

Professional learning design
features that help support
adult mindset and practice
shifts

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1 Background & Methodology

This report explores professional development 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 PD providers 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, engaged five national organizations and conducted interviews with their staff and partners



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.



The New Teacher Center partners with school districts to “co-create thriving, inclusive cultures” through targeted coaching around people and cultures.

We also looked at how practitioners use tools focused on assessing classroom learning conditions

Learning Conditions

Learning conditions are “factors or circumstances that exist in students’ classrooms, or in schools or districts, that support or hinder students’ ability to learn” (PERTS, 2021).

1

Learning conditions can make or break a student’s academic, social and emotional development^{1,2,3,4}

2

Well-designed learning conditions can alleviate racial and other inequities^{3,5,6}

3

Frameworks that describe the learning conditions necessary to support academic, social and emotional development have been created for several contexts^{1,7}

4

The most widely used learning conditions frameworks emphasize a core set of beliefs and practices for which classroom teachers hold the primary responsibility

For our research, we focused on the PERTS framework



The Project for Education Research That Scales (PERTS) is a nonprofit research and development institute that translates insights from psychological science into cutting-edge tools, measures, and recommendations that educators anywhere can use to foster healthy and equitable academic engagement and success.

PERTS Elevate

- Elevate is a **data-driven professional learning program** that elevates student voice to help 6th to 12th grade educators create engaging, equitable experiences that support academic and social-emotional learning
- The main component of Elevate is a **brief, customizable survey** that sheds light on the way students are experiencing each class by measuring learning conditions. The results can be disaggregated in a number of ways to highlight growth in specific populations.
- Another component of Elevate is a free **practice guide** with teacher-tested strategies and activities as it relates to each learning condition

Learning conditions

- PERTS focuses on a total of six primary and three supplementary learning conditions
- Each learning condition is based on **research** showing its relation to student academic engagement and achievement and is also **within the locus of educator influence**

PERTS Elevate is one example of a framework that focuses on learning conditions, yet the themes may be relevant across frameworks and to different users.

PERTS' Elevate survey measures six primary and three supplemental learning conditions

Learning Condition	Rationale
Affirming Identities	Students feel more connected to and motivated in classes that recognize and affirm their backgrounds and identities.
Classroom Community	Students feel safe to engage and succeed in school when the classroom environment encourages a sense of community and fosters mutual support among classmates.
Feedback for Growth	Students learn more effectively when their teachers set high expectations, recognize progress and offer respectful, critical feedback to help students improve.
Meaningful Work	Students are more motivated to learn when the work in class feels interesting and relevant to them.
Student Voice	Students take ownership of their learning and are more actively engaged in their schoolwork when they have choices, share their ideas and feel heard.
Teacher Caring	Students engage more deeply in their work when they feel like their teacher likes and cares about them.
Learning Goals*	Students learn more effectively when it is clear to them what they are supposed to be learning and how it fits into the big ideas of that subject area.
Supportive Teaching*	Students learn more effectively and are more likely to feel valued when their teachers provide them with the instructional support to be successful.
Well-Organized Class*	Students learn more effectively and are more motivated when the teacher develops routines and systems that contribute to the smooth functioning of the classroom.

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)¹

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

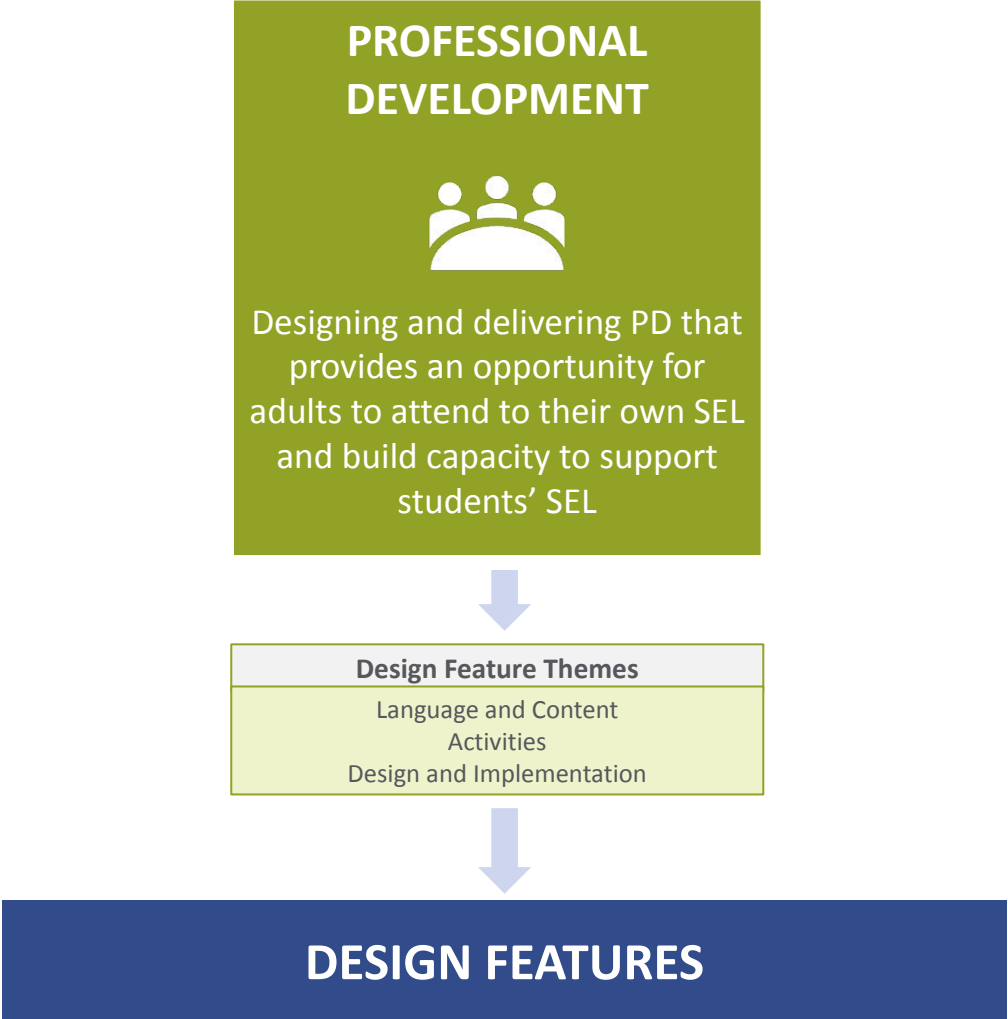
Something that **cannot be readily scaled**

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 identified design features for effectively embedding SEL in professional development



This deck describes design features for professional development, but keep in mind that effectively embedding SEL rests on interdependencies and cohesion across curriculum, school design and PD

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Design features that provide the space, time, resources and facilitation necessary to build relationships with each other, and practice SEL as adults for their own selves and to practice with students, support the creation of an inclusive learning environment for students



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 purposeful PD and 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

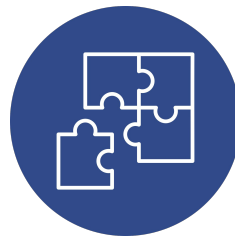
Attention

“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.”



