The Three Highest Priority Investments to Make in SEL with ARP Dollars

The $123 billion infusion to K-12 education in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 offers a critical opportunity to invest in systemic approaches to social and emotional learning (SEL) that fully support students and schools through the pandemic and beyond. Investments in SEL align to the ARP expenditure guidelines (see Appendix), and state and local policymakers can help optimize resources by ensuring investments are evidence-based, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of all students including those in historically marginalized communities.

Decades of research have demonstrated the effectiveness of SEL for supporting students' academics, behaviors, mental health, and long-term success.[1] To be most impactful, states, districts, and schools should implement SEL systemically across practices and policies such as curriculum and instruction, extracurricular activities, discipline, student support services, professional learning, and ongoing assessment for continuous improvement.[2]

Below are three areas where investments of ARP dollars could most effectively bolster systemic implementation of SEL: 1) promote SEL for students, 2) support adult SEL competencies and capacity-building, and 3) align SEL efforts across schools, families, and communities. State and local policymakers can use these recommendations to ensure quality SEL implementation that translates to intended outcomes. Leaders at all levels must also engage students, educators, families, and communities in the planning and decision-making process.

1) PROMOTE SEL FOR STUDENTS

As districts and states plan how to accelerate learning, engage students, and promote mental health, they should focus ARP investments on:
- Expanded learning opportunities that integrate social, emotional, and academic learning across in-school and out-of-school time.
- Evidence-based SEL programs from preschool to high school that emphasize developmentally appropriate and culturally affirming SEL competencies. To maximize effectiveness, evidence-based SEL programs[3] should include: (1) Sequenced, connected, and coordinated activities; (2) Active forms of learning; (3) Focused time on skills development; and (4) Explicit targeting of specific SEL skills.
- Structures that support relationship-centered practices. Strong relationships are critical to young people's social, emotional, and academic development.[4] Consider ways to structure staffing, class assignments, and schedules to maximize opportunities for relationship building.

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[1] Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "Benefits of SEL," https://casel.org/impact/.

[2] Joseph L. Mahoney et al., "Systemic Social and Emotional Learning: Promoting Educational Success for All Preschool to High School Students," *American Psychologist*, advance online publication, 2020, https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Design-Systemic-SEL.pdf.

[3] CASEL, "CASEL Program Guides," https://casel.org/guide/.

[4] The Education Trust and MDRC, *The Importance of Strong Relationships as a Strategy to Solve Unfinished Learning* (New York, NY and Washington, DC: Education Trust and MDRC, 2021), https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/The-Importance-of-Strong-Relationships-as-a-Strategy-to-Solve-Unfinished-Learning-March-2021.pdf.

State policymakers should:
- Develop state-level guidance around the use of ARP dollars to prioritize SEL and student well-being; for example, Washington's policy guide for LEAs.[5]
- Promote a focus on students' SEL integrated with academic interventions by encouraging or incentivizing coordination across agencies[6] focused on academic tutoring and SEL.
- Promote the use of evidence-based and culturally affirming SEL programs and practices, for example through explicit guidance offered by Massachusetts and spotlighting districts that have already engaged in effective SEL implementation.[7]
- Create coherence among SEL funding sources to ensure systemic implementation, for example by prioritizing evidence-based SEL programming in out-of-school time as part of future 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant applications or leveraging the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) authorization within ARP to redesign youth programs with an SEL focus.
- Refine and/or develop comprehensive, equity-focused PreK/K-12th grade SEL standards or guidelines that provide a framework to support LEAs in implementing SEL and selecting programs. See examples of SEL standards from 18 states.[8]
- Align state career and technical education and broader workforce development efforts (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning, career pathways, dual enrollment) to explicitly integrate with SEL skills;[9] for example, Pennsylvania's integrated career-ready skills.[10]

Local policymakers should:
- Review and adopt statewide SEL standards or develop local standards; for example, Oakland Unified School District's SEL Standards.[11]
- Adopt evidence-based SEL programs/curricula that focus on instructional practices and classroom climate, embed teaching of social and emotional skills into academic content, address schoolwide policies and organizational structures, and/or directly teach SEL skills through free-standing lessons.
- Invest in aligned program assessments to measure implementation and outcomes.
- Adopt and fund HR practices that support a more diverse workforce that better reflects student populations.[12]

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[5] Michaela W. Miller et al., *Academic and Student Well-Being Recovery Plan: Planning Guide 2021* (Olympia, WA: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2021), https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/2021docs/OSPI-Academic-and-Student-Well-Being-Recovery-Plan-Planning-Guide.pdf.

[6] Mokoto Rich, "Intensive Small-Group Tutoring and Counseling Helps Struggling Students," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/education/intensive-tutoring-and-counseling-found-to-help-struggling-teenagers.html.

[7] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Culturally Responsive Social-Emotional Competency Development* (Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, updated 2020), https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/sel/sel-all.docx.

