Research Report

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Investing in Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning

Companion Guide to *Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review*

A growing body of research indicates that social and emotional competencies, such as collaboration and self-management, have important roles in students' success, both in and out of school. Proficiency in these competencies can enhance academic achievement and attainment (Durlak et al., 2011; Osher et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017); improve students' attitudes and behaviors toward themselves and others (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017); and have a positive impact on later-life outcomes, such as earnings (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; National Research Council, 2012). As a result, educators and policymakers are increasingly interested in helping students develop these competencies—a process known as social and emotional learning (SEL).

The importance of evidence-based SEL interventions gained salience as a result of the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. ESSA provides opportunities for state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to integrate SEL into schools' instructional activities and out-of-school time (OST) programs.[1] At least three funding streams within ESSA can be used to support SEL through explicit lessons on social and emotional competencies, incorporating instruction for SEL into academic curricula, and creating classroom environments and schoolwide climates favorable to SEL. However, many of the ESSA funding streams require education leaders at the state and local levels to demonstrate that selected interventions meet the evidence standards of the associated funding stream and are aligned to local needs as identified through a needs assessment. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) published nonregulatory guidance in September 2016 to assist education leaders in understanding the policy regulations and in selecting evidence-based interventions, as defined by ESSA (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, this guidance is limited in both its scope and the amount of detail provided; practitioners might need additional support to ensure compliance with ESSA's evidence regulations.

Even before statewide ESSA plans were enacted, educators across the United States were exploring new approaches to SEL. Results from a national survey of school principals suggest that large majorities of principals agreed that it was important to address SEL and had a plan for doing so, but many principals expressed a need to learn more about research-based SEL strategies (DePaoli, Atwell, and Bridgeland, 2017). Moreover, relatively few principals reported taking concrete steps to adopt evidence-based programs. Our report, *Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review* (Grant et al., 2017), describes the opportunities ESSA provides for supporting SEL, discusses the standards of evidence delineated under ESSA, and synthesizes the research base on SEL interventions with respect to those evidence standards. Several other resources have been developed to help educators identify SEL interventions to implement in their local contexts (CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). These resources help educators sift through a wide range of available interventions, as well as the unfiltered information they receive from vendors and other sources, in order to ensure that they are identifying evidence-based approaches.

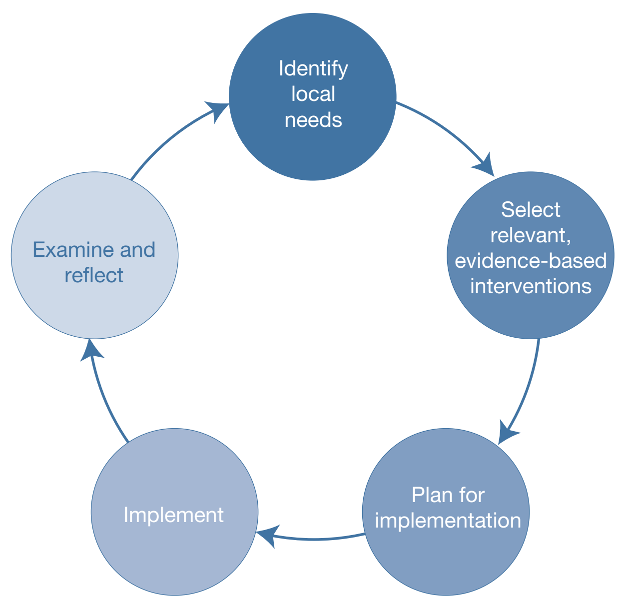
Although these resources can be enormously helpful to educators seeking to adopt SEL interventions that are grounded in high-quality research, they do not address all the steps that educators typically need to carry out to ensure high-quality implementation and promote positive outcomes. As shown in Figure 1 (adopted from the nonregulatory guidance), education leaders should carry out five steps to promote effective implementation of interventions; we discuss these steps later in this report. A crucial first step is a local needs assessment that helps identify strengths and weaknesses, which in turn can help educators determine which interventions will best meet each school's needs. Moreover, some ESSA funding streams require educators to conduct a needs assessment to ensure that school improvement efforts and the evidence-based interventions used to support

Abbreviations

CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
CNA	comprehensive needs assessment
CORE	California Office to Reform Education
ED	U.S. Department of Education
ELA	English language arts
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
LEA	local education agency
OST	out-of-school time
PD	professional development
REL	Regional Educational Laboratory
SEA	state education agency
SEL	social and emotional learning
SNA	segmented needs assessment

FIGURE 1

Steps for Promoting Effective Investments of Federal Funds



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, 2016.
NOTE: The nonregulatory guidance for ESSA describes five steps that SEAs, LEAs, and schools should take to promote effective investments in federal funds.

those efforts are tailored to meet the needs of the local community (Chiefs for Change and Results for America, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Even in the absence of ESSA requirements, selecting SEL interventions based on high-quality, relevant data can be beneficial. Most educators have access to a broad range of data that could inform a decision about what SEL interventions to adopt, but it can be challenging to make sense of these data and to synthesize the information into a coherent narrative that will inform decisions. The purpose of this companion guide to our evidence review on SEL interventions (Grant et al., 2017) is to provide support for educators on assessing local SEL needs and using these needs assessments to integrate SEL into school practices and improvement efforts. While our guide is especially pertinent to educators looking to leverage federal ESSA funds to support SEL, it can support any SEA, LEA, or educational leader in responsibly allocating scarce resources to support school-based SEL interventions.

Overarching Considerations

Three overarching considerations should inform how readers utilize this guide to inform local needs assessments and identify SEL improvement strategies: equity, coherence, and capacity.

Equity

Across the United States, SEAs and LEAs are leveraging opportunities within ESSA to address system-level sources of inequity. Many SEAs and LEAs have established equity plans that guide local practice and decisionmaking. A needs assessment should be aligned with any equity plans that SEAs or LEAs have established or are developing.

Regardless of whether an SEA or LEA has developed an explicit equity plan, decisions about SEL practices should be informed by equity-related considerations that are relevant in that particular local or state context. Students from historically underserved groups are more likely than their more-advantaged peers to face challenging school and neighborhood environments that can limit learning opportunities. These include actions that are under schools' control, such as inequitable use of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g., suspensions) or inequities in student access to high-quality, rigorous coursework (Kostyo, Cardichon, and Darling-Hammond, 2018). Students might also be affected by biases that adults bring to the school or classroom or by conditions in the community that schools are less able to influence.

Education leaders can use the needs assessment process to identify potential sources of inequity and develop plans to address them. SEL programs and practices can support district and state equity goals, though leaders also need to keep in mind the limitations inherent in the use of SEL data and programs to promote equity. SEL assessments, for instance, may not be culturally appropriate for all students, which could result in scores that do not accurately reflect these students' competencies. Students from traditionally underserved groups often lack access to SEL-supportive environments and activities, and in many cases they tend to perform more poorly than their more-advantaged counterparts on assessments of social and emotional competencies (Hough, Kalogrides, and Loeb, 2017). Education leaders need to explore the reasons for these disparities, which could include a combination of assessment bias and differences in educational opportunities. Analyses of data from a needs assessment should seek to identify and understand these inequities and should be used to inform decisions about SEL interventions that can address them.

Education leaders can access several resources to support their equity work. Some leaders might have access to equity experts (e.g., from local universities) who can serve as thought partners throughout the needs assessment process, providing guidance on how to adapt SEL interventions that meet the needs of all students. Community-based organizations that represent different constituencies also could be asked to provide input at different stages in the needs assessment process. The Learning Policy Institute has provided several reports and briefs related to the promotion of equity under ESSA, including one focused on SEL (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). Viewing decisions about SEL through an equity lens can help leaders determine whether some students are benefitting more than others from new interventions and can shed light on possible remedies.

Coherence

Research on school reform suggests that the coherence of concurrent improvement efforts is an important component of effective reform implementation (Newmann et al., 2001). The same principle is likely to apply in the SEL context, where there exists a diversity of ways that schools might choose to engage in SEL. Students' social and emotional development can be promoted through stand-alone curricula or practices that are explicitly designed to enhance learning of one or more social or emotional competencies, integration of SEL-promoting practices into academic instruction or other activities, or efforts to improve schoolwide climate and culture (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Decisionmakers should consider strategies to promote a coherent approach to enacting SEL interventions; this could include the adoption of a framework or set of best practices that underlies all SEL activity (Stillman et al., 2018) and the use of a common set of data from a needs assessment to inform decisions about all aspects of SEL in a school. Moreover, decisionmakers should help educators understand how SEL can reinforce—rather than detract from—other SEA and LEA goals, such as the need to ensure that students meet academic content standards (Johnson and Wiener, 2017).

In the same way that chosen interventions and practices should enhance rather than detract from the cohesiveness of the many initiatives and strategies that local communities implement for school improvement, SEAs and LEAs may want to consider how the practices and data sources discussed throughout this guide overlap or integrate with other planned needs assessments or evaluations. Where possible, any newly identified assessment practices should complement, not duplicate, efforts already in place. Users of this guide may consider engaging or collaborating with colleagues outside the SEL realm—such as academic curriculum developers—to review planned practices for coherence.

