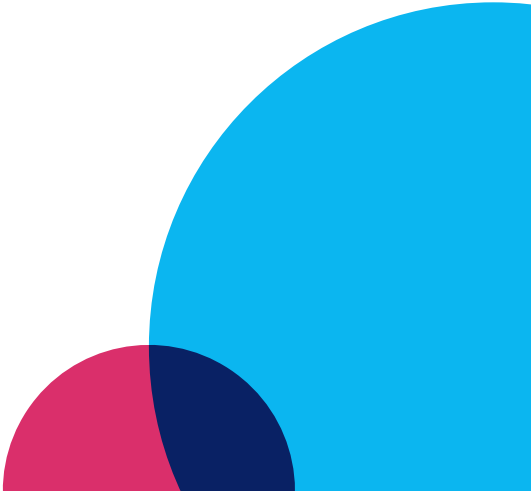# Guide to Improving Social and Emotional Learning Support
Now and Beyond

Practical solutions to the rising need of SEL for students, teachers, and administrators

PowerSchool

Contents

Introduction

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the need for a long-term solution—versus short-term fixes—to support students and educators.

From the classroom to the superintendent's office, disruptions continue to be felt in schools at all levels. And the role of social and emotional learning (SEL) is more critical than ever.

A survey of U.S school districts revealed that the chaos of the pandemic resulted in enormous setbacks, including **90% higher rates of student absenteeism, 74% of districts reporting multiple indicators of increased mental health stresses among students**, and **57% reporting an increase in teachers and support staff seeking assistance.**

Further underscoring the urgency of the situation, The Learning Counsel's 2019 Survey of School and District Digital Curriculum Strategy and Transformation identified, for the first time ever, **social-emotional needs as outranking every other major issue facing K-12 schools.**

What is SEL?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a nonprofit research institute dedicated to making SEL an integral part of education from preschool through high school.

- **CASEL defines SEL** as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."

SEL provides insight into students' beliefs and attitudes about their own intelligence, interpersonal skills, and academic skills. Its constructs are thought to contribute to the behaviors that are often measured by at-risk data, and they mediate short-term outcomes like attendance and behavior. This impacts longer-term learning outcomes like grades, assessment, performance, graduation, and beyond.

CASEL's SEL framework centers on five core areas of competence:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Responsible decision-making
- Relationship skills
- Social awareness

Together, these competencies support the goals of a successful SEL plan and whole-child instruction by **creating an early foundation** for skills that can be continually applied across many aspects of their lives.

Adapted from casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/
what-is-the-casel-framework/#communities

COMMUNITIES
FAMILIES & CAREGIVERS
SCHOOLS
CLASSROOMS

Self-Awareness

Self-Management

Social & Emotional Learning

Social Awareness

Responsible Decision-Making

Relationship Skills

SEL Instruction & Classroom Climate
Schoolwide Culture, Practices, & Policies
Authentic Partnerships
Aligned Learning Opportunities

Because equity is of such paramount concern, CASEL is developing a more focused variation of SEL called Transformative SEL.

- CASEL **defines Transformative SEL** as "a process whereby young people and adults build strong, respectful, and lasting relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine root causes of inequity and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community, and societal well-being."

At PowerSchool, we believe that SEL and Transformative SEL are critical to supporting whole-child instruction.

And that an equitable, multi-dimensional approach—in which SEL, academic success, and college and career readiness are given the same weight—will help ensure students personally thrive in college, career, and life.

The Whole Child

College & Career Readiness

Social and Emotional Learning

Academic Success
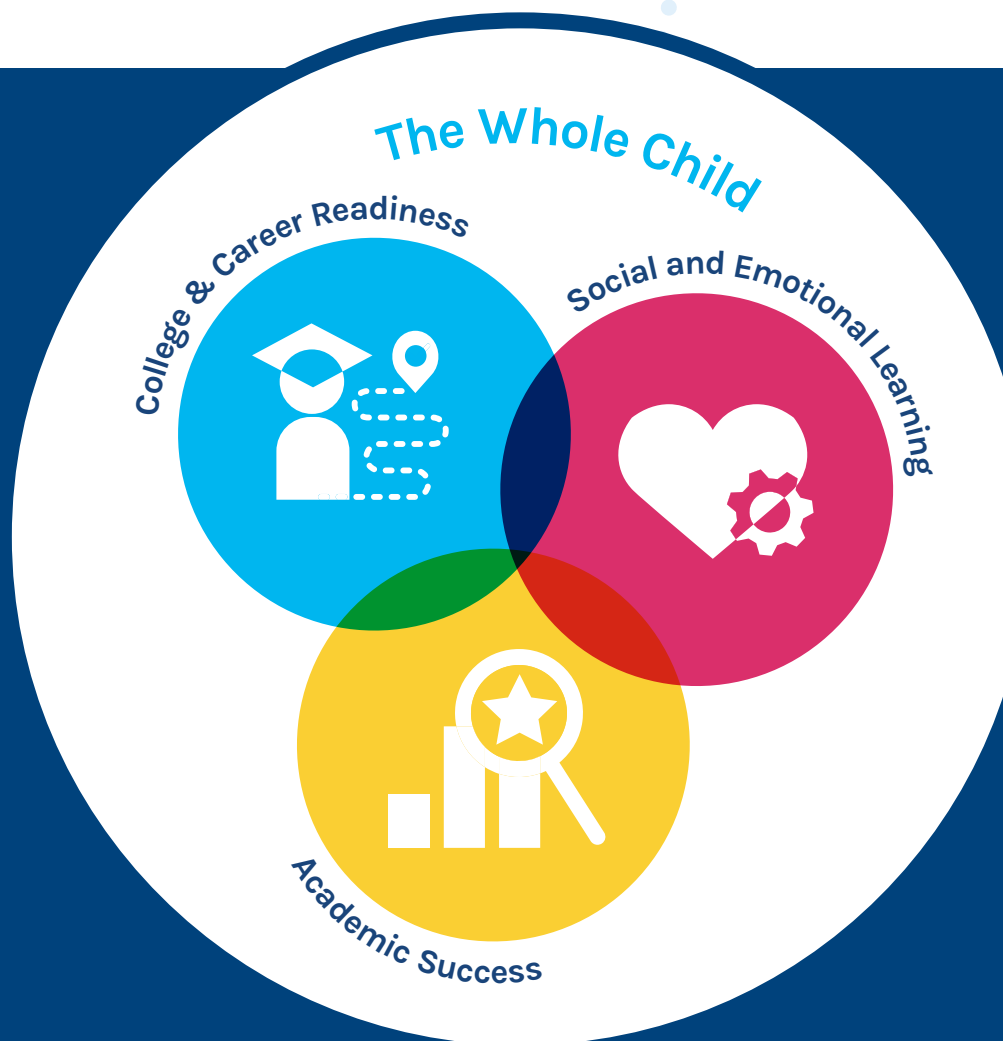
The Growing Importance of SEL

