



HEATHER L. SCHWARTZ, MICHELLE BONGARD, ERIN D. BOGAN, ALAINA E. BOYLE, DUNCAN C. MEYERS,  
ROBERT J. JAGERS

# Social and Emotional Learning in Schools Nationally and in the Collaborating Districts Initiative

Selected Findings from the American  
Teacher Panel and American School Leader  
Panel Surveys



Over the past two decades, a growing body of research has shown the importance of social and emotional development in a student’s short- and long-term academic success, emotional well-being, positive behaviors, and life outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the “process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], undated-b). When SEL skills are intentionally, systematically implemented and reinforced in school settings, students are better equipped not only to be successful in school but also to become informed and engaged citizens (Holbein, 2017; Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Williams, 2019).

Use of SEL strategies appears to be a common practice in most schools and classrooms, as evidenced by a nationally representative survey from spring 2018 in which 72 percent of school principals said SEL was one of the school’s top priorities (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019b). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has further increased educators’ demand for SEL instruction, as shown by the large number of districts that have included SEL investments in their pandemic-relief spending plans (DiMarco and Jordan, 2022).

Evidence-based SEL interventions are an important part of safe, supportive, and academically productive learning environments (Osher, Dwyer, and Jackson, 2004; Osher and Berg, 2018). However, implementation challenges, such as limited professional learning or a lack of administrative support, can restrict the effectiveness of the evidence-based SEL programming for improving student academic and social and emotional outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Moreover, high-quality implementation can be difficult to sustain over the long term (Battistich, Schaps, and Wilson, 2004), and schools that implement SEL programs without broader district support may not achieve the desired positive effects (Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010).

CASEL recognized these challenges for SEL implementation. In 2011, CASEL launched the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) to study whether it was possible to implement high-quality SEL systematically in large, urban districts across the United States. Beyond an isolated SEL classroom lesson, systemic SEL implementation involves all aspects of the district, including classroom instruction, school climate, staffing, professional learning, district policies, family engagement, and systems for continuous improvement. Twenty school districts across the country participate in the CDI.<sup>2</sup> CASEL provides coaching and technical assistance to CDI districts to help them form teams to develop and implement a district-driven SEL vision, create a multiyear implementation plan, and develop systems of coordina-

## KEY FINDINGS

- Seventy-six percent of principals and 53 percent of teachers nationally reported that their schools used a social and emotional learning (SEL) program or SEL curriculum materials in the 2021–2022 school year.
- The use of a formal SEL program or curricula rose by 25 percentage points or more from spring 2018 to fall 2021, according to teachers and principals.
- Ninety-six percent of Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) principals and 64 percent of CDI teachers reported that their schools used an SEL program or curriculum in the 2021–2022 school year.
- Both CDI teachers and CDI principals reported more frequent use of SEL practices than their comparable non-CDI counterparts for six of the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation examined. The largest differences were in the frequency of classroom-based SEL instruction.

tion across central office departments. CASEL also engages with CDI districts to provide guidance on how to offer meaningful professional development opportunities; how to partner with families and communities; and how to collect, analyze, and make decisions using SEL implementation and outcome data about teachers, students, or parents.

Although the CDI is a large-scale initiative with robust and sustained scaffolding of SEL within participating districts, there has not yet been extensive research about either SEL implementation in CDI districts or how CDI districts compare with peer districts or districts nationally. Moreover, most SEL implementation studies to date have been in large, urban districts (most of the CDI districts meet these criteria) and we know less about what schoolwide SEL practices look like in smaller, rural or suburban, and/or higher-income districts. It is for all of these reasons that we conducted the current study, in which we investigate the following research questions:

1. How common are SEL implementation strategies in schools nationally, and how do they vary by school characteristics?
2. Is there a higher level of systemic SEL implementation among CDI districts compared with demographically similar non-CDI districts? If yes, in which areas?

To answer these questions, CASEL engaged RAND researchers to learn whether the 20 districts' participation in the CDI has resulted in more frequent implementation of SEL practices than in peer districts and to learn about SEL implementation nationally. Accordingly, we fielded a survey to the following three groups of classroom teachers and principals from November 15 to December 16, 2021:<sup>3</sup>

1. those who work in CDI districts (called *CDI districts* hereafter)
2. those who work in districts that are demographically similar to the CDI districts<sup>4</sup> (called *comparable non-CDI districts* hereafter)
3. those who work in additional districts. (We include educators from all three categories in the national results that we present next.)

The survey posed a series of questions to all three groups of teachers and principals about their schoolwide SEL practices and strategies in the 2021–2022 school year. We obtained survey responses from approximately 1,200 K–12 classroom teachers and 1,100 school principals. Because we used samples of teachers and principals to represent teachers and principals nationally (and samples of CDI and comparable non-CDI educators to represent CDI and comparable non-CDI educators as a whole), we apply survey weights to the survey responses. The weights adjust the demographic and school characteristics of survey respondents to match those of the larger group (such as of all teachers in CDI districts). We also conduct statistical significance testing to compare CDI and comparable non-CDI educators' responses to answer our second research question.

Respondents to our survey consist of teachers from all 20 CDI districts, principals from 18 of the 20 CDI districts, and teachers and principals from hundreds of additional U.S. districts. We obtained a completion rate of 54.5 percent for teachers we invited to take the survey and a completion rate of 45.6 percent for principals. The teachers and principals we surveyed are members of the RAND Corporation's nationally representative American Teacher Panel (ATP) and American School Leader Panel (ASLP). For further details about the survey sample and administration, see the appendix at the end of this report.

This report is intended for SEL directors in schools and districts, SEL-focused staff in state education agencies, and district and school leaders. It is also intended for researchers and SEL technical assistance providers. The main limitation of this report is that we cannot identify whether the heightened SEL implementation we note in CDI districts has

#### **Note About the Research Team**

The RAND Corporation and CASEL have co-authored this report. To ensure its objectivity, RAND has independently fielded the surveys, analyzed the results, and presented them here. CASEL has described the CDI work and helped interpret the implications of the survey results with RAND.

improved student outcomes, such as increased SEL competencies and academic achievement. We discuss this limitation and others in the appendix.

In what follows, we first set the stage by explaining the CDI initiative in greater detail. We then present the nationally representative survey results to establish a benchmark for how common SEL strategies are in today's classrooms. Next, we explore ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation in the CDI districts and in comparable non-CDI districts. We conclude with a discussion of the implications for districts nationally and, specifically, for CDI districts and CASEL.

## Overview of the CDI

In 2011, CASEL launched the CDI with the goal of supporting school districts to build their capacities to promote SEL for all students. Although many approaches to support SEL start in the classroom, the CDI model takes an ecological approach and addresses the district-level systems, school-level practices, and classroom-level SEL instruction as three necessary components of effective implementation and sustainability. This model is based on the understanding that SEL develops within and across contexts and that classrooms and schools are as much learning environments as the family and broader community.

CASEL's district theory of change for the CDI effort posits that positive student academic and behavioral outcomes are contingent on each participating district focusing on the following four areas, which we have excerpted from a CASEL webpage as follows:

- **Build foundational support and plan.** Districts establish a foundation for SEL that is carried throughout the system. Key activities include developing and communicating an SEL vision, creating a multi-year plan for implementation, fostering collaboration across central office departments to ensure alignment, communicating about the district's commitment to SEL, and budgeting for resources and staffing to support full implementation.
- **Strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity.** Supporting adults to practice,

model, and implement SEL is a critical foundational step. Districts provide the resources and framework to do this by ensuring central office staff are well-versed in SEL research and best practices, and by providing professional learning and a work environment that supports adult SEL, cultural competence, and collective efficacy.

- **Promote SEL for students.** District-level coordination and support of SEL is critical to ensuring rich educational experiences for all students. By partnering with families and communities to develop standards and benchmarks for SEL learning, identifying and supporting evidence-based programs for teaching SEL, and integrating SEL into all district priorities (e.g., academics, discipline, student supports such as MTSS), the district ensures all students benefit from SEL.
- **Reflect on data for continuous improvement.** Implementing SEL is an ongoing process that requires committed support from top leadership. Central to this effort is a commitment to continuous improvement of SEL implementation by collecting, analyzing and acting upon SEL implementation and outcome data (CASEL, undated-c).

These district-level focus areas are in the service of building a schoolwide approach to SEL, which we outline in Figure 1.

All four focus areas consist of strategies for using SEL as a lever for equity and excellence. CASEL updated the CDI model to the one shown in Figure 1 to emphasize the synergy between SEL implementation and promoting equitable learning environments. These updates were based on what has been learned through supporting CDI districts and advances in the SEL field. Therefore, equity is a prominent consideration throughout all four focus areas of this model, including the support that CASEL provides to districts that implement the model.

CASEL provides coaching and technical assistance to district-level teams in the CDI to help them implement these four district-level focus areas. The district teams vary in size, but they typically consist of a dis-

FIGURE 1  
Ten Indicators of Schoolwide SEL in the CDI

Classroom		<b>Explicit SEL instruction</b>	Students have consistent opportunities to cultivate, practice, and reflect on social and emotional competencies in ways that are developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive.
		<b>SEL integrated with academic instruction</b>	SEL objectives are integrated into instructional content and teaching strategies for academics, music, art, and physical education.
		<b>Youth voice and engagement</b>	Staff honor and elevate a broad range of student perspectives and experiences by engaging students as leaders, problem-solvers, and decisionmakers.
School		<b>Supportive school and classroom climates</b>	Schoolwide and classroom learning environments are supportive, culturally responsive, and focused on building relationships and community.
		<b>Focus on adult SEL</b>	Staff have regular opportunities to cultivate their own social, emotional, and cultural competence; collaborate with one another; build trusting relationships; and maintain a strong community.
		<b>Supportive discipline</b>	Discipline policies and practices are instructive, restorative, developmentally appropriate, and equitably applied.
Family Community		<b>A continuum of integrated supports</b>	SEL is seamlessly integrated into a continuum of academic and behavioral supports, which are available to ensure that all student needs are met.
		<b>Authentic family partnerships</b>	Families and school staff have regular and meaningful opportunities to build relationships and collaborate to support students' social, emotional, and academic development.
		<b>Aligned community partnerships</b>	School staff and community partners align on common language, strategies, and communication around all SEL-related efforts and initiatives, including out-of-school time.
		<b>Systems for continuous improvement</b>	Implementation and outcome data are collected and used to continuously improve all SEL-related systems, practices, and policies with a focus on equity.