Professional development that effectively embeds SEL should...

Language and Content

Focus on how to talk about identity and build empathy

Be clear, ask essential questions and guide teachers to refine their focus

DESIGN FEATURES

- PD guides teachers in how to talk about identity and belonging, first among themselves and then with their students
- PD supports teachers as they teach SEL within the context of a school's mission and vision
- PD supports teachers in learning about the community
- PD discusses essential questions that center student experiences
- PD gives space to teachers to decide what work they want to target with their students
- PD provides clarity through rubrics and icons

Activities

Encourage consistent and deep staff connections with each other

Provide many opportunities for staff to model SEL practices with each other

- PD incorporates frequent connector activities with adults
- PD calls for empathy interviews with staff
- PD combines other structures that are set up to deeply connect adults
- PD includes activities for teachers to model SEL practices with each other
- PD delivery includes SEL practices for the facilitator to model with participants

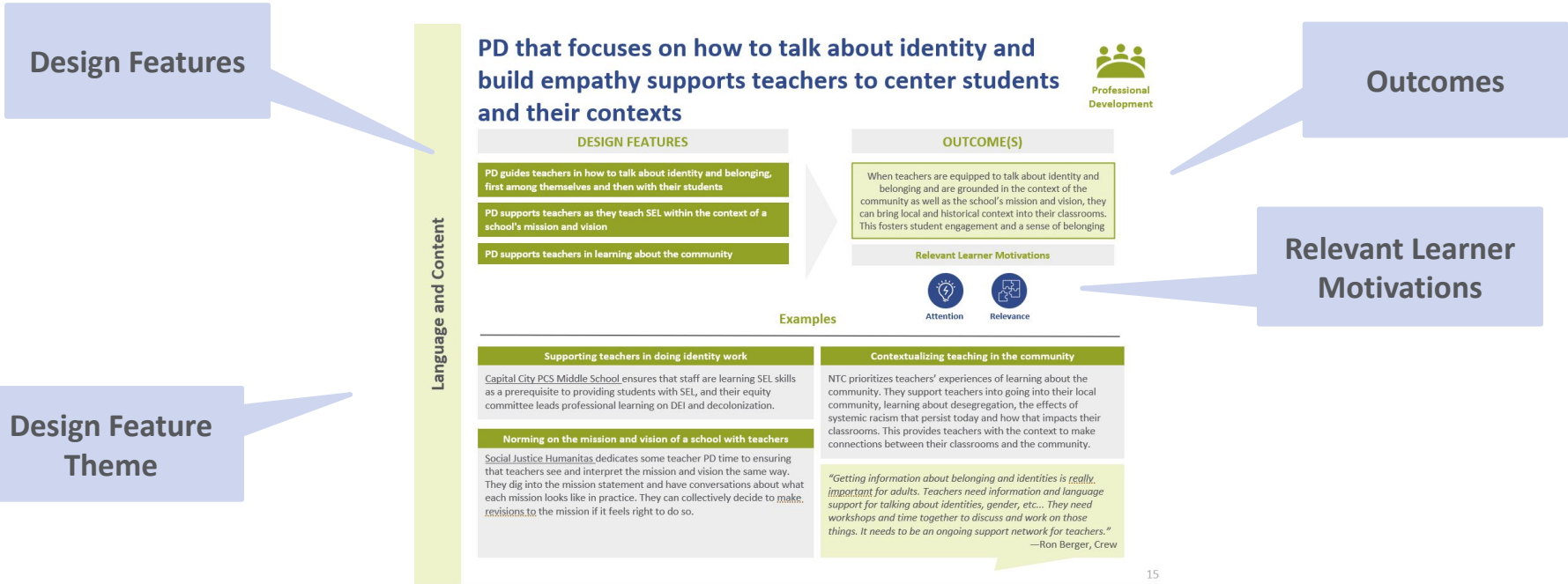
Design and Implementation

Include teacher voice and student voice in its design

Be offered in longer amounts of time, over a longer period of time

- PD is designed by teachers themselves
- PD provides opportunities for teachers to co-design school practices
- PD includes the voices of students and community members
- PD is offered in a longer amount of time, rather than broken up into smaller sessions
- PD is offered in multi-month cohorts

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



Examples
Examples of professional development providers and other organizations use the design features

PD that focuses on how to talk about identity and build empathy supports teachers to center students and their contexts



Professional
Development

DESIGN FEATURES

PD guides teachers in how to talk about identity and belonging, first among themselves and then with their students

PD supports teachers as they teach SEL within the context of a school's mission and vision

PD supports teachers in learning about the community

OUTCOME(S)

When teachers are equipped to talk about identity and belonging and are grounded in the context of the community as well as the school's mission and vision, they can bring local and historical context into their classrooms. This fosters student engagement and a sense of belonging

Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Relevance

Examples

Supporting teachers in doing identity work

Capital City PCS Middle School ensures that staff are learning SEL skills as a prerequisite to providing students with SEL, and their equity committee leads professional learning on DEI and decolonization.

Norming on the mission and vision of a school with teachers

Social Justice Humanitas dedicates some teacher PD time to ensuring that teachers see and interpret the mission and vision the same way. They dig into the mission statement and have conversations about what each mission looks like in practice. They can collectively decide to make revisions to the mission if it feels right to do so.

Contextualizing teaching in the community

NTC prioritizes teachers' experiences of learning about the community. They support teachers into going into their local community, learning about desegregation, the effects of systemic racism that persist today and how that impacts their classrooms. This provides teachers with the context to make connections between their classrooms and the community.

"Getting information about belonging and identities is really important for adults. Teachers need information and language support for talking about identities, gender, etc... They need workshops and time together to discuss and work on those things. It needs to be an ongoing support network for teachers."

