

Social Emotional Learning Demonstration Sites in Washington State



Support for Districts: Introduction and Overview

Schools and districts in Washington state are implementing the Washington Social Emotional Learning (SEL) standards and benchmarks. This includes using the [**Washington SEL Implementation Guide**](#) as a framework to address the four guiding principles (equity, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, and universal design) and the three essential elements of SEL (see sidebar).

Essential Elements

- Create conditions to support students' SEL
- Collaborate with families, communities, and extended learning opportunity (ELO) providers
- Build adult capacity that supports SEL for all

Guiding Questions

In response to the need for practical examples of SEL implementation, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has created a series of four briefs based on the implementation efforts at five demonstration site districts. In addition to this introductory brief, there is one brief devoted to each of three guiding questions related to SEL implementation at the district (local education agency) level:



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

- How are local education agencies **encouraging school leaders to prioritize SEL?**
- How are local education agencies **supporting school leaders and staff members to implement SEL?**
- How are local education agencies **engaging students, families, and community partners in SEL?**

Demonstration Site Districts

Cape Flattery School District is located in the Northwest corner of the state and includes three schools spread across two communities, Neah Bay and Clallam Bay. The data collection and information shared here are primarily drawn from Neah Bay, a community on the Makah Reservation, where the focus is on culturally responsive practice and student and educator well-being. Although SEL is being implemented districtwide, much of what is shared in this series of briefs is specific to the Neah Bay community and schools.

Franklin Pierce School District is located in a large suburb near Tacoma. Several team members from their Title VI and SEL programs are working together to create an approach to SEL that combines culturally responsive Indigenous practices and the Washington SEL standards and benchmarks. We also interviewed the district director for college and career readiness about the district's approach to expanding SEL to the middle and high school levels.

Richland School District is located in the Southeast part of the state and is part of a larger metropolitan area known as the Tri-Cities (Kennewick, Pasco, Richland). The district has been focused on improving mental health and addressing suicide ideation. They have worked with the University of Washington School Mental Health Assessment Research and Training (UW SMART) team to plan and address the Interconnected Systems Framework, which expands tiered systems of support by incorporating mental health.

Renton School District serves the suburban community of Renton, located in King County just south of Seattle. The district has focused on improving family and community engagement, promoting excellence in learning and teaching, removing barriers to student retention, and providing SEL supports. Renton has created pilot sites to intentionally promote consistent implementation of SEL practices. We interviewed the director of student support and a veteran educator who serves as a SEL facilitator and provides implementation support across the district.

Steilacoom Historical School District is located in south Puget Sound near the Joint Base Lewis-McChord military installation. The district serves approximately 3,100 students (41% of whom are military-connected) in pre-K–12 at six facilities: a remote pre-K–3 elementary school on Anderson Island and five mainland schools. The district prioritizes strong relationships and fosters the

cognitive, social, and emotional development of each student. We conducted a two-person focus group with the district SEL director and the director of teaching and learning.

District Statistics

	Cape Flattery	Franklin Pierce	Richland	Renton	Steilacoom Historical
Enrollment	482	7,419	14,150	15,276	3,136
Number of schools	3	16	23	31	11
Locale	Rural, remote	Large suburb	Small city	Midsize city	Small city/ Large suburb
Location	Northwest Washington	Tacoma	Southeast Washington	Suburb of Seattle	SW of Seattle
Students of color	90%	74%	33%	79%	54%
English learner students	0%	14%	7%	23%	4%
Low-income students	83%	59%	43%	55%	31%
Students with disabilities	18%	15%	15%	16%	15%

Note: Enrollment and demographic data are from the 2022–23 school year.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction district report cards

<https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us> and National Center for Education Statistics district locale data

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/maped/LocaleLookup/>

How are local education agencies encouraging school leaders to prioritize SEL?

Evidence and recommended practices

District leaders can support SEL by explicitly identifying it as a priority and by creating a clear vision and policy rooted in specific standards.^{1,2,3} This includes strategies for integrating SEL into all district priorities, such as academics, tiered systems of support, discipline, data collection, and student supports.^{2,3} It should also include a coordinated effort to provide training and support across all schools and all district departments.^{1,2,3} As central office staff members build their own knowledge and skills, they can continue to provide SEL training for teachers and administrators^{1,2} and support continuous improvement by collecting, analyzing, and acting on SEL implementation data.^{1,2}

Schools that have systemically implemented SEL are seeing the benefits, including critical thinking abilities and the ability to apply knowledge and skills beyond the school day.⁴ Guidance and support from the district office benefit school leaders which included coordinated efforts of professional development for staff and teaching time.¹

How are local education agencies supporting school leaders and staff members to implement SEL?

Evidence and recommended practices

Demonstration districts have focused on building knowledge and understanding of SEL skills and how to incorporate those skills into instructional practices. This has been accompanied by data-informed decision making based on ongoing needs assessments,³ which helps districts align human and financial resources to address schools' most pressing needs.¹

Ongoing data reviews provide an understanding of daily SEL implementation strategies at the school level. This includes multiple sources of information, such as direct observation and administrative statistics about student behavior, attendance, discipline, direct measures of students' SEL skills, and academic outcomes.³ Data review teams look at students' mastery of SEL standards and benchmarks and then use that information to improve teaching and learning, rather than for reporting as part of a high-stakes accountability system.¹ The team then looks for evidenced-based programs that teach SEL skills while also addressing specific areas of student need.^{2,3} The data review process promotes an asset-based approach that includes frequent opportunities to celebrate and leverage strengths for ongoing improvement.²

How are local education agencies and schools engaging students, families, and community partners in SEL?