SOURCE: CASEL.

trict leader or staff person who has been designated as the district's SEL lead, the district's equity lead, a staff person from the district's research and evaluation unit, and other educators who work at the central office level to support SEL implementation throughout the district. CASEL also hosts cross-district professional learning events throughout the year so that districts have the opportunity to share and learn from each

other. For example, the content discussed at these meetings includes strategies for promoting SEL for students and adults and for using data to support ongoing improvement in implementing SEL.

Critically, CASEL's CDI model proposes that districtwide SEL implementation across the four focus areas listed earlier should have the intended effect of promoting schoolwide implementation of SEL, as

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When fully implemented, schoolwide SEL should contribute to more successful and equitable outcomes for young people.

evidenced by shifts in the ten SEL activity indicators of schoolwide SEL shown in Figure 1. CASEL's theory of change for schools proposes that a systemic schoolwide SEL approach requires that academic and SEL instruction be integrated across the school context in which a student is embedded, including the student's classroom, school, family context, and the broader community. In addition to such integration, professional development and continuous improvement are key to ensuring that systemic SEL is maintained across and embedded within contexts. When fully implemented, schoolwide SEL should contribute to more successful and equitable outcomes for young people.

To assess whether educators are implementing the activities within the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation shown in Figure 1, CASEL wrote—and then an advisory group and RAND researchers reviewed—a classroom teacher and a school leader survey instrument. Using previously administered items where available, CASEL developed survey scales for each indicator. School principals primarily answered questions about schoolwide practices (e.g., the principal reported on the frequency of these items: “At this school, students take an active role in working to improve aspects of the school and/or classroom” and “Teachers integrate SEL into their academic lesson plans”), while the teachers answered questions that were alternately about the teacher's own actions and beliefs (e.g., “When opportunities arise for my students to learn/practice social and emotional competencies, I act on them”) or about the

school at large (e.g., “At this school, staff care about students' feedback and ideas”).

RAND researchers then analyzed the survey scales with the resulting survey data to establish the reliability of each. To ease comparison of the survey scale results for each of the ten indicators, all of the underlying survey items ask about frequency of implementation on a 5-point scale of frequency ranging from “never” to “always.” The appendix lists the wording of each survey item in the ten scales and the Cronbach's alpha<sup>5</sup> for each to indicate the items' interrelatedness within the scale. By surveying both principals and teachers, CASEL was better able to understand the extent to which CDI districts achieved each indicator of schoolwide SEL implementation.

## **Educators' SEL Implementation Nationally as of 2021**

To address the first research question about how widespread SEL strategies are in schools nationally as of the 2021–2022 school year, we draw on the responses of all 1,231 teachers and 1,104 principals who took our survey. These educators work in schools that are a representative cross-section of schools nationally, as is shown in Tables A.1 and A.2 in the appendix.

To set the stage for the later discussion of the CDI districts and the comparable non-CDI districts, we first summarize the prevalence of SEL implementation in K–12 schools nationally in fall 2021 and compare it with results from a spring 2018 survey. We organize the results by the ten indicators of SEL implementation shown in Figure 1. Throughout this section, we compare our 2021–2022 results with those from a national survey of teachers and principals about SEL in the 2017–2018 school year (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019a).

### **Prevalence of SEL Implementation in U.S. Schools**

According to the nationally representative set of teachers and of principals whom we surveyed in November 2021, 90 percent of school principals and 75 percent of classroom teachers reported that their

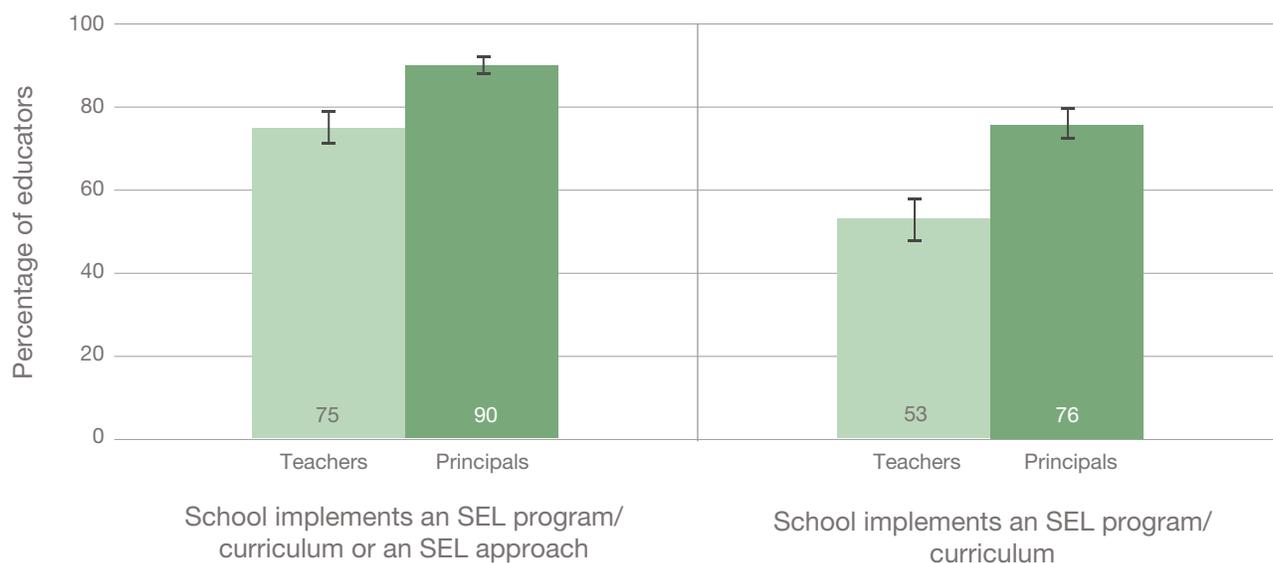
schools used an “SEL program or approach” to promote students’ SEL “sometimes,” “most of the time,” or “always” in the 2021–2022 school year (see the left side of Figure 2). Although we did not define these terms on the survey, we assume the respondents interpreted *SEL program* to mean the use of either a written SEL curriculum (such as Second Step or a written program, such as RULER), and the term *SEL approach* to mean the use of informal practices that are not necessarily written and formally included in a sequence of instruction, such as an individualized welcome for each student at the beginning of class.

To distinguish between the use of written SEL programs or curricula and the use of a less formal approach, we also compare teachers’ and principals’ responses from the first survey question shown (on the left side of Figure 2) with two other survey questions in which we asked solely about implementing a commercial, district-, or school-produced SEL program or curriculum. The right side of Figure 2 shows that 76 percent of principals and 53 percent of teachers

reported use of either a commercially produced or a district- or school-produced curriculum (or both) to a “moderate” or “great” extent. We deduce that 22 percent of teachers (i.e., 75 percent who use an “SEL program or approach” minus the 53 percent who use an SEL program or curriculum) and 14 percent of principals reported sole use of an informal SEL approach.<sup>6</sup>

In results not shown, elementary school principals were somewhat more likely to report that their schools implemented an SEL program or curriculum (81 percent) than secondary school principals (70 percent). (We combine middle and high school responses into the single category of secondary schools because of sample size.) A greater proportion of secondary school principals than elementary school principals relied on district- or school-created SEL curriculum as opposed to a commercial curriculum. Specifically, 53 percent of secondary school principals reported using a school- or district-created SEL program and 41 percent reported using a commercial curriculum. In comparison, 63 percent of elementary school prin-

FIGURE 2  
Percentage of Teachers and Principals Nationally Who Reported Their Schools Used an SEL Approach or Program in the 2021–2022 School Year



NOTES: The left set of two bars in the figure shows the weighted percentages of teachers ( $n = 987$ ) and principals ( $n = 1,003$ ) who responded “sometimes,” “most of the time,” or “always” to the following survey question: “My school uses an SEL program or approach to promote students’ social and emotional competence.” The right set of two bars in the figure shows the weighted percentages of teachers ( $n = 647$ ) and principals ( $n = 825$ ) who reported that they used one or both of the two following approaches, “Implement a commercially available social and emotional learning program or curricula,” or “Implement a district- or school-created social and emotional learning program or curricula,” this school year (2021–2022) to a “moderate” or “great” extent. Note that 35 percent of teachers and 52 percent of principals selected “moderate” or “great” extent for the commercial curriculum, while 43 percent of teachers and 55 percent of principals selected “moderate” or “great” extent for the district- or school-created SEL curriculum.

cipals reported using a commercial curriculum, while 58 percent reported using a school- or district-created SEL program.

To understand how SEL practices have changed nationally over time, we next compared a survey item about delivering explicit SEL instruction from the spring 2018 survey of principals and teachers about the 2017–2018 school year (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019a) with somewhat similarly worded questions we posed on the November 2021 survey. Although the comparison is imperfect for reasons that we explain in the next paragraph, it provides a rough sense of change over time in use of SEL programs or curricula. We only compare one survey item because the other survey items of interest were not sufficiently similar in wording to allow for comparison.

In spring 2018, the authors asked teachers and principals to select strategies they used to improve students’ SEL. In Figure 3, we display the proportion of them who selected “implement SEL programs.” We compare that item from spring 2018 with the combi-

nation of two November 2021 items in which teachers and principals said they either “implement[ed] a commercially available social and emotional learning program or curricula” or “implement[ed] a district- or school-created social and emotional learning program or curricula” (or both) “to a moderate extent” or “to a great extent.” We interpret the combination of two items as a measure of delivering explicit SEL instruction (indicator 1).