[8] CASEL, "CSI Resources: Frameworks & Competencies," https://casel.org/csi-resources-frameworks-competencies/.

[9] Nick Yoder et al., *Preparing Youth for the Workforce of Tomorrow: Cultivating the Social and Emotional Skills Employers Demand* (Chicago, IL: CASEL, 2020), https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Preparing-Youth-for-the-Workforce-of-Tomorrow-Final.pdf.

[10] Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Pennsylvania Career Ready Skills," https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/CareerReadyPA/CareerReadySkills/Pages/default.aspx.

[11] Oakland Unified School District, "Social and Emotional Learning," https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2DcKbJpERRRQmYzV0NqQUU3MFQ0SnVGbzlWNmhldUxENE5R/view.

[12] Jason Greenberg Motamedi and David Stevens, *Human Resources Practices for Recruiting, Selecting, and Retaining Teachers of Color* (Portland, OR: REL Northwest, 2018), https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/human-resources-practices.pdf.

District leaders should:
- Offer students mentorship and tutoring that support academic acceleration as well as social-emotional skills development and relationship-building, such as peer mentoring.[13]
- Provide summer school and after-school programs that offer explicit SEL instruction, integrate SEL into academic instruction, and create opportunities for community-building.[14]
- Create structures for every student to have regular check-ins with a caring adult.[15]
- Provide staffing and/or training to school leaders to implement schedules that minimize class transitions, such as team teaching, block scheduling, or "looping" students with the same teachers and peers from previous years.
- Invest in staff or community partners who can support personalized instruction and engagement, such as extended time in small homeroom or advisory groups.

2) SUPPORT ADULT SEL COMPETENCIES AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

To effectively support students, adults need to focus on their own social and emotional competencies, and to feel connected and valued. ARP investments can:
- Support well-being for educators, staff, and out-of-school time providers.
- Provide job-embedded professional learning that builds educator capacity to promote SEL and create safe, inclusive learning environments for all students.

State policymakers should:
- Create and host statewide professional learning modules to support adult SEL and educator capacity to implement evidence-based SEL. See Tennessee as an example.[16]
- Establish statewide communities of practice to leverage SEL across disciplines and maximize state ARP funding and financial resources. For example, Delaware is bringing together policymakers, practitioners, and youth to integrate SEL and workforce preparedness, as well as SEL and academic content areas.[17]
- Invest in statewide supports, such as consultation and technical assistance, that offer ongoing, high-quality implementation support and guidance to LEAs, as in Oklahoma.[18]
- Encourage state university systems to infuse SEL pedagogical theory and practice into pre-service and in-service educator programs; for example, California's Commission on Teacher Credentialing has integrated SEL into new teacher expectations.[19]
- Develop or support LEAs in micro-credentialing or certification that encourage quality professional learning; for example, Nevada offers SEL certification to educators.[20]

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[13] Daniel F. Oscar and Margo Ross, "School-Based Peer Mentoring: A Powerful Tool to Help Close the Mentoring Gap," *National Mentoring Resource Center* (blog), National Mentoring Resource Center, March 1, 2016, https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/nmrc-blog/130-school-based-peer-mentoring-a-powerful-tool-to-help-close-the-mentoring-gap.html.

[14] Stephanie Jones, Rebecca Bailey, Katharine Brush, and Jennifer Kahn, *Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time Settings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2017), https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/social-and-emotional-learning-in-out-of-school-time-settings.aspx.

[15] Making Caring Common Project, "Relationship Mapping Strategy," Harvard Graduate School of Education, last reviewed May 2020, https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-educators/relationship-mapping-strategy.

[16] Tennessee Department of Education, "Social and Personal Competencies," https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/school-climate/social-and-personal-competencies.html.

[17] Delaware Department of Education, "Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)," https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/4351.

[18] Oklahoma State Department of Education, "Counseling," https://sde.ok.gov/counseling.

[19] California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, *California Teaching Performance Expectations* (Sacramento, CA: Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016), https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/standards/adopted-tpes-2016.pdf.

[20] State of Nevada Department of Education, "SEAD," https://doe.nv.gov/SafeRespectfulLearning/SEAD/.

Local policymakers should:
- Review staffing levels that ensure sustainable work hours and class sizes.
- Establish community partnerships that can support teachers in culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices.

District leaders should:
- Invest in professional learning or programs focused on adults' personal SEL skills.[21]
- Provide embedded professional learning on teaching and integrating SEL, culturally responsive education, family engagement, and creating a supportive climate.
- Establish structures to share and elevate expertise and experiences of educators, such as peer coaching/mentoring and dedicated time for collaborative problem solving.
- Develop instructional coaching and feedback loops focused on SEL and school climate.