Lasting Student Impact

Students' lives and learning were immediately disrupted when the pandemic first emerged, as schools across the country closed and classrooms were moved online.

This sudden transition from in-person to all-virtual instruction had a negative ripple effect—it sowed social isolation for kids and left families struggling to fill the role of "teacher." On a broader level, it led to economic recession. Students who needed special accommodations were among those who suffered most, as they lost the level of support they needed to help keep them on track. And for lower-income households, the effects of the disruption—on academics, finances, and mental health—were magnified.

Even before the pandemic, though, there was evidence to support the value of SEL. **According to the 2021 Wallace Foundation report, Navigating SEL from the Inside Out,**

" Over the past two decades, there has emerged a growing consensus among researchers who study child development, education, and health that social and emotional skills are essential to learning and life outcomes."

The report also notes that "Research has demonstrated that high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs **produce positive outcomes for students, including improved behavior, attitudes, and academic performance**."

But the pandemic did shine a spotlight on how critical SEL is for students and on the role it plays in the link between mental health and academics.

Though educators have long understood the connection between SEL and classroom success, the pandemic's toll on student learning and emotional well-being continues to drive efforts to incorporate it into more teaching strategies.

The PowerSchool whitepaper, Using SEL, CCLR, & At-Risk Data to Support the Whole Child, highlights several takeaways from empirically supported work:

- SEL programming can have a positive impact on academics, conduct, emotional distress, and drug use **up to 18 years later**.
- High social and emotional competence **increases high school graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment, postsecondary completion, employment rates, and average wages.**
- It also **decreases dropout rates, classroom behavior issues, drug use, teen pregnancy, and difficulties related to mental health.**
- **90% of teachers believe social and emotional skills can be taugh**t and that they benefit students.
- **80% of employers say social and emotional skills are the most critical to professional success,** and they're also the hardest skills to find.

More Support for Teachers

Since the onset of COVID-19, burnout has become a worsening phenomenon, and teachers are among those feeling it the most.

According to Southern Education Foundation's July 2021 Policy Brief, "longstanding inequities, exacerbated by the pandemic, have compounded to **create stressful working conditions for teachers**, making it even more difficult for them to provide a high-quality education."

Teachers need support in order to effectively support their students.

According to 2009 research by Jennings & Greenberg, "When adults have strong SEL skills and the knowledge and tools to combat this stress, they are better able to build relationships with students, effectively manage the learning environment, and deliver SEL curricula."

Skills for Lifelong Resiliency

A [report](#) by McKinsey & Company on the effects of COVID-19 on learning highlights the need to support children's well-being, especially during times of upheaval.

SEL programs help build resiliency, which is key to pulling through difficult circumstances—whether it's a shifting learning environment caused by a pandemic or just the normal ebb and flow of challenges everyone faces over time.

According to the Wallace Foundation report, "Social and emotional skills also serve as important **protective factors in the face of negative life events or chronic stressors** and support general well-being, such as job and financial security as well as physical and mental health, through adulthood."

In a survey of more than 16,370 parents across the U.S., **more than 35% reported being very or extremely concerned about their children's mental health.**

“

High schoolers are not just working towards graduation, they're also on a path of self-discovery and are continually figuring out who they are, both as individuals and within their communities. Robust SEL activities are vital tools for teachers as we accompany students on their journeys to adulthood. As an English teacher, I find that I can construct SEL activities that not only help all of us work through challenging issues and reinforce personal strengths, but that also increase proficiency in reading, writing, and analytical thinking.

JENNIFER WINTERS | English Language Arts Teacher,
Carver Vocational-Technical High School, MD
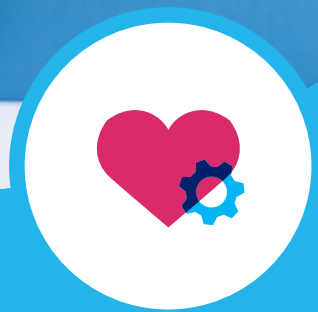
Practical Application:
3 Levels of SEL

As pandemic-related school closures, remote and hybrid learning challenges, and continual uncertainty have shown, **it's more important than ever to have an SEL program in place** that truly supports educators and students into the future.

In a recent Education Week Research Center survey, "social emotional learning/supports" was the **number-one priority for spending federal stimulus funds**—to help students rebuild crucial skills that will allow them to re-enter a changed school environment, quickly adapt, and make up for any potential learning loss.

For an SEL program to be effective long-term, it requires focus on three levels of practical application and support: **at the student level, at the school level, and at the district level.**

One in six children, aged two to eight, has a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder

Source: Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

70% of students who need services do not have access to them

Source: Rennie Center, 2019 survey

SEL in the Classroom

Studies have shown that while 74% of students in 5th grade report feeling engaged in school, that number drops to 45% by 8th grade and to just 32% by 11th grade.