—Ron Berger, Crew

PD content that is clear, asks essential questions and guides teachers in refining their focus allows them to better center students

DESIGN FEATURES

PD discusses essential questions that center student experiences

PD gives space to teachers to decide what work they want to target with their students

PD provides clarity through rubrics and icons

OUTCOME(S)

When teachers can frequently center student experiences and focus on aspects of frameworks that they feel most compelled to, there is ownership and meaning woven into the work

Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Relevance

Examples

Framing around essential questions

Learning For Justice frames learning around essential questions that follow the format of their social justice standards. For example, in PD about access to math education, an identity question might be “What was *my* math experience?” A justice question might be “Why are some groups seen as more worthy of math than others?” These questions provide teachers with actionable takeaways and bring them back to centering students.

Clarifying through rubrics

Crew rubrics aim to be as explicit as possible about the structure of Crew, through providing teachers with what Crew should look, sound and feel like.

Determining areas of focus

The NTC coach who works with teachers in Florida implementing a student learning condition survey tool has found that when it is overwhelming to work on all aspects of a learning framework, for example, teachers put in the work on areas they want to see change and areas that they’ve chosen to focus on themselves. The coach asks teachers “What are some areas you’d like to focus on?” instead of “What are you struggling with?” When asked this question, 90 percent of teachers chose areas that they were struggling with anyway.

Determining areas of focus

Similarly, Learning For Justice is finding that, instead of giving teachers all 20 social justice standards to work on, it is more supportive to teachers to ask them to pick, for example, four standards to start with, to help teachers make sense of all the materials they are provided with.

Clarifying through icons

Committee for Children recommends to add an icon at the top of lesson plans to explain the learning condition(s) that might be most relevant.

PD that encourages consistent and deep staff connections with each other gives adults the tools to make connections with students

DESIGN FEATURES

PD incorporates frequent connector activities with adults

PD calls for empathy interviews with staff

PD combines other structures that are set up to deeply connect adults



OUTCOME(S)

Cultivating affirming, trusting teacher-teacher relationships supports effective adult SEL and gives teachers relational tools they can employ in their classrooms. This serves to bolster classroom relationships and foster an inclusive learning environment

Relevant Learner Motivations



Relevance



Confidence

Examples

Incorporating frequent moments of connection

In their communities of practice, Beloved Community offers 'warm welcomes' or ways of introducing their participants into the work of each session. These warm welcomes serve to create the type of atmosphere where trust can be built quickly and securely. This approach extends beyond the welcome and lives inside many of the activities around the capacity building activities within the communities of practice.

Building empathy

Byron McClure, the founder of Lessons for SEL, encourages listening to each other's needs, and in particular, deeply listening to the needs of teachers. He encourages empathy interviews between staff to foster connection.

Engaging in deep conversations

Social Justice Humanitas engages teachers in a three-day retreat before the start of the school year, where they spend much of their time in small group conversations discussing vulnerable topics and finds that their teachers are less focused on control and compliance during the year, but more on helping students achieve for the sake of learning.

Engaging in deep conversations

EL Education encourages "staff crew," or having staff engage in Crew much like students. Through going through many of the same conversations that they might have with students, this practice sets the stage for brave and honest communication between teachers.

PD that provides many opportunities for staff to model SEL practices with each other strengthens teacher understanding and relationships

DESIGN FEATURES

PD includes activities for teachers to model SEL practices with each other

PD delivery includes SEL practices for the facilitator to model with participants

OUTCOME(S)

When staff model SEL practices with each other before practicing them with students, their buy-in increases, they have more opportunities for relationship-building with each other and they are better able to support students

Relevant Learner Motivations



Attention



Confidence

Examples

Modeling SEL practices to support adult SEL

Beloved Community professional learning communities feature strong SEL practices with the participants. The facilitation of their equity audit experience is meant to demonstrate process as product, so that participants feel the impact of SEL as they are developing their own capacity to create spaces in their schools and organizations for the type of liberation that SEL, through a racial equity lens, can support.

Modeling SEL practices to embody traits that students are asked to embody

Shatera Weaver, Dean of Culture at an EL Education school in Queens, New York, knows that staff crew is especially important in not just providing staff with an opportunity to work on adult SEL, but for that adult SEL work to trickle down to students, what they observe and what they practice. She knows that staff must talk about empathy, for example, authentically during staff crew to embody it in front of students.

Modeling SEL practices to support adult SEL

Renee Mitchell, founder of I am MORE, starts her trainings by telling her story and modeling authenticity. This gives teachers the space to tap into their own emotions and brings them toward healing.

“If we’re not living these things as staff crew or adult crew, we can’t expect students to. They’ll never outpace us. They will never set the tone. It’s difficult when you have an educator that lacks SEL competencies themselves. Asking them to do this work is incredibly difficult.”

—Francesca Peck, Director of Culture and Character at an EL Education School

PD that is co-designed with teachers and incorporates student voice gives teachers and students agency over their own learning

DESIGN FEATURES

PD is designed by teachers themselves

PD provides opportunities for teachers to co-design school practices

PD includes the voices of students and community members

OUTCOME(S)

When educators have an opportunity to take an active role in defining the learning they need to create inclusive learning environments, they feel more connected and engaged to learn practices for their classrooms

Relevant Learner Motivations



Confidence



Satisfaction

Examples

Incorporating teacher, student and community voice in elect to work agreements

Social Justice Humanitas is able to provide their teachers with autonomy in many ways. Their elect-to-work agreement is written in collaboration with teachers, administration and a governing council made up of students, family and community members. Though it does give teachers more responsibility than what is necessarily in their contract, the addition of teacher voice is empowering and helps define school culture by setting expectations.