Figure 3 shows there has been a substantial increase of 26 to 33 percentage points in elementary (left side of figure) and secondary (right side of figure) teachers’ and principals’ reported use of an SEL program or curriculum. The increase was approximately 25 to 30 percentage points at both the elementary and the secondary level. More specifically, from spring 2018 to fall 2021, there was a 26 percentage point increase in elementary teachers and 27 percentage point increase in secondary teachers who reported frequent use of an SEL program or curriculum. Over this same period, there was a 29 percentage point increase in elementary principals and

FIGURE 3  
Percentage of Teachers and Principals Nationally Who Reported Implementation of an SEL Program in 2017–2018 and 2021–2022



NOTES: The 2018 results in this figure show the weighted percentages of teachers ( $n = 14,880$ ) and principals ( $n = 3,362$ ) who selected “Implement SEL programs” when asked to select strategies they used to improve students’ SEL. The 2021 results in this figure show weighted percentages of teachers ( $n = 1,186$ ) and principals ( $n = 1,059$ ) who selected “a moderate extent” or “great extent” when asked whether they used one or both of the following approaches to promote SEL: “Implement a commercially available social and emotional learning program or curricula” or “Implement a district- or school-created social and emotional learning program or curricula.” Note that 43 percent of elementary teachers and 28 percent of secondary teachers selected “moderate” or “great” extent for commercial SEL curricula, while 47 percent of elementary teachers and 38 percent of secondary teachers selected “moderate” or “great” extent for district- or school-created curricula. Confidence intervals are not presented because the data were not available for the spring 2018 survey results.

33 percentage point increase in secondary principals who reported use of an SEL program or curriculum.

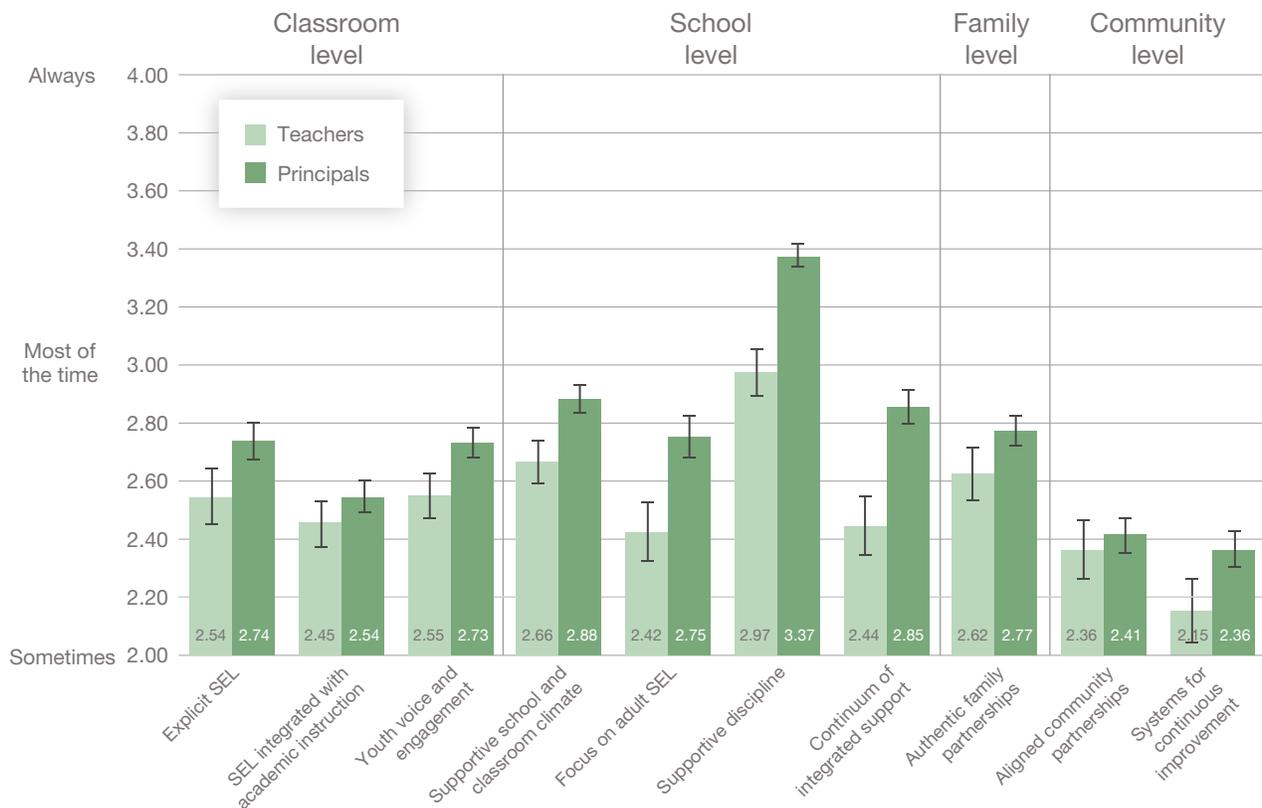
### Schoolwide SEL Practices as of 2021

Figure 4 displays the results from all surveyed teachers and principals nationally for all ten indicators we examined of schoolwide SEL implementation to answer research question 1. Applying the same categories shown in Figure 1, we organize these ten indicators into three classroom-level, four school-level, one family-level, and two community-level indicators. The results provide national context that

we then build on in the second research question exploring CDI and comparable districts.

Looking across the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL activity, principals nationally reported more frequent use of SEL practices in their schools than teachers did on each of the ten indicators. These differences may reflect principals’ presumably greater insight into practices across all classrooms in the school, or they may reflect a tendency for principals to believe desired practices occur more frequently than they do. Nevertheless, the difference is relatively small in the sense that teachers’ and principals’

FIGURE 4  
Frequency of Ten Indicators of Schoolwide SEL Activities During the 2021–2022 School Year, According to Teachers and Principals



NOTES: The results in this figure show the weighted means of teachers and principals for the following survey scales: explicit SEL, teacher ( $n = 1,209$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,088$ ); SEL integrated with academic instruction, teacher ( $n = 1,203$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,086$ ); youth voice and engagement, teacher ( $n = 1,200$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,081$ ); supportive school and classroom climate, teacher ( $n = 1,199$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,081$ ); focus on adult SEL, teacher ( $n = 1,196$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,081$ ); supportive discipline, teacher ( $n = 1,194$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,079$ ); continuum of integrated support, teacher ( $n = 1,194$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,077$ ); authentic family partnerships, teacher ( $n = 1,192$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,076$ ); aligned community partnerships, teacher ( $n = 1,153$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,073$ ); and systems for continuous improvement, teacher ( $n = 1,191$ ) and principal ( $n = 1,072$ ). The survey items making up each scale can be found in the appendix. The vertical black bars represent the 95-percent confidence interval for each weighted mean. Values for each scale can range from 0 (corresponding to “never”) to 4 (corresponding to “always”).

responses almost always ranged between “sometimes” and “most of the time.”

The practices that both teachers and principals reported doing most frequently (i.e., “most of the time”) related to supportive discipline (indicator 6). This indicator refers to the equal application of school rules to all students regardless of their characteristics, disciplinary practices that promote students’ social and emotional competencies, and staff modeling of problem-solving strategies that students can use to resolve conflicts. This focus on supportive discipline comports with the results of the national survey about the 2017–2018 school year, which show that many SEL programs were focused on behavior management (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019a).

The two community-focused activities (indicators 9 and 10) were the least frequently implemented of the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation. The aligned community partnership scale (indicator 9) refers to (1) the frequency with which a school’s community partnerships promote SEL, (2) the frequency with which after-school programs share the school’s SEL initiatives or language, and (3) the frequency of a school having community partnerships that support students and families during challenging times, such as periods of food insecurity. The systems for continuous improvement scale (indicator 10), meanwhile, refers to the frequency of the school communicating its SEL goals and progress to the larger school community and the frequency of using student data to understand issues of equity. Nationally, principals and teachers reported these

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happened “sometimes” during the 2021–2022 school year.

Teachers and principals reported that the remaining seven indicators—which focused broadly on classroom and school actions other than discipline—occurred more frequently than the community-focused activities but less frequently than supportive discipline activities (i.e., the remaining seven indicators occurred more often than “sometimes” and less often than “most of the time”). These activities included explicit SEL instruction in the classroom (indicator 1), the integration of SEL into academic lesson plans (indicator 2), youth voice and engagement (indicator 3), supportive school and classroom climate (indicator 4), focus on adult SEL (indicator 5), continuum of integrated support (indicator 7), and authentic family partnerships (indicator 8).

## Variation in SEL Attitudes and Practices by Educator and School Characteristics

To explore differences in national SEL attitudes and practices, we next looked at subgroups of teachers’ and principals’ reports about the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL shown in Figure 4. We examined whether frequency of reported SEL implementation differed based on educators’ locale (i.e., urban, suburban, rural), years of experience (i.e., five years or less, more than five years), school level (i.e., elementary, which includes grades K–5, and secondary, which includes grades 6–12), or race (i.e., White, Black or African American, other races). We collapsed educators’ race and ethnicity into only three categories because of the limited sample size; for example, of the 1,231 teachers who took our survey, 71 percent identified as White, 12 percent as Black or African American, and a smaller proportion identified as other races/ethnicities, including Hispanic. We show the results in the heat maps in Figures 5 and 6. In these figures, the lighter colors represent a less frequent use of the SEL strategies within that particular indicator, while the darker colors represent more frequent use.

Overall, we found similar patterns among teachers and principals in their reported frequency of using SEL strategies by subgroup. For example, both

elementary school teachers and elementary school principals reported more frequent use of SEL practices in their schools than their secondary school counterparts, as shown in the last two columns of Figures 5 and 6. The differences among teacher subgroups' reported frequency of SEL indicators (Figure 5) were more pronounced than among the principal subgroups (Figure 6). Therefore, we focus

our discussion on teacher differences in the rest of this section.