This "school engagement cliff" can be minimized through the implementation of SEL, which provides an avenue to counteract the cliff as students move through middle and high school. Relationships are key to ensuring a healthy school community, and research shows that attending to SEL can make a significant difference.

Gallup found that **students who strongly agreed that their school is committed to building the strengths of each student and who feel they have at least one staff member who makes them excited about the future…**

...were 30 times as likely to be engaged at school as students who strongly disagree.

Source: Reuters, February 2021

Now, more than ever, as communities determine how to safely navigate ongoing hybrid and in-person learning challenges, **SEL is critical to ensuring schools attend to the holistic needs of students and staff.**
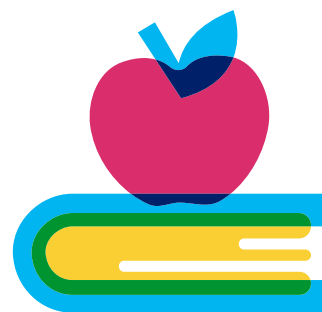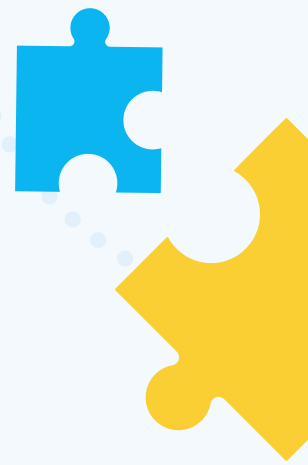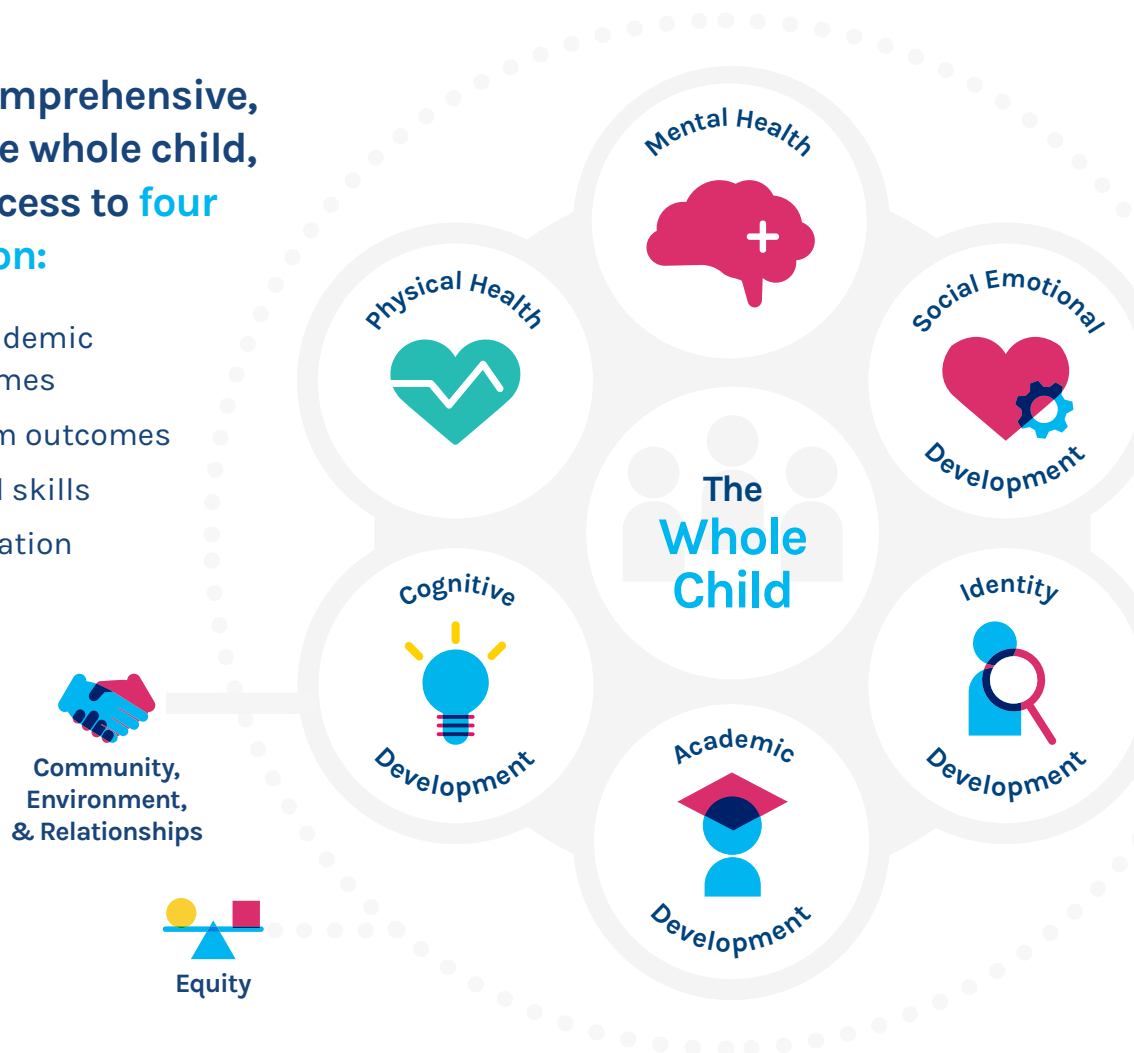
Take a whole-child approach

Taking a whole-child approach is an inclusive way to help all students achieve their full potential. The whole-child approach **places equal value on all areas of a child's development**, from academics to mental and physical health, in order to help them reach the best outcome possible in both school and life.

