In the following report, Hanover Research synthesizes the literature on social-emotional learning (SEL) and reviews best practices for implementing and monitoring the integration of SEL into multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a key indicator of student success, as research demonstrates that SEL correlates with positive academic, social, and behavioral outcomes and employers increasingly emphasize “soft skills” as desirable traits for future employees.¹ Further, by teaching social-emotional skills through a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that focuses on prevention and evidence-based approaches, districts can improve efficiency and student outcomes.²

To assist our member district with their efforts to integrate SEL and MTSS, Hanover Research (Hanover) synthesizes the literature on SEL and reviews best practices for implementing and monitoring the integration of SEL into MTSS. This report includes the following two sections:

- **Section I: Social-Emotional Learning** examines the importance of social-emotional learning for K-12 districts as well as the roles and responsibilities of teachers, school leaders, and school psychologists and counselors for supporting students’ social-emotional well-being.

- **Section II: Integrating SEL into MTSS** discusses the benefits of integrating SEL into MTSS, strategies for integrating SEL and MTSS, and best practices for monitoring fidelity of implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our analysis of the literature, Hanover recommends that LBUSD:

- **Establish a leadership team that is responsible for directing the integration of SEL into MTSS and that includes school leaders, counselors or psychologists, and teachers;**

- **Identify outcomes and metrics for monitoring implementation fidelity prior to implementing SEL within MTSS; and**

- **Consider surveying school staff to gauge staff SEL skills, staff comfort with teaching SEL within an MTSS framework, and professional learning needs on SEL or MTSS.**

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² Cook, C.R. et al. “An Integrated Approach to Universal Prevention: Independent and Combined Effects of PBIS and SEL on Youths’ Mental Health.” *School Psychology Quarterly*, 30:2, June 2015. [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b1e3/1bc0d338d5a397b01458f1e12198062ef0da.pdf](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b1e3/1bc0d338d5a397b01458f1e12198062ef0da.pdf)
KEY FINDINGS

- Participating in programs that develop SEL competencies can positively impact both students and teachers. Research shows that teaching SEL can improve students’ SEL skills, increase positive social behaviors and academic performance, and decrease emotional distress, mental disorders, antisocial behaviors, and conduct problems. SEL programs can also benefit teachers by improving conflict resolution skills and decreasing stress due to student misbehavior.

- Supporting students’ social-emotional well-being requires active commitment to SEL from a variety of school staff. School staff often work in teams, such as a leadership team responsible for implementing SEL and a student support team for referring and providing additional support to students.
  - Teachers support students’ social-emotional well-being by providing instruction that develops students’ SEL competencies, establishing student-centered and responsive classroom management practices, and creating positive teacher-student relationships.
  - School leaders support students’ social-emotional well-being by establishing a school vision for SEL, modeling SEL skills, creating a positive school environment, and providing professional development for teachers.
  - Counselors and psychologists support students’ social-emotional well-being by developing a school-wide focus on SEL standards, providing small-group and individual counseling and interventions to students who require additional support, and collaborating with teachers and other mental health professionals to meet students’ SEL needs.

- Integrating SEL within MTSS offers districts multiple benefits, including better program implementation, improved student behavior and mental health, and increased efficiency and resource use. Alternatively, implementing SEL and MTSS separately may lead to contradictory, fragmented, or redundant programming; implementation and program burnout for teachers and administrators; and reduced program sustainability.

- Strategies for integrating SEL into MTSS include establishing a leadership team to lead integration efforts, reviewing the district’s SEL and MTSS approaches for commonalities and overlapping priorities, and following a phased implementation process. Districts must also consider how SEL supports will differ by MTSS tiers to provide universal SEL programming to all students, targeted supports to some students, and intensive interventions to individual students.