Capacity

Although the comprehensive approach we describe in this guide is ideal, we recognize that enacting the full set of activities or strategies in this guide may not be feasible, depending on local resources and capacity. For example, implementing all of the recommended data collection and analyses may be beyond the expertise or availability of local staff. In addition, conducting a needs assessment may place additional burden on already–limited local resources, including staff time, staff expertise, and SEA or LEA funding. Consequently, educators who are interested in adopting parts of this approach should review the topics addressed in this guide and focus on the activities that are most relevant to a particular decision or context. SEAs and LEAs should also consider where existing or new partnerships—e.g., a Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) or an external research partner—may increase the local capability to implement the sophisticated data collection and analysis strategies identified in this guide. Overall, we encourage users of this guide to identify current capabilities and what is feasible in the short term, given current resources and capacity. Over time, and as additional resources become available, education leaders and decisionmakers can fold in the recommendations in this guide that were not initially adopted.

In the remaining sections of this guide, we discuss how to identify local SEL needs; how to prioritize needs for selecting SEL interventions; and how to implement, monitor, and evaluate SEL interventions once they are selected. These activities roughly align with the steps depicted in Figure 1.

Identifying Local Social and Emotional Learning Needs

An important first step in planning for the selection and implementation of SEL interventions involves identifying the specific student and school needs that these interventions are intended to address.[2] A needs assessment is a systematic practice for assessing strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement within an organization (Corbett and Redding, 2017). It often includes an analysis of student and school characteristics and performance, available local resources, and constraining or enabling conditions influencing the implementation of existing or new initiatives. In the ESSA context, the results of a needs assessment guide educators' selection of priority improvement areas and the interventions that will be implemented to address those areas.

The WestEd Center on School Turnaround (Corbett and Redding, 2017) identifies two types of needs assessments: comprehensive and segmented. Comprehensive needs assessments (CNAs) focus on all aspects of performance within an organization. For schools, this means considering the full scope of a school's instructional programs, human capital, and resource allocations, as well as the extent to which current practices and resources meet the learning and developmental needs of the school's students. Segmented needs assessments (SNAs) focus on a subset of an organization's performance or practice. For example, an SNA may focus solely on assessing the SEL needs of students in grades K–5. The type of needs assessment—comprehensive or segmented—guides the information collected and analyzed to identify needs and plans for improvement. Under the ESSA statute, SEAs and LEAs are required to base comprehensive support and improvement plans on a school-level needs assessment. The information and discussion presented in this guide focus predominantly on CNAs, summarizing the data and information sources that can be used in a CNA to support the incorporation of SEL into planned school improvement efforts. Notably, these same data features can be used in an SNA to inform the selection of local SEL interventions, as well as the more general applications of data-informed decisionmaking outside the context of ESSA.

Developing a Needs Assessment

The results of a needs assessment should guide the selection of strategies and approaches to be included in a school's improvement plan. In many states, SEAs and LEAs have established tools or practices for needs assessments, and they have provided guidance or regulations on the types of data and information that should be assessed to identify school needs. Local communities can expand on SEA and LEA requirements to ensure that local context is reflected in needs assessments. It is important to note that for some ESSA funding streams, schools and districts are only able to use interventions that align with what is measured in a needs assessment. Thus, to incorporate interventions for SEL using these funds, indicators related to SEL must be assessed.

Because a needs assessment is required for some funding streams in ESSA and is closely tied to school performance and improvement, needs assessments will typically draw on measures used in the statewide accountability system, such as standardized test scores and student attendance data. However, the policy also includes a stipulation that SEAs and LEAs identify the root causes of the needs identified in each community. As such, many SEAs and LEAs have expanded beyond common administrative data sources to incorporate observation and assessment rubrics that focus on the daily practices and policies of a school.

In what follows, we briefly describe several data sources that might be incorporated into a needs assessment to help identify SEL-related needs. Prior to collecting any new data, we suggest that decisionmakers develop a clear plan for how each data source will be used to identify needs related to students' social and emotional competences, as well as the broader learning environment that can support students' social and emotional development.[3] Although some of the data sources listed below draw on information that is already available, others impose some burden on educators, students, or both, so it is important that the benefits of gathering this information outweigh the costs. In addition, some degree of parsimony in the data elements collected can reduce the time required to analyze and process the information, and the elements can facilitate interpretation and use by educators.

For each category of data described in the next section, we briefly discuss its relevance to the assessment of SEL needs and, where relevant, the types of indicators that can be generated from it. These data sources are also summarized in Table 1. We also describe the key limitations of each source. Educators should keep these limitations in mind and should evaluate each source in light of technical and practical considerations.

TABLE 1

Sources of Data for SEL-Related Needs Assessments

Data Type	Data Examples
Administrative	• Student achievement scores • Attendance or disciplinary records • Background demographics of students or staff • Staff employment history • Staff performance on evaluations
Surveys	• Student, parents, staff, or community surveys on school climate or school support and safety
Observation	• Structured classroom observations that measure quality and content of instruction
Professional development records	• Professional development attendance • Records on professional development content
SEL curricula	• Curricula used with students in and out of school • Competencies on which the curricula focus at each grade level • Dosage of curricula students receive
LEA and school priorities and goals	• Information identifying current priorities and goals, obtained through established documents, focus groups, or interviews with key personnel and stakeholders
Local conditions	• Demographics, resources, and conditions of the communities surrounding the LEA or school
Social and emotional competency	• Measures of student competencies from student self-reports, adult ratings of students, or direct assessments of students

Data Sources That Can Inform a Needs Assessment for SEL

Administrative Data

Each year, schools and districts collect data on students, staff, programs, and policies. Many of these data points are used by administrators on an ongoing basis not only to ensure the instructional programs at a school are delivered as intended, but also to demonstrate compliance with local, state, and federal regulations. These data include student enrollment, demographics, achievement, attendance, and behavioral records. Staff data often include education and employment history, credentials, and certifications; professional development courses attended; records of absence or leave; and performance on evaluation measures—e.g., classroom observation rubrics. Program data can include costs, dates of delivery, students or staff who participated in a program and the dates of participation, and any program implementation or evaluation tracking. Such administrative data can be utilized in a needs assessment. However, use of these data must comply with local and state policy regarding data security and privacy protections, so users must first be aware of these policies.

The benefits of these data sources are that they bear no additional cost to schools or districts when using them in a needs assessment, other than the time required to analyze and report on the data. For the most part, these data are already integrated into regular school operations. Moreover, the specific data collected each year tend to remain consistent over time, enabling the tracking of measures across multiple years. The major limitation of such data is that the team conducting the needs assessment generally has no control over when or in what form these data are collected. Moreover, the format of the data may differ from what the needs assessment team would ideally utilize. Understanding what data are available and in which format can help the needs assessment team identify the types of measures they will be able to create or access.

Decisionmakers can use these data in a variety of ways to support assessment of SEL needs and opportunities. For instance, student attendance measures can support assessment of how much exposure each student receives to the curriculum and programs within a school: Students who only receive 80 percent of an SEL curriculum may be expected to demonstrate lower progress toward meeting key outcomes than students who are present 95 percent of the days the SEL curriculum is delivered. Rates of individual student absences may also reflect levels of student engagement, a student's sense of safety and support within a school, or the quality of relationships a student has developed with peers and teachers. The needs assessment team should consider each potential data source in light of its relevance to understanding what SEL supports students have received and what those students are likely to need in the future. At the same time, the team should not assume that each source of administrative data has clear implications for assessing SEL needs simply because the data are easily available.

Indicators related to student behavior, such as disciplinary referrals, can be an especially valuable source of information to guide decisions about SEL approaches. However, decisionmakers should be cautious about using SEL interventions solely as ways to address student behavior challenges and should use behavior data as only one of multiple sources of information for identifying students' social and emotional needs. Educators should take a strengths-based approach to SEL—one that focuses on a broad range of developmental needs and promotes growth for all students, rather than a deficit-based approach that seeks primarily to remedy student behavior problems (Weissberg et al., 2015). In addition, data on disciplinary incidents should be viewed as sources of evidence regarding not just student behaviors, but also adults' responses to those behaviors, and should be interpreted in the context of the school's disciplinary policies and approaches. This context could help decisionmakers assess whether changes to the school's disciplinary policies might be warranted by clarifying the extent to which school policies are restorative rather than exclusionary or punitive and whether these policies are applied equitably across student groups. Policies that focus on restorative approaches and are equitably applied can help promote students' social and emotional development (Greenberg et al., 2017).

Measures of student academic performance are often used to identify areas of need and choose grade-level–appropriate SEL strategies. Student assessments can include annual state standardized tests, language fluency assessments, and formative or curricula-based assessments. Potential uses of these data include identifying subgroups of students who may struggle to work through challenging math problems or complete close reading of texts. These data may suggest the need for focusing on persistence or emotion regulation (e.g., managing frustration). English language learners might demonstrate struggles with speaking and might benefit from relationship-building activities where they work on small-group tasks to practice interacting and talking with peers. Adopted interventions can serve to develop social and emotional competencies while promoting additional academic-subject learning. Thus, utilizing the various types of student assessment data can guide the selection of SEL-related practices while maintaining coherence with the many improvement goals schools identify.