Key to the whole-child approach is a systems view—taking into account data from current and past academic behavior and outcomes, long-term outcomes, social and emotional skillsets, and intervention participation and impacts.

To apply a more comprehensive, systems view of the whole child, educators need access to four types of information:

- Current and past academic behaviors and outcomes
- Prospective long-term outcomes
- Social and emotional skills
- Intervention participation and impacts

Community, Environment, & Relationships

Equity

Physical Health

Mental Health

Social Emotional Development

The **Whole Child**

Identity Development

Cognitive Development

Academic Development

Connect the data dots

SEL can facilitate a more whole-child approach to student development because it enables integrated lessons that develop non-academic skills, like teamwork, collaboration, discipline, and respect. Meanwhile, college, career, and life readiness (CCLR) focuses on equipping students with the skills they need for continued success after they graduate.

Together, SEL and CCLR interventions can make a profound, long-lasting impact compared with more narrowly focused interventions.

Educators can use this data, combined with at-risk data, to determine a course of action most likely to impact the student's behavior, well-being, and overall life readiness.

The final data point is response to intervention (RTI), which guides instructors' efforts to address students' needs. RTI is also a source for information about what programs students have been exposed to and the extent of that exposure.

By integrating RTI with SEL, at-risk data, and CCLR, educators get a clearer picture of how well specific intervention programs have performed in the past for students. Disparate views into SEL, CCLR, and at-risk data are not enough—educators need an integrated infrastructure that can support many different functions and views of the problem.

5 Practical Steps to Support Student Transitions:

1. Use student surveys to assess well-being, task completion, or post-high school plans

2. Use data to get a pulse on your student's well-being

3. Utilize social media to encourage engagement and completion of tasks

4. Connect with students one-on-one

5. Remember you're not alone—look to colleagues, counselors, college reps, and others for help

SEL in the School

A [Yale/CASEL survey of 5,000 U.S. teachers](#) in March 2020 revealed the five most-mentioned descriptions of teachers' feelings were: anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad.

They connected these feelings with medical concerns due to the pandemic, managing family needs, and adapting to new teaching technology. **For teachers, the challenges around SEL are twofold.**

First, teachers need SEL themselves so that they have the tools they need to stay healthy, model healthy behaviors for their students, and help them manage feelings of burnout. The stress of the pandemic drove many teachers to quit, but **retention has long been a problem.**

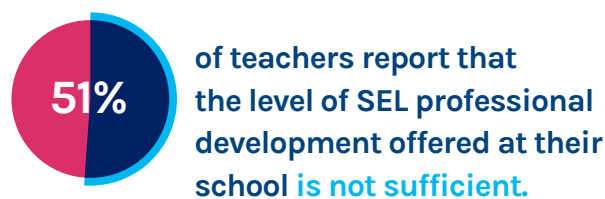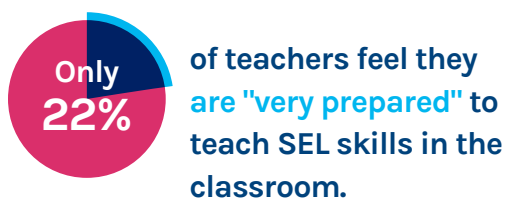**New teachers are especially at risk, with 44% leaving within the first five years.**

Source: CPRE Research Reports, 2018

The research institute, Transforming Education, identifies **three elements of Educator SEL:**

1. **The competencies** that adults need in order to manage stress and create a safe and supportive classroom environment
2. **The skills and mindsets** that adults need to effectively embody, teach, model, and coach SEL for students
3. **The overall well-being and emotional state** of adults in school settings

Second, teachers also need SEL as part of their professional development training. According to a McGraw Hill report:

Only **22%** of teachers feel they are "very prepared" to teach SEL skills in the classroom.

51% of teachers report that the level of SEL professional development offered at their school is not sufficient.

Prioritize and check in with teachers

Teachers don't just need the right tools. They also must have the skills needed to put them to good use. Make sure your educators have access to professional development materials and on-demand content that empowers them to glean insights from the data and take action based on what they see.

Modeling SEL throughout your organization supports teacher growth. Just as students pick up the five social and emotional competencies when they're modeled by teachers, teachers also develop these skills faster when they're modeled by administrators and district leadership.

Making SEL a priority for your leadership and curriculum staff puts the structure in place to create a more resilient organization that can quickly adjust and adapt to changes.

Checking in with educators about their concerns, needs, and stressors is a great place to start. SEL helps teachers develop a general resilience in difficult times, but routine check-ins may reveal opportunities to quickly address specific issues. For example, stress resulting from difficulty navigating the multiple systems required to work remotely may be alleviated by providing additional training on these tools or offering regularly-scheduled tech support office hours.

Providing flexible training and development opportunities in different formats, synchronously and asynchronously, gives educators the ability to adapt their training to the time and method that work best for them. Building flexibility into the support available to educators is an additional way to meet teachers where they are with empathy.

"

As we strengthen our personal SEL competencies, we become better teachers and models for those around us.

KRISTIN HENDRICKS | Learning and Organizational Development Specialist, Wake County Public School System, NC

SEL in the District

According to research conducted by CASEL, principals increasingly recognize the value of and need for social and emotional learning.
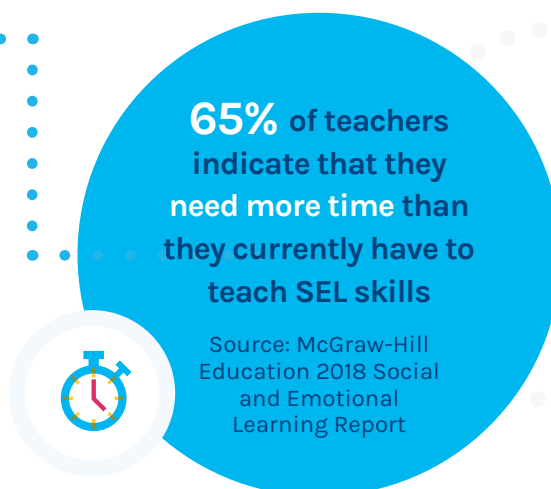
In 2017, only 43% believed that SEL should definitely be included in state education standards. In 2019, that number jumped to 70%. And 87% of principals believe state standards probably should explicitly include SEL.