- To monitor fidelity of implementation of SEL and MTSS, districts should define evaluation goals, metrics, and outcomes prior to beginning implementation and data collection. Common tools for collecting implementation data include rubrics, surveys, classroom observations, and self-reporting. Districts should measure program implementation at multiple points in time to gain a more accurate understanding of implementation quality.
SECTION I: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

This section examines the importance of social-emotional learning for K-12 districts as well as the roles and responsibilities of teachers, school leaders, and school psychologists and counselors for supporting students’ social-emotional well-being.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Social-emotional learning (SEL) refers to the skills and abilities that allow individuals to relate to others, set goals, manage emotions, and resolve conflict. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a leading organization for the practice and research of SEL, defines SEL as:

[T]he process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

SEL competencies are vital for student success both in and outside of school, for they encourage positive social interactions and reduce behavioral problems in students of all ages. SEL skills promote success in the classroom and are crucial as students transition to college and careers. Thus, due to the amount of time students spend in school interacting with teachers and peers, schools act as a significant conduit for teaching SEL competencies alongside academic content.

Overall, studies of SEL programs indicate positive effects for students. For example, in a 2011 meta-analysis of SEL programs published in Child Development, researchers analyzed 213 quasi-experimental and experimental studies of school-based, universal SEL programs with 270,034 students in Grades K-12 and found that SEL programs effectively improve students’ SEL skills, behaviors, attitudes, and academic performance. Results indicated a statistically significant positive program effect on the following six outcomes categories: increase social and emotional skills, increase attitudes toward self and others, increase positive social behaviors, decrease conduct problems, decrease emotional distress, and increase academic performance. While effect sizes ranged from 0.22 for a decrease in conduct problems to 0.57 for an increase in SEL skills (Figure 1.1), the meta-analysis revealed an overall effect size of SEL programs of 0.30.

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6 Ibid., p. 405.
7 Ibid., p. 412-413.
Notably, in addition to improving SEL skills, program participation was associated with an 11 percent gain in academic performance compared to control groups. SEL program participation showed positive results across all educational levels (elementary, middle, and high school), student subgroups (age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status), and locales (urban, suburban, or rural).\(^8\)

Similarly, a 2017 meta-analysis of the follow-up effects of school-based, universal SEL education found that SEL programs contribute to positive youth development by both increasing positive behaviors and decreasing negative behaviors. The study analyzed 82 SEL interventions that collected follow-up data from 97,406 students in Grades K-12. The researchers found that “SEL program participants benefit[ed] significantly more than controls across all of the social and emotional assets and positive and negative indicators of well-being.”\(^9\) Specifically, effect sizes for positive and negative outcomes, collected 56 to 195 weeks (depending on the outcome) following the intervention, are presented in Figure 1.2. The researchers note that the follow-up benefits of SEL program participation held across demographic subgroups and socio-economic status.\(^10\)

School-based SEL programs can also positively affect teachers. Many SEL programs improve teachers’ SEL competencies by providing practice on how to deal with conflict. Research shows that teachers with better SEL skills have greater self-efficacy and greater enjoyment of teaching.\(^11\) Furthermore, SEL programs can reduce teachers’ stress levels by reducing student misbehaviors, which are often a main cause of teacher stress. One of many positive effects of reducing teachers’ stress levels and improving student behavior is more positive student-teacher relationships.\(^12\)

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8 Ibid., pp. 412–417.
10 Ibid., p. 1162.
11 Ibid., p. 1163.
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS’ SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The following subsection discusses the roles and responsibilities of teachers, school leaders, and psychologists and counselors for supporting students’ social-emotional well-being.

TEACHERS

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Teachers’ support students’ social-emotional well-being through instruction that develops students’ SEL competencies. Classroom instruction should build student’s SEL competencies with a balanced approach. Instruction can follow a cycle whereby the teacher: (1) sets lesson objectives; (2) introduces new concepts and models new skills; (3) provides opportunities for group and individual practice; and (4) allows time for self-reflection and assessment. Teachers can use both direct instruction on SEL topics and modeling of SEL skills in conjunction with active tasks that allow students to practice skills and apply knowledge. Throughout the lesson’s progression, instructional staff should monitor student interactions to ensure successful understanding and usage of SEL skills. Teachers may also ask students to reflect on their progress and assess how they can advance their proficiency with SEL skills.14

SEL instruction must also “implement a set of focused, high-quality, research-based teaching strategies” to effectively develop students’ SEL skills.15 Researchers from the Harvard Graduate School of Education compiled a list of common SEL instructional practices used in PK-12 settings that can advance students’ SEL competencies. These strategies, presented below in Figure 1.3, include discussion, role-playing situations where SEL skills are applicable, and the use of songs, videos, and visuals to promote understanding.