Surveys and Observations of School and Classroom Environment

Measures of student-adult relationships and other aspects of the learning environment can shed light on the experiences that are provided in the classroom or throughout the broader school. These measures often take the form of surveys administered to school staff, students, and family members. The Tripod survey, for example, asks students to rate their classroom environments on several dimensions, such as the extent to which teachers hold high expectations for students and the extent to which students believe teachers care about them (Tripod Education Partners, 2018). The U.S. Department of Education developed the ED School Climate Surveys to measure student, staff, and family perceptions of school climate; the surveys are free for SEAs and LEAs, and they are accompanied by supporting documentation about how to interpret and use the data (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research has developed teacher and student surveys that provide information about several aspects of school and classroom climate and supports (Chicago Public Schools and UChicagoImpact, 2018). School and classroom climate measures can be particularly valuable for helping educators assess the extent to which students and staff believe that the school environment offers the physical and emotional safety and supports that are important for promoting SEL outcomes (Devaney and Berg, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

In addition, many districts use structured classroom observation rubrics to inform teacher evaluation or professional development needs, and these data can indicate the quality and content of instruction. Some widely used rubrics, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), include measures of such factors as emotional support (Pianta, La Paro, and Hamre, 2008). They can be particularly valuable for documenting educators' current capacity, as well as tailoring professional development and other supports to prepare them to promote SEL in a more intensive way (Yoder, 2014). Structured observation protocols or surveys can also provide evidence of the extent to which educators are adopting specific SEL-focused practices and whether those practices are used in an equitable way across classrooms and student groups.

Surveys and observations can generate indicators of school or classroom environment that can be incorporated into a needs assessment. Many surveys are designed to support the aggregation of individual survey items into a scale or index that captures an aspect of the environment, such as quality of relationships among staff or degree of challenge in instruction. Observation rubrics also typically support the aggregation of individual rubric items for constructing scales or indices that reflect observed aspects of a learning environment, such as opportunities that youths have to develop a sense of belonging or make choices based on their own interests.

Surveys and observations provide opportunities to gather input from key stakeholder groups and to capture direct evidence of classroom and school practices and the overall learning environment. However, users of these data should keep in mind the possibility that the validity of inferences based on these measures could be threatened by either conscious or unconscious efforts to manipulate the results, which are especially likely if stakes are attached to the measures. For instance, principals tend to assign higher ratings to classroom observations when those data are used for high-stakes teacher evaluation compared with when they are primarily used for professional learning purposes (Grissom and Loeb, 2017). In addition, observations require substantial up-front investments of time and resources for training to ensure the collection of useful data, yet these observations usually capture information at a single point in time rather than events over the course of the academic year. Surveys can be designed to gather information more quickly over a longer time period, but surveys rely on respondents' ability to recall earlier events and their willingness to respond candidly. Surveys also sometimes lack important contextual information that can facilitate accurate interpretation.

Professional Development Offerings and Participation

Data on professional development (PD) can provide insight on what SEL-related dimensions are covered in workshops, coaching, or mentoring sessions and who is participating in these sessions (e.g., teachers, principals, other school staff). Data on participation in workshops or job-embedded PD, such as coaching and mentoring, can be collected in several ways. For instance, a central office staff member can track the focus and amount of various types of PD provided, whereas data on participation might be collected through staff surveys or sign-in sheets. In addition to collecting participation data, information on the content of workshops and coaching and mentoring can provide helpful data on topics covered. Detailed information on content can include agendas, lesson plans, and coaching logs or reports. Many schools and districts already collect data on PD offerings and participation, although the specific data collected varies across schools and districts.

Having detailed data on professional development received and offered and on satisfaction with workshops or coaching and mentoring can provide evidence on existing gaps in the types of trainings that are offered and who is receiving that training. For example, data on participation can shed light on whether all, some, or few staff are taking up offerings and whether some staff are attending or receiving training on certain SEL topics more frequently than others. Additionally, PD offerings data can help determine whether effective strategies are being employed—such as the provision of active learning opportunities, as opposed to workshops or lecture series, which may be less effective (Garet et al., 2001).

Although PD offerings and participation data provide valuable information on trainings offered and trainings received, these data do not indicate whether the trainings translated to improved practice. For example, a teacher might receive several job-embedded coaching sessions but might employ fewer SEL-related instructional practices than others who had fewer training sessions. Additionally, PD attendance data does not signal engagement in the session or workshop. Decisionmakers should consider drawing on other available data sources that could better assess actual practices, such as classroom observations and surveys that the school might already be using, to supplement professional development participation data.

Information About SEL Curricula in School and During Out-of-School Time

Schools and districts may wish to review SEL curricula used in classrooms or OST activities that might provide important SEL opportunities to students. Information collected on curricula—such as type (e.g., brand, package) used, dosage, lesson instructors (e.g., teachers, guidance counselors), and other components—can inform which SEL-related content is provided, and how it is provided. Curricula may vary by grade level or classroom, so collecting detailed information is important to understand this variation. Curricula information is likely to be collected at multiple levels, such as the classroom, school, or LEA. In addition to reviewing formal curricula, decisionmakers should collect information on informal SEL activities (e.g., assemblies or rewards for demonstrating school values), school mission or vision statements, and school policy documents.

OST data might include grade levels and students served, activities provided, curricula used, staff qualifications and training, and program quality. Detailed information on student participation (such as daily attendance for specific activities) and OST program features (such as the type of instruction provided, opportunity for choice, and staff qualifications) can illuminate students' SEL experiences outside of the school day. OST data are typically collected by the OST program and can be stored in a central database, such as with a YMCA home office or school district, or with independent programs. Obtaining these data and linking them with other school data may pose challenges, especially if data are missing, incomplete, or lacking sufficient student identifiers to enable linking.

A challenge to reviewing curricula is that educators sometimes implement only parts of a curriculum rather than the entire curriculum. Tracking variations in curricula used is important for understanding strengths and gaps, but it is likely difficult to do so if the data are not collected at the appropriate level and in a way that addresses incomplete implementation. Additionally, data collected on OST programs may vary by program or may not be complete enough to conduct a full needs and content analysis of the programs and activities in which students are engaged. Data from external programs, such as those that are not affiliated with schools, may require extensive data cleaning and mapping to school data to understand program content and student participation, which requires staff time and data expertise.

Local Education Agency and School Social and Emotional Learning Priorities and Goals

Conducting a thorough needs assessment includes documenting current LEA and school SEL priorities and goals. This information can help LEAs and school leaders refine priorities and goals, and it helps ensure that decisions about SEL interventions are informed by an understanding of what educators want to accomplish with those interventions. Information about LEA and school priorities and goals might be obtained through document reviews, interviews, or focus groups. The latter two can help leaders learn about what SEL priorities and goals staff believe should be included in the LEA and school plans and how practices should be altered to meet the goals.

Publicly available resources, such as those provide by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL),[4] can aid in gathering data on LEA and school priorities and goals and developing key indicators from the data to determine whether current practices are meeting them. For example, CASEL provides separate tools and assessments for central offices and schools so that leaders can ask targeted questions and gather data about school and district SEL capacity and available resources. Assessment tools—either from a partner like CASEL or developed locally—enable leaders to share findings with stakeholders and may help leaders gain consensus on areas for improvement. Additionally, a thorough review of capacity, resources, needs, priorities, and goals may benefit from the inclusion of outside experts who can help gather the data and synthesize it for school and district leaders. Such a thorough needs and priorities review is likely to require a significant amount of staff time and resources; outside experts can provide needed support in an objective way.

A thorough assessment has some drawbacks. First, the assessment is happening at one point in time. Consequently, it is likely that practices will change, school staff and teacher opinions could shift, and school funding might alter priorities and goals. Continually updating the assessment and priorities and goals would be ideal but requires significant time and resource investments. Second, available resources—including time—could limit the amount of input provided by school or district staff. Having insufficient information could lead to the establishment of goals or priorities that are not shared widely within the school or district or goals or priorities that may be hard to attain with the available resources.

Local Conditions Related to Contextual Factors

Considering local conditions is critically important for informing an SEL-focused needs assessment. Community data on neighborhood conditions, family poverty levels, adverse childhood experiences (e.g., stress and trauma), and available family resources (such as food or nutrition assistance or housing assistance) can help educators understand ways that students' environments might influence their needs. Data on neighborhood and community conditions, such as demographic information and crime statistics, are likely available from county or state government websites. Additionally, some demographic information (e.g., race and ethnicity, family poverty, home ownership) is available at the county level from the American Community Survey (ACS).[5] Community resource data, such as the availability of community services, most likely can be found through local United Way chapters or county government websites. More detailed data on local context can also be gathered through family member surveys or focus groups, although these data may be less representative than government-gathered statistics. Gathering local context data from publicly available databases, such as ACS; hosting focus groups with families; or fielding surveys can be resource intensive, and data analyses from these sources will require expert staff or support from external partners. Additionally, local context data will not necessarily provide a complete picture of student life and should be considered as one category of data in the needs assessment.

Social and Emotional Competency Assessments

Finally, measures of students' social and emotional competencies can help schools identify those areas where students are in need of support, either for the student body as a whole or for specific subgroups of students. Adopting social and emotional competency assessments can be helpful not only for an initial needs assessment, but also for monitoring students' development of these competencies and tracking the outcomes of SEL interventions. Several resources provide information about social and emotional competency assessments; these include the RAND Education Assessment Finder (RAND Corporation, 2018), the Assessment Work Group Guide (Measuring SEL, 2018), and the American Institute for Research's Ready to Assess tool (American Institutes for Research, 2015).

Most social and emotional competency assessments can be classified into three broad categories: student self-report surveys, which ask students to answer questions or respond to prompts about their behaviors and beliefs; ratings of student behaviors or competencies provided by others, including peers or adults, such as teachers or family members; and direct assessments of students' competencies that require students to apply their skills directly to answer questions or solve problems. McKown (2015) provides additional detail and explanation of the strengths and limitations of various approaches.