Yet, a 2020 Tyton Partners report found that 93% of districts adopt some kind of SEL, but:

Only 73% of districts adopt an SEL curriculum **• • • AND • • • Only 45%** of districts adopt ways to measure SEL

Among low-income schools, these challenges are even bigger. Schools with more than 80% of low-income students are more likely to cite a lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school by 27 percentage points. Part of the issue is barriers to implementation, such as time constraints, funding, and prioritizing teacher professional development.

Indeed, a 2013 teacher survey revealed that a majority of teachers (81%) rank time as the biggest challenge to implementing SEL, although research shows SEL can support increased time on task.

65% of teachers indicate that they need more time than they currently have to teach SEL skills

Source: McGraw-Hill Education 2018 Social and Emotional Learning Report

Cultivate an SEL-supportive school climate

In order for a district's environment and culture to be truly supportive of SEL, **programs must be implemented in an equitable, consistent manner** in which communication is clear and transparency and accountability are expected.

Teachers' emotions are being profoundly impacted as their entire career field transforms. On top of learning entirely new skills for teaching students in a changing learning environment, they're also experiencing stress at home and throughout their extended families.

To support them as they contend with all of this and help them enable student learning, **K-12 leaders can offer supplemental resources and training that help them channel their energy into productive outcomes**. Since new teachers are most vulnerable to leaving their jobs, pay special attention to them.

Empower educators to make data-driven decisions
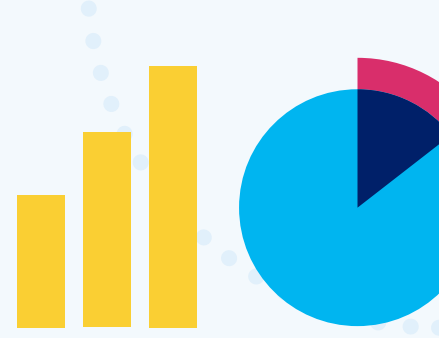
Schools also need to encourage a data-driven culture that empowers teachers and administrators to incorporate analytics into their daily routines. This becomes a resource they can use—issues appear in the data before they appear in the classroom. The first step in establishing a data-driven culture is creating a platform that staff can easily access, use, and draw conclusions from.

Data is great for informing decisions, but it's useless if it can't be applied through actions that actually influence learning outcomes—and that can only happen if the educators who perform those actions have data that is:

Centralized
Student data should live in one place, so educators don't have to spend extra time hunting down information from disparate sources.

Aligned with standards
Handle data in a way that aligns with requirements like those set by ESSA through every step of the reporting process. Your analytics won't be helpful if they're not guiding you toward the standards to which your school is held by state and federal governments.
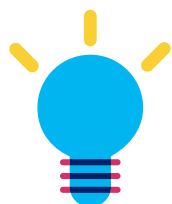
Easy to use
Support educators by providing analytics that presents and visualizes their data in an engaging way, arranges it into a narrative that clarifies decisions, and makes the process more approachable.

According to the Tyton report, interoperable SEL-focused solutions help make things easy. "More integrated SEL implementation models are perceived as making more progress towards an ideal environment than other approaches."

Districts must not only combine data from disparate systems but also use a strong analytics platform that makes data easily accessible.

That platform supports your teachers and educators by using a blend of analytics that is simultaneously historical, current, and forward-thinking.