**Figure 1.3: Common Instructional Practices for Developing Students’ SEL Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRACTICE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Discussions can occur in pairs, small groups, or as a class to introduce a SEL theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didactic Instruction</td>
<td>Teacher provides specific instructions and models SEL skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books/Stories</td>
<td>Teacher reads a book or story that illustrates a particular SEL theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Activities teach language, words, or terms related to a SEL concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools/Handouts</td>
<td>Tools and handouts promote SEL strategies in a concrete way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Students write about personal experiences related to a SEL theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art/Creative Projects</td>
<td>Students create art or a creative project related to a SEL theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Displays</td>
<td>Teachers post charts, posters, or other visual displays related to SEL themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>Videos depict challenging situations and are used to prompt discussion around SEL topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>Songs reinforce a SEL theme and involve dances, hand movements, or strategy practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills Practice</td>
<td>Students actively practice using SEL skills or strategies outside of a game or role-play scenario.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-Playing</td>
<td>At younger ages, this may involve a teacher simulating an SEL skill. At older ages, it may involve the entire class role-playing in pairs or two students performing in front of the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>Games can reinforce an SEL theme and build community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>Activities involving student movement and physical activity can link SEL with motor functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Any activity not captured by the above descriptions. Common examples include poetry, visualization exercises, meditation, and more.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Harvard Graduate School of Education

Explicit skill instruction is an effective strategy to boost students SEL competencies. Teachers can specifically address how a given skill applies in daily life and break down strategies into smaller, more manageable components. A teacher can then model the skill for students and clarify specific situations in which it can be employed. As lessons progress, students should receive opportunities to practice target skills and receive corrective feedback until proficiency is evident. Teachers can further facilitate student SEL aptitudes—specifically regarding interpersonal interactions—through cooperative learning tasks. In such tasks, students will need to navigate peer relationships, communicate effectively, and monitor progress toward formative and summative goals. To incentivize participation, teachers can establish collective and individual accountability measures.

Classroom management strategies can improve SEL instruction. Teachers should strive to create a responsive classroom that nurtures student belonging and increases comfortability. Establishing a responsive classroom can help “create a calm, orderly environment that promotes autonomy and allows students to focus on learning.”

Classroom discipline that supports students’ social-emotional well-being is student-centered and developmentally appropriate, while also encouraging positive behavior. Students and teachers should collaborate to develop classroom rules. Similarly, teachers should avoid overmanaging students or using punitive measures to force compliance and instead opt for students to have opportunities for choice and self-direction in the classroom.

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16 Figure adapted from: Ibid., pp. 19–20.  
Such actions will give students a voice as well as a chance for meaningful input in their education.\textsuperscript{20}

**Teachers should also be conscientious of the language they use when speaking with students** and actively encourage student effort to use SEL-positive skills rather than exclusively praising achievement. For example, a teacher can say, “I see that you are trying harder to raise your hand before speaking,” instead of saying, “You did a great job listening today!” Effective teacher-student interactions also highlight potential areas of improvement and advise students to monitor their own behavior. Teachers can use verbal communications that are warm and supportive to demonstrate a caring attitude toward students, while also demanding that they take responsibility for their own social and emotional development.\textsuperscript{21}

Although Hanover was unable to identify formal research-based guidelines for teacher referrals to other school staff regarding SEL support, several districts publish their own procedures.\textsuperscript{22} These guidelines focus on processes for referring a student to the Student Support Team (SST), which often includes a school psychologist or counselor.

**TEACHER- STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS**

Teachers also support students’ social-emotional well-being by developing positive relationships with their students. Positive teacher-student relationships, which include high degrees of trust, closeness and support, and little dependency, contribute to classroom environments that promote and support students’ social, emotional, and academic success.\textsuperscript{23} Students who experience positive teacher-student relationships also experience better long-term academic and social outcomes.\textsuperscript{24} According to the American Psychological Association, positive teacher-student relationships “support students’ adjustment to school, contribute to their social skills, promote academic performance and foster students’ resiliency in academic performance.”\textsuperscript{25} Research examining out of school time SEL programs also find that positive relationships between students and staff members are

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 12–13.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
essential to the success of these programs. Additional studies show that student-teacher relationships that focus on respect, acknowledgment, and trust can decrease racial disparities in suspension rates.