Each of the three assessment approaches has limitations, including threats to validity. For example, student self-reports can produce inaccurate information if the reading level of the questions is too high, and self-reports can be subject to various types of reporting biases. Teacher reports can be burdensome and may also be subject to biases, possibly unconscious, related to the characteristics of students with whom teachers typically interact or the prior exposure teachers have had to SEL-related concepts. Teacher reports also focus on observable behaviors and therefore might lead to inaccurate inferences if students' actions do not reflect all of their underlying competencies. Direct assessments are, in general, less subject to the reporting biases that can affect student and teacher reports, but there are few such assessments available for use in schools, and the administration of such assessments often requires technological resources and support that might not be available. Moreover, the performance-based tasks that these assessments typically include can be unfamiliar to students, and the scoring protocols are usually more opaque than those for student and teacher reports. As with all assessments, educators should use these only to support inferences and uses for which validity and reliability evidence has been gathered.

Another challenge that users of social and emotional competency data might face is a lack of availability of assessments for all grade levels and competencies. The gaps in availability of high-quality assessments for some grade levels and competencies

Examples of Social and Emotional Learning–Related Measures in State and District Needs Assessments

Many states and districts have already integrated SEL-focused measures from administrative data, surveys, and observations into their accountability systems and comprehensive needs assessments. Below, we highlight a few examples of the data sources being utilized.

- The Colorado Department of Education integrates a wide range of data sources into its Unified Improvement Planning. These sources include survey measures assessing student perceptions of safety and climate and a diagnostic appraisal rubric. Among other critical aspects of a school's instructional environment, the rubric includes assessing the degree to which instructional planning involves a focus on student interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, such as collaboration, self-direction, invention, and the degree to which the school is a welcoming and inviting environment for students, staff, and families (Colorado Department of Education, 2012).
- As of fall 2018, the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) districts incorporate measures of student SEL in the accountability system and rely on student self-report surveys of students in grades 5–12. These surveys measure self-efficacy, growth mindset, self-management, and social awareness. CORE's School Quality Improvement Index is published annually and calculates both status and change on these SEL measures (CORE Districts, 2017).
- The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) provides LEAs with a School Climate Measurement Package at no cost. The package includes surveys for students, family members, and staff. Currently, only a subset of schools are expected to implement the survey as part of their needs assessment. According to the state's approved ESSA state plan, the TDOE is considering a requirement for all of the lowest-performing schools to administer the surveys. Regardless, the TDOE suggests that having accessible school climate data enables communities to understand the relationship between the learning conditions to which students are exposed and the academic outcomes those students achieve (Tennessee Department of Education, 2018a and 2018b).

create opportunities for LEAs to collaborate with assessment developers and researchers to explore new assessment approaches and pilot them (LaRocca and Krachman, 2018). These types of collaborations can help generate better assessments that meet the needs of the field, even if they do not immediately produce data that are usable for a needs assessment.

Evidence regarding students' social and emotional competencies might also be gleaned from other sources, such as report cards and records of students' extracurricular activity participation. However, using these sources to make inferences about competencies is not straightforward and should be done with caution and in relation to findings from other data sources. Table 2 lists some important practical and technical considerations that should inform the selection of assessments. These considerations include the technical quality of the assessment and the practical conditions and constraints that need to be addressed to ensure that administration and use of the assessment can be carried out in a sound and appropriate way.

Analyzing Data for a Needs Assessment

A needs assessment should not only utilize data from multiple sources (e.g., administrative records, observations of classroom practices) but should also examine the available data using multiple analytic approaches. In this section, we describe different types of analyses and highlight how they can contribute to the identification of need or demonstration of improvement. Not all data sources can be examined using each approach (e.g., multiple years of data might not be available), but local communities should consider which approaches will provide the type of information needed to identify and address local priorities. Additionally, communities should consult with SEA or LEA staff or external partners with the needed analytic expertise to ensure that the desired analyses are appropriate and feasible to provide the needed information.

Cross-sectional analyses are methods that look at data at a single point in time and for a subset of observations (e.g., only third graders) in the data. For

TABLE 2

Considerations When Selecting Social and Emotional Competency Assessments

Practical Considerations	
Cost	Consider total dollar amount required for initial acquisition and ongoing administration
Required training	Consider training required for administration, scoring, and use of the assessment
Ease of scoring	Consider whether scoring is done by computers or by people and whether complex scoring rules are involved
Ease of administration	Consider administration mode (e.g., paper, computer, behavioral observation) and whether time and other resources will support it
Ease of technological implementation, if applicable	For technology-based assessments, consider requirements related to hardware, software, and internet access, as well as needed supports (e.g., support from a district technology coordinator)
Technical Considerations	
Validity	Consider extent to which evidence supports the intended score interpretations and uses
Reliability	Consider extent to which the assessment produces similar results under consistent conditions
Fairness	Consider extent to which evidence supports the intended score interpretations and uses for individuals from all relevant subgroups

example, the self-report scores for students, by grade level, on a self-efficacy scale from the most recent school year provide a cross-section of data that can be examined.

Longitudinal analyses evaluate performance over time. For example, longitudinal methods can be used to follow a cohort of students from kindergarten to fifth grade to track how rates of annual school attendance change from one year to the next. Longitudinal methods can also be used to explore how attendance by successive cohorts of third-grade students changes over time (e.g., from 2010 to 2018). Analyses such as the first example, which follows a single cohort as they progress through school, can support different inferences than the second example, which examines performance or behaviors for a different set of students each year. Both approaches can help communities identify whether the current programs or practices are creating improved allocations, opportunities, and outcomes for students and schools, even when end goals have yet to be met.

Comparative analyses assess the performance of a group relative to some external target, benchmark, or similar group. Accountability systems commonly compare student achievement to performance targets set by the state. Here, performance may be identified as being below, at, or above expectations. Performance can be compared with important evidence-informed benchmarks or locally established goals (e.g., every student will receive at least 30 hours of explicit SEL instruction in a school year). Finally, comparative analyses can compare more than one group on a measure. For example, some communities may be interested in tracking how well a school is progressing toward the goal of reducing chronic absenteeism relative to similar schools in the district. Schools closer to meeting program goals might need less support to reach said goal than schools well below the benchmark. Comparative analyses can help contextualize cross-sectional or longitudinal analyses by identifying areas or places where limited resources are most needed. These analyses can be particularly helpful for identifying success stories—e.g., if a particular school shows greater progress on an outcome when compared with other similarly situated schools in terms of factors such as funding and student need, the successful school could host visits by staff from other schools or could make its staff available for outreach to support shared learning.

Subgroup analyses, a type of comparative analysis, are often used to highlight how performance, opportunities, or resources are allocated across important groups of students within a school or district. Demographic-based subgroups (e.g., racial or ethnic groups, students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English language learners, students with disabilities) are common focuses of these analyses. Additional subgroups may be defined by grade levels, age, gender, or other characteristics relevant and critical in the local context. Disaggregating needs assessment measures by subgroups helps communities understand current educational disparities, which is necessary for identifying root causes of and advancing strategies to address issues of inequity (Aspen Institute, 2018).

Stakeholder Engagement

ESSA creates new opportunities for SEAs and LEAs to engage stakeholders in school improvement efforts (Council of Chief School Officers and Partners for Each and Every Child, 2017).[6] Thoughtful and effective stakeholder engagement is an essential element in developing and conducting a successful needs assessment (Cuiccio and Husby-Slater, 2018). Certain funding streams within ESSA (e.g., Promise Neighborhood grants) expect engagement of stakeholder groups, including teachers, school leaders, family member, and community members. Through the process of engaging a diverse set of stakeholders, SEAs and LEAs can help address issues of educational equity in local communities (Council of Chief School Officers and Partners for Each and Every Child, 2017).

As part of the needs assessment, stakeholders should be involved in two distinct ways. First, stakeholders can help inform the types of information included in the needs assessment. For example, teachers may indicate the need to examine interpersonal skills, such as social problem-solving or positive communication. Families may indicate the importance of examining the school's practices for creating a welcoming community that supports student learning. Community leaders may suggest that they need graduates who can work in collaborative teams and who can handle frustration when dealing with difficult tasks. These stakeholders are providing insight into the types of measures related to SEL that communities may consider including in their assessment. Stakeholder groups can also highlight new ways of looking at or considering the shortcomings of available data to ensure that the skills and competencies of all students are recognized and valued.

The second way stakeholders should be incorporated into the needs assessment process is in the review of assessment results and identification of priority areas for the school to target with improvement efforts. Once information is collected on the broad range of practices, activities, and outcomes that make up the school's needs assessment, and the trends have been assessed, a broad group of individuals should be part of the team identifying root causes of the needs identified, identifying key areas for improvement, and selecting the strategies that will be used to address those areas.

Students constitute a key stakeholder group that should be included in planning for SEL interventions in a way that is appropriate to their ages and their participation in relevant school or classroom environments. Students can provide an important and unique perspective on the school environment and curricular offerings and on such factors as their level of engagement and sense of belonging. Best practices for data use can include inviting students to reflect on their own data and to share ideas about next steps (Hamilton et al., 2009). The extent and type of student involvement in this process should be determined in large part by students' developmental levels—for example, adolescents are generally more capable of providing valid responses to surveys compared with early elementary students. But students at all ages can be engaged in the needs assessment process to some degree, and their involvement can help round out the stakeholder perspectives and increase the likelihood that proposed interventions will address student needs. Moreover, this strategy can promote student agency and leadership, which can, in turn, provide a means for enhancing students' social and emotional competencies. Harris and colleagues (2014) have developed a toolkit for engaging students in school improvement efforts that could be useful in identifying and addressing local SEL needs.