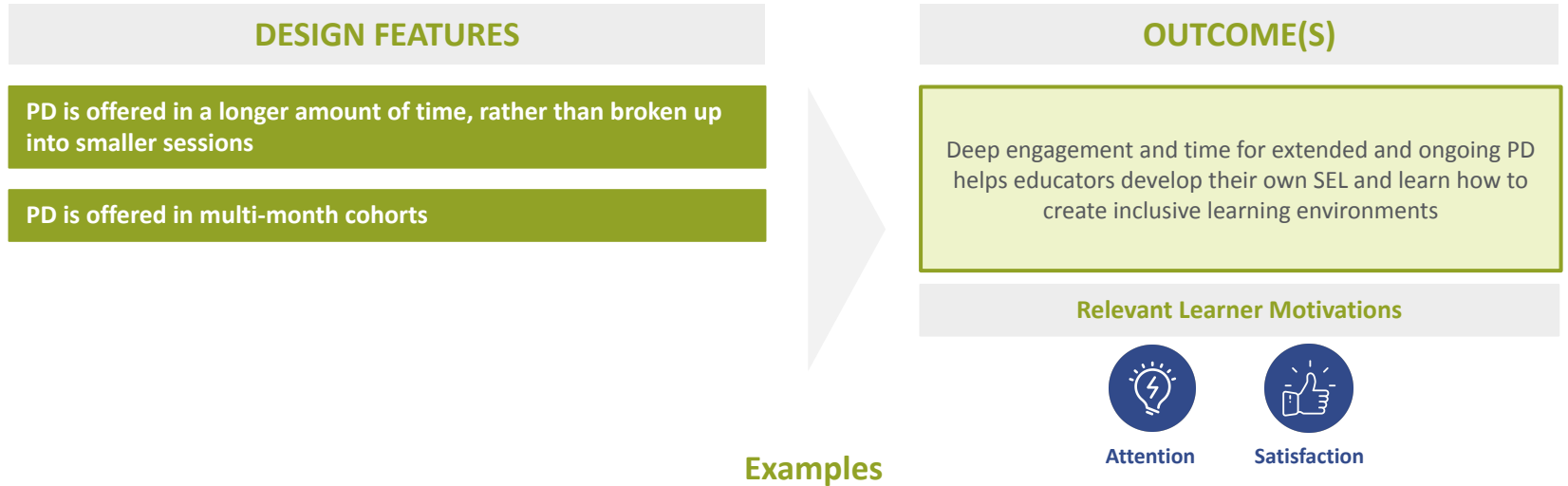
Committees designing professional learning

At Capital City PCS Middle School there is an equity committee of teachers who design professional learning experiences for all staff. Instructional staff, through this committee, learn about leveraging DEI and decolonization practices. Because these learnings are co-designed, participants can come to common definitions together.

“Teachers tell us they are nervous to teach social justice, that they might mess up. I tell them it’s ok. We repeat this saying a lot around here: perfection is not expected, grace is appreciated and effort matters.”

—Sarah Blackburn, Learning for Justice

PD supporting adult SEL that is offered in longer amounts of time, over a longer period, fosters deeper engagement and skill building



Examples

Multi-month cohorts	Working on SEL over three days
<p><u>Learning For Justice</u> is moving toward more extended and deeper engagements with educators to maximize support and learning. They are moving away from one-off webinars toward multi-month cohorts.</p>	<p><u>Social Justice Humanitas</u> holds two weeks of PD for teachers before the school year starts. Three of those days are dedicated solely toward SEL, where they focus on small group conversations, modeling SEL practices and learning from veteran teachers.</p>

In addition to these design features, we also identified three areas that influence the effectiveness of assessing and acting on learning conditions, drawing from our research with PERTS

1 User Motivations



Partners seek ways to uplift student voice, alternative data to traditional, quantitative performance data (e.g., grades, attendance) and a method to measure SEL-related programming and interventions

2 Pre-Conditions



Structures that enable successful implementation include having a school climate that emphasizes the need for student voice, explicit connections between school priorities and Elevate, structures for supporting teacher engagement and a plan to have multiple teachers using Elevate

3 Implementation



Providing coaching in tandem with learning conditions data is a promising method to foster the conditions necessary for shifts in practice. This is especially noticeable in the difference in the depth and quality of changes to teacher practices and mindsets between those teachers with coaching supports and those without.



Our case study revealed that practitioners seek out tools like Elevate to center student experiences and evaluate teacher practice

Emerging user motivations for using PERTS Elevate

Uplift Student Voice to Enhance Teaching

More and more, schools are seeing the value of student voice in shaping their education experience, though they don't always know where to find information about the best methods for doing so.¹ Elevate prioritizes student-reported experiences of learning conditions in classrooms as the basis for shifting teacher practice. The tool provides schools and districts with a structure to center student voice.

“Instead of just having a room filled with state test scores, attendance, and all these other measures, we started to hold up student voice survey data [from Elevate]... That data has gotten so much more attention because it's added nuance and flavor and depth to conversations [with school and district leaders] that have been really exciting for us... Having student voice in the room in that way really does shift the dynamics of the conversation.”

—Principal

Examine Engagement-centered Data

Student engagement is a key indicator of academic achievement.² Elevate provides student feedback data to schools about learning conditions as a measure of the learning environment, as a complement to quantitative student performance data (e.g., grades, attendance, etc.). The product allows and guides teachers to focus on cultivating a positive learning environment for students, including how they are engaging with teachers, peers and content.

Evaluate SEL Efforts

It is critical to evaluate SEL-related programming for implementation and continuous improvement but can be difficult to do so without a formal structure.³ Even when a school is not aligned to the PERTS Learning Conditions, Elevate provides schools implementing SEL programs a way of measuring learning conditions and student feedback.

1. [Rand](#) (2021); 2. [YouthTruth](#) (2020); 3. [CASEL](#) (2018).



Research shows that a tool used in isolation is not an effective lever for change. Similarly, our case study revealed that deep engagement with Elevate requires four school-wide pre-conditions

Given that schools are the primary implementers of these tools, our findings focus on pre-conditions at the school level. The school-level pre-conditions for effective implementation of learning conditions frameworks and assessments include:

1

Culture of Student Voice

2

Explicit Connections between Tool and School Goals

3

Structures that Support Teacher Engagement with Tool

4

Multiple Teachers Implement Tool



A school-wide culture of fostering student voice primes teachers to value student feedback to inform their practice

1

Culture of Student Voice

Pre-Condition: The school has a culture of incorporating and fostering student voice

How does the pre-condition support the adoption of learning conditions frameworks and assessments? Elevate uses *student* feedback on learning conditions to guide teacher practice, as opposed to more traditional measures, such as quantitative performance data, or feedback from school leaders. When there is already a culture of valuing student voice in the building, teachers may have an easier time adjusting to using student feedback to change their practice.

“We include a lot about student voice [in our programming]... We are in an ecosystem where adults have the agency over what students experience, and adults have trouble (because they are all human) ceding power to students in the ways we want them to.”

—TA Provider



When schools align learning conditions tools to school-wide goals, teachers can more readily connect the data to their classroom practice and ongoing professional learning

2

Explicit Connections between Learning Conditions Tools and School Goals

Pre-Condition: The school leadership ties Learning Conditions and the effort to measure them directly to school-wide goals and objectives (e.g., connecting improvements in student SEL with improvements in math learning)

How does the pre-condition support the adoption of learning conditions frameworks and assessments? Teachers have numerous demands on their time that create conflicting priorities. When the school's goals are connected explicitly to a focus on learning conditions, teachers feel more empowered to focus on the data coming from an assessment as part of their regular practice.