Additionally, behind-the-scenes statistics and data science can help boil down oceans of data into a few key long-term outcomes. By creating a data-driven culture that can reliably detect and diagnose poor academic outcomes, you create a sort of safety net for your students that ensures you'll be there when they need you most. There is no way to guarantee that every student will overcome their challenges, but with the right data and the right context, you can give yourself the power to intervene in a meaningful way.
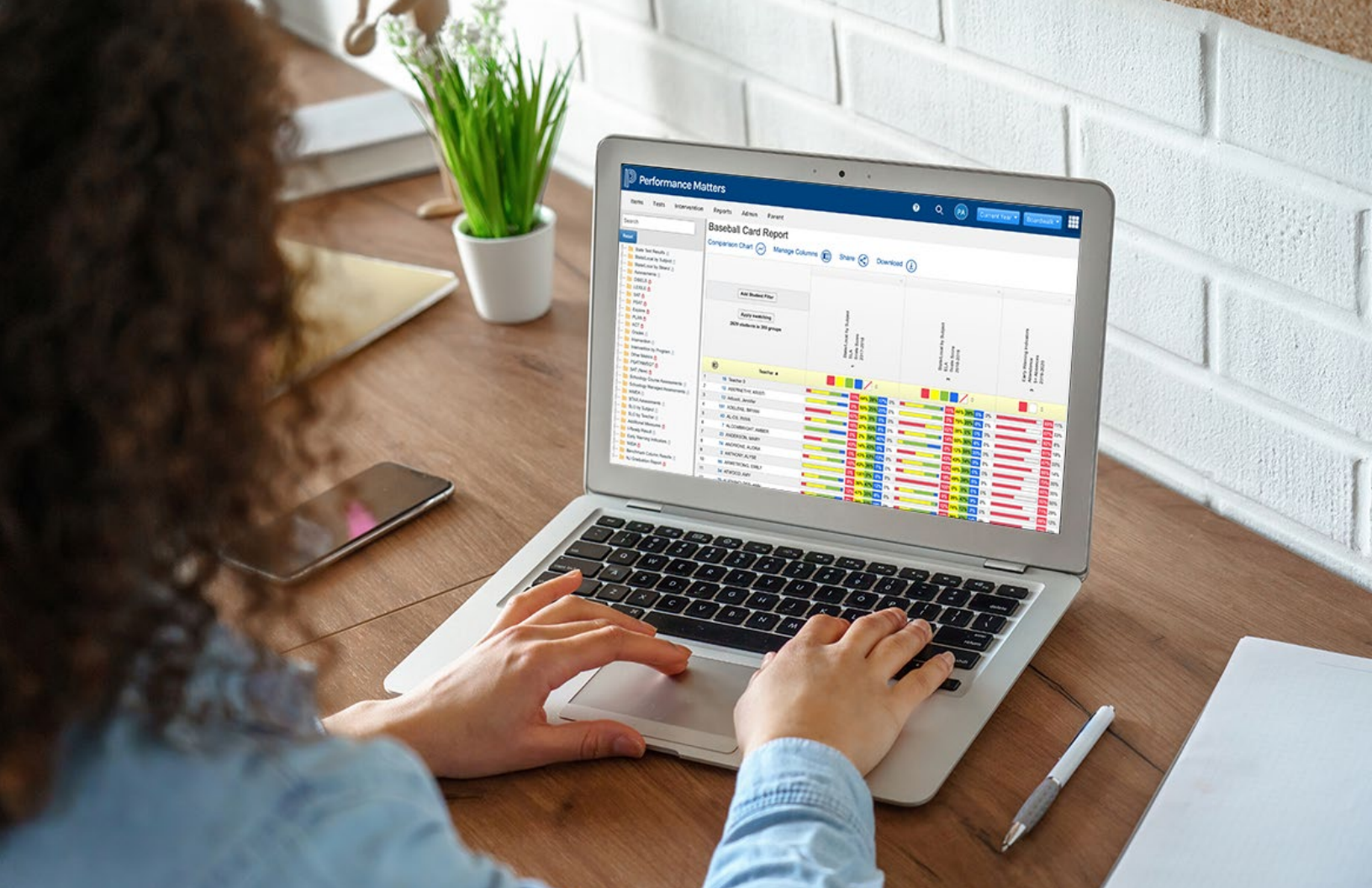
When a foundation for social and emotional skills is established early on, students transform into effective adults.

BECKY BALLBACH | Director of Student Support Services, Everett Public Schools, WA

How PowerSchool
Can Help Support Student, Educator, and Institutional SEL

The unified, interoperable solutions and products PowerSchool offers support educators' ability to impact their students' social, emotional, and behavioral learning needs while supporting multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

Our modern and integrated edtech solutions can help K-12 leaders support SEL, PBIS, and MTSS among their students, educators, and institutions. Principals and K-12 instructional leaders can leverage PowerSchool professional learning solutions to give teachers the support and resources they need to grow their skills and maximize classroom effectiveness. And PowerSchool's comprehensive data solutions support district-wide SEL and MTSS initiatives by providing holistic and actionable insights on SEL data across their entire institution.

The following provides a look at PowerSchool's suite of solutions that supports SEL initiatives at the classroom, school, and district levels.

Unified Insights

PowerSchool is the only provider of unified analytics solutions for educators with the experience and expertise to empower your teachers and help improve student outcomes.

Our solutions **work together**, ensuring you can combine data from disparate sources into single, cohesive visualizations of academic progress at the district, teacher, and student levels.

Unified Insights gives districts the tools they need to better leverage their data, leading the education industry in precision, accuracy, and performance by combining that data into a single, coherent view. Using Unified Insights™ Student Essentials, educators can easily identify students who need additional support, understand what kind of support is needed, manage the delivery of those supports, and understand when students are back on track. Furthermore, these tools support SEL initiatives by enabling K-12 leaders to drill down to each teacher's student data in a few clicks and determine if and how the professional learning courses they've completed may have impacted student learning.

> ❝
>
> **The ability to drill down from school-wide data to individual student data is a powerful support for instruction and school improvement.**
>
> **TIM SCHELL |** Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Waunakee Community School District, WI

PowerSchool Unified Classroom®

Unified Classroom helps K-12 leaders serve all their students' academic and social and emotional learning (SEL) needs with Performance Matters, Schoology Learning, Special Programs, and Behavior Support.

By connecting all the tools needed to deliver whole-child instruction, Unified Classroom gives teachers and administrators simplified access to critical data and the education behavior management tools they need to effectively manage SEL and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

Unified Classroom Performance Matters can give teachers access to important academic and assessment data about each student to help inform personalized instruction and gauge the effectiveness of ongoing MTSS efforts. The early warning system (EWS) in Performance Matters provides an intuitive view of student performance on local and third-party assessments, course grades, and assignments alongside behavior indicators—like discipline referrals, suspensions, and attendance.

Plus, educators can incorporate SEL indicators (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) into Performance Matters. **This robust student profile helps educators promote SEL competence and support while preventing adverse outcomes such as chronic absenteeism and dropouts.**
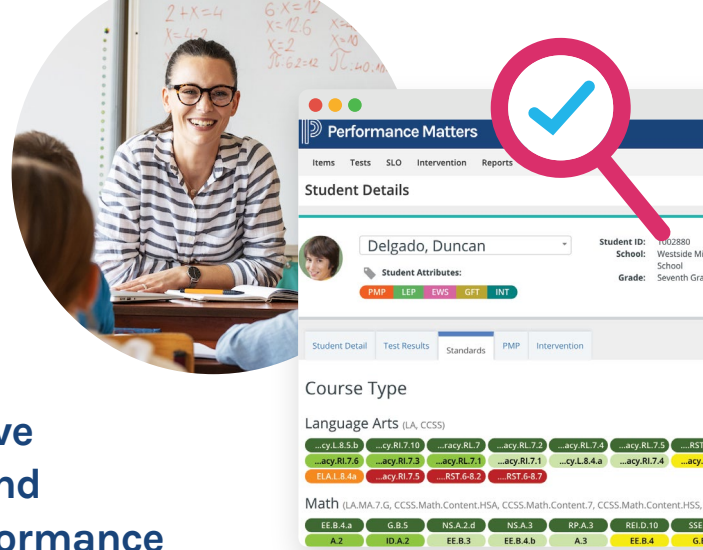
Case in Point:

"The power of Performance Matters is that we can put pretty much anything in it," says Molly Walker, Director of SEL & Measurement at [Hilliard City Schools](#) in Columbus, Ohio. "We've started to survey our students on how they feel. For SEL, we track 6 attributes: hope, sense of belonging, growth mindset, grit, compassion, and emotional regulation. We're starting to track students who are in certain interventions through this system, which makes it super easy when people ask, 'Is this working?'"

Unified Classroom also gives teachers access to pre-made CASEL-aligned surveys that can easily be rolled out to an entire district through Schoology Learning. Educators can use short- and long-form SEL competency surveys and an item bank of 138 pre-made items to make their own assessments. Educators are also empowered to quickly identify at-risk students by comparing this SEL data with classroom data and district-wide benchmarks.

Principals and other K-12 leaders can use Schoology Learning to deliver high-quality professional learning content to teachers using the same learning management system (LMS) they use for students. For example, principals can create their own courses or browse the content library for off-the-shelf courses to quickly implement as needed.

Additionally, schools and districts can use Schoology Groups to create extracurricular student and teacher professional learning communities (PLCs) dedicated to building SEL-related skills outside of regular coursework.

With Kickboard now part of PowerSchool's Unified Classroom® Behavior Support, educators can access the tools they need to support SEL, MTSS, and positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS) initiatives. These evidence-based frameworks provide a better way to integrate all the data needed to effectively manage SEL with direct, school-wide, and targeted student support, including helping improve student well-being, school culture, and equitable outcomes.
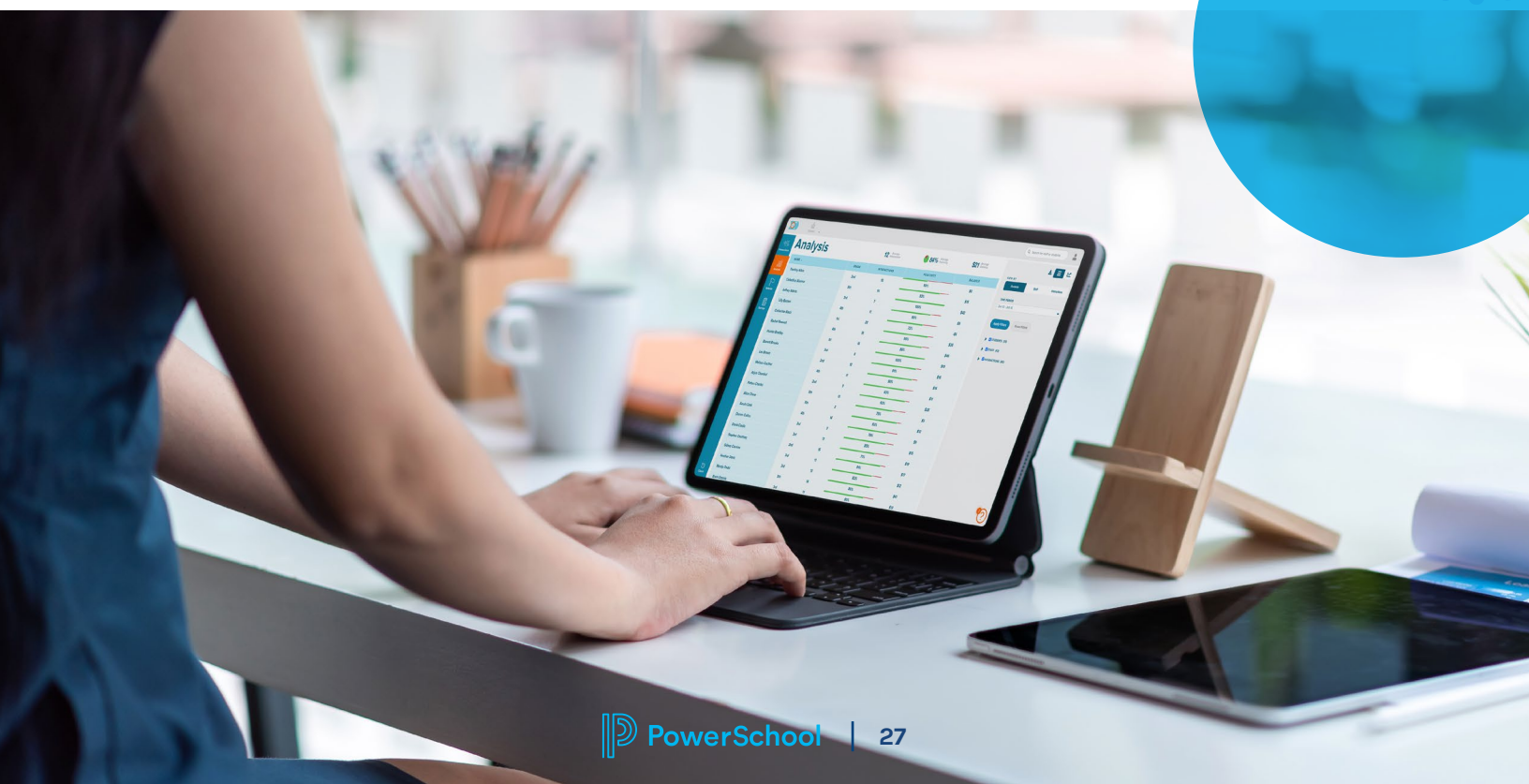
With Unified Classroom® Behavior Support, educators and administrators can adopt a more comprehensive approach to assessing and analyzing student behavior in the moment, including:

- **Centralizing all behavior management and reporting:** Educators can keep track of all student-focused initiatives, including SEL, PBIS, MTSS, overall student performance, and professional development programs in one place.