Evidence and recommended practices

Student, family, and community engagement is essential for effective SEL implementation. Districts should partner with families and community members to develop the SEL vision, standards, and benchmarks and a common language for communicating about SEL efforts both within classrooms and during out-of-school time.² This partnership should also focus on communicating SEL goals, strategies, and outcomes to the broader community to build support. At the district level, the SEL vision and implementation strategies are strengthened by two-way communication with families and community members and their involvement in decision making, including policy and curriculum decisions. District leaders and staff members can also increase the capacity of school staff members to partner with families, and they can provide guidance on observation and administrative data on behavior and academics.⁵

"[Our district] is a place, where not only you know SEL for the sake of SEL, but there is real purpose of this, so that students can engage their full selves right in the experience of learning and thinking and growing in our spaces."

—Steilacoom Historical District leader

Summary of lessons from demonstration sites

The three accompanying briefs provide more detail on how demonstration districts addressed the guiding questions. Across all districts, there were some key ideas and common approaches.

District superintendents should be directly involved in the SEL implementation effort. This includes leading the SEL visioning process and ensuring it is connected to district and school improvement plans and actions. The superintendent can also assign specific roles within the district to support school implementation. A focus of sustainability includes braiding Title VI funding and other general funds with grants to connect SEL to additional district efforts.

Limiting initiatives to a few targeted and interconnected efforts emphasizes the importance of SEL and reduces stress for leaders and educators. Coordinating efforts within the district office and between schools allows educators from across the district to learn from and advance each other's efforts. Many programs are doing similar work in silos but have been able to leverage support and connect varying initiatives across the district.

While the superintendent and district directors provide leadership on SEL, it is critical to identify SEL leaders and champions within smaller departments and across schools, including non-instructional staff members. This creates opportunities to address variability of support based on local needs and it provides a deeper understanding of how SEL practices apply to each person's role.

Key Ideas

- Connect the district vision for SEL to district and school improvement plans.
- Create funding sustainability by blending and braiding multiple grants, Title allocations, and general funds.
- Limit and coordinate initiatives to leverage support and reduce siloing.
- Identify SEL leaders and champions across all departments.
- Engage families early and often and in ways that are authentic and culturally responsive.
- Celebrate often and in meaningful ways.

Authentically engage families and communities early and often. This helps promote open communication and support between schools and families and helps identify shared values and a common language for talking about SEL skills and practices. Most importantly, districts, schools, families, and the community should celebrate successes often and in small, visible, and meaningful ways.

To Learn More

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is committed to supporting schools, districts, and community partners in implementing SEL that is equitable, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and universally designed. Read more about SEL in Washington and access additional resources here: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/social-emotional-learning-sel>

References

1. Atwell, M. N., & Bridgeland, J. M. (2019). *Ready to lead: A 2019 update of principals' perspectives on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools*. A report for CASEL. Civic. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED602977.pdf>
2. Schwartz, H. L., Bongard, M., Bogan, E. D., Boyle, A. E., Meyers, D. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2022). *Social and emotional learning in schools nationally and in the Collaborating Districts Initiative: Selected findings from the American Teacher Panel and American School Leader Panel surveys*. (Research Report. RR-A1822-1). RAND Corporation.
3. Kendziora, K., & Yoder, N. (2016). *When districts support and integrate social and emotional learning (SEL): Findings from an ongoing evaluation of districtwide implementation of SEL*. Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research.
4. DePaoli, J. L., Atwell, M. N., & Bridgeland, J. (2017). *Ready to lead: A national principal survey on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools: A report for CASEL*. Civic Enterprises. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579088.pdf>
5. Swanson, L., Beaty, J., & Patel, L. G. (2021). Family-school partnerships nurture student SEL. *The Learning Professional*, 42(4), 46–50.

Legal Notice



Except where otherwise noted, this work by the [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution License](#).

Alternate material licenses with different levels of user permission are clearly indicated next to the specific content in the materials.

This resource may contain links to websites operated by third parties. These links are provided for your convenience only and do not constitute or imply any endorsement or monitoring by OSPI.

If this work is adapted, note the substantive changes and re-title, removing any Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction logos. Provide the following attribution:

"This resource was adapted from original materials provided by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Original materials may be accessed at [OSPI's Social Emotional Learning webpage](#)."

OSPI provides equal access to all programs and services without discrimination based on sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. Questions and complaints of alleged discrimination should be directed to the Equity and Civil Rights Director at 360-725-6162 or P.O. Box 47200 Olympia, WA 98504-7200.

Download this material in PDF at [OSPI's Social Emotional Learning webpage](#). This material is available in alternative format upon request. Contact the Resource Center at 888-595-3276, TTY 360-664-3631.

This resource was developed by Education Northwest in partnership with American Institutes for Research (AIR) and with funding from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.



American Institutes for Research®
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
202.403.5000 | [AIR.ORG](#)