“It makes a world of difference when schools and districts are really explicit about how Elevate ties into the work they’re doing. If in their minds teachers are convinced it’s a culture survey, they’ll view it as a transactional thing. Communication around what Elevate is [a professional learning tool] and what it isn’t [a snapshot of data] is really critical.”

—PD provider



When schools provide sufficient time and resources, teachers can successfully implement learning conditions tools and frameworks

3

Structures that Support Teacher Engagement

Pre-Condition: The school or district provides dedicated resources (e.g., stipend, prep time, emotional space, professional development) to support teachers in implementing the tool

How does the pre-condition support the adoption of learning conditions frameworks and assessments? Using a tool like Elevate can be an intensive process and an increased time investment. It can surface vulnerability and emotions for teachers. When a school sets up structures that provide sufficient time, resources and “emotional space,” teachers can more successfully implement frameworks and assessments of learning conditions.

“Something we have seen is making sure teachers have the time to engage and learn. But also, to incentivize them in ways beyond the intrinsic aspect. We’ve seen that teachers are able to commit more deeply if they’re compensated for extra time if they have to commit that. Or compensated with professional development credit.”

—PD Provider

“[After the survey on Monday], we have meetings scheduled on that Wednesday and Thursday throughout the week...Having it on the schedule has helped teachers to know this is what’s coming up. I view this as a multi-tiered support for teachers. For me, the reports are great, all of it’s great. But the conversations that happened during this meeting are so powerful. Really want to focus on those meetings next year. Why do you think that they chose this? How are the teachers feeling? We don’t have opportunities to talk about that with them.”

—Principal



Having a cohort of teachers implementing a common tool or framework in a school fosters a supportive learning environment for teachers

4

Multiple Teachers Implement

Pre-Condition: Ensuring that a team of teachers will work on Elevate—as opposed to one teacher—can create a supportive environment for teachers to begin implementation

How does the pre-condition support the adoption of learning conditions frameworks and assessments? Using a tool like Elevate might involve new or initially-challenging experiences for a teacher (e.g., internalizing that a positive learning environment is critical to student success, using student feedback to guide practice). When a teacher has peers who are using the same new tools or frameworks, they have a supportive network with whom they can problem solve and thought partner.

“There are teachers doing it [PERTS Elevate] alone, but the ones with a team are really excelling and taking it further.”

—PD Provider

Throughout the year, coaching, advancing equity and multiple administration cycles bolster deep teacher engagement