The largest differences in reported SEL practices between teacher subgroups were between elementary and secondary teachers. Elementary teachers reported teaching explicit SEL and integrating SEL into academic lessons with greater frequency than secondary teachers. Elementary teachers also

FIGURE 5  
Frequency of Classroom- and School-Level SEL Activities in 2021–2022, by Teacher Subgroup

		Locale				Years of experience		Race/ethnicity			School level	
		National sample (n = 1,231)	Urban (n = 710)	Suburban (n = 314)	Rural (n = 190)	0–5 years (n = 301)	5 or more years (n = 926)	White (n = 688)	Black or African American (n = 116)	Other (n = 166)	Elementary (n = 568)	Secondary (n = 631)
Classroom-level SEL	Explicit SEL	2.5	<b>2.7</b>	2.6	<b>2.4</b>	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.7	2.6	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.3</b>
	SEL integrated with academic instruction	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.4	<b>2.8</b>	2.5	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.3</b>
	Youth voice and engagement	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.4	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.4</b>
School-level SEL	Supportive school and classroom climates	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.7	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.5</b>
	Focus on adult SEL	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.3	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>
	Supportive discipline	<b>3.0</b>	2.9	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	2.9	<b>3.2</b>	<b>2.8</b>
	A continuum of integrated supports	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.3	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>
Family-level SEL	Authentic family partnerships	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.6	<b>3.1</b>	2.5	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.3</b>
Community-level SEL	Aligned community partnerships	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.4	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.3</b>	2.4	2.6	2.3	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>
	Systems for continuous improvement	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.0</b>

NOTES: The results in this figure show the weighted means of teachers and principals by different subgroups for each of the survey scales shown in the leftmost column. The survey items making up each scale can be found in the appendix. Values shown in bold indicate that the subgroup percentage of teachers or principals is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from teachers or principals not in that subgroup. The race/ethnicity variable was constructed by grouping respondents into a single category based on race/ethnicity data from the panel. Values for each scale can range from 0 (corresponding to “never”) to 4 (corresponding to “always”).

FIGURE 6

Frequency of Classroom- and School-Level SEL Activities in 2021–2002, by Principal Subgroup

		Locale			Years of experience		Race/ethnicity			School level		
		National sample (n = 1,104)	Urban (n = 494)	Suburban (n = 325)	Rural (n = 272)	0–2 years (n = 176)	3 or more years (n = 925)	White (n = 663)	Black or African American (n = 161)	Other (n = 117)	Elementary (n = 615)	Secondary (n = 459)
Classroom-level SEL	Explicit SEL	2.7	<b>2.9</b>	2.8	<b>2.6</b>	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.8	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.5</b>
	SEL integrated with academic instruction	2.5	<b>2.7</b>	2.5	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.6</b>	2.6	2.6	2.5	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.4</b>
	Youth voice and engagement	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.7</b>
School-level SEL	Supportive school and classroom climates	2.9	<b>3.0</b>	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.8</b>
	Focus on adult SEL	2.8	<b>2.9</b>	2.8	<b>2.7</b>	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.7	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.7</b>
	Supportive discipline	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>
	A continuum of integrated supports	2.8	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.0	2.8	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.7</b>
Family-level SEL	Authentic family partnerships	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.0</b>	2.9	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.6</b>
Community-level SEL	Aligned community partnerships	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	<b>2.4</b>	2.5	2.6	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.3</b>
	Systems for continuous improvement	2.4	<b>2.5</b>	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3

NOTES: The results in this figure show the weighted means of teachers and principals by different subgroups for each of the survey scales shown in the leftmost column. The survey items making up each scale can be found in the appendix. Values shown in bold indicate that the subgroup percentage of teachers or principals is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from teachers or principals not in that subgroup. The race/ethnicity variable was constructed by grouping respondents into a single category based on race/ethnicity data from the panel. Values for each scale can range from 0 (corresponding to “never”) to 4 (corresponding to “always”).

reported that a schoolwide focus on SEL, such as training staff members in SEL, supportive discipline, and supportive climate occurred more frequently than did secondary teachers. These results mirror those from a similar survey about the 2017–2018 school year, where elementary educators reported more SEL implementation than did secondary educators (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019a).

The next largest difference among teachers’ SEL practices was by locale. Specifically, urban and suburban teachers reported more frequent SEL instruction than rural teachers, as was also true in the 2017–2018 school year. Also, teachers with five or more years of experience reported teaching SEL more frequently than their less experienced counterparts. Finally, Black or African American teachers reported

somewhat more frequent SEL instruction than their counterparts from other racial and ethnic groups.

## Comparing CDI District Implementation with That of Demographically Similar Non-CDI Districts

We now turn to our second research question investigating schoolwide SEL implementation in CDI versus comparable non-CDI districts according to educators' responses from the November 2021 survey. Specifically, we compare responses from 325 classroom teachers from 20 CDI districts with responses of 443 classroom teachers from 77 comparable non-CDI districts. We also compare 105 principals' responses from 18 of the 20 CDI districts with 484 principals' responses from 211 comparable non-CDI districts. We conducted statistical significance tests of the differences presented throughout this section, and we only discuss statistically significant differences unless otherwise noted. As we describe in the appendix, we weighted these two sets of CDI and comparable non-CDI responses to be representative of all teachers and principals working in CDI districts and of all teachers and principals working in comparable non-CDI districts nationally. We first examined the percentage of educators who reported implementing SEL in their schools and we then examine the ten schoolwide indicators of SEL implementation set forth in Figure 1.

### Prevalence of SEL Strategies in CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Districts

The majority of classroom teachers and principals in both the CDI and comparable non-CDI districts reported that their schools used an SEL curriculum, program, or approach in the 2021–2022 school year (see the left side of Figure 7). A higher proportion of CDI and comparable non-CDI district educators reported doing so than educators nationally. Whereas 75 percent of teachers and 90 percent of principals nationally said their schools used an SEL program or approach to promote students' SEL in 2021–2022

(Figure 2), 88 percent of CDI teachers and 97 percent of CDI principals reported doing so (Figure 7).

Although more CDI and comparable non-CDI districts reported use of an SEL approach than educators nationally, we did not find that CDI educators were statistically significantly more likely to do so than their comparable non-CDI counterparts. Figure 7 shows that, while a slightly higher percentage of CDI teachers and principals reported use of an SEL approach and of an SEL program or curriculum than comparable non-CDI educators, the differences were not statistically significant.

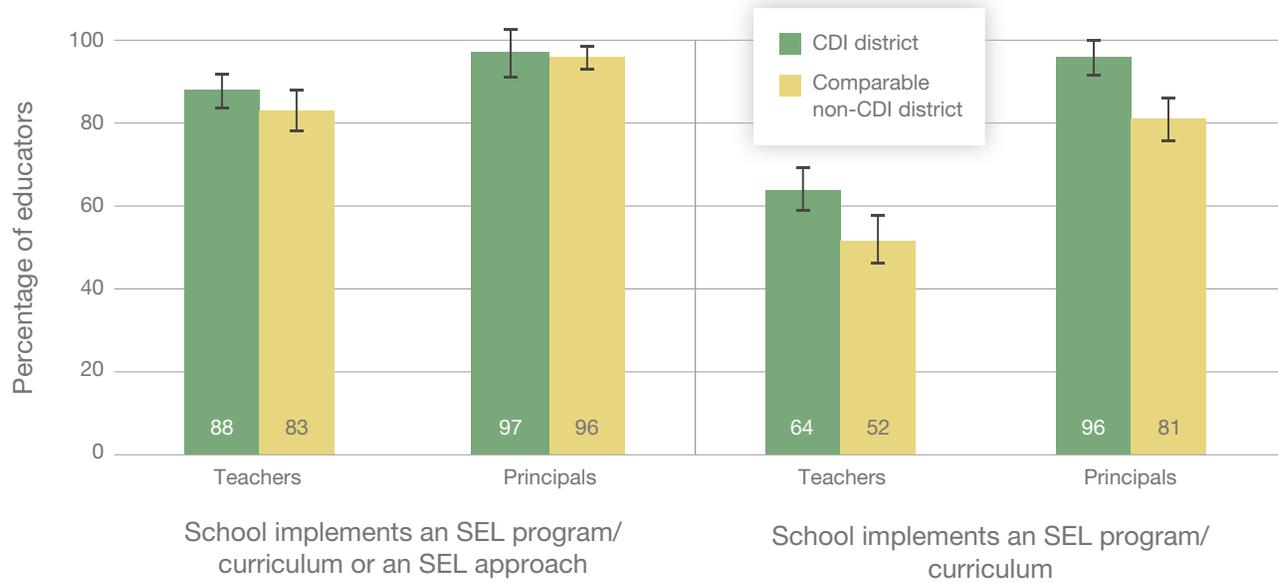
### Summary of Differences Among the Ten Schoolwide SEL Indicators of Schoolwide SEL Between CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Educators

Here we preview the most notable differences between the CDI and comparable non-CDI educators' reported frequency of implementation of the ten classroom, school, family, and community SEL activity indicators of schoolwide SEL listed in Figure 1. We discuss these differences in more detail in the rest of this section.