Meaningful and ongoing stakeholder engagement helps ensure that all steps for making effective decisions about which SEL interventions to select and implement lead to the best possible education systems for developing students' social and emotional competencies and increase public buy-in throughout the stages of intervention implementation and evaluation (King, 2016). Educators seeking to engage community stakeholders in discussions regarding the identification of and approaches to addressing local social and emotional needs should first establish a plan to solicit, analyze, and incorporate feedback received from stakeholders into local plans. Decisionmakers should identify which groups to engage, but also when and how they will be involved in engagement efforts (Garcia et al., 2016). Decisionmakers may wish to initially engage each group of stakeholders in different ways, holding several listening sessions or focus groups, conducting interviews, or deploying surveys to gather the desired input. Once this feedback is gathered, decisionmakers could seek to work with smaller groups of stakeholders to analyze and incorporate feedback into local plans or to set local SEL priorities.

Finally, effective stakeholder engagement requires those who collect, store, and analyze data to apply appropriate methods to ensure the integrity and privacy of the data, while also promoting access to selected data sources in cases where such access can support decisionmaking without compromising confidentiality or promoting misuse. As described by the Data Quality Campaign (2017), mechanisms and training to ensure data security are unevenly implemented across states and districts but are essential for effective data use.

Helpful Resources for Identifying Local Social and Emotional Learning Needs

- Julie Corbett and Sam Redding, *Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement*, San Francisco, Calif.: Center on School Turnaround and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017.

- CASEL, “Needs Assessment,” 2018.
- Data Quality Campaign, *Time to Act 2017: Putting Data in the Hands of People*, Washington, D.C.: Data Quality Campaign, 2017.
- Maria Elena Garcia, Kay Frunzi, Ceri B. Dean, Nieves Flores, and Kirsten B. Miller, *Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education Part 1: Building an Understanding of Family and Community Engagement*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific, September 2016.
- John B. King, Jr., “Supporting High-Quality Stakeholder Engagement and Removing Barriers to Genuine Stakeholder Engagement,” letter, U.S. Department of Education, June 23, 2016.
- Bob LaRocca and Sara Bartolino Krachman, *A Data-Informed Approach to Social-Emotional Learning: Policy Recommendations for State and Local Leaders*, Boston, Mass.: Transforming Education, May 2018.

Prioritizing Needs and Selecting Social and Emotional Learning Interventions

Once decisionmakers have carried out a needs assessment, the next step involves using the information from this assessment to select interventions that will best serve local needs. As discussed in our companion report (Grant et al., 2017), SEL interventions target a wide variety of student outcomes, including social and emotional competencies, academic achievement, student behavior, school climate and safety, and civic outcomes. All the data sources described in the previous section can illuminate areas of strength and need related to SEL. Access to multiple data sources can be beneficial for decisionmaking but can also feel overwhelming, and users will need to extract the most relevant information and bring coherence to a diverse array of indicators. Different data sources might point in different directions, and decisionmakers will need to make sense of this information and generate a coherent narrative to inform next steps. In this section, we provide suggestions for tackling this challenge.

Making Sense of Multiple Measures

Decisionmakers should review all the data and analyses conducted as part of the needs assessment to illuminate factors such as trends over time or differences in experiences or outcomes across groups of students. In this section, we lay out several approaches to reviewing data that can help decisionmakers and other stakeholders move from data to decisions. These actions are not all relevant to every context, but together they provide suggestions for ways to make sense of a large amount of information for informing decisions about the adoption of SEL programs and practices. Underlying all these approaches is the assertion that important decisions should be guided by multiple data sources rather than just one.

Start by Clarifying the Goals for the School

Regardless of what the data indicate, a school might have a particular mission or set of goals that should guide all programmatic decisions. A review of these goals, preferably involving input from different stakeholders, can help inform ways of looking at data. In a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics–themed school, for instance, student learning in mathematics and science might be a central priority, and SEL supports might need to be integrated into existing mathematics and science programming and activities. If this school also has a project-based learning focus, decisions about what SEL activities to adopt should take that into consideration, focusing on SEL activities that can be adopted in the context of a project-based curriculum. Even in the absence of a strong thematic focus, a school’s community members might have agreed to prioritize specific student outcomes, such as increasing college readiness, and these priorities could guide decisions about what data sources are most relevant to determining how SEL can support that goal. This assessment of goals can also help decisionmakers determine whether to seek programs that address a wide range of social and emotional competencies or focus on a narrower set of these competencies. In a school in which students and staff have decided to prioritize improved relationships among students and staff, staff might decide to seek guidance from data sources that are most relevant to this goal—e.g., climate survey data, behavioral incidents—and might conclude that an explicit focus on select interpersonal skills (e.g., social awareness) is the most promising strategy for reaching that goal.

Identify Practical Constraints

Any decision about SEL interventions is made in the context of community, school, and classroom conditions that are likely to facilitate or hinder the adoption of those interventions. Decisionmakers must be especially attuned to non-negotiable factors, such as limited time and budgets for staff training or lack of flexibility in the school's schedule to permit the adoption of stand-alone SEL interventions. Decisionmakers also need to consider what conditions are likely to be needed to support effective implementation; for instance, some leaders may decide that any new SEL intervention needs to include developer-provided training or other implementation supports, whereas leaders in other schools might conclude that they have the capacity to provide these supports and would prefer a less expensive—but more bare-bones—intervention. Considering these non-negotiables and needs can help decisionmakers narrow down the list of interventions to adopt, and a review of available data can then guide the decision within this smaller range of options.

Identify Themes in Each Data Source, and Examine Commonalities in Themes Across Sources

Although the data elements discussed in the "Identifying Local Social and Emotional Learning Needs" section are diverse and reflect the experiences and outcomes of different groups, it is likely that many of them will point to common themes. For example, climate surveys might indicate that teachers rate themselves highly on the quality of student-staff relationships, whereas students describe low-quality relationships with their teachers. Disciplinary data might point to high levels of exclusionary disciplinary actions such as suspensions, and a deeper

Example from the Field: Making Sense of Multiple Measures

The CORE network of districts in California has developed a School Quality Improvement Index to monitor schools' progress using a variety of measures. CORE leaders designed the index so that 60 percent of a school's score is based on academic indicators, such as achievement test scores and graduation rates, and the other 40 percent is based on nonacademic indicators, such as rates of chronic absenteeism, school climate, and students' social and emotional competencies.

To make sense of the data produced by this index and translate those data into decisions about school practices, CORE made use of several of the strategies described in this report. In particular, leaders engaged a variety of stakeholder groups, including district superintendents, data experts, and school leaders, to provide input regarding the social and emotional competency assessments. They addressed staff development needs by providing training and supporting the development of professional learning communities to enable schools to learn from one another and developed mechanisms that would enable high- and low-performing schools and districts to partner. CORE also took steps to ensure that the School Quality Improvement Index focused on measures that reflected the goals and priorities of participating districts and schools.

In addition, CORE leaders have attempted to bring coherence to multiple data sources and explore ways to integrate SEL with academic instruction and to use SEL to promote the districts' equity agendas. All of this work was supported by CORE's organization into a Networked Improvement Community that emphasized continuous improvement and that provided opportunities to seek external expertise to help develop, pilot, and make sense of their measures. For more information on CORE's activities, see Data Quality Campaign, 2018, and Marsh et al., 2018.

analysis of these disciplinary policies could indicate that they are related to classroom management challenges that teachers are facing. A review of curriculum and instruction might reveal heavy use of teacher-centered practices that do not give students voice or agency. Together, these data suggest a need to help teachers better self-assess the quality of their interactions with students and a need for professional development to help teachers engage with students in constructive relationships.

Of course, it is possible that a thematic review of data will generate conflicting findings. In this case, decisionmakers should try to generate hypotheses for these conflicts. For instance, if students rate themselves highly on a self-report measure of emotion regulation, but a skills-based measure indicates relatively low performance on this dimension, one hypothesis is that students have not developed a clear understanding of what it means to regulate one's emotions, and, therefore, their responses are inflated. On the other hand, it could indicate that the skills assessment is not eliciting students' best performance, perhaps because of technical difficulties or other problems with administration conditions. Decisionmakers can use these hypotheses to identify additional information to gather—for example, by talking with students about how they understand emotion regulation and by talking with teachers about how the skills assessment is administered and whether any challenges have arisen.

The thematic review could also lead to a variety of different conclusions with no underlying theme (e.g., low mathematics achievement, high levels of absenteeism, good student social competencies, and mixed-quality professional development). In these cases, decisionmakers can examine these themes and findings and use them to develop a list of priority areas based on the relative perceived importance of each finding or the extent to which the data suggest whether a particular problem or need is minor, moderate, or substantial.

Start with Student Outcome Data and Link to Other Information

Rather than examining all data sources at once, decisionmakers might want to start by reviewing a variety of student outcomes data, exploring trends as well as differences across groups. These data might point to an area of urgent need or might suggest that all outcomes should be prioritized equally when selecting an intervention. For example, persistently low reading scores combined with low performance on measures of interpersonal competencies might suggest that students could benefit from a program that integrates social skill development into an English language arts (ELA) curriculum. Once decisionmakers have made sense of the outcome data, they should examine the other data sources to inform the decision. In the example described here, it would be important to review the existing ELA curriculum to understand what social supports it offers and whether a new approach is needed, and to review the school's professional development schedule, budget, and offerings to ensure that the necessary training can be provided to teachers.