The following section explores all three components

1

Coaching

**Implementation:
Coaching**



2

**Advancing
Equity**


**Implementation:
Equity**



3

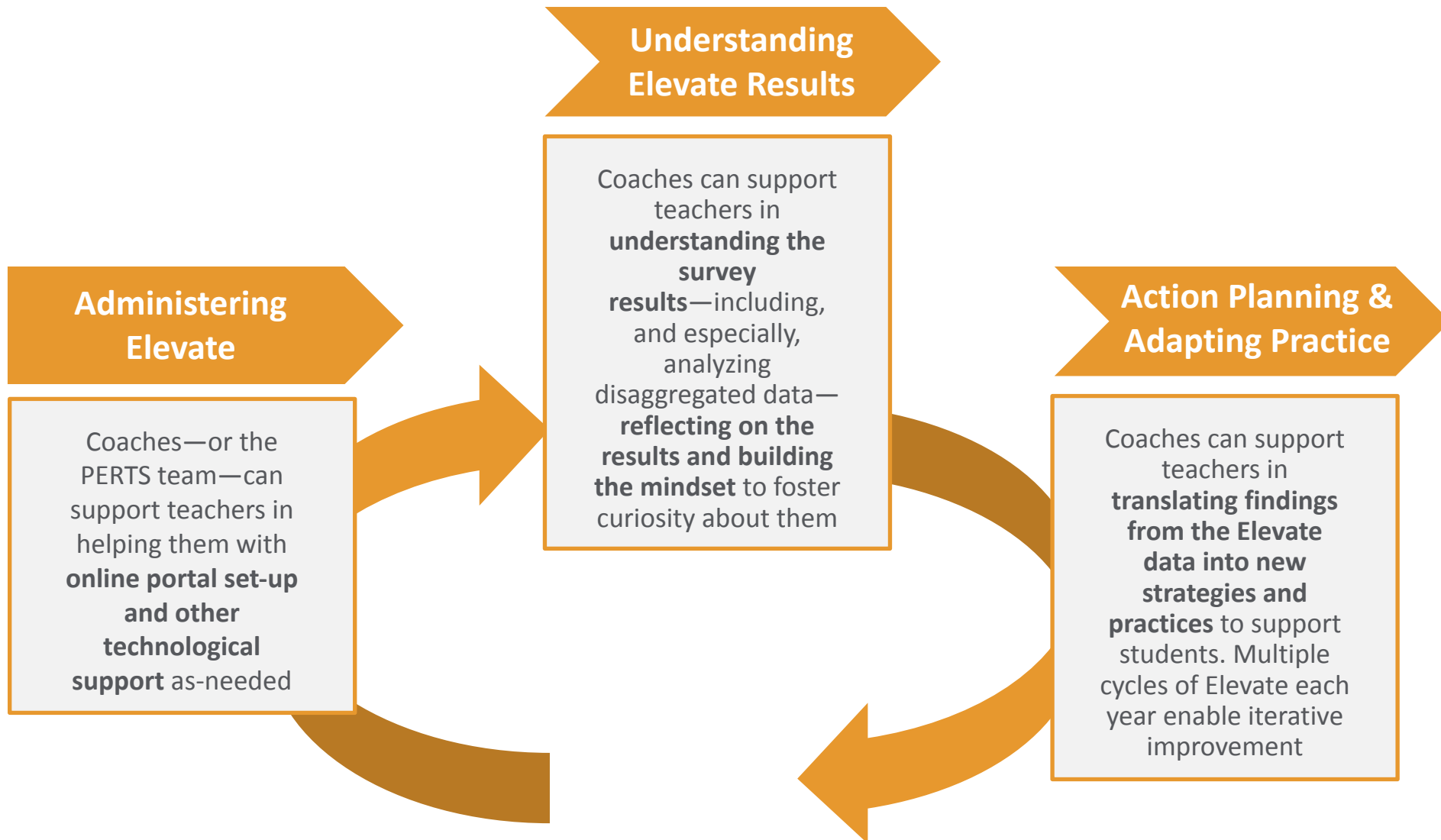
**Multiple
Administration
Cycles**

**Implementation:
Multiple Cycles**





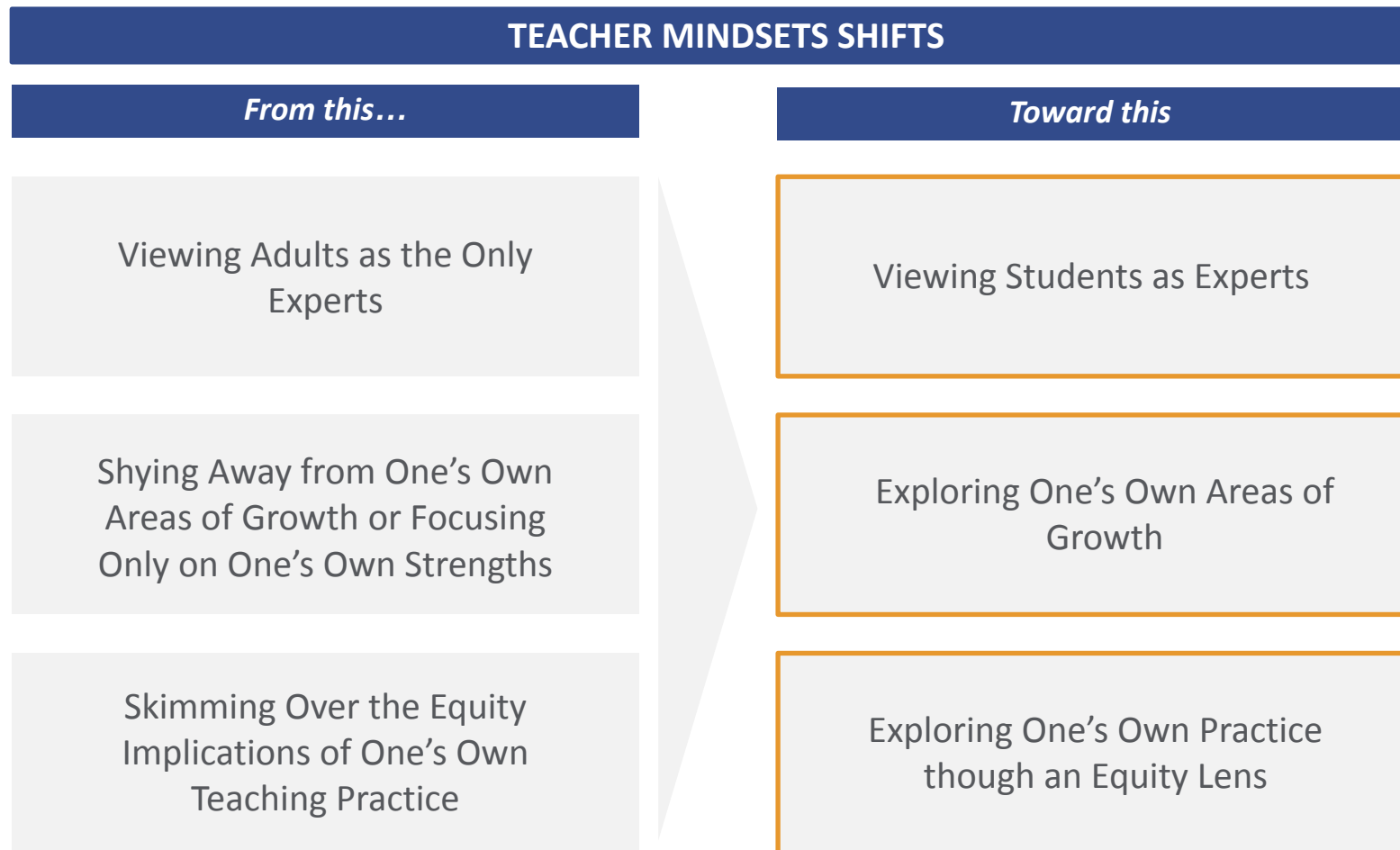
With the right preconditions in place, Elevate consists of three repeating phases



Iterating through this cycle four or more times throughout the school year and providing teachers with a variety of supports—**direct coaching** at each point of the process as well as **asynchronous and concise online tools**—is most impactful



Users and coaches describe how coaching teachers to interpret learning conditions data leads to meaningful shifts in teacher mindsets in three predominant ways





Coaches can help educators understand the value of student feedback

Viewing Students as Experts

Tools like Elevate use student feedback—as opposed to student performance data—to measure classroom learning conditions. This marks a **paradigm shift** in agency and responsibility for some educators. As a result, educators often need additional support in understanding and internalizing the data. Through coaching, external service providers are helping to **shift adult mindsets** by transferring power to students in determining the quality of their own education.

Teachers are “used to getting feedback from principals, instructional coaches, consultants—but do they view students as valid and credible authority on their classroom?”

—PD Provider

“We could ask students to review [Elevate] and the data, etc. but at the end of the day our influence is with adults. We want to shift adult mindsets based on the data we collect. We are in an ecosystem where adults have the agency over what students experience.”

—PD Provider



When coaches have access to learning conditions data, they can help teachers see and own their strengths and growth

Exploring One's Own Areas of Growth

Elevate reports lay bare how students experience a classroom. For an educator who is trying their best, **data that show room for improvement can be difficult to internalize**. Doing so, however, is an integral part of improving practice. The coach uses the foundation of a strong relationship to **focus on strengths first, identify some focus areas and discuss the teacher's locus of control**.

One coach explained how the learning unfolds for teachers:

Experience Initial Apprehension



Reflect Together



Craft Teacher-led Next Steps



"Teachers' initial reaction [when examining Elevate data] is victimizing. They want to go straight to fixing it."

—Elevate Coach

"It was really important for me to build relationships... Relationship building + always starting with the good = being able to mitigate the 'straight to fixing' thing. I had them look and see what was going well and had them reflect on how they got certain responses from students. I helped them see that they're not awful and can do this well."

—Elevate Coach

"I allowed them to identify 'some focus areas' (not 'what are you struggling in')... because the teacher is going to put in the work on something that they want to see change and something that they chose. Most of my conversations were easy because [the teacher] looked at the data and determined their area of focus. 90 percent of them chose things they needed to work on. 90 percent of them dug into meaningful work. We talked about factors that could cause some of these learning conditions to be lower. Things in and out of our control."