- In six out of the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL activity, CDI teachers or principals (or both) reported statistically significantly more frequent SEL practices than their comparable non-CDI counterparts. These activities include explicit SEL instruction (indicator 1), SEL integrated with academic instruction (indicator 2), youth voice and engagement (indicator 3), focus on adult SEL (indicator 5), aligned community partnerships (indicator 9), and systems for continuous improvement (indicator 10). The differences for the other four indicators of SEL activity were not statistically significant (indicators 4, 6, 7, and 8).
- The largest differences between CDI and comparable non-CDI educators were in classroom-based SEL instruction (indicators 1 and 2, shown in Figure 8), and adult focus on SEL (indicator 5, shown in Figure 9).
- The CDI and comparable non-CDI educators' responses shared several traits with the

FIGURE 7

CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Teachers' and Principals' Reports About SEL Use in 2021–2022



NOTES: The four bars at the left show the weighted percentages of teachers ( $n = 752$ ) and principals ( $n = 582$ ) who reported, “My school uses an SEL program or approach to promote students’ social and emotional competence,” in the 2021–2022 school year “sometimes,” “most of the time,” or “always.” The four bars at the right show the weighted percentages of teachers ( $n = 740$ ) and principals ( $n = 565$ ) who reported that they used or anticipated using one or both of the following approaches: “Implement a commercially available social and emotional learning program or curricula” or “Implement a district or school-created social and emotional learning program or curricula,” this school year (2021–2022) to a “moderate” or “great” extent. Note that 44 percent of CDI teachers, 37 percent of comparable non-CDI teachers, 71 percent of CDI principals, and 58 percent of comparable non-CDI principals selected “moderate” or “great” extent for the commercial SEL curricula, while 54 percent of CDI teachers, 41 percent of comparable non-CDI teachers, 68 percent of CDI principals, and 61 percent of comparable non-CDI principals selected “moderate” or “great” extent for district- or school-created SEL curricula. The vertical black bars represent the 95-percent confidence interval for each weighted percentage. None of the differences between CDI and comparable non-CDI districts in this figure were statistically significant.

national results. Specifically, the least frequently implemented SEL indicators in CDI districts related to the community (indicators 9 and 10), while the most frequent was supportive discipline (indicator 6). In results not shown in figures, CDI teachers in elementary schools reported more frequent use of SEL than did teachers in secondary schools for seven out of the ten indicators. CDI elementary school principals, meanwhile, reported statistically significantly more frequent use of SEL strategies for two of the ten indicators and directionally (but not statistically significantly) more frequent in the others.

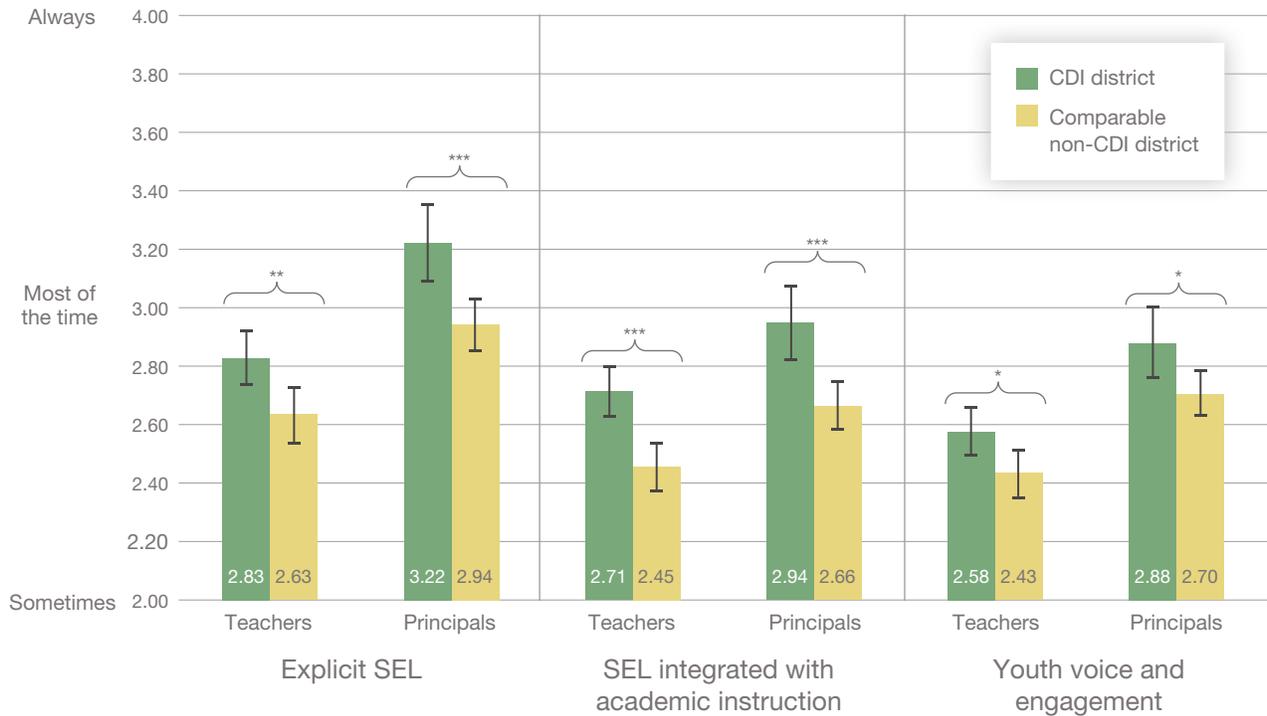
### Classroom-Based SEL Use in CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Districts

In this section, we discuss the three classroom-level indicators shown in Figure 1. Out of all ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation, explicit SEL instruction (indicator 1) and SEL integrated with academic instruction (indicator 2) yielded the largest differences between CDI and comparable non-CDI educators. Looking beyond the composite indicator scores to the specific items within them, we see in the explicit SEL instruction indicator the largest differences between CDI and comparable non-CDI teachers’ responses in the following two out of three total survey items in the scale:

- “My school uses an SEL program or approach to promote students’ social and emotional competence.”

FIGURE 8

Frequency of CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Teachers' and Principals' Reported Use of SEL in the Classroom in 2021–2022



NOTES: The results in this figure show the weighted means of teachers and principals for the following survey scales: explicit SEL, teacher ( $n = 752$ ) and principal ( $n = 582$ ); SEL integrated with academic instruction, teacher ( $n = 751$ ) and principal ( $n = 581$ ); and youth voice and engagement, teacher ( $n = 748$ ) and principal ( $n = 577$ ). The survey items making up each scale can be found in the appendix. The vertical black bars represent the 95-percent confidence interval for each weighted mean. Values for each scale can range from 0 (corresponding to “never”) to 4 (corresponding to “always”). \* indicates that the difference between teachers or principals from CDI districts and comparable non-CDI districts is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. \*\* indicates that the difference between teachers or principals from CDI districts and comparable non-CDI districts is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level. \*\*\* indicates that the difference between teachers or principals from CDI districts and comparable non-CDI districts is significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level.

- “The SEL lessons in my class provide opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies.”

CDI principals also reported more frequent use than comparable non-CDI principals for these same two items, as well as the third: “When opportunities arise for our students to learn/practice social and emotional competencies, teachers act on them.”

Turning to explicit integration of SEL into academics (indicator 2), CDI teachers also reported more frequent integration of SEL into academics than comparable non-CDI teachers on the following two out of three survey items within the scale:

- “My school provides me with the necessary support/resources on how to integrate SEL with academic instruction.”

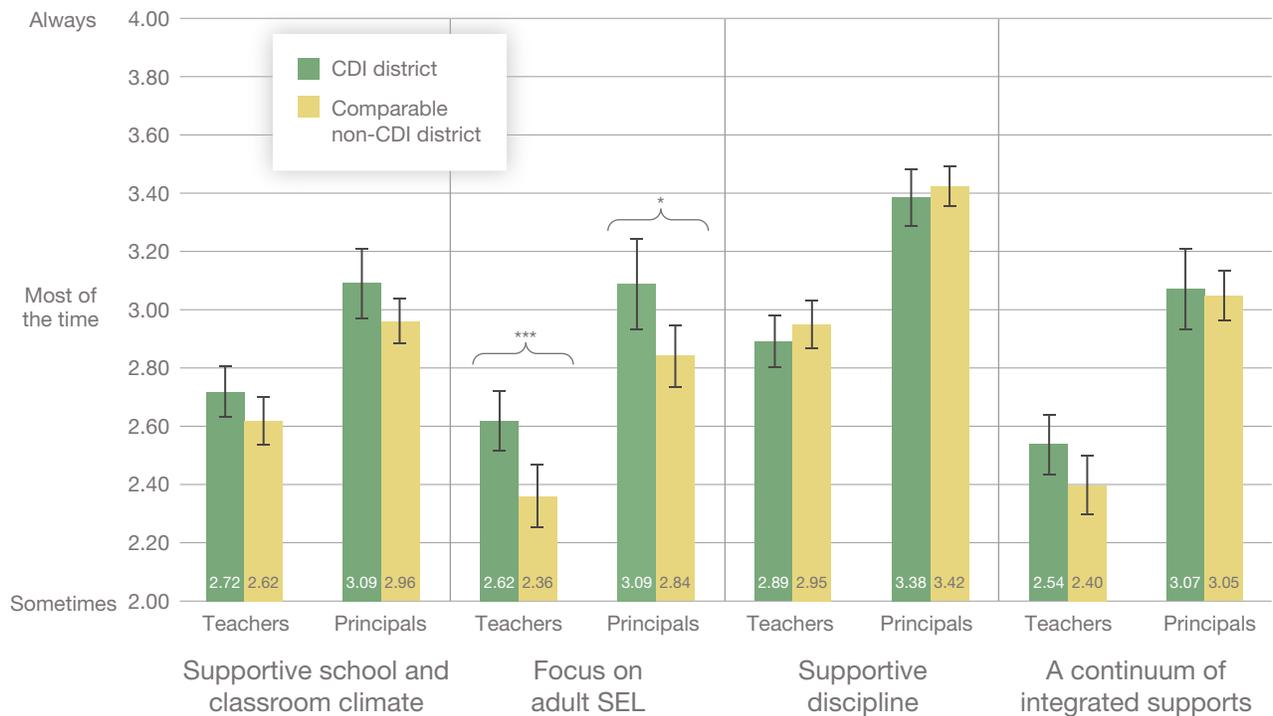
- “I integrate SEL into my academic lesson plans.”

CDI principals also reported that their schools enacted these two practices with greater frequency than did comparable non-CDI principals, as well as the third item: “The teaching practices at this school make connections to students’ lives.”

CDI teachers and principals also reported more frequent youth voice and engagement (indicator 3) than their comparable non-CDI counterparts. Looking at the specific survey items within the indicator, both teachers and principals reported statistically significantly more frequent occurrence for only the first of three survey items: “At this school, students take an active role in working to improve aspects of the school and/or classroom.”