- **Providing complete and clear visibility to the whole child:** With a comprehensive view of social and emotional well-being and mental health data, combined with student performance, academic outcomes, demographic data, and attendance, educators will be able to better support their students' overall achievement and preparation for life beyond K-12.

- **Giving teachers back time with integration between behavior management and their PowerSchool solutions:** Single-sign-on (SSO) from Unified Classroom® Schoology Learning makes it easier for educators to manage and track their interactions with students. Data integration with PowerSchool SIS—like logging entries and managing incidents—and Unified Classroom® Performance Matters ensures data quality and eliminates the need for manual data imports and exports.

Unified Classroom® Behavior Support helps educators streamline and simplify behavior management and interventions, positive behavior reinforcement, classroom management, SEL, and district-wide school culture analysis.

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Enhancing our family communications with the help of Kickboard has been one of the major reasons for reducing detentions and suspensions school-wide.

KYLE COFFMAN | Principal,
Plymouth Community School Corporation, IN

Unified Talent™ Professional Learning

A modern, integrated professional learning solution helps principals and K-12 instructional leaders give teachers the support and resources they need to drive student success all year, including SEL initiatives.

Unified Talent™ Professional Learning helps educators consistently grow their skills and enhance classroom effectiveness with content and plans tailored to their students' needs. With the Professional Learning platform, administrators can also provide SEL surveys to gauge where teachers stand emotionally to better support their needs. Using surveys and teacher evaluations that incorporate SEL areas of focus, districts can further reinforce their SEL goals.

Providing teachers with the general skills development to teach in a hybrid environment while using new tools comfortably, teachers gain the ability to address SEL needs with confidence. Improve teachers' ability to provide SEL support to their students while giving them the SEL skills they need to avoid burnout.

> "
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> Professional learning gets assigned during the onboarding process according to each new hire's individual needs, creating a personalized learning experience. Evaluators can suggest professional learning content while logging observation results. Communication has vastly improved, with principals and administrators able to support each teacher's unique career growth.

DEBRA LANE | Director of Talent Development, Alexandria City Public Schools, VA

Naviance by PowerSchool

Naviance by PowerSchool is the leading college, career, and life readiness (CCLR) platform that enables students to discover their strengths and interests, build critical social and emotional skills, create actionable goals, and find their best-fit path after high school.

Naviance helps ensure that all paths students take after high school lead to fulfilling and meaningful careers. As a complement to SEL initiatives, **Naviance helps students understand their strengths, manage emotions, build relationships, plan, and make informed decisions.** Its built-in survey tool allows counselors to reach out to students and assess their attitudes and general state of mind.

Naviance provides online content and assessments aligned to CASEL's five pillars of SEL, so schools can flexibly incorporate critical social and emotional learning into the curriculum at multiple stages throughout middle and high school. The Naviance by PowerSchool team was recently selected to join the SEL Providers Council. The council, overseen by CASEL, brings together providers of high-quality SEL programs, curricula, and assessments for collective learning, thought leadership, advocacy, and action.
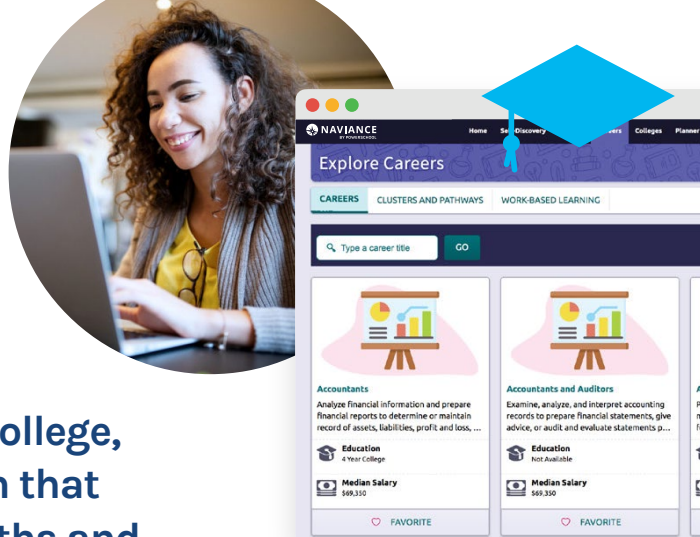
Cases in Point:

Everett Public Schools (EPS), a district located in Everett, Washington, launched Naviance as part of its focus on SEL. Since introducing Naviance's social and emotional curriculum, the district has consistently surpassed the state's graduation rate. **EPS has experienced a 65% increase in on-time graduation and decreased drop-out rates by 50%.**

Read the case study

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the third largest school district in the United States, uses Naviance to help students develop transition skills, a key aspect of social and emotional learning. **The district has achieved a college enrollment rate of 68%, a 13% increase in just two years, and a 36% increase since 2006.**

Read the case study

Conclusion

The future of education is about students, teachers, and staff.

Now, more than ever, as communities determine how to safely return to hybrid and in-person learning, **SEL is critical to ensuring schools attend to the holistic needs of students, teachers, and staff**.

The future of education is about more than test scores and grades—it's about people. Unified technology gives district leadership comprehensive insights from multiple data sources, including the classroom, professional development activities, and more. With this holistic view, you can identify and address teachers' and students' unique needs. Support them with personalized learning, career support, and SEL.

See how unified technology can help your school or district support a brighter future for students, teachers, and staff.

Learn more

PowerSchool

Powering Brighter Futures

www.PowerSchool.com