provides models for how students can talk to and see others

## Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Confidence

## Examples

### Infusing SEL language with content

A leader at EL Education noted that regularly using terms like “mathematical resilience”, “mathematical belonging”, “mathematical collaboration” and “mathematical courage” means that students learn “that that’s the only way to talk about math.” They noticed that once a math or grade level team, for example, agrees upon this type of language and brings it into the classroom, students “start doing this with themselves and others.”

### Teaching sentence stems that foster collaboration

Transcend, which provides support to schools and districts building inclusive learning environments, noted that many of their partner schools are creating norms of encouraging students to use sentence stems during cooperative work and discussions, such as “I disagree with you or your approach because...,” which fosters confidence, productive criticism, positive conflict resolution and debate.

### Creating positive labels

A key part of Kingmakers of Oakland classrooms’ is that facilitators call Black students “Kings” and “Queens” to affirm and uplift students who often experience the opposite treatment in traditional classrooms.

*“At the moment [because of the political situation], we get some pushback for calling boys ‘Kings’ but when you see the shift—the way they move is even different. That cannot be captured in quantitative data.”*

—Kingmakers of Oakland



# Curriculum should incorporate connectors between students and between students and adults to foster relationship-building

## DESIGN FEATURES

Curriculum includes connecting, opening activities prompted by teacher curiosity

Curriculum provides facilitation techniques for cooperative learning

## OUTCOME(S)

Connections between students and between students and adults build trusting student-student and student-teacher relationships, which are preconditions for SEL and inclusive learning environments

## Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Relevance

## Examples

### Using connectors to strengthen relationships

Byron McClure of [Lessons for SEL](#) includes an opening ice breaker that asks questions like “If you had a Netflix special, what would the name of it be?” to focus on community-building and belonging. He reads the prompt to the class and has students discuss in small groups before moving the discussion to the whole group.

### Using connectors to strengthen relationships

An EL Education educator who wasn’t sure how to encourage vulnerability with students asked students to write anything they’d like to talk about on index cards. The teacher was able to prepare and decide which honest conversations they wanted to have with students, from students’ own suggestions.

### Fostering collaborative learning with facilitation techniques

At the foundation of Crew is the idea that everyone—including teachers—sits in a circle. This might look different from many elementary school classrooms, where the teacher is often outside of, or at the head of, a circle. Including teachers in the physical space signals to students that everyone’s success is interdependent.

### Fostering collaborative learning with facilitation techniques

[CASEL’s SEL Integration Playbook](#) encourages facilitation techniques that require cooperative learning:

- Look for places for students to work in pairs or groups to accomplish a collective goal
- Design tasks that require talk and collaboration
- Design tasks that foster interdependence by requiring students to individually contribute and negotiate agreements in order to complete the task as a team
- Teach and explicitly practice the skills needed for working effectively as a team



# Curriculum should support students to share their experiences so that they can thrive in their personal and academic identities

## DESIGN FEATURES

Curriculum provides facilitation techniques that allow students the space to bring their personal lives into school

Curriculum provides intentional pauses for students to express how their day is going

Curriculum provides debriefing discussion points at the end of a class



## OUTCOME(S)

When students have the space to talk about the school day and life outside of school, they are able to express their needs, educators have insight into students' energies and actions, and both students and educators can grow as a result

### Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Relevance

## Examples

### Facilitation techniques to let students "be"

Techniques such as Crew in advisory, morning meetings, or pauses in content classes give students space and opportunity to bring their whole selves to teachers and other students.

*"Providing opportunities for all types of modalities...to really see some success...it's important to take a break from the standard and rigid content requirements of class structure. Give students who don't always thrive in that setting the opportunity to thrive"*

—Shatera Weaver, Crew curriculum user

### Providing space for students to vent about their current state

One educator noted the necessity for curriculum and systems to give students access to voicing concerns about their lives. They noted that spending time at the beginning of one class to let students vent about the previous class was an important outlet for students to debrief and move more smoothly through the transition. This educator saw a connection between the move to let students vent about their day and de-escalating and understanding challenging situations whenever they would come up, preventing punitive disciplinary action. This is an example of an instructional practice, and curricular materials can include explicit recommendations or moments for teachers to pause for students to express feelings about their day.



# Curriculum should include service components and opportunities to promote engagement and take action

## DESIGN FEATURES

Curriculum includes service components and a focus on justice

Curriculum includes opportunities for students to take active roles in the classroom

## OUTCOME(S)

When paired with content, service learning and classroom responsibility provides students with opportunities to apply and contextualize content, and diverse learning options give all students a chance to engage and learn

## Relevant Learner Motivations



Confidence



Satisfaction

## Examples

### Learning justice and fairness through service

EL Education highlights how students in a school that implements curriculum with service learning opportunities have more of an action-minded orientation. For example, students define empathy as not just a feeling, but something that requires action. In one school, Crew is primarily focused on fairness, justice and activation. Learning these principles through natural ways of advocating and engaging helps students support their community, and also provides them with an impetus and ways to stand up for themselves and others.