FIGURE 9

Frequency of CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Teachers' and Principals' Reported Use of SEL Schoolwide in 2021–2022



NOTES: The results in this figure show the weighted means of teachers and principals for the following survey scales: supportive school and classroom climate, teacher ( $n = 747$ ) and principal ( $n = 577$ ); focus on adult SEL, teacher ( $n = 745$ ) and principal ( $n = 577$ ); supportive discipline, teacher ( $n = 743$ ) and principal ( $n = 575$ ); and a continuum of integrated supports, teacher ( $n = 743$ ) and principal ( $n = 573$ ). The survey items making up each scale can be found in the appendix. The vertical black bars represent the 95-percent confidence interval for each weighted mean. Values for each scale can range from 0 (corresponding to “never”) to 4 (corresponding to “always”). \* indicates that the difference between teachers or principals from CDI districts and comparable non-CDI districts is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. \*\*\* indicates that the difference between teachers or principals from CDI districts and comparable non-CDI districts is significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level.

Although it is not one of the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation, we note that the survey of teachers and principals also contained a scale about the programmatic coherence of SEL in school buildings. This scale included three survey items about whether the SEL curriculum and instruction in the 2021–2022 school year were well coordinated across the different grade levels and among teachers in the same grade level, and whether most teachers were engaged in integrating SEL into classroom instruction. CDI teachers reported these activities occurred at a greater frequency than their comparable non-CDI counterparts for all three items, while CDI principals reported the activities occurred at a greater frequency than their non-CDI counterparts for two of the three items. These differences

suggest that not only was explicit SEL instruction and integration of SEL into academics more frequent within classrooms in CDI districts than in comparable non-CDI districts (i.e., indicators 1 and 2) but also educators in CDI districts coordinated SEL instruction more frequently across classrooms.

### Schoolwide SEL Use in CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Districts

In this section, we discuss the four school-level indicators of SEL implementation (i.e., indicators 4 to 7) listed in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 9, CDI teachers and principals reported more frequent focus on adult SEL (indicator 5) than comparable non-CDI teachers and principals. We did not, however, find differences

between these groups in the other three schoolwide indicators: supportive school and classroom climates (indicator 4), supportive discipline (indicator 6), or continuum of integrated supports (indicator 7).

Looking at the specific survey items within the adult SEL development (indicator 5) scale, CDI teachers and principals each reported higher frequency than their comparable counterparts on each of the items in the scale:

- “I have participated in professional learning on how my interactions with students can promote their social and emotional competence.”
- “My school provides me with the necessary support/resources to better reflect on how my identities and experiences can shape my perspectives.”
- [survey item was listed for teachers only] “My principal models social and emotional competence in the way he/she interacts.”

## Family and Community SEL Partnerships in CDI and Non-CDI Districts

In this section, we discuss the final three out of the ten schoolwide indicators of SEL implementation listed in Figure 1. No statistically significant difference emerged in the family engagement scale (indicator 8) between CDI and comparable non-CDI educators, as shown in the left side of Figure 10. Two statistically significant differences emerged in community partnerships, as shown on the right side of the figure. Specifically, CDI teachers reported their schools’ community partnerships more frequently promoted SEL than comparable non-CDI teachers did (indicator 9), and they did the same about systems for continuous improvement (indicator 10).

Looking at the three items within the teachers’ report about community partnerships (but not the principals’ report because their estimated frequencies were not statistically significantly different), CDI teachers reported the following occurred statistically significantly more frequently than their comparable non-CDI peers: “At this school, community partnerships (such as businesses, community organizations, etc.) promote students’ social and emotional skill

development.” Within continuous improvement, CDI teachers indicated the following item occurred more frequently: “My school communicates our SEL goals and our progress on these goals with the larger school community.”

## Implications for Districts Nationally and for CDI and CASEL

We conclude with the third research question about the implications of these results for districts nationally and, specifically, for CDI districts and CASEL.

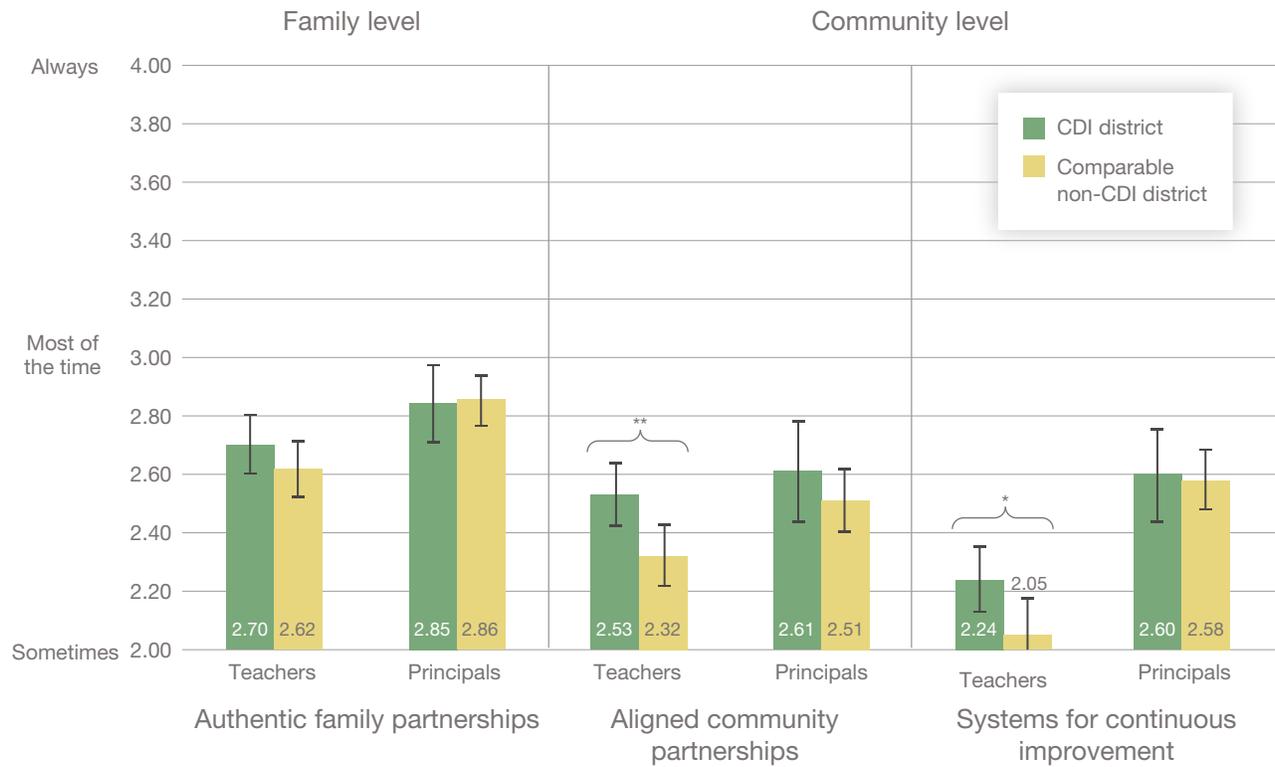
### Implications for Districts Nationally

Nationally representative surveys of educators as of spring 2018 and fall 2021 indicate significant increases of approximately 25 percentage points or more over that time in the percentages of both elementary and secondary educators’ reports of using SEL programs or curricula. By fall 2021, approximately half or more of teachers and/or principals reported that their elementary or secondary schools used an SEL program or curriculum. Furthermore, teachers and principals indicated that they implemented several SEL strategies as of the 2021–2022 school year that ranged across an array of classroom, schoolwide, and family activities. As of fall 2021, teachers and principals reported that most of their various SEL activities occurred somewhere between “sometimes” and “most of the time.”

Of the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation that we examined, the least frequent activities were those that embed SEL in family and community partnerships. Although several of these strategies logically occur less frequently than such activities as student discipline, we still note a general pattern of greater take-up of SEL in the classroom than in schoolwide activities, such as data use and communications with family and with the community. Yet families and caregivers are an essential factor in the cultivation of social and emotional competencies throughout a student’s life. Schools and families that work together can build strong connections that reinforce a student’s positive academic,

FIGURE 10

Frequency of CDI and Comparable Non-CDI Teachers' and Principals' Reported Partnerships with Families and in the Community, in 2021–2022



NOTES: The results in this figure show the weighted means of the following survey scales: Authentic family partnerships, teacher ( $n = 743$ ) and principal ( $n = 572$ ), aligned community partnerships, teacher ( $n = 718$ ) and principal ( $n = 570$ ); and systems for continuous improvement, teacher ( $n = 743$ ) and principal ( $n = 569$ ). The survey items making up each scale can be found in the appendix. The vertical black bars represent the 95-percent confidence interval for each weighted mean. Values for each scale can range from 0 (corresponding to “never”) to 4 (corresponding to “always”). \* indicates that the difference between teachers or principals from CDI districts and comparable non-CDI districts is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. \*\* indicates that the difference between teachers or principals from CDI districts and comparable non-CDI districts is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level.

social, and emotional adjustment (Albright and Weissberg, 2010). Fostering a welcoming and culturally responsive school environment and authentically engaging families as partners are critical for districts and schools to promote students’ SEL.

These survey results about the frequency of various SEL activities suggest that, in those districts and schools that wish to implement SEL systemically, teachers and school leaders may want to examine their implementation of SEL beyond the classroom. They can do so by studying whether SEL is embedded in professional development, in continuous improvement data cycles, and in their family and community partnerships.

The November 2021 national results echo the same pattern from spring 2018 of less use of com-

mercially published SEL curricula in secondary schools relative to elementary schools and secondary schools’ greater reliance on informal SEL practices and district- or school-created SEL curricula. This points to the continued need for more commercially developed and evidence-based SEL curricula and programs that are specifically designed for high school students (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Grant et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017).

Finally, the higher frequency of SEL implementation reported by principals compared with teachers suggests a broader need for districts and schools to look at multiple sources of data—not just survey data—to understand daily SEL implementation strategies at the school level. This factor is especially true for socially desirable, but important, activities,

such as educators using equitable discipline strategies with students, in which survey data likely inflate actual practice. Other sources of data include direct observation and administrative data about student behavior, attendance, discipline, direct measures of students' SEL skills, and academic outcomes. Survey data from educators are an important, but not wholly sufficient, part of understanding how educators work together to improve schools so they are genuinely welcoming for students and staff and challenge students to grow academically and socially.