—Elevate Coach



Coaches can help teachers make sense of the ways their teaching practice advances equity—and especially the ways in which it doesn't

Exploring One's Own Practice through an Equity Lens

Elevate reports disaggregated data that can **shed light on how students with different identities (e.g., race, neurodivergence) experience the same classroom differently**. Seeing that a classroom is not serving a particular student group can be a difficult realization for teachers. Taking action upon it proves even more difficult. The coach uses the foundation of a strong relationship to focus the teacher on equity.

“Equity was probably the one thing [teachers] never went to. I [as the coach] had to bring it up. I personally had to make sure I was committed to bring it in. Teachers didn't even go to that [the equity] section on their own. I just made it my responsibility [to engage with the equity section], as awkward as it might be for a white male teacher to [engage in discussion] with me... especially when I asked questions like ‘In period 2, your males, maybe African American males, what do you think?’ It would be them realizing if they talk to those students a lot and wondering how often they engage with those students. The Elevate data goes into all demographics. The beginning of those conversations were ‘what do they mean by advantaged/disadvantaged?’ We spent some time looking into PERTS definitions. The teachers showed some deflection [during the process], but we would just talk about it.”

— Elevate Coach

“Teachers involved in coaching have more focus on particular learning conditions. Those teachers have gone into topics of equity, gender, race... more meaningful work. The teachers [who have not received coaching] have picked learning conditions like teacher caring, student voice, etc. Most of them are scared of meaningful work.”

—PD Provider

Many coaches rely on supplemental tools or frameworks (e.g., NTC's Knowing Students tool, a coach-created google form teachers can use to learn more about their students) to engage in equity work with teachers.



Administering learning conditions assessments multiple times per year enables students and teachers alike to engage more deeply with them

IMPACT ON TEACHERS

Multiple cycles provides educators the opportunities, time and space to cultivate mindsets that allow them to more deeply engage with and act upon the Elevate findings.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Multiple cycles increases student fluency and engagement with the tool itself, which unlocks the opportunity to share more nuanced feedback.

“As students become more familiar [with the survey], the feedback became more honed and specific. Students are doing this from fifth sixth seventh and eighth grade, they’re starting to use the written responses a lot more. I was so excited to see that. They were giving me concrete examples [of Meaningful Work].... we learned about children of the industrial revolution, clean drinking water, etc. ...That was from a seventh grader.”

—Teacher

“When we focused on [a learning condition], we still looked into the PERTS data at all the questions. Sometimes, for example, students even needed more info on the questions and that’s why the data was low.”

—Elevate Coach

“We typically meet [as a teacher team] and have a conversation about what was done in each room, what we want to continue and what we want to change. We did make a change at the end [of the cycle], based on what we were getting from the kids... [The] initial protocol was [to have students reflect], ‘I used to think, then I think now’ after learning something. But the explanation part was such a struggle [for students]. So I said, we need to create a draft structure for them. Now we do ‘my favorite rough draft.’ It takes a whole class period, which is okay, I’ve managed to figure it out. Slow and steady, I have seen some progress.”

—Teacher

In addition to being effective in shifting classrooms, learning environment assessments can support mindset shifts and teacher morale improvements

"[Teacher's] stories brings me to tears. I had no clue on the other side of the screen what this experience [of using PERTS Elevate in a team] is doing for them, but a lot of teachers were over [teaching] and this really did bring a lot back for them. [Now, they're] just excited about what's next."

—Elevate Coach

"With some teachers, they were so different all of a sudden. They were so happy at work, and people asked them questions about it... Teachers having fun again, also feeling weird about that. I think that principals seeing that and wanting that to spread. I think that's why it's growing and that's why there is support. From a coaching standpoint, I saw when there were multiple teachers doing the work that created more momentum."

—Elevate Coach

"We have veterans who are stuck and are thinking about leaving profession but decided to stay because of this [Elevate] experience. [PERTS Elevate has] retention implications; the special sauce is teachers having ownership of their PD."

—Elevate Coach

3 Recommendations

Professional development providers should include practices for integrating SEL into teaching and learning and should align efforts to the local context

DESIGN FEATURES THAT EFFECTIVELY EMBED SEL IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Language and Content

Focus on how to talk about identity and build empathy

Be clear, ask essential questions and guide teachers to refine their focus

Activities

Encourage consistent and deep staff connections with each other

Provide many opportunities for staff to model SEL practices with each other

Design and Implementation

Include teacher voice and student voice in its design

Be offered in longer amounts of time, over a longer period of time

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PD PROVIDERS

Incorporate direct PD on the specific practices that educators can use to incorporate SEL into their practice.

For example:

- Coach teachers to collaborate on effective techniques for supporting student engagement, motivation and persistence in (e.g., discussing student assessment and experience data to adjust instruction)
- Coach teachers to understand their own biases and academic identities and connections between SEL and academic content (e.g., stereotype threat, growth mindset, racial bias, systemic racism and connections to academics)
- Support/coach educators to reflect on – and act on – their strengths and growth areas, based on indicators of inclusive environments
- Engage educators in redesigning curriculum and instruction to reflect inclusive environments (e.g., have math educators align curriculum maps with state SEL & math frameworks or standards by identifying gaps and weaknesses or repetitions and redundancies)

RESOURCES

- The [Building Equitable Learning Environments \(BELE\) Resource Library](#) offers educators a range of resources for creating student-centered learning experiences in schools
- [AMTE's standards for preparing teachers of mathematics](#)
- [Sadlier's description of the three categories of knowledge](#) that math teachers need and a related checklist for mentors
- [A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction](#) is an "integrated approach to mathematics that centers Black, Latinx and Multilingual students in grades 6–8, addresses barriers to math equity, and aligns instruction to grade-level priority standards"

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Appendix: Learning Conditions

Research shows that how students experience their classrooms' learning conditions significantly influences student motivation, engagement and achievement



Countless studies show that **learning conditions influence students' motivation and also their ability to engage and learn**. When supportive learning conditions are present, students learn more and learn more equitably¹.

For example, in a [2019 study](#), students who experienced positive learning conditions in a class were 30 percent more likely to earn an A or B in that class and **those benefits were pronounced for students of color**. For example, Black males who experienced positive learning conditions were almost two times more likely to earn an A or B than those who did not².

Better learning conditions also led to **better social and emotional learning outcomes**. When learning conditions improved, students were 86 percent more likely to experience a higher sense of belonging, 24 percent more likely to develop a growth mindset, and two times more likely to report they “tried their very best” in class.