### Service through classroom responsibility

Renee Mitchell, founder of I am MORE, centers healing through giving students authority over what's going on in the classroom. For her programming, this looks like letting students hold the camera, put the lights up, etc.

*“Crew curriculum really includes lessons that help kids think about their own role in making their crew a better place, and then their school, and then their place in their wider community.”*

—Libby Woodfin, Crew curriculum writer

# Curriculum should include assessments that center critical thinking and incorporate students' interests, culture and community to further engage students



Curriculum

## DESIGN FEATURES

Curriculum includes assessments that allow students to explore a topic aligned to their interests and that are rigorous and community-oriented, like a graduate capstone project

Curriculum includes assessments that capture critical thinking, creativity and communication

## OUTCOME(S)

Assessments that are relevant to students' lives and allow students to have a sense of agency in how they show their mastery provide students more holistic ways to display their learning and comprehension, and signal to students that their development is a priority

## Relevant Learner Motivations



Relevance



Satisfaction

## Examples

### Graduate capstone projects

Life Academy High School in Oakland—part of the California Performance Assessment Collaborative—extends their focus on rooting learning in the life experiences of their students to their way of assessing students. Students select an issue of interest for a graduate capstone project and explore it throughout their senior year through rigorous research. At the end of the year, they present their work and reflections formally before peers, teachers and community members.

### Testing non-traditional skills in non-traditional ways

exalt, an organization that supports court-involved youth, captures a wide range of skills such as communication, critical thinking, creative problem-solving and resource management through their assessment. For example, they may assess students' critical thinking by having them watch an episode of "The Wire" and discuss how it relates to their own lives, and assess problem through role playing making tough decisions as an executive of a company.

# Curriculum should engage students in their own progress monitoring and reflection to provide them with ownership and agency over their learning



Curriculum

## DESIGN FEATURES

Curriculum includes a preview step for teachers to have students identify learning targets *before* a lesson and reflect after

Curriculum includes exit tickets that prompt students to reflect on the day and consider tomorrow

## OUTCOME(S)

When students have opportunities for agency in all the steps of the evaluation process (knowing learning targets, observing and reflecting), they can take more ownership over their learning experience and feel empowered

## Relevant Learner Motivations



Confidence



Satisfaction

## Examples

### Empowering students through self-measuring learning targets

Students in EL Education's Crew explicitly identify learning targets before and after each Crew lesson. As a result, they report that they are can better understand and track their progress to learning targets and feel more empowered in their learning.

### Closing the day with reflection

Byron McClure, the founder of [Lessons for SEL](#), noted that his students have what they call "Closing Round." They reflect on one thing learned throughout the day and take an exit ticket that focuses on an emotion or feeling, one thing that they can work on for tomorrow. This focuses students on reflecting upon the day.

*"The most powerful practice was reflecting on 3 good things that happened over the course of the day. Identify those 3 good things and reflect on why happened to you. I use this as a practice inside schools from PreK to high school to PD. I've seen it adapted by a teacher of year who used it as an elementary school warmup activity. Students reflect on 3 good things that happened on previous day. Another example is outside of the school context. It is important because parents can use it as well. Major downfall is that SEL is only inside of school—it should happen across communities and industries."*

—Byron McClure, SEL provider

# Protecting time for SEL-related activities for students and staff creates a school culture with SEL embedded throughout

## DESIGN FEATURES

Schools engage new students in substantial SEL-related activities before diving into academics

Schools offer more time for adult SEL and SEL-related activities

Schools offer compensation for teachers to spend more time working on SEL

## OUTCOME(S)

School structures and incentives that create time and space for SEL-related activities in the school day can help educators and students prioritize SEL in ways that support academics

## Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Relevance

## Examples

### Identifying solutions for lack of time for teachers to meet

Shatera Weaver, Dean of Culture at a school that practices Crew, realized that when it was left up to teachers to make their own time for staff Crew, they often de-prioritized it over more immediate or pressing job demands, even though they knew it was important for school culture. As a result, Crew fizzled out. She noted that schools who want to implement it need to be intentional about making it possible for staff to be able to participate. Combining it with other professional development, creating new opportunities and times to practice Crew, and providing monetary compensation for the extra time are three solutions that she identified for this problem.