## Implications for CDI Districts

Turning to CDI districts specifically, the survey data show that CDI educators reported SEL implementation that was statistically significantly more frequent than comparable non-CDI educators across six of the ten indicators of schoolwide implementation of SEL. This suggests that districts' participation in the CDI is strongly linked with more frequent SEL implementation.

Of the ten indicators we examined, the three that addressed teacher SEL practices—explicit SEL instruction in the classroom, integration of SEL into academics, and frequency of professional learning for teachers about SEL—yielded the largest statistically significant differences between CDI and comparable non-CDI districts. That is, CDI teachers and principals reported more frequent use of SEL lessons that give their students the chance to practice social and emotional competencies, integration of SEL into academics, programmatic coherence of SEL in the school, participation in professional learning that teaches how the teacher's interactions with students can promote students' social and emotional competencies, and provision of school resources to reflect on how teachers' identities and experiences shape their perspectives. These results collectively indicate that CDI districts' focus on SEL has filtered down to the classroom, where we see the largest, most notable differences in SEL activity for CDI districts.

The differences between CDI and comparable non-CDI districts diminish for indicators of SEL activities that either (1) reach beyond the classroom, such as community partnerships and SEL data systems; or (2) include widely implemented concepts,

such as the teaching of problem-solving strategies, the fair application of rules to students, communication with families, the importance of students feeling comfortable talking to adults at the school about personal problems, and caring about students' feedback and ideas.

We believe there might be several reasons that the reported differences in implementation of these activities between CDI and comparable non-CDI districts are smaller for SEL that extends beyond classroom instruction. The first reason is that such activities as creating norms for how school adults will interact with their students have been so widely adopted by schools that they are no more or less likely to be implemented in a CDI district than a comparable non-CDI district. The second reason is that such concepts as giving students choices, creating a positive climate, and partnering with families are socially desirable activities that CDI and non-CDI educators alike may feel they should report occur (if not do) with frequency. The third is that SEL activities that go beyond delivering instruction, such as collection of data about students' social and emotional skills, might be activities that school systems approach only at more mature stages of SEL implementation or enact less frequently by design.

We recommend that CASEL and CDI districts crosswalk these results about the ten indicators of schoolwide SEL implementation with the CDI districts' multiyear implementation plans to gauge whether the activities that CDI educators reported happening at greatest frequency accord with those the districts intended, and whether the reported frequency of implementation is appropriate to the activity. If there are priority areas in a district's implementation plans that are not frequent in the survey results—for example, the frequent communication of SEL goals to the broader community, or the incorporation of SEL into community partnerships—these are areas where the CDI districts and CASEL could then work to identify barriers to implementation and take steps to address them. By the same token, if there are high-frequency survey results that map onto the districts' implementation plans, these are areas to celebrate with teachers and principals and from which to build.

In conclusion, we identify several areas of strength in schoolwide SEL implementation in CDI districts. These areas of strength center on the classroom, such as explicit SEL instruction and integration of SEL into academics. We also note areas for growth in particularly those SEL strategies that extend beyond the classroom, such as collection and use of data about SEL and community partnerships.

CASEL intends to track the patterns of change in SEL implementation over time, because doing so is key to educators being better equipped with the data necessary to develop and scope out realistic, multiyear plans for SEL. Such multiyear plans can help educators become progressively more systematic and comprehensive in their approach to SEL so as to meet the needs of the students in their districts and across the United States.

## Appendix

In this appendix, we provide a description of the survey methods, who took the survey, how we weighted the results, the ten survey scales, and limitations of our analysis. The survey instruments and deidentified survey data are available for free in the RAND American Educator Panels (AEP) data portal found at [www.rand.org/aep](http://www.rand.org/aep).

### Survey Details

The survey was fielded by the AEP, using samples of K–12 teachers from the ATP and principals from the ASLP. To compare CDI districts with comparable non-CDI districts, we divided the teachers and principals in the survey into three different samples:

1. teachers and principals from CDI districts
2. those from comparable non-CDI districts
3. a national sample that did not include teachers or principals from the other two samples (comparable non-CDI districts selected based on U.S. Census geographic division, locale, school size, and student racial/ethnic composition).

We emailed the first invitation to take the survey on November 15, 2021, to 2,260 teachers and 2,422 principals. The teacher survey closed on Decem-

ber 16, 2021, and the principal survey closed earlier on December 13, 2021. The teacher survey had 1,231 responses (including partial responses of at least 10 percent of the survey), resulting in a 54.5 percent completion rate. The principal survey had 1,104 responses, including partial responses, resulting in a 45.6 percent completion rate. Teachers from all 20 CDI districts responded to the survey, while principals from 18 out of the 20 districts responded.

Given the complexity of our sample and our research goals, we developed two separate weights to do the analyses shown in the report. The first was a calibration weight, which allows us to calculate national average benchmarks over the whole sample. We present the results using this weight in the section of the report about national averages. This weight was applied to teachers and principals in all three populations (CDI districts, comparable non-CDI districts, and the rest of the sample) and considers the likelihood of response for each educator.

The second weight we used was a propensity score average treatment on the treated weight. This weight allows us to compare the CDI respondents with the comparable non-CDI respondents and was only applied to teachers and principals in those samples. Tables A.1 and A.2 show the descriptive statistics based on this second weight for the CDI and the comparable non-CDI respondents. CDI respondents all received a weight of 1, while the non-CDI respondents received non-constant weights to make that sample similar to the CDI sample. All numbers presented in the report, whether means or percentages, are weighted.

To answer our research question about the differences between CDI educators' and comparable non-CDI educators' use of SEL, we calculated whether the difference in means were statistically significant between those two samples. Given that we did not stratify our sample of invited educators for our survey by schools or districts but rather by our three different populations (CDI, comparable non-CDI, and the rest of the sample), we did not make any school or district clustering adjustments to the standard errors. In addition to the population-level randomization, we note that there was very little clustering of teachers within schools and schools

TABLE A.1  
 Weighted Descriptive Statistics for ATP Survey Respondents

Variable	CDI Sample Estimates	Non-CDI Sample	
		Unweighted	Weighted
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>			
Black	20.8	12.1	13.0
White	60.0	68.0	65.0
Other	19.2	19.9	22.0
<b>Years of experience</b>			
Less than 4 years	16.9	13.1	15.0
4 to 9 years	31.7	26.0	32.0
10 to 14 years	20.9	23.0	21.1
More than 15 years	30.5	37.9	31.9
<b>School type</b>			
Elementary	32.0	37.0	35.2
Elementary-Middle	17.9	13.1	19.1
High	24.6	30.0	23.3
Middle	17.2	17.4	15.8
Middle-High	8.3	2.5	6.7
<b>Percentage of minority students</b>			
0%–25%	1.5	0.5	2.4
25%–50%	9.5	9.9	10.9
50%–75%	18.5	25.3	18.5
75%–100%	70.5	64.3	68.1
<b>Percentage of students eligible for a free or reduced-price meal</b>			
0%–25%	8.6	10.6	8.9
25%–50%	14.8	17.2	16.6
50%–75%	22.8	27.1	20.2
75%–100%	53.9	45.2	54.4
<b>School size</b>			
Small	18.2	10.6	18.0
Medium	40.6	33.9	38.2
Large	41.2	55.5	43.8

Table A.1—Continued

Variable	CDI Sample Estimates	Non-CDI Sample	
		Unweighted	Weighted
<b>Locale</b>			
Urban	81.2	79.2	81.2
Suburban	14.2	15.1	15.1
Town	0.6	0.2	0.8
Rural	4.0	5.4	2.9
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	20.3	25.5	19.3
Female	79.7	74.5	80.7

NOTE: The total survey sample consists of 1,231 respondents, while the sample in this table consists of 325 CDI teachers and 443 comparable non-CDI teachers. We obtained school characteristics from a combination of panel data from MDR Education and the Common Core of Data files; these data are from the 2019–2020 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Weighted proportions were calculated using survey weights, which were calculated to match CDI to the comparable non-CDI teachers.

TABLE A.2  
Weighted Descriptive Statistics for ASLP Survey Respondents

Variable	CDI Sample Estimates	Non-CDI Sample	
		Unweighted	Weighted
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>			
Black	30.4	23.1	23.6
White	52.2	62.5	63.3
Other	17.4	14.4	13.1
<b>Years of experience</b>			
Less than 4 years	21.0	27.7	20.5
4 to 9 years	45.7	41.9	43.8
10 to 14 years	21.0	18.4	23.5
More than 15 years	12.4	12.0	12.2
<b>School type</b>			
Elementary	70.5	64.5	71.2
Middle	18.1	13.6	17.7
High	11.4	21.9	11.1
<b>Percentage of minority students</b>			
0%–25%	6.7	2.5	8.2
25%–50%	11.4	16.9	11.5
50%–75%	16.2	25.4	16.0
75%–100%	65.7	55.2	64.3

Table A.2—Continued

Variable	CDI Sample Estimates	Non-CDI Sample	
		Unweighted	Weighted
<b>Percentage of students eligible for a free or reduced-price meal</b>			
0%–25%	10.5	13.4	11.8
25%–50%	23.8	19.0	23.1
50%–75%	17.1	25.6	16.9
75%–100%	48.6	41.9	48.2
<b>School size</b>			
Small	32.4	19.8	31.2
Medium	41.9	50.0	43.2
Large	25.7	30.2	25.7
<b>Locale</b>			
Urban	84.8	64.3	84.9
Suburban	11.4	29.1	11.6
Town	1.0	1.2	0.6
Rural	2.9	5.4	3.0
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	61.0	63.2	60.7
Female	39.1	36.8	39.3

NOTE: The total survey sample consists of 1,104 respondents, while the sample in this table consists of 105 CDI principals and 484 comparable non-CDI principals. We obtained school characteristics from a combination of panel data from MDR Education and the Common Core of Data files; these data are from the 2019–2020 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Weighted proportions were calculated using survey weights, which were calculated to match CDI to the comparable non-CDI teachers.

within districts. For example, 91 percent of teacher respondents came from unique schools.