There are several learning conditions frameworks, and a key contrast among them is if—and how—they focus on race equity

FRAMEWORK	ORGANIZATION	POSITION ON RACE AND EQUITY
<u>Elevate</u>	 PERTS	PERTS suggests supportive learning conditions allow students to “learn more and learn more equitably” and notes particularly positive impacts on students of color.
<u>BELE Framework</u>	 Building Equitable Learning Environments Network	“We all inherited a public education system that limits possibilities for many young people and reproduces inequities based on race and class... While we didn’t create this inequitable system, it is our responsibility to redesign it now!”
<u>Anti-Bias Education Framework</u>	 ROOTS CONNECTED <i>Educating for Equity</i>	Identity (deep understanding of one's intersecting identifiers + community embrace of an authentic sense of belonging) and inclusion are the central mindset of the framework, and the explicit purpose of the org is to create "intentionally integrated, inclusive, anti-racist, and anti-bias school communities."
<u>Cues and Conditions of Student Belonging</u>	EQUAL OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS	EOS developed their framework in response to traditional measures of belonging, which “placed an undue burden on low-income and students of color to identify with and ‘belong’ in racialized school environments.”
<u>Teaching for Equity</u>	 Leading Educators <i>Potential, ignited.</i>	“Teaching all students requires us to critically understand and center racial identity to disrupt the patterns of harm our country has inflicted on communities of color and that our education system continues to perpetuate.”
<u>Optimal Learning Continuum</u>	 NEW TEACHER CENTER	The framework includes an emphasis on meeting the needs of diverse learners, having high expectations of all, culturally responsive teaching, etc. New Teacher Center is focused particularly on educators who serve BIPOC students and students experiencing poverty.

Frameworks for learning conditions can support equity, especially if they include additional or alternative learning conditions such as liberation or ceding power

Certain criteria might indicate a framework fully supports equity

Racial justice is an explicit goal from the conception of a framework or tool

Learning conditions help educators address systems and practices that promote white supremacy, racist and/or gender-based oppression

"The ecology of public-school systems has to be dismantled while this ether of white dominance has to be solved."
—Chris Chatmon, *Kingmakers of Oakland*

But frameworks might not always work for organizations advancing racial justice

Fitting into a framework model can be constricting and may not promote the interconnectedness of learning conditions

Frameworks created for and not with communities can distract from advancing racial equity

"If it were up to me we would expand [frameworks] to [include] community. Why are we trying to fit things into an oppressive system, because it's never worked. Can come up with new definitions, frameworks, etc., but the situation will still be the same... I think we get distracted by these frameworks sometimes, that show we are doing all this great work but the communities still look the same."

—Dena Simmons, *LiberatED*

Appendix: PERTS Elevate

Upon implementing Elevate, teachers receive a confidential report of results

Student Experience Overview

? [How Can I Use the Student Experience Overview?](#)

Learning Condition	Rated Positively on Last Survey ▲ change since survey 1	Resources
Affirming Identities	56% ▲ 8	Strategies
Classroom Community	54% ▲ 8	Strategies
Feedback For Growth	56% ▲ 11	Strategies
Meaningful Work	70% ▲ 20	Strategies
Student Voice	59% ▲ 13	Strategies
Teacher Caring	79% ▲ 36	Strategies

Data refreshed 9/20/2021

100% (30) responded (see [Participation by Subpopulation](#))

The report contains links to **research-backed strategies** teachers can implement to address a learning condition

Equity Overview

? [How Can I Use the Equity Overview?](#)

Equity gaps are highlighted in red below.

Learning Condition	Rated Positively on Last Survey					
	Girl/Woman	Boy/Man	Struct. Disadv. Race	Struct. Adv. Race	Tgt Group	Not Tgt. Group
Affirming Identities	28%	74%	39%	79%	47%	63%
Classroom Community	31%	67%	39%	73%	42%	63%
Feedback For Growth	36%	67%	43%	73%	42%	67%
Meaningful Work	54%	79%	65%	76%	67%	73%
Student Voice	36%	74%	45%	78%	45%	69%
Teacher Caring	72%	82%	78%	79%	72%	84%

Data refreshed 9/20/2021

Show ▲ change since survey 1

100% (30) responded (see [Participation by Subpopulation](#))

The report allows schools to disaggregate their data by various subgroups (e.g., gender, race, “target” and “not target” groups). Schools use this to **track how students rate their experiences of the learning conditions over the course of the year^{1,2}**. It highlights when the learning conditions are better serving certain student groups than others.

Schools and teachers use—and often supplement—the Elevate survey in various ways

Using Elevate in direct partnership with PERTS

PERTS partners with some schools and school districts directly. PERTS provides schools with initial set-up support of the tool and provides ongoing technical troubleshooting when necessary. **Teachers administer the surveys with their students, review the feedback, apply new strategies and continue with this cycle throughout the year.**

Using Elevate in partnership with school support providers that provide coaching for educators

Some schools use Elevate with the **addition of dedicated coaching** to support teachers in working with the data they receive and refining their practices.

Some support providers who provide such coaching include the **New Teacher Center and Impact Florida.**

Using Elevate in tandem with supplementary tools or frameworks

Some support providers use additional tools or frameworks in tandem with Elevate to **bolster the equity aspects of Elevate.** For example, one coach regularly used NTC's Knowing Students tool to have conversations with teachers about their equity data.

"I don't know if Elevate has what's needed for [equity] conversations in the system...A teacher looking at their data by themselves wouldn't dig into the equity section unless they wanted to and wouldn't know how unless they wanted to learn."—Elevate Coach

Some schools use Elevate as a way of evaluating their own learning condition framework, as opposed to the PERTS Learning Conditions, because Elevate provides constant student feedback data for measurement. Other partners may be interested only in the PERTS Learning Conditions as a framework and not use Elevate as a measure of those learning conditions.

Appendix: Shifts in SEL

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.**¹ 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.²

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.³

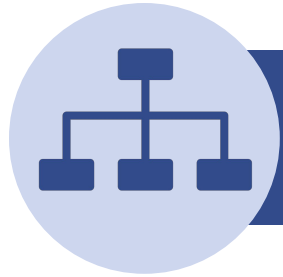
*“SEL can live separately from core content areas, but **we think that there is some magic missing when we aren't embedding core, racially-affirming SEL into core content areas.**”*

—TA Provider

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

—TA Provider

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 society¹

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.²

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 as well as various other student co-led structures such as peer mediations and youth court, advance the school’s vision.³

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 inequities¹

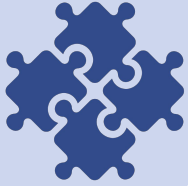
THE ISSUE

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.”²

MODEL EXAMPLE

Healing Illinois is a racial healing initiative of the Illinois Department of Human Services³ 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.⁴

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 system¹

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.¹

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.”²