### Diving into SEL before diving into academics

Social Justice Humanitas brings all 9<sup>th</sup> graders, on their second day of school, into a three-day workshop with their partner, EduCare. They work on SEL-related activities and hear from alumni about dealing with the challenges of life. Though SJH has experienced criticism about students not doing any academic work for three days, they note that spending those three days acknowledging that life can be a struggle has long-term effects on students, their wellbeing and their academics. For example, one may go into a math classroom during the year and see a teacher having a conversation with students about their frustrations with the subject and how to solve for that.

*"[It's about] making sure teachers have the time to engage and learn. But also, incentivize them in ways beyond the intrinsic aspect. We've seen teachers are able to commit more deeply if they're compensated for extra time if they have to commit that. Or compensated with PD credit. Doesn't always go back to cash. But how else?"*

—Lilia De Lewis, PERTS

# School structures that incorporate student, staff and community voice into the school day and school culture signal that students are valued

## DESIGN FEATURES

Schools have design teams, advisory boards and steering committees made up of students

Schools host community dialogues

Schools do "empathy tours" of the community

Schools bring alumni back to talk to students

## OUTCOME(S)

Schools and systems that prioritize student, staff and community voice signal to the school community that everyone is valued, gives school community members agency and ownership over their school lives, and ensures that school community members' needs are prioritized

## Relevant Learner Motivations



Relevance



Satisfaction

## Examples

### Letting students take the lead

Byron McClure at [Lessons for SEL](#) suggests creating student design teams. The design teams are made up of "Extreme End Users" (e.g., AP students or BIPOC students) who engage in design thinking around school SEL.

[Social Justice Humanitas](#) has a student steering committee, made up of two representatives from each advisory, that meets with grade-level teachers and provides constructive feedback.

Renee Mitchell, founder of [I am MORE](#), creates a youth advisory board that helps make funding decisions.

### Learning from alumni

Several organizations bring back alumni to speak with students about dealing with school life (e.g., former 9<sup>th</sup> graders talking to current 9<sup>th</sup> graders, graduated court-involved youth talking to current students).

### Hosting community dialogues

Before rolling out a Culturally Responsive and Embedded SEL (CRESEL) initiative to support Native Alaskan students, Alaskan schools hosted community dialogues to define and create SEL that is guided by the community and culture, realizing that SEL had always existed in the community but without the acronym.

### Putting staff in students' shoes with empathy tours

Byron McClure at [Lessons for SEL](#) emphasizes the importance of listening deeply to student experience. They started designing work by riding the bus with students or doing an "empathy tour." They went into neighborhoods, communities and developments and asked community members "What would it take for you to send your kids to school here?" This built an understanding of the community's needs.



# 3 Recommendations

**Our findings on design features draw from SEL, ELA and history curriculum or programs, which is where SEL efforts tend to be focused in schools. However, creating inclusive learning environments will require schools to embed SEL across core academic content.**

**The following slides offer high-level recommendations for incorporating key design features for effectively embedding SEL into curriculum and school design.**

# Curriculum developers should incorporate SEL design features and work toward aligning these features to state standards and frameworks

## DESIGN FEATURES TO EFFECTIVELY EMBED SEL IN CURRICULUM SHOULD...

### Language and Content

Be culturally dynamic and flexible enough to include local content and context

Include SEL-related language for teachers to use with students throughout the day

### Activities

Incorporate connectors between students and between students and adults to foster relationship-building

Allow for and encourage students to share their experiences so that they can thrive in their personal and academic identities

Include service components and opportunities to take action

### Assessments

Center critical thinking and incorporate students' interests, culture and community to further engage students

Engage students in their own progress monitoring and reflection to provide them with ownership and agency over their learning

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS

Review state standards or frameworks that attend to SEL to identify opportunities to align instructional materials to these standards or frameworks while incorporating the design features. Design and/or update instructional materials to connect to student identity and community, promote growth mindset, and support critical thinking.

For example:

- Lessons that allow students to connect tasks to examples from their own lives
- Language prompts that support student risk-taking
- Prompts that support “meta-cognition” by having students share/show multiple ways to get to an answer
- Prompts that guide students through error analysis tasks where they identify and explain their problem-solving processes
- Lessons that incorporate group work or projects and that build on concepts over time
- Lessons that allow teachers flexibility to coordinate across content areas

## RESOURCES

- See [UT Dana Center's tool](#) to determine if your mathematics instructional materials support students' understanding and application of SEL competencies
- See Massachusetts's [crosswalk](#) and Delaware's [SEL Competencies and Mathematical Practice Standards Crosswalk](#) to determine if your mathematics instructional materials support students' understanding and application of SEL competencies
- Read about how STEMscopes Math [adapted their curriculum to better incorporate SEL](#)

# School designers have opportunities to embed SEL into all aspects of the design process, from initial design to implementation to ongoing, continuous improvement

## DESIGN FEATURES TO EFFECTIVELY EMBED SEL IN SCHOOL DESIGN SHOULD

### Schoolwide structures

Protect time for SEL-related activities for students and staff

### Schoolwide practices

Incorporate student, staff and community voice into the school day and school culture

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL DESIGNERS

Build trust with communities at the outset of the school design process by listening to the needs and desires of community members. Bring the community into the codesign of content, structures, practices, and policies that draw on community assets and align school design with community-rooted goals. Create intentional spaces within school structures to facilitate opportunities for students and educators to bring their whole selves into school.