## Survey Items for the Ten CASEL Indicators

CASEL designed the survey to measure primarily classroom and school-level implementation of the ten indicators listed in Figure 1 of this report. For these ten indicators, they drew on their own teacher survey from 2020, which was in turn drawn from CASEL’s guide for schoolwide SEL (CASEL, undated-a). We performed confirmatory factor analysis after the survey was fielded to ensure that each of the ten scales listed in this appendix were sufficiently reliable.

To test the clarity of the survey items, we first conducted two rounds of cognitive interviews with a small number of teachers in summer 2021. Teach-

ers first took a draft version of the survey, and we then debriefed with these teachers in an interview to ensure that the survey questions were understood as intended by teachers. After the first round of interviews, some modifications were made and tested with the second group of teachers. Following the cognitive interviews, we fielded a pilot survey to obtain about 80 completed surveys by teachers (40) and principals (40) in October 2021. After a brief pause to examine the pilot survey data, no further edits were made to the survey, and we continued fielding the survey in November 2022.

Next, we list the ten survey scales presented throughout the report along with their Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for each sample and the individual survey items. Each survey item within these ten scales had the initial survey prompt of “How often has each of the following occurred over the summer and/or so

far this school year (2021–2022)?” Each survey item had a five-option frequency response scale of “Never,” “Hardly ever,” “Sometimes,” “Most of the time,” and “Always.” Occasionally, the principal survey had slightly different wording than in the teacher survey, which we have noted in brackets below.

### **Explicit SEL**

**(teacher alpha 0.79; principal alpha 0.87)**

- My school uses an SEL program or approach to promote students’ social and emotional competence.
- The SEL lessons in my class provide opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies.
- When opportunities arise for my students to learn/practice social and emotional competencies, I [teachers] act on them.

### **SEL integrated with academic instruction**

**(teacher alpha 0.73; principal alpha 0.81)**

- My school provides me [teachers] with the necessary support/resources on how to integrate SEL with academic content instruction.
- I [Teachers] integrate SEL into my academic lesson plans.
- My [The] teaching practices [at this school] make connections to my students’ lives.

### **Youth voice and engagement**

**(teacher alpha 0.84; principal alpha 0.83)**

- At this school, students take an active role in working to improve aspects of the school and/or classroom.
- At this school, staff care about students’ feedback and ideas.
- At this school, staff incorporate students’ feedback/ideas into aspects of the school and/or classroom.

### **Supportive school and classroom climates**

**(teacher alpha 0.75; principal alpha 0.72)**

- The culture at my school supports SEL.

- My school’s staff use shared agreements/norms for how we will all interact with our students.
- Students feel comfortable talking to adults at this school about personal problems.

### **Focus on adult SEL**

**(teacher alpha 0.79; principal alpha 0.81)**

- I have participated in professional learning on how my interactions with students can promote their social and emotional competence.
- My principal models social and emotional competence in the way he/she interacts with staff in our school community. [This item was not asked of principals.]
- My school provides me with the necessary support/resources to better reflect on how my identities and experiences can shape my perspectives.

### **Supportive discipline**

**(teacher alpha 0.89; principal alpha 0.83)**

- My school’s disciplinary practices promote students’ social and emotional competencies.
- I model problem-solving strategies that students can use to resolve conflicts.
- My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their race/ethnicity.
- My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their family’s income level.
- My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their academic abilities or achievement.
- My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their past behavioral issues/referrals.

### **Continuum of integrated supports**

**(teacher alpha 0.79; principal alpha 0.80)**

- At this school, staff use a multitiered system of supports (such as [Multi-Tiered System of Supports] or Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems) to meet the social and emotional needs of all students.

- My school provides me [teachers] with the necessary support on how to best implement SEL in the classroom.
- Interdisciplinary teams work together to monitor students' social and emotional development.

**Authentic family partnerships  
(teacher alpha 0.87; principal alpha 0.81)**

- I seek input from families about how to best meet their students' social and emotional needs.
- I communicate with my students' families as a way to build positive relationships.
- I involve my students' families in meaningful decisionmaking.

**Aligned community partnerships  
(teacher alpha 0.84; principal alpha 0.78)**

- At this school, community partnerships (such as businesses or community organizations, etc.) promote students' social and emotional skill development.
- At this school, community partnerships support students and families during challenging times (such as school or life transitions, food insecurity, etc.).
- At this school, after-school programming and/or extracurricular activities share our SEL initiatives/language.

**Systems for continuous improvement  
(teacher alpha 0.88; principal alpha 0.82)**

- My school communicates our SEL goals and our progress on these goals.
- My school communicates what data are collected on students' social and emotional skills.
- My school uses student data to better understand issues of equity.

## Survey Limitations

There are several limitations to this report. The first is that we acquired the sampling frame for recruiting teachers to participate in the ATP from MDR Education. Although the roster is meant to be as comprehensive as possible, it likely underrepresents new teachers or experienced teachers who are new to a school or district. Although we weighted the results to look like the national population of teachers or CDI teachers, we may not have drawn the teachers from a completely random sample. Second, because there are only 20 CDI districts from which to sample educators, we consider the CDI group to be a convenience sample for which standard errors may not be straightforward. However, because we randomly sampled teachers and principals at the population level (i.e., at CDI, non-CDI, and other national), there was limited clustering of educators within schools and districts, and we do not adjust our standard errors for clustering. This is important to keep in mind when interpreting our results.

Third, the responses presented in this report reflect teacher and principal perceptions, which may not align with schools' and districts' actual experiences. This limitation is particularly salient for socially desirable survey questions, such as the equal application of rules to all children, regardless of their background. Fourth, teachers' and principals' responses from CDI districts may be influenced by language they had heard as a result of participating in the CDI; therefore, their responses may or may not align with actual experiences. Fifth, respondents might not consistently interpret terms on the survey, such as "sometimes," "most of the time," or "moderate extent," which might affect how they answer survey items. Sixth and finally, although our analysis establishes substantive differences in responses from CDI educators and comparable non-CDI educators, the survey does not establish whether the higher-reported frequency of SEL activity has or has not influenced student outcomes.

## Abbreviations

AEP	American Educator Panel
ASLP	American School Leader Panel
ATP	American Teacher Panel
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
CDI	Collaborating Districts Initiative
SEL	social and emotional learning

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Two meta-analytic studies that included hundreds of social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions found positive effects on social and emotional skills, indicators of well-being, and academic performance (Taylor et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011). In an evidence review of SEL, Grant and colleagues, 2017, found that “interpersonal competencies (e.g., hostile attribution biases, prosocial behaviors, interpersonal communication, and social problem-solving skills) were more likely to be positively affected than intrapersonal competencies (e.g., attention, concentration, emotional regulation, and perseverance)” (p. 72). Two examples of individual studies provide more detail. A 2011 study found that social and emotional competencies in early childhood were strongly associated with young adult outcomes in education, employment, need for public assistance, mental health, substance abuse, and criminal activity (Moffitt et al., 2011). In a 2015 study, researchers found that kindergartners’ social competence was associated with increased likelihood of graduating from college and being employed full time by the age of 25 (Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley, 2015). Even with imperfect implementation, comprehensive SEL programs have demonstrated improvements in students’ social and emotional competence (Faria et al., 2013). Research also shows that, when districts systematically implement SEL, it improves students’ grade point averages, math and reading scores, and standardized math and English language arts achievement scores (Kendziora and Yoder, 2016; Payton et al., 2008). Research also points to improved behavioral outcomes, including social-emotional competence and attendance rates, in addition to decreases in suspensions (Kendziora and Yoder, 2016). Finally, research points to the importance of supporting adults to develop their own social and emotional skills. Adult SEL is important because it can help educators not only cope with the demands of the job but also effectively model SEL. Adults are important in shaping the contexts and opportunities that children have to exercise SEL competencies (Berman, Chaffee, and Sarmiento, 2018; Jones and Kahn, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The 20 participants in the CDI are Anchorage, Alaska; Atlanta, Georgia; Austin, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; DuPage County, Illinois; El Paso, Texas; Guilford County, North Carolina; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Nashville, Tennessee; Oakland, California; Palm Beach, Florida; Sacramento, California; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Warren, Michigan; Washoe County, Nevada.

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, we refer to the survey period as *November 2021* throughout the rest of the report. At the time of fielding, nearly all public schools were offering in-person instruction according to the Burbio weekly tracker of pandemic-related disruptions (Burbio, undated).

<sup>4</sup> We identified similar districts using propensity score matching based on the following demographic characteristics: Census geographic division, urbanicity, school size, and student racial/ethnic composition. For more details, see the appendix.

<sup>5</sup> Cronbach’s alpha provides an estimate of the reliability of a scale based on the extent to which scores on individual items are related to one another.

<sup>6</sup> We note that it is possible, although we think it unlikely, that we are overestimating the use of the term *informal approach*. This is because the survey question about use of a “SEL program and approach” covered both the summer 2021 and the 2021–2022 year time frames, whereas the second set of questions about use of an SEL program or curricula only covered the 2021–2022 school year. We think the longer time frame in the first question is unlikely to significantly increase the percentage of teachers or principals who reported using an “SEL program or approach,” because we believe only a small percentage of teachers or principals worked in a summer 2021 program. District leaders in a separate survey indicated that an average of 14 percent of students were enrolled in district-sponsored summer 2021 programming, which suggests that an equally small proportion of educators worked at these programs (American School District Panel, undated).

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## About This Report

This report summarizes results from two surveys fielded to teachers and school principals who belong to the American Educator Panels (AEP). The AEP are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders across the country.

We are extremely grateful to the educators who have agreed to participate in the panels. Their time and willingness to share their experiences are invaluable for this effort and for helping us understand how to better support their hard work in schools. We also thank Laura Hamilton and Elizabeth Steiner for helpful feedback that greatly improved this report. We also thank Maria Vega, Monette Velasco, and Amanda Wilson for their expertise in overseeing the publication and editing process for this report.

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