

Washington SEL Professional Learning Network Needs Assessment Summary

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) collaborated to conduct a needs assessment to inform the design of a [professional learning network](#) to support social and emotional learning (SEL) in Washington schools. The network will support local education agency (LEA)¹ teams to build adult capacity; create conditions to support student SEL; and collaborate with families and communities through webinars, peer-to-peer sessions, individualized supports, and more.

In spring 2022, AIR produced summary reports from multiple data sources (*see sidebar*). On June 14, 2022, OSPI hosted a **collaborative data interpretation workshop**, which brought together 28 community partners representing a variety of perspectives and roles to analyze the various data sources. Community partners represented several perspectives including LEA administrators and staff, school-based instructional staff, OSPI staff, community group members, and members of the Washington SEL Advisory Committee.

As a collective, the workshop participants refined the data into 16 **key findings**. Workshop participants also prioritized which key findings they felt were most important to consider when developing professional learning opportunities to support SEL implementation. This report describes the top five prioritized key findings (those receiving five or more votes; further key findings received between zero and three votes each) with their supporting findings from the needs assessment, in priority order as identified by collaborative interpretation workshop participants.

¹ LEAs include Educational Service Districts (ESDs), districts, State-Tribal Education Compact Schools (STECs), and charter schools.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA SOURCES

OSPI **survey** with designated points of contact for SEL in LEAs (113 participants from 54 LEAs)

Summaries of listening sessions with

- Five students (three LEAs)
- 32 family and community members (14 LEAs)*
- Eight instructional staff (seven LEAs)
- Three school administrators (three LEAs)
- Four LEA contacts (four LEAs)
- 18 rural superintendents

Existing state-level surveys

- Healthy Youth Survey, 2021
- COVID-19 Student Survey, 2022

**Three listening sessions for family and community members were held. Two sessions were conducted in English, and one session was conducted in Spanish in response to a request from a parent group at an LEA.*



Key Finding 1. Across grade levels and unique learning needs, all staff need an understanding of SEL implementation (including building positive relationships with students) throughout the school day.

Schoolwide SEL. Workshop participants emphasized the importance of schoolwide SEL implementation with findings drawn from the family and community member listening sessions. Workshop participants elevated points made by family and community members, particularly that all staff need to be able to build positive relationships with students and that SEL activities should be provided across multiple classes throughout the school day. Workshop participants agreed that "every moment is an opportunity" to practice SEL. A listening session participant noted that teachers have an important role in teaching SEL strategies so that students can implement to care for themselves.

Existing strengths. When focusing on staff understanding of SEL activities described in the educator listening session summary, workshop participants identified a range of existing strategies as strengths on which to build. These strategies include informal SEL supports, such as after-school activities or lunchtime clubs through which students connect with each other. Existing strategies also include classroom practices, such as allowing students to show their capabilities through presentations and normalizing spaces to take a "brain break" in the classroom in a "quiet corner."

Current challenges. Workshop participants also identified current challenges to schoolwide SEL implementation that emerged from the information sources. In the educator listening sessions, school administrators said teachers need support for self-care; further SEL training without a system for self-care would be burdensome. In family and community listening sessions, participants noted that staff need to know more about supporting SEL needs for students with learning disabilities. Family members in the Spanish language session felt teachers needed more training in classroom management to guide student behavior and to raise the level of mutual respect between teachers and students. Finally, findings from the LEA points of contact survey indicated that most LEAs were in the early stages of exploring or implementing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), a strategy to identify and address students' social, emotional, academic, and behavioral needs through differentiated supports. Workshop participants viewed early-stage implementation of MTSS around the state as evidence that staff are also in the beginning stages of understanding how SEL can fit into a broader framework for student support.



Key Finding 2. Educators need clear information about the SEL standards and access to relevant curriculum and resources before they can evaluate their efforts for fidelity of implementation.

Clarity of information. OSPI and AIR identified local-level evaluation and continuous improvement of SEL implementation as an important topic to explore through the data sources. When considering questions associated with evaluating SEL efforts, workshop participants focused on how information about the standards and clarity of expectations for implementing them need to be in place before evaluation of SEL efforts for fidelity can occur. Workshop participants identified findings that illustrated a lack of information for educators about the standards and local implementation expectations. In listening sessions, instructional staff were not consistently familiar with the standards, and some saw the standards as relevant for special education instead of for general education students. Rural superintendents expressed concern that teachers were not focused on the importance of SEL support in their schools. An instructor said that websites or recorded webinars about SEL activities were available, but no cohesive roll-out of the SEL standards or supports to teach them had occurred. Students shared that the SEL activities they have encountered are “ineffective” because they are not engaging for their age group. Students also described SEL instruction and activities as “inadequate” and “shallow.” Workshop participants viewed these findings as illustrative of the informational challenges that must be addressed for educators prior to establishing evaluation processes.