Focus on Staff Development Needs

Particularly in schools where SEL has not been a long-standing priority, it could be beneficial to first address the need to ensure that teachers and other staff are on board with the idea that SEL should be a priority, and that they bring the necessary skills and dispositions to enable them to promote SEL in students. Relevant data sources for understanding staff needs and capacity include PD data, teacher evaluation scores (particularly if the evaluation includes a classroom observation rubric that addresses aspects of teaching, such as emotional support), and data on climate and relationships—e.g., student and staff climate survey data. Title II of ESSA provides funds to support PD that emphasizes staff SEL skill development, and many of the SEL interventions reviewed in Grant et al. (2017) place a strong emphasis on professional learning.

One strategy that schools could use to promote adult skill development, while also supporting students, is to help educators gather, interpret, and use data on students' social and emotional competencies. Monitoring students' social and emotional competencies can play an important role in informing instruction but can also improve educators' understanding of how various social and emotional competencies are defined and how they manifest themselves in students' words and actions. If this is not current practice in the school, teachers will need training on how to select and administer assessments, how to ensure appropriate use and discourage inappropriate use of these assessments, how to protect student privacy, and how to translate results into instructional decisions (LaRocca and Krachman, 2018). This PD could include not just traditional training but also collaborative opportunities for teachers to review and make sense of data together. Capacity building through peer networks and opportunities to share best practices can be especially valuable (Data Quality Campaign, 2018).

Engage Stakeholders in Data Interpretation and Application

Participation in a robust process of continuous improvement not only helps to improve the quality of intervention implementation; it can also provide valuable learning for staff who can later apply these lessons to other aspects of their jobs. Decisionmakers can ensure broad representation in the decisionmaking process by giving teachers and other stakeholders opportunities to make sense of the data from a needs assessment, as well as to contribute to discussions about what actions to take. Involvement in both aspects of this process also builds stakeholders' capacity to apply continuous improvement methods to their day-to-day practice through techniques such as the application of a data-use cycle—reviewing data, developing hypotheses, testing the hypotheses by trying out a new approach, and collecting additional data (Hamilton et al., 2009).

Identify and Address Data Limitations

Even the most comprehensive set of data available to decisionmakers provides incomplete information to guide decisionmaking. Each data source faces potential threats to validity and other limitations that need to be considered by anyone interpreting or using those data. Those involved in developing needs assessments are in a good position to understand the data limitations and to consider ways to overcome them, either through refinements to existing methods or through the collection of additional data. Partnering with technical assistance providers or research organizations can help provide the necessary development and analysis expertise to help district and school leaders improve their measures and data, including the analyses described earlier.

Selecting Appropriate Social and Emotional Learning Interventions

Educators must look to match their prioritized SEL needs with interventions that address these needs, are feasible to implement in the local context, and ideally have strong evidence of effectiveness. In this section, we briefly describe some considerations for informing the application of a needs assessment to decisions about SEL interventions. This material is intended to be illustrative of the factors that decisionmakers should keep in mind when making these decisions; it does not provide a comprehensive discussion of every consideration (Walsh, Reutz, and Williams, 2015).

Considering the Body of Evidence on Social and Emotional Learning Interventions

Decisionmakers should search for interventions that not only meet their local SEL needs but also have strong evidence supporting their effectiveness (Lee et al., 2017). When searching for SEL interventions, decisionmakers should examine resources that assess the entire body or "totality" of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions, rather than sources that selectively review studies on an intervention. SEAs may provide their LEAs and schools with a menu of intervention options from which to choose, or SEAs may allow LEAs or schools flexibility in choosing the evidence-based SEL interventions that they believe are most appropriate for their local context (Lee et al., 2017). In either case, decisionmakers at SEAs, LEAs, and schools will likely benefit from resources that identify evidence-based SEL interventions. We provide such a resource in Grant et al. (2017), which identified 60 SEL interventions that meet ESSA requirements as evidence-based and were recently evaluated in U.S.–based K–12 public schools. Another resource that specifically assesses interventions according to ESSA evidence requirements is Evidence for ESSA, which currently lists mathematics and

Example from the Field: Identifying and Overcoming Data Limitations

As part of its work with the Collaborating Districts Initiative, developed by CASEL and the NoVo Foundation, Washoe County School District (WCSD) administered self-report measures of students' social and emotional competencies to track its SEL work and to inform its assessment of student resilience and risk. Although scores derived from these survey items had good reliability, WCSD leaders determined that they had ceiling effects—i.e., fairly large proportions of students rated themselves very highly, resulting in reduced opportunities to measure student growth or to differentiate among students in ways that would identify needs for additional SEL supports.

To address this limitation, WCSD partnered with CASEL to obtain a Research-Practice Partnership grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences. Through that grant, WCSD leaders, educators, and students have been able to collaborate with researchers to engage in a continuous improvement process that involved iterative refinement and testing of the self-report measures of social and emotional competencies. Researchers and practitioners worked together to revise item wording and response scales and to apply sophisticated psychometric techniques that helped reduce the ceiling effect. The partnership not only led to improved measurement, but it also contributed to capacity-building among the WCSD team and laid the groundwork for future innovative measurement and data use practices in the district. For more information about WCSD's work, see Davidson et al. (2018).

reading programs, but plans to add SEL interventions in the future (Evidence for ESSA, 2018).

Although they do not specifically identify which interventions meet ESSA's evidence requirements, other resources that decisionmakers can use to identify the body of evidence on SEL interventions include

- What Works Clearinghouse review of interventions for student behavior (What Works Clearinghouse, undated-b)[7]
- CrimeSolutions review of school-based SEL programs (National Institute of Justice, undated)
- *2013 CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs: Preschool and Elementary School Edition* (CASEL, 2013)
- *2015 CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs: Middle and High School Edition* (CASEL, 2015)
- *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and Practice* (Durlak et al., 2015)
- *Navigating SEL from the Inside Out* (Jones et al., 2017)
- several recent meta-analyses on SEL interventions (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

Decisionmakers can also contact federally-funded technical assistance centers, such as their local ED REL, to see whether they can provide summaries of the evidence on various SEL interventions and guidance on how existing research aligns to the ESSA evidence levels (U.S. Department of Education, undated).

Strength of the Evidence on Appropriate Outcomes

Decisionmakers need to demonstrate that the SEL interventions they wish to implement meet certain evidence requirements to use federal funds to pay for these interventions. ESSA defines four tiers that reflect the strength of the evidence in making claims that the intervention led to improved student outcomes. Chapter Three of our earlier report provides greater detail on how ESSA defines these evidence tiers, including the interpretation of these definitions in the ED nonregulatory guidance (Grant et al., 2017). In brief, evidence-based interventions in the top three tiers must show statistically significant positive effects on or relationships with a relevant outcome in an evaluation using one of the following research methods:

- Tier I, or strong evidence: at least one well-designed and well-implemented randomized controlled trial

- Tier II, or moderate evidence: at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study
- Tier III, or promising evidence: at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study that controls for selection bias.

The legislation includes a fourth tier that offers additional flexibility to educators. Tier IV does not require an empirical evidence base, but rather requires an intervention to be supported by a strong *rationale* for how an intervention is likely to improve the targeted outcomes. Additionally, educators using Tier IV interventions must ensure that the intervention is being evaluated to help generate empirical evidence for the field. When using federal funds under ESSA to pay for SEL interventions, decisionmakers must ensure that their proposed interventions meet the minimum evidence tier permissible within a funding stream.

We recommend that decisionmakers strive to identify SEL interventions addressing their local social and emotional needs that are supported by Tier I or II evidence. SEL interventions supported by these higher evidence tiers are more likely to improve student outcomes because they have been shown to be effective in a previous context using high-quality research methods. If no SEL interventions addressing local needs have strong or moderate evidence, decisionmakers may then wish to explore interventions with promising evidence (Tier III). Given the complexities involved in assessing the strength of a body of evidence, we strongly encourage decisionmakers without commensurate training in research methods to use resources specifically dedicated to assessing interventions against the ESSA evidence tiers (such as Grant et al., 2017) or to engage local researchers or dedicated technical assistance providers (such as RELs) when making determinations about the strength of evidence on an SEL intervention of interest.

Relevance of the Evidence

In addition to looking for SEL interventions with higher levels of evidence, decisionmakers should also look for SEL interventions that were evaluated with comparable populations and in settings similar to their local context (Hale et al., 2017). The relevance of the evidence to the local context may predict how well an evidence-based SEL intervention will work in that context. Potentially relevant aspects of student populations include grade levels, gender, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability status, English Language Learner status, and prior performance and behavior (e.g., achievement, attendance, disciplinary actions). Potentially relevant aspects of school settings include location (e.g., urban, suburban, rural), grade levels served, school and district size, and the school's Title I status.

Local Capacity

After selecting relevant SEL interventions that meet minimum evidence requirements for a targeted funding stream, decisionmakers need to assess local capacity to deliver interventions successfully. Local capacity is an important predictor of desired improvements in social and emotional competencies. Aspects of capacity to consider include amount of funding available for SEL initiatives, school and district resources for SEL, the skills and competencies of staff expected to implement and assess SEL interventions, and leadership support for SEL. Decisionmakers should prioritize the selection of SEL interventions, for which they have sufficient and sustainable funding, for which staff have sufficient capacity (or will be able to develop their capacity) to implement, where there is sufficient buy-in by leadership and stakeholders involved in its implementation, and where intervention objectives and activities fit with larger strategic goals and other existing efforts. For instance, if research suggests that an intervention is effective when implemented with extensive one-on-one coaching, but the needs assessment and other considerations of local context suggest that such coaching would not be feasible, that intervention might be considered a poor fit for addressing identified needs.