**SCHOOL LEADERS**

School leaders play a critical role in contributing to students’ social-emotional development by leading and actively promoting SEL initiatives. Experts recommend that school leaders support SEL program implementation and the development of a positive school environment by creating a vision for SEL throughout the school. By collaborating with teachers and other school staff (on a leadership team, for example) to develop a SEL vision, school leaders can help increase the implementation of SEL practices and supports. School leaders should also clearly define what SEL means for their school and ensure staff and student understanding. Similarly, before implementing a SEL program, administrators should determine how the SEL program supports the school’s overall mission and day-to-day activities. Administrators can consider:

- How to connect the teaching of SEL skills with the academic mission of the school;
- How to create time and space in the curriculum;
- How to select programs and other approaches like routines;
- How to support teachers and staff; and
- How to lead by example.

School leaders are also responsible for ensuring a positive school culture, which research shows is critical to supporting positive student outcomes. Administrators help to create a climate that supports social-emotional development by modeling SEL language and clearly endorsing SEL practices. Similarly, in a 2016 Principal article, the authors note that principals

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30 Ibid.


are responsible for creating safe and supportive learning environments for students. Based on their research and CASEL’s review of evidence-based SEL programs, the Principal article offers multiple recommendations (Figure 1.4) for how school principals can effectively create school environments that support students’ social-emotional well-being.

**Figure 1.4: Principals’ Responsibilities for Supporting Social-Emotional Learning**

- **Provide leadership.** Communicate in everything and at every opportunity that SEL is an explicit part of the school’s mission. Work with your leadership team to create a vision for SEL. Create professional development opportunities in SEL for staff. Attend workshops along with teachers who are being trained in how to implement SEL programs. Be aware of district or state standards, policies, or guidelines to support SEL, and promote them.

- **Conduct a needs and resources assessment** to consider all the programming in the school and how it supports SEL. Identify and address gaps in SEL, and coordinate everything in such a way as to take full advantage of opportunities to promote SEL in students.

- **Make sure teachers and other staff receive professional development, coaching, and ongoing support** for implementing SEL programming. Many evidence-based programs provide training and ongoing support.

- **Build a positive school climate** that creates optimal conditions for student social and emotional development. Help students feel safe, welcomed, and respected in school – so that they love school and want to come, bond to school, and are motivated to complete their education. Begin by modeling respect for all teachers and students.

- **Select an evidence-based SEL program** to get all the adults in the school on the same page, using the common language and strategies to promote social and emotional development in students.

- **Create opportunities** that help all the adults in the school develop social and emotional competence themselves so they become good models of SEL.

- **Create active partnerships with the community**, and especially with families. Social and emotional development is grounded in each child’s cultural identity and family. Create an environment that celebrates diversity, where every child and family feel respected.

Source: Principal

Building leaders also contribute to students’ social-emotional development by supporting teachers’ implementation of SEL skills. Administrators can support teachers by allocating resources, creating a culture of high expectations, and modeling SEL practices.

Furthermore, building leaders can support teachers’ own SEL development and abilities to teach SEL competencies by providing professional development in SEL. Teachers must possess SEL skills to communicate behavioral expectations clearly, promote a positive and supportive school and classroom climate, and respond to conflict and SEL challenges. For example, to ensure that school staff members possess SEL skills before they teach them to

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35 Figure contents quoted verbatim with modification from: Ibid.


students, Anchorage School District uses an external partner to train its staff on SEL skills for adults. 39 Examples of SEL programs for teachers that include mindfulness support and training intended to reduce burnout include CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) and SMART (Stress Management and Resiliency Training). Administrators can support teachers’ use of SEL by emphasizing growth, recognizing mistakes as natural to learning, promoting an organizational culture of discussion and reflection, and providing teachers with time for collaboration and networking about SEL practices and implementation.40

**COUNSELORS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS**

School counselors and psychologists are responsible for supporting students’ social-emotional well-being by developing and supporting a school-wide SEL focus and positive school culture, providing small-group and individual counseling and interventions to students who require additional support, and collaborating with teachers and other school staff to ensure the school is meeting students’ SEL needs.41 According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), school counselors have “unique training” that allows them to “serve as a first line of defense in identifying and addressing student social/emotional needs within the school setting.”42