Resources. In addition to the barriers to clear expectations for implementing SEL standards, workshop participants identified findings pointing to how limited resources present challenges to the implementation and evaluation of SEL standards. Educators in the educator listening session said insufficient human and curricular resources were barriers to knowing and teaching to Washington’s SEL standards. LEA points of contact described a need for resources to better support high school aged students. About two thirds of the respondents to the LEA point-of-contact survey indicated that their LEA was in the process of identifying or selecting evidence-based SEL programs, suggesting that implementation had yet to occur. Relatedly, workshop participants observed a lack of information about formal program evaluation strategies in the summary reports used during the collaborative data review. Workshop participants expected educators to describe how they evaluated their SEL programs; the lack of information about formal evaluation processes became a finding.



Key Finding 3. SEL decisions appear to be top-down without valuing consistent or intentional involvement and engagement from collaborators (families, staff, students). Rules/practices, relationships, and structures can either uphold access to SEL decision-making or be barriers to access to SEL decision-making.

Educators. Workshop participants identified findings in educator listening sessions that illustrated barriers to community partner involvement in schools' decisions about SEL practices. For example, instructional staff and administrators consistently indicated they were not including families, community members, staff, or students in their SEL decision-making processes. An instructor commented that their administration was "very open" to collaborating with teachers and families, but conflicting priorities limited opportunities to follow through. Another instructor said that parents may receive surveys, but decisions were made by higher-ups. An administrator said their school had a leadership team to set the vision and goals for SEL activities, but they did not specify who was on the team.

Family and community members. Workshop participants identified related findings from family and community listening sessions. For example, family members described a "disconnect" and lack of involvement with decision making about SEL. In addition, students reported limited involvement in SEL decision-making efforts. Students may be invited to provide feedback on SEL programs, but they were not involved in subsequent follow-up or discussion.

Key Finding 4. Learning environments do not sufficiently support all students and families across different groups, affecting well-being and sense of safety and belonging.

Students with disabilities. Drawing from existing surveys and family and community listening sessions, workshop participants found that family members were concerned that educators needed additional training to support the SEL needs of students with disabilities. This concern was underscored by survey findings showing that among Grade 10 students, those with disabilities were more than twice as likely as students without disabilities to feel sad or hopeless (61% and 28%, respectively) and to feel lonely (42% and 16.7%). Similarly, 60% of Grade 8 students with disabilities reported feeling sad or hopeless.

Families of English learners. Workshop participants learned from the family and community listening session summary that bilingual supports for Spanish-speaking families were insufficient for students and for family members who wish to volunteer in schools. Family and community members in listening sessions shared that Hispanic families were not made to feel welcome in schools and "families feel discouraged." These families also reported that their students



experienced bullying, and families' efforts to work with school staff to address bullying concerns have not been effective.

LGBTQ+ youth. Workshop participants identified findings from existing surveys that highlight SEL needs experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth. Among Grades 8 and 10 survey respondents, about two thirds of students identifying as LGBTQ+ reported feeling hopeless, as compared with about one third of heterosexual students. The proportions of students who reported feeling scared was similar. Higher proportions of Grade 10 students who said they felt sad or hopeless identified as LGBTQ+, and lower proportions of these students indicated that they felt supported by peers or adults. Apart from sexual orientation, twice as many female survey respondents reported feeling sad or hopeless as compared with male respondents (50% and 25%, respectively).

Key Finding 5. There are gaps in educator capacity to apply culturally responsive and sustaining practices with students and their families. Strengthening these capacities is important for advancing equity.

Culturally responsive and sustaining practices. Findings related to gaps in educator capacity to apply culturally responsive and sustaining practices emerged as a priority for participants (the other guiding principles are equity, universal design, and trauma-informed practice). In listening sessions, a majority of educators reported that they were in the early stages of engaging in cultural responsiveness. Family and community members' comments underscored the educators' points, noting that staff in their schools needed more training to apply culturally responsive practices with students from diverse backgrounds and that student diversity was not reflected in school staff. Further, students in a listening session said their teachers lacked cultural awareness and the curriculum lacked diversity. When identifying SEL professional learning priorities, about half of the LEA points of contact did not select culturally sustaining SEL practices among their four priority areas.

LIMITATIONS

OSPI and AIR sought to collect information from as many individuals representing community partner groups as possible, from diverse communities around the state.

However, given the small number of participants in listening sessions and the OSPI survey, findings should not be taken as broadly representative of community partner groups across Washington. In addition, time for the virtual collaborative interpretation workshop was limited such that the process to identify priorities occurred asynchronously, after the session.

This difference in method may or may not have affected participants' engagement with the final step.





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