Helpful Resources for Selecting Relevant SEL Interventions

- Cambria Walsh, Jennifer Rolls Reutz, and Rhonda Williams, *Selecting and Implementing Evidence-Based Practices*, 2nd ed., San Diego, Calif: California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, 2015.
- Chiefs for Change and Results for America, *Evidence-Building Opportunities Under ESSA: How States Can and Should Generate Evidence to Drive Better Outcomes for Students*, Washington, D.C., 2018.
- Sean Grant, Laura S. Hamilton, Stephani L. Wrabel, Celia J. Gomez, Anamarie Whitaker, Jennifer T. Leschitz, Fatih Unlu, Emilio R. Chavez-Herrerias, Garrett Baker, Mark Barrett, Mark Harris, and Alyssa Ramos, *Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2133-WF, 2017.
- Sylvie Hale, Lenay Dunn, Nikola Filby, John Rice, and Lori Van Houten, *Evidence-Based Improvement: A Guide for States to Strengthen Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA*, San Francisco, Calif.: WestEd, 2017.
- Stephanie Jones, Katharine Brush, Rebecca Bailey, Gretchen Brion-Miesels, Joseph McIntyre, Jennifer Kahn, Bryan Nelson, and Laura Stickle, *Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out: Looking Inside and Across 25 Leading SEL Programs: A Practical Resource for Schools and OST Providers (Elementary School Focus)*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Graduate School of Education, May 2017.

Implementing, Monitoring, and Evaluating Social and Emotional Learning Interventions

Once needs have been identified and interventions have been selected, SEA and LEA leaders will need to develop a plan for implementing the selected interventions, monitor implementation over time, and evaluate the outcomes that result from the intervention. These steps contribute to a cycle of continuous improvement whereby educators enact interventions, gather data, and revise the implementation in response to the data. Educators should develop these continuous improvement plans with input from relevant stakeholders to ensure the successful delivery of the SEL interventions that they have selected for their local context. In this section, we discuss several important steps that can contribute to a high-quality continuous improvement approach.

Developing a Logic Model to Inform Implementation

To identify conditions that will support high-quality implementation and to guide the development of plans for monitoring and evaluation, a concrete visualization of how the intervention is thought to improve social and emotional competencies in a specific school context can be helpful. A useful method for visualizing an intervention is a logic model. Logic models illustrate the relationships between the core activities of an SEL intervention and how these core activities are intended to improve the targeted social and emotional competencies through a clear chain of actions. Understanding these connections between activities and outcomes facilitates the development of implementation and evaluation plans that can provide decisionmakers with the information needed for continuous improvement of an SEL intervention and the selection of future SEL interventions (Wrabel, Herman, and Gates, 2018). Information from an intervention developer, conversations with other educators who have used an intervention, and previous evaluations of similar types of SEL interventions may help with developing a logic model and subsequent aspects of the implementation plan. In fact, ESSA's Tier IV evidence requirements involve developing a logic model, based on prior research, to illustrate the evidence-informed rationale that links intervention activities to targeted outcomes.

Logic models typically contain five key components: resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and context (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004).

- **Resources** are the inputs needed to support implementation of the program, such as funding, staff, facilities, materials, and time.

Decisionmakers should identify and list all the resources (material, financial, human) required to implement and support the SEL intervention.

- **Activities** involve the actions, strategies, and techniques that constitute the SEL intervention. Decisionmakers should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities for the people involved in each activity of the SEL intervention. These personnel include those directly implementing the SEL intervention on the ground, those supporting its implementation in some way (e.g., training, supervision, administrative support), and those who will ultimately be held responsible for its success.
- **Outputs** consist of the direct and observable products, goods, and services that result from the SEL intervention (regardless of whether the desired improvements in social and emotional competencies are achieved).
- **Outcomes** are the short-, intermediate-, and long-term changes expected as a result of implementing the SEL intervention, such as students' social and emotional competencies, academic performance, or rates of school attendance.
- Lastly, because SEL interventions may work differently in different settings, the logic model should include the most critical **contextual factors** that may influence intervention implementation, development of desired social and emotional competencies, and differences in implementation and outcomes across sites.

Logic models should contain these key components and be developed collaboratively with relevant stakeholders (ideally those involved in the local needs assessment) to ensure accuracy, comprehensiveness, and a shared understanding of the SEL intervention. Decisionmakers need to establish a concrete timeline for all the activities and phases of implementing the SEL intervention to facilitate its successful delivery. That said, timelines and logic models can be updated once the implementation plan is initiated as educators gain more information about the intervention over time or certain aspects of the plan change (e.g., resources, activities). Recent toolkits on school leadership interventions from RAND provide detailed advice on how to develop a logic model in the context of ESSA (Daugherty, Herman, and Unlu, 2017; Wrabel, Herman, and Gates, 2018). And, finally, an example of an SEL-related logic model can be found in Grant et al. (2017, p. 63).

A crucial component of a logic model is a set of well-defined and measurable outcomes to assess whether the goals of the SEL intervention implementation plans are successfully achieved. The best practice is to define outcomes that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (Doran, 1981). The timing of outcome measures will be influenced by the duration of the SEL intervention, when social and emotional competencies are expected to have changed as a result of the SEL intervention, the time available for the evaluation, and the types of data and resources available to the evaluation team. Short-term outcomes may provide useful information for early decisionmaking about intervention implementation and whether an intervention is on track to improve social and emotional outcomes (Wrabel, Herman, and Gates, 2018), while critically examining intermediate- and long-term outcomes can help clarify whether to sustain or scale up existing SEL interventions at both the state and local levels.

Helpful Resources for Developing a Logic Model

- Lindsay Daugherty, Rebecca Herman, and Fatih Unlu, *Logic Models for Selecting, Designing, and Implementing Evidence-Based Leadership Interventions: Companion Guide to School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, TL-274-WF, 2017.
- Brian Lawton, Paul R. Brandon, Louis Cicchinelli, and Wendy Kekahio, *Logic Models: A Tool for Designing and Monitoring Program Evaluations*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific, 2014.

- W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation, and Action: Logic Model Development Guide*, Battle Creek, Mich., 2004.

Planning for Implementation

High-quality implementation of an intervention is important for producing the desired student and staff outcomes and can help promote positive perceptions of the intervention and engagement with materials (Durlak and DuPre, 2008; Jones et al., 2018; Reyes et al., 2012). Planning for implementation can lead to a smooth implementation process and help leaders foresee potential challenges and generate solutions prior to the intervention being rolled out. SEL intervention planning should closely follow the logic model created. When needed, planning activities and resources should be incorporated into the logic model. Planning activities can include constructing an implementation team, developing or gathering needed materials, training staff, establishing timelines for implementation, piloting the intervention and refining the process, or creating a plan for engaging stakeholders throughout implementation (Jones et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Walsh, Rolls Reutz, and Williams, 2015).

Forming an implementation team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities can help make the task of implementing a new curriculum or program more efficient by dividing tasks among the team members and ensuring that all members understand their roles throughout the planning and implementation phases (Walsh, Rolls Reutz, and Williams, 2015). Implementation team members should represent important stakeholders in the process and include decisionmakers and staff who will directly implement the intervention. Responsibilities for team members can include gathering needed intervention materials, such as handbooks, worksheets, surveys, and other documents, and developing instruments or assessments for formative and summative evaluations of the intervention (Garcia et al., 2016). Additionally, team members can develop detailed timelines for implementation based on staff training, school schedules, and other factors. Timelines should include important milestones, such as classroom or school observations, and more common activities like weekly or monthly check-ins with principals or other stakeholders.

Planning for implementation also requires training staff prior to and throughout the implementation of the program. Staff who will lead lessons or directly interact with content should be provided ongoing supports, and potential challenges can be mitigated with pre-implementation planning time. Providing staff with ongoing training and development opportunities, including those that could promote their positive social and emotional development, is likely to aid in making the intervention effective (Jones et al., 2018).

Another valuable component of the planning process is piloting the intervention on a small sample of classrooms or schools. Piloting the intervention can provide critical lessons on how the intervention is received by staff and students, how best to track fidelity of implementation, and strengths and challenges of the intervention content. Once the intervention has been piloted, the implementation team should assess whether the intervention meets the priorities and goals developed from the needs assessment and whether it is likely to produce the outcomes outlined in the logic model. Additionally, team members can address any early challenges encountered and refine materials, training, or other aspects of implementation as needed.

Along with the components discussed here, there are other important considerations that should

Helpful Resources for Planning for Implementation

- Stephanie Jones, Rebecca Bailey, Katharine Brush, and Jennifer Kahn, *Preparing for Effective SEL Implementation*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2018.
- Cambria Walsh, Jennifer Rolls Reutz, and Rhonda Williams, *Selecting and Implementing Evidence-Based Practices: A Guide for Child and Family Serving Systems*, 2nd ed., San Diego, Calif.: California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, 2015.

factor into the planning process, such as calculating implementation timing, selecting team members, and identifying stakeholders. Other components or elements may need to be considered in the planning process, including some that are unique to individual schools or districts.

Monitoring Implementation

Performance monitoring involves regularly collecting and tracking data about the SEL intervention to see how well outcomes and goals are being met. Information can be collected about the degree to which key aspects of the SEL intervention are being implemented as planned, as well as whether the desired improvements in social and emotional competencies are being achieved. Examples include scores on assessments administered by the program, ratings by program staff, self-assessments by program participants, and satisfaction surveys by participants. Sources include program or evaluation data collected from participants or program staff (questionnaire, survey, assessment) and administrative data, where available.