3) ALIGN SEL EFFORTS ACROSS SCHOOLS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

A focus on SEL can coordinate aligned efforts that leverage school and community assets to fully support the social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of students and families. This is also a key opportunity to rethink assessment systems to more holistically measure students' social, emotional, and academic strengths and experiences. Invest in:
- Integrated support systems across schools, families, and communities.
- Data systems that inform students, educators, and families, and support continuous improvement of student outcomes and experiences.

State policymakers should:
- Conduct statewide needs and resource assessment to build on existing efforts, coordinate related initiatives, and identify strengths and concerns. For example, Washington hosts a work group to conduct SEL landscape scans.[22]
- Develop resources that support LEAs in planning for ARP dollars with a systemic approach to SEL. For example, Washington's ARP policy guidance promotes a planning tool that integrates equity-centered support for SEL and whole child services.[23]
- Review and update existing assessment policies and data infrastructures to more holistically measure students' social, emotional, and academic development, and address inequities in opportunities and experiences across classrooms and schools. See Nevada School Climate and SEL system[24] and administrator guidance.[25]

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[21] CASEL, "Focus Area 2: Learn," https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-2/learn/.

[22] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, "Social Emotional Learning Indicators Workgroup," https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/workgroups-committees/currently-meeting-workgroups/social-emotional-learning-indicators-workgroup.

[23] Michaela W. Miller et al., *Academic and Student Well-Being Recovery Plan: Planning Guide 2021* (Olympia, WA: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2021), https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/2021docs/OSPI-Academic-and-Student-Well-Being-Recovery-Plan-Planning-Guide.pdf.

[24] Nevada Department of Education, "The Nevada School Climate/Social Emotional Learning Survey," https://www.nevadaschoolclimate.org/.

[25] Nevada Department of Education, "The Nevada School Climate/Social Emotional Learning Survey: Administrator Manual, Grades 5-12," school year 2020-21, https://www.nevadaschoolclimate.org/NV-SCSELAdministratorManualSpring2021.pdf.

- Provide specific policy guidance to LEAs on SEL assessment and continuous improvement processes that engage family and community stakeholders through data-informed decision making. See Minnesota as an example.[26]

Local policymakers should:
- Invest in Full Service Community Schools,[27] which center on integrated supports, expanded learning, and family engagement.
- Design collaborative leadership practices that engage families and communities.
- Regularly review and use data on SEL implementation and outcomes to inform policies, including to identify inequities that need to be addressed.

District leaders should:
- Establish community partnerships to create wraparound supports, aligning mental health services to SEL goals.
- Use two-way communications structures with families, such as regular parent-teacher-student check-ins to learn more about students' social, emotional, and academic goals, strengths, and needs.
- Ensure structures and resources that support schools in the regular collection of data on student outcomes, student and family experiences, and school climate.
- Establish data systems that support analysis of data disaggregated by key subgroups (e.g., race, income, gender) to allow issues of equity to be addressed.
- Establish systems for sharing and involving educators, students, families, and communities in data reflection and planning for continuous improvement of evidence-based SEL implementation.

For additional resources, see CASEL's SEL Roadmap for Reopening Schools[28] and the U.S. Department of Education's COVID-19 Handbook.[29]

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[26] Minnesota Department of Education, "Social and Emotional Learning Assessment Guidance," https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE073521&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary.

[27] Jeannie Oakes, Anna Maier, and Julia Daniel, *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement* (Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center, 2017), https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Evidence_Based_Strategy_BRIEF.pdf.

[28] CASEL, "SEL Roadmap: Actions for a Successful Second Semester," 2021, https://casel.org/reopening-with-sel/.

[29] US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, *ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2021), https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf.

APPENDIX: Summary of Potential SEL Investments and Funding Eligibility under ARPA

SEL Investments	Funding Eligibility Under ARPA
Expanded learning opportunities that integrate social, emotional, and academic learning across in-school and out-of-school time	(1) Learning Loss 20% Section 2001, Subtitle A.1. (Summer/return) (F) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.F. (Underserved/targeted populations) (N) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.N. (Learning Recovery/Assessment/Family Support for Learning)
Evidence-based SEL programs that emphasize developmentally appropriate and culturally affirming SEL competencies	(1) Learning Loss 20% Section 2001, Subtitle A.1. (Summer/return) (A) Learning Loss 20% Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.A. (ESEA) (H) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.H. (Training/PD)
Structures that support relationship-centered practices	(F) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.F. (Underserved/targeted populations) (L) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.L. (Mental health/full service community schools)
Support for educator, school staff, and out-of-school time provider well-being	(H) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.H. (Training/PD)
Professional learning to promote SEL and create safe, inclusive learning environments for all students	(H) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.H. (Training/PD)
Integrated support systems across schools, families, and communities	(E) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.E. (Agency Coordination) (L) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.L. (MH/FSCS)
Data systems that inform and continuously improve students, parents, and educators of progress and areas requiring additional support	(N) Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.N. (Learning Recovery/Assessment/Family Support for Learning)