School mental health professionals (including psychologists, counselors, and social workers) should integrate SEL standards into interventions for individual students. When schools have a classroom SEL curriculum in place, psychologists and counselors can reinforce that curriculum’s mental health standards through interventions. Schools can facilitate the alignment of classroom SEL curriculum and mental health interventions through professional development and collaboration among teachers and school mental health professionals.43

Additionally, a 2016 article in the journal *Children and Schools* recommends that school social workers lead school-wide efforts to connect academic and social-emotional learning (SEL).44 Social workers have historically exercised responsibility for social and behavioral programs in

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42 Ibid.


schools, enabling them to lead the implementation of school-wide SEL programs. Figure 1.5 identifies potential roles of social workers in supporting school-wide SEL programs. In addition to leadership roles, school social workers and other mental health professionals can support SEL by coteaching SEL lessons and collaboratively developing student interventions with classroom teachers.

**Figure 1.5: Roles of School Social Workers in Supporting SEL**

| Planning and leading schoolwide SEL programs | Infusing SEL into classroom instruction through meetings, topical class discussions, and activities aligned to the academic curriculum |
| Consult with administrators and teachers regarding SEL infusion into the curriculum | Infuse SEL schools into individual and group counseling |

Source: *Principal Leadership*

Furthermore, the ASCA’s position statement on school counselors and SEL notes that the key responsibilities of school counselors in supporting students’ social-emotional development include:

- Collaborating with classroom teachers to provide the school counseling core curriculum to all students through direct instruction, team-teaching or providing lesson plans for learning activities or units in classrooms aimed at social-emotional development;
- Understanding the nature and range of human characteristics specific to child and adolescent development;
- Identifying and employing appropriate appraisal methods for individual and group interventions that support K–12 students’ social-emotional development;
- Knowing and utilizing counseling theories to inform both direct and indirect services providing support to K–12 students’ social-emotional development;
- Using evaluation in the context of appropriate statistics and research methodology and conducting follow-up evaluation and measurement methods to implement appropriate program planning for social-emotional development;
- Selecting and implementing technology in a comprehensive school counseling program to facilitate K–12 students’ social-emotional development; and

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Serving as a referral source for students when social-emotional issues become too great to be dealt with solely by the school counselor, including crisis interventions.

School counselors and psychologists should also participate in a student-focused consultation teaming process, such as a Student Support Team, where they can work together with other school staff and mental health providers to identify at-risk students and plan, deliver, and evaluate appropriate interventions. The Maryland State Department of Education recommends using a tiered teaming process for identifying at-risk students, where team members use a problem-solving framework to hypothesize the reasons behind the student’s behavior to assist in determining the appropriate intervention.

School psychologists can also support the integration of SEL into MTSS by providing different levels of SEL support according to student need. At Tier I, school psychologists and counselors are responsible for collaborating with other school staff to plan, implement, and evaluate school-wide SEL programs that support the social and emotional well-being of all students. At Tier II, school psychologists and counselors should be closely involved in screening and identifying students in need of Tier II supports, developing and delivering the intervention plan, and working with teachers and a team to monitor student progress. At Tier III, school psychologists and counselors use their assessment, intervention, and consultation skills to deliver interventions and collaborate and communicate with school staff, other mental health professionals, and students’ families. Figure 1.6, below, describes school psychologists’ responsibilities for supporting students’ mental health at each tier.

**Figure 1.6: Mental Health Responsibilities of School Psychologists Across MTSS Tiers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier I: Universal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Planning, implementing, and evaluating school-wide prevention efforts targeting bullying, crisis prevention, suicide, violence, health and mental health concerns (e.g., obesity, depression, disruptive behavior), and substance use as member of Tier I team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Help school-wide MTSS schools identify, teach, and reinforce behavioral expectations across all school environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Help schools identify evidence-based social-emotional learning curriculum, plan for implementation, train and support implementation, and implement the curriculum as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Lead and support the screening process using school-wide data (e.g., office discipline referrals, grades, attendance/tardiness, and academic performance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Program evaluation to assess the effectiveness of school-wide efforts and identify improvements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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50 Ibid., pp. 9–10.
### Tier II: Targeted

- Contribute to the development, evaluation, and implementation of a more comprehensive mental health screening system to address concerns of a limited range of existing measures.
- Help design effective interventions for small groups of students identified as needing additional support through the screening process.
- Support and deliver an implementation of targeted interventions.
- Monitor progress and implementation fidelity of targeted interventions to make data-based decisions regarding continued usage and intervention need.