The resources available for performance monitoring (e.g., staff time, financial resources, and technology for data collection and analysis) should be considered before implementing the SEL intervention. For example, taking an inventory of available data sources (e.g., surveys, administrative data, and observation rubrics already collected as part of the intervention) can help reduce duplication of efforts, saving both time and money. The intervention logic model can help evaluators identify the types of data and resources needed to evaluate the intervention (e.g., measures for analyzing short-term outcomes). Performance-monitoring strategies should include plans for collecting and analyzing data, including details about the kind of data that will be used to monitor the SEL intervention implementation and outcomes, who will be responsible for collecting and analyzing this data, and who will be responsible for using this data to ensure that the implementation plan is being followed or determine whether it needs to change (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrators). Decisionmakers should also specify in advance what reasonable expectations of success are and how success will be measured. The REL Pacific has developed a Program Outcomes, Measures, and Targets (POMT) Application to help educators create an ongoing plan for monitoring, measuring, and tracking outcomes over time to evaluate intervention ,implementation and effectiveness (Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific, undated).

Monitoring Fidelity of Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Implementation

Decisionmakers should use the information collected from their performance monitoring plans to identify how well the SEL intervention implementation plan is being followed and to inform continuous improvement of SEL intervention implementation. Revisiting the logic model can facilitate examination of whether the assumed resources were utilized, the activities were delivered as intended, and the intended outputs from the SEL intervention were produced. For example, we suggest revisiting some of the teachers and staff interviewed during the needs assessment to follow up on implementation fidelity and satisfaction. Additional information may need to be collected beyond the teacher and staff interviews to determine whether benchmarks are being met and to better understand whether stakeholders, such as family members, are satisfied with the SEL intervention and its implementation.

Deviations from expectations set out in the logic model and implementation plan not only assist in understanding what was actually delivered, but they may also help understand why desired changes in students' social and emotional competencies did or did not occur. If decisionmakers identify aspects of the plan that are not being followed well, they should examine what changes may be needed to improve implementation. These changes could involve adding or realigning resources, as well as adjusting timelines. Decisionmakers may wish to engage stakeholders in this process to ensure that there is community and school buy-in with any needed changes.

Identifying Barriers and Facilitators to Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Implementation

In addition to assessing how well the SEL intervention is being implemented, decisionmakers should also examine the potential barriers to and facilitators of successful implementation. Decisionmakers should consider the contextual factors from the intervention logic model to assess potential barriers to and facilitators of implementation. For instance, limited availability of staff might be a contextual factor that could hinder implementation. Decisionmakers should also investigate the views that students and personnel involved in implementation have about their experiences with the SEL intervention to better understand barriers and facilitators. These examinations could particularly help decisionmakers at the state and local levels assess whether a given SEL intervention might be ready for scaling up or wider dissemination.

Helpful Resources for Initiating and Monitoring the Implementation Plan

- Karen Blase, Melissa Van Dyke, and Dean Fixsen, *Stages of Implementation Analysis: Where Are We?* Chapel Hill, N.C.: National Implementation Research Network, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013.
- Humphrey, Neil, Ann Lendrum, Emma Ashworth, Kirsty Frearson, Robert Buck, and Kirstin Kerr, *Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) for Interventions in Education Settings: An Introductory Handbook*, London: Education Endowment Foundation, and Manchester, United Kingdom: University of Manchester, 2016.
- Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific, "POMT Application," website, undated.

Evaluating Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Effectiveness

Decisionmakers should consider whether there is a need for their performance monitoring plan to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the SEL intervention. Evaluations of effectiveness may be appropriate when decisionmakers want to know with confidence whether the SEL intervention is leading to intended social and emotional competencies. Such ongoing evaluation efforts are required if a Tier IV intervention is being implemented. If an evaluation is desired or required, the chosen evaluation approach will, in large part, depend on the type of intervention chosen, as well as the resources and expertise available for the evaluation. Decisionmakers need to assess the technical capacity of their staff and the resources available to conduct such an evaluation. We strongly encourage engaging with local academics or leveraging technical assistance from ED through local RELs to design an evaluation with the most rigorous research design feasible (ideally strong or moderate evidence, as defined in evidence Tiers I and II of ESSA) and, therefore, provide the best information for future decisionmaking. In addition, the American Evaluation Association provides a searchable database for potential evaluation consultants, and the What Works Clearinghouse Help Desk provides support to evaluators aiming to develop rigorous studies (American Evaluation Association, undated; What Works Clearinghouse, undated-a). Decisionmakers can work with trained local researchers to plan, implement, and conduct rigorous evaluations according to What Works Clearinghouse guidelines and standards (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017). To safeguard the credibility of evaluation results, decisionmakers should ask those designing and conducting evaluations to preregister the evaluation protocol and analysis plan of these evaluations (Gehlbach and Robinson, 2018) in a central registry, such as the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies (Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2018).

Outcomes, Moderators, and Mediators

Decisionmakers should assess the impact that the SEL intervention has had on social and emotional competencies in the short, intermediate, and long terms. There are several ways for decisionmakers to identify whether changes in outcomes met initial expectations. Statistical significance of changes or differences across groups indicates that the observed results are probably not due to chance alone. Effect sizes indicate the size of the impact on social and emotional competencies. Benchmarks involving statistical significance and effect sizes should be set prior to the evaluation to assess whether the desired impacts on social and emotional competencies are met. These benchmarks should be based on the goals of the SEL intervention in the local context and what prior research suggests about the intervention.

In addition to overall impacts on social and emotional competencies, decisionmakers may also want to assess whether changes differ by important subgroups, or *moderators*. Moderator analyses can help determine whether differences in student populations and aspects of the school setting led to differences in the effectiveness of an SEL intervention. In addition, decisionmakers may also want to examine whether changes in certain competencies lead to changes in other competencies, or *mediators*. Mediator analyses can help determine whether certain social and emotional competencies need to change first in order for other competencies to be impacted by the SEL intervention.

Sharing Collected Evidence

Findings may be of interest with numerous stakeholders, such as SEA and LEA staff, school personnel, students and families, and other community members. Decisionmakers should share the information that they obtain about the SEL intervention and its implementation with the appropriate decisionmakers to assess whether intervention should be discontinued, modified, continued as is, or even scaled up. Because this information may also be of interest to a wider audience, decisionmakers may also look to publish a report about their evaluation. Explicit reporting about selecting the SEL intervention, how it was implemented, and what impact (if any) it had on social and emotional competencies can help other schools, districts, and states decide whether to adopt the SEL intervention in their local contexts. The specific timing of this reporting may depend on several factors, such as expectations of SEA and LEA staff, the nature of the findings, and policy time frames (e.g., submission of state ESSA plans). Whatever the timing, decisionmakers should use appropriate guidelines for reporting evaluations, as well as publish with open access and online for anyone to read the report free of charge.

Helpful Resources for Evaluating SEL Intervention Effectiveness

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disseminating Program Achievements and Evaluation Findings to Garner Support*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, February 2009.
- W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *The Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluation: How to Become Savvy Evaluation Consumers*, Battle Creek, Mich., 2017.

Conclusion

The resources and recommended practices in this guide are intended to help education leaders assess local needs and identify appropriate evidence-based SEL interventions to meet those needs. Education leaders should revisit their original needs assessments and their selected interventions, programs, and practices regularly to ensure that these efforts promote equity, maintain coherence across a diverse set of school improvement strategies, and fit within the limited resources that LEAs and schools have available. Regardless of whether leaders adopt the comprehensive approach described in this guide or only parts of this approach, this information should help leaders identify SEL interventions that will meet the needs of their local community.

Notes

[1] For ease of reference, throughout this report we typically refer to schools and districts, but the guidance is generally applicable to other types of LEAs, such as charter management organizations, and to OST programs.

[2] We use the term *interventions* broadly to refer to SEL curricula and other approaches to promoting SEL (e.g., improvements to school culture and climate).

[3] We use *decisionmakers* to refer to the group of educators using data to make decisions about SEL interventions. This group could include administrators, teachers, or other educators who are in decisionmaking roles.

[4] CASEL provides a needs assessment framework on its website. See CASEL, 2018.

[5] Details of the American Community Survey are available on the U.S. Census Bureau website. See U.S. Census Bureau, 2018.

[6] This report includes a summary of ESSA's stakeholder engagement requirements for SEAs and LEAs as well as for each funding stream and focal area of the legislation.

[7] Although interventions to improve behavior should not be considered synonymous with those intended to address SEL, there is some overlap.

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About This Report

The reauthorization of the U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act, referred to as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), emphasizes evidence-based interventions while providing new flexibilities to states and districts with regard to the use of federal funds, including funds that could be used to support social and emotional learning (SEL). This new flexibility comes with an expectation that state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) select and implement evidence-based interventions when using federal funds. To support education decisionmakers at the state and local levels, the RAND Corporation conducted a review of recent evidence on U.S.-based SEL interventions for K–12 students to better inform the use of SEL interventions under ESSA, *Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review*. This report serves as a companion guide to the evidence review by providing guidance on how to assess local needs relative to SEL and how to identify appropriate evidence-based interventions based on those local needs. This report also provides introductory information on implementing, monitoring, and evaluating selected SEL interventions. The information in this report aligns with opportunities under ESSA to leverage federal funds to support SEL, but can be used by all schools and communities interested in identifying social and emotional needs locally.

This study was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and decisionmaking. This study was sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices to improve learning and enrichment opportunities for children. For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit its Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report should be directed to swrabel@rand.org, and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.

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