For example:

- Opportunities for students to lead communitywide reflections – and where needed, redesign – of the structures, policies and practices in place
- Time and resource allocations in the school schedule and budget to allow for relationship- and SEL-skill building as a grounding for academic work
- Implementation of evidence-based models and designs, aligned to redesigning the student experience in school

## RESOURCES

- See Transcend's [Leaps for Equitable, 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning](#) and community-based design resources to learn about how school designers can work with communities to design schools that center the student experience
- Read about EL Education's [Crew curriculum](#) for building an authentic school community

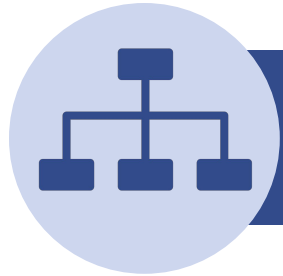
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# Appendix: Shifts in SEL

# Centering equity in SEL requires acknowledging the system-level conditions in which adults and students alike are asked to operate



SEL that focuses on the individual student without considering system-level conditions perpetuates inequities, particularly racial inequities, ubiquitous in our education system and society<sup>1</sup>

## THE ISSUE

One of the benefits of SEL often cited in research is that it leads to fewer disciplinary incidents. Yet, without centering equity, a common result is that SEL is used as a form of control, particularly against BIPOC students, to further perpetuate white dominant culture that narrowly defines what is “acceptable” behavior.<sup>2</sup>

## MODEL EXAMPLE

Bronxdale High School, designated as a model site for restorative practice by the NYC DOE, infuses social justice and SEL throughout all aspects of their school as reflected in their vision for a safe, caring collaborative community in which all community members have voice, agency and responsibility. Strategic structures and policies such as small classes and restorative approaches, reinforced by five full-time positions dedicated to social and emotional supports and various other student co-led structures such as peer mediation and youth court, advance the school’s vision.<sup>3</sup>



# Centering equity in SEL requires fostering an understanding of one's identity, role and agency as it relates to systemic root causes



SEL that focuses solely on interpersonal relationships without fostering an understanding of systemic root causes and one's identity, role and agency further perpetuates inequities<sup>1</sup>

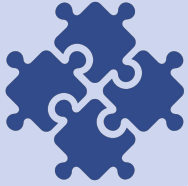
## THE ISSUE

One of the benefits of SEL often cited in research is that it is critical to developing the interpersonal skills needed for employability. Yet, without centering equity, a common result is that SEL is used to reinforce white dominant culture by not acknowledging the systemic conditions that affect who is seen as “employable” and “professional.”<sup>2</sup>

## MODEL EXAMPLE

Healing Illinois is a racial healing initiative of the Illinois Department of Human Services<sup>3</sup> and as part of this initiative, Mahomet-Seymour Community Unit School District No. 3 in Mahomet, Illinois, embarked on a process to advance SEL by addressing the root causes of inequity. For example, they held town halls for Mahomet community members to voice their concerns amid nationwide racial unrest in the summer of 2020, conducted workshops and trainings for Mahomet staff and administration where they read books like “Culture, Class and Race” and learned to discuss SEL as well as diversity, equity and inclusion with students.<sup>4</sup>

# Sustainable change requires integrating SEL throughout all aspects of the education system and this is particularly critical when centering equity in SEL



SEL that is perceived as a standalone program or a separate initiative is unsustainable and places undue burden on individuals within the system<sup>1</sup>

## THE ISSUE

Some of the challenges of SEL implementation include discrepancies in stakeholder understanding of the vision and scope of SEL as well as “initiative fatigue” wherein high turnover of SEL initiatives and lack of long-term resources and supports stunt implementation efforts.<sup>1</sup>

## MODEL EXAMPLE

Kansas MTSS and Alignment model is an integrated approach to education across academic, behavioral and social and emotional learning needs. It focuses on “system-level change across the school, district and state” including guidance for schools around the “process of needs assessment and decision-making that assists in not only selecting effective practices, but also creating a sustainable aligned structure,” as well as “a system of prevention, early identification and intervention.”<sup>2</sup>