### Tier III: Intensive

- Expand traditional role in special education assessment process such that assessments more effectively inform intervention development, incorporate intervention in the assessment process, include ongoing assessments to establish a baseline, and lead to data-based decisions.
- Expand traditional role in special education services to incorporate evidence-based interventions from other settings into the school environment.
- Seek training needed to advance skills in evidence-based indicated interventions.
- Collaborate, consult, and communicate with families and range of school and community-based professionals. Given the complexity and comprehensiveness of problems experienced in Tier III, family engagement and interprofessional collaboration is critical to intervention effectiveness.
- Advocate for increased use of positive behavioral intervention and supports rather than traditional punitive measures when disciplinary problems occur.

Source: *Psychology in the Schools* 52

Additionally, the spotlight below illustrates a Colorado school district’s approach to integrating SEL and MTSS. This district relied on a school social worker to lead the implementation of a Tier I preventative curriculum and implement a screening system to refer students for Tier II and Tier III interventions. 53

#### K-12 Spotlight: Aurora Public Schools

Aurora Public Schools in Colorado combined SEL with an MTSS framework through an initiative that included school social workers. This initiative began as a pilot SEL program at the elementary school level led by a behavior analyst and special education consultant. To scale up the program, the behavior analyst collaborated with a social worker and school psychologists to implement the *Caring School Communities* SEL curriculum across schools. This team also worked with classroom teachers to implement the following MTSS:

- Teachers use universal screening to identify the three students with the highest levels of externalizing behavior and the three students with the highest levels of internalizing behavior in each classroom. These students are screened using the BASC-2 behavior assessment.

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52 Figure contents quoted verbatim with slight modification from: Ibid., p. 248.
Students scoring in the extremely elevated range of the BASC-2 assessment receive a Tier II intervention using either the *I Can Problem Solve* or the *Social Skills Improvement System* SEL curriculum.

Students who fail to respond to Tier II intervention receive a Tier III intervention using the *Skill Streaming* curriculum.

The Colorado Education Initiative reports that 50 percent of students who participated in this program for 10 to 15 weeks demonstrated significant improvement in behavioral outcomes measured through pre-intervention and post-intervention assessments.

Source: Colorado Education Initiative

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SECTION II: INTEGRATING SEL INTO MTSS

This section discusses the benefits of integrating SEL into MTSS, strategies for integrating SEL and MTSS, and best practices for monitoring fidelity of implementation. Notably, while the literature on integrating SEL and MTSS focuses on integrating SEL and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a tiered support system for improving student behavior, districts can apply these recommendations to integrating SEL into MTSS.

THE BENEFITS OF INTEGRATING SEL AND MTSS

Researchers consistently recommend teaching social-emotional skills through a multi-tiered system of supports that focuses on prevention and evidence-based approaches. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education’s OSEP Technical Assistance Center for PBIS recommends that districts “teach social-emotional competencies within a framework of teaming, technical assistance, and use of data to monitor implementation and outcomes” and note that “The implementation and instruction systems of PBIS are an ideal service delivery model for embedding social-emotional competencies into the school social curriculum.”

Implementing SEL and MTSS separately may lead to contradictory, fragmented, or redundant programming; implementation and program burnout for teachers and administrators; and reduced program sustainability due to the burdens of implementing redundant activities. Additionally, “Without a common roadmap and a coordinated leadership team, it is possible that well-meaning implementers of [SEL and MTSS] may create unnecessary overlap and ineffective organizational structures.” Alternatively, MTSS provides a school-wide framework for teaching and reinforcing SEL competencies, and implementing SEL within MTSS can enhance program implementation and efficiency, increase alignment, and ensure effective resource use. In fact, a recent study shows that combining SEL with PBIS improves student behavior and mental health more than when either approach is implemented alone.

STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING SEL INTO MTSS

Districts can choose to integrate SEL and MTSS either horizontally or vertically. In horizontal integration, districts integrate a universal SEL program into school-wide MTSS. In vertical integration, districts implement evidence-based SEL programs into each tier level of the MTSS framework.\(^{61}\)

When integrating SEL, districts should establish a leadership team to oversee the integration.\(^{62}\) Instead of having multiple teams that are responsible for separate programs, districts can increase integration success and efficiency by providing a consolidated team with the support and authority to integrate both approaches. The OSEP Technical Assistance Center on PBIS notes that “District and school administrators can ensure teams have sufficient resources to coordinate and implement an expanded approach by providing time, training, and support for ALL staff to model, teach, and reinforce social-emotional competencies.”\(^{63}\) Additionally, having a staff member on the team who has training and experience with both SEL and MTSS provides additional support and coaching to the integration process.\(^{64}\)

Before beginning the integration process, districts should review their SEL and MTSS approaches for commonalities and overlapping priorities. The leadership team in charge of integration efforts should identify:\(^{65}\)

- Key components of each intervention or approach;
- Areas that share common aims, goals, and practices; and
- Differences in key components and decide if these can enhance one another or should be modified or negotiated.

When integrating SEL into MTSS, districts and schools should develop universal SEL supports for all students, targeted supports for students who require additional supports, and intensive supports for students who require individualized support (Figure 2.1 on the following page). Notably, strong Tier I implementation that supports the social-emotional development of all students is vital to preventing challenges and reducing the number of students who require Tier II or III supports.\(^{66}\) As such, Tier II supports are designed for students whose data indicate that they do not respond to Tier I supports, not students who initially lack quality social, emotional, and behavioral supports.\(^{67}\)

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 113.


\(^{63}\) Ibid.


\(^{67}\) Ibid.
In a chapter on integrating SEL and PBIS, Catherine Bradshaw recommends using a phased implementation process. For example, districts could begin with school-wide activities that impact all students and then create further support systems. Figure 2.2, below, presents her recommended phases for implementing integrated SEL and PBIS. While Bradshaw focuses on PBIS, districts can readily apply these steps to the integration of SEL into a broader MTSS framework.

**Figure 2.2: Recommended Steps for Implementing Integrated SEL and PBIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commit to Coordinated Implementation of SEL and PBIS</th>
<th>Requires administrator involvement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set the vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allocate resources.</td>
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<td>Plan for professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain Staff and Community Buy-In for PBIS and SEL Implementation and Integration</td>
<td>Ensure staff understand the key features, strengths, and weaknesses of both models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have staff share existing examples of PBIS and SEL that they are already implementing in their classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build agreements for how to move forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage Stakeholders to Form a Team</td>
<td>Including administrators, grade levels teachers, SEL master teachers, counselors or school psychologists, health and physical education teachers, teaching assistants, and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop A Shared Vision for Integrated Model</td>
<td>Engage in a visioning process with staff, students, and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider how current SEL or PBIS efforts capture core values/vision of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess School-Wide Strengths, Weaknesses,</td>
<td>Determine:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the strengths of PBIS and our selected SEL program?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT analysis) to Integrated PBIS and SEL

- What are the weaknesses?
- What opportunities exist to integrate strengths and enhancements?
- What barriers currently exist? What may be barriers to integration?
- Do we need more information from our stakeholders?

### Use Data to Identify and Select Programming and Formulate Decision-Making Guidelines About Referral

- Use SWOT analysis data.
- Use extant data to identify important student outcomes to target school-wide:
  - School Climate, Social and Emotional Competency, Student Engagement, and Bullying Victimization data
  - Office disciplinary referrals
  - Nurse visits
  - Counselor contacts
- Use extant data and requests for assistance to intensify support for some students.

### Create an Integration Action Plan

- Create a statement of purpose for integration.
- Create visuals and “cheat sheets” for teachers to easily use common language.
- Develop implementation measures that reflect integrated treatment integrity.
- Explicitly state strategies for maintaining faculty buy-in and orienting new faculty.
- Set up explicit opportunities for faculty to reflect on implementation and effectiveness.
- Create an implementation timeline.

### Develop Job-Embedded Professional Development Opportunities

- Establish a Professional Learning Community dedicated to integrated PBIS and SEL.
- Build in structures for PLC learning.
- Give implementation updates at each faculty meeting.
- Use exit tickets at faculty meetings to obtain feedback on implementation.
- Use a portion of shared grade level planning time to observe grade level data and do classroom problem-solving.
- Use new teacher orientation structures to ensure SEL and PBIS implementation is occurring and to troubleshoot barriers.

### Launch SEL and PBIS Together

- Help students and staff to connect the dots.
- Avoid confusion by giving the initiative one name.
- Create a calendar for implementation of lessons, practice, and activities.

### Develop an On-Going Technical Assistance Plan

- Identify the role that internal coaches can take to support implementation of PBIS and SEL.
- Identify needs for external consultation.
- The plan should include content, timeline, and format of assistance.
- Also consider the district vision for integrated MTSS and SEL in technical assistance planning.

Source: Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project

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MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY OF SEL AND MTSS

Experts note that collecting fidelity of implementation data is crucial to monitoring the integration of SEL into MTSS and should occur on an ongoing basis throughout implementation.\(^71\) Accordingly, in her chapter on integrating PBIS and SEL, Bradshaw asserts that “Implementation data should be collected on all [MTTSS and] SEL processes and components in order to monitor the implementation quality of the integrated system of support and to indicate areas in need of further training and technical assistance.”\(^72\)

CASEL recommends considering how to evaluate a program before implementing it, stating that “A process for regularly evaluating the program’s impact on students should be in place from the beginning.”\(^73\) Districts and schools should consider the following questions about a SEL program’s evaluation procedures:\(^74\)

- Does the program provide school districts with on-site assistance in designing an evaluation to determine the program’s impact on students?
- Does the program provide on-site assistance in collecting and analyzing evaluation data?
- Does the program provide assistance in interpreting evaluation data and making appropriate recommendations?

Similarly, prior to beginning implementation and data collection, districts should define evaluation goals, metrics, and the outcomes they wish to measure.\(^75\) In addition to measuring implementation, goals and metrics help districts with continuous improvement. According to CASEL, “Only by outlining what you want to achieve and then measuring your progress will you be able to make informed decisions about whether a given strategy is effective and if you need to adjust your approach to SEL implementation.”\(^76\)

To monitor fidelity of implementation of implementing SEL and MTSS, districts can look at implementation data, which reflect the quality of implementation.\(^77\) Common methods for evaluating SEL implementation include gathering data from observations of program delivery; self-ratings, journals, or logs completed by those implementing the program; and evaluations by coaches or external trainers.\(^78\) Notably, districts can evaluate implementation fidelity in

\(^{71}\) Barrett et al., Op. cit., p. 3.
\(^{72}\) Bradshaw et al., Op. cit., p. 113.
\(^{74}\) Bullet points quoted verbatim with modification from: Ibid.
\(^{77}\) Ibid.
multiple ways, and the literature does not recommend a single method as most appropriate. Methods for gathering implementation data are further explained in Figure 2.3, below.

**Figure 2.3: Sources for Gathering Implementation Fidelity Data**

- **Rubrics**: Rubrics provide qualitative descriptions (benchmarks) that can help the district determine where it is currently and identify what success might look like. Rubrics typically represent the perspective of a small group of people, often leaders or decision-makers.

- **Surveys**: By collecting feedback from staff or students, district administrators can broaden the perspective on SEL activities in the district. Staff perceptions may differ from those of district leaders, which can lead to fruitful discussion.

- **Observation**: Observational walk-throughs can provide a variety of information about SEL implementation. Both school and district leaders and SEL team members can collect powerful qualitative data, including anecdotes that are valuable for improving action plans and communicating with various stakeholders about the work.

- **Self-reporting**: School-level staff and others close to implementation can provide useful insights into the quantity, content, and timing of implementation activities.

Source: CASEL

Furthermore, districts should measure program implementation at multiple points in time, as an evaluation at one point in time may not reveal an accurate measure of implementation quality. Implementation levels can change over time, and may increase over time with practice or decrease over time due to factors such as decreasing commitment or staff turnover. Durlak notes that “The time period for achieving acceptable levels of implementation can be up to four years depending on program circumstances and specifics.” Thus, multiple evaluations over time provide a more accurate account.

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79 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
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