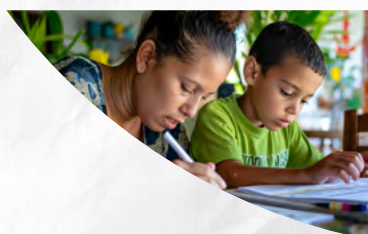# How do
Disruptive
Innovators
prepare today's students
to be tomorrow's workforce?

CASEL
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

IDB

CASEL
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

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Abstract

Now more than ever, the overall health and well-being of students and educators alike has become a global priority for health-care professionals, educators, and families. Social–emotional learning (SEL) competencies are critical for success in college, career, and life. To truly transform our schools and create more equitable outcomes for all students and more satisfying experiences for adults, schools should consider a systemic approach to SEL. This brief introduces the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and its work on systemic SEL. The systemic SEL** approach emphasizes relationship-rich learning environments where instructional practices, resources, policies, and communication are aligned and coordinated to promote socioemotional competence for all. CASEL, a field leader in SEL for 30 years, has a mission to help make evidence-based SEL an integral part of education from preschool through high school. CASEL envisions all children and adults as self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and create a more inclusive, just, and equitable world

1. Introduction

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of young people were grappling with anxiety, depression, and a general lack of interest in school. The culprits behind these issues were varied, ranging from outdated or irrelevant teaching methods to the pervasive influence of social media and cyberbullying. As these challenges mounted, schools struggled to adapt, often relying on traditional approaches that failed to address the underlying causes of student disengagement. Now, in a predominantly post-pandemic world, schools have resumed in-person learning, but the challenges have only intensified. Student apathy and disengagement have surged, compounded by significant learning loss, a rise in mental health challenges, and sharp increases in disruptive behavior and truancy. Educators, too, are feeling the strain, leaving the profession in record numbers due to burnout and mental health issues of their own. As is often the case, those who have historically most lacked opportunity are bearing the brunt of these challenges, with marginalized communities facing the most severe impacts.

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequities within the educational system, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive, systemic change. Traditionally, when faced with such widespread challenges, schools have often turned to quick fixes—reactive, narrow solutions that may offer short-term relief but fail to address the deeper, systemic issues at play. These approaches fail to consider the complexity and interconnectedness of the challenges facing today's students and educators. There is a growing recognition that, to truly make a difference, schools must adopt a systemic approach to social–emotional learning (SEL). This means integrating SEL into every aspect of the educational environment—embedding opportunities for socioemotional growth within instructional practices, school policies, resource allocation, discipline strategies, and overall school climate. This holistic integration ensures that socioemotional competence and well-being are not treated as add-ons but are woven into the fabric of the educational experience, benefiting students throughout and beyond the school day.

This brief summarizes the research findings on SEL in schools and provides an overview of CASEL's systemic approach to supporting districts and schools in this endeavor. The evidence is compelling: when schools become welcoming and supportive environments where every student is known, valued, and cared for, the benefits extend far beyond academic

achievement. Students develop the socioemotional skills necessary to navigate life's challenges, form meaningful relationships, and engage as responsible, compassionate members of society. Educators, too, find renewed purpose and satisfaction in their roles, leading to a more sustainable and fulfilling teaching experience.

CASEL's vision is one where every student, regardless of their background, has access to a high-quality education that includes SEL as a core component. Through systemic SEL, it is possible to contribute to creating a world where children and adults are self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and contribute to a more inclusive, just, and equitable society. This brief outline the steps needed to turn that vision into reality, emphasizing the importance of SEL not just as a tool for academic success but as a foundation for a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society.

2. Problem(s)

Educators are facing unprecedented challenges in today's post-pandemic world, where disengagement and mental health crisis are on the rise, leading to truancy, behavior problems, and academic decline. While many of these issues aren't new, they have exacerbated existing educational disparities and pushed educators to a breaking point, with high levels of burnout and turnover at all levels. For instance, during the pandemic, 27 percent of U.S. educators reported symptoms consistent with clinical depression, and 37 percent reported symptoms consistent with generalized anxiety (Kush et al., 2022).

At best, solutions to these challenges have often been misguided; at worst, they have caused additional problems and disenfranchisement. For instance, in response to academic decline, some schools have increased test preparation time instead of fostering opportunities for deeper learning, creative problem-solving, and collaboration (Ravitch, 2016). To address behavior challenges, schools may implement zero-tolerance policies and harsh disciplinary measures rather than restorative approaches. To boost attendance, schools are deploying truancy officers to fetch absent students rather than focusing on making school more relevant and engaging (Mann et al., 2019). These well-intentioned Band-Aid remedies address symptoms but fail to tackle the root causes of student disengagement and educator burnout. Often, these issues stem from students feeling disconnected and uninspired by academic content, their peers, and their teachers. As a result, they may stay home or act out, as a coping mechanism or out of boredom (Jones & Khan, 2017).

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), recent decades have seen increased attention to integrating personal development, civic development, and skills to navigate diversity within educational goals and systems. However, historical inequalities, socioeconomic disparities, and political instability have further compounded educational challenges in the region. These have especially affected marginalized communities, including indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. Moreover, high levels of violence and crime in certain regions significantly impact students' mental health and engagement in school, creating the need for strategies to build safe and supportive school environments (UNESCO, 2022). Concerns about school violence and bullying have also led to more focus on SEL (UNICEF, 2019). Hence, countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil have integrated SEL into their national standards or curriculums. Across LAC, there remains a need for systemic support for SEL implementation and assessment of practices and outcomes over time, along with more focus on teacher preparation and ongoing professional development in these areas (Costin & Pontual, 2020). Improving SEL and educational outcomes can also contribute to better economic opportunities and prospects for students in LAC countries, highlighting the connection between education, workforce development, and economic growth in the region (Greenberg, 2023).

Research has confirmed what parents and educators have long understood intuitively: the social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of personal development are intertwined. Fortunately, there is a movement toward prioritizing the overall well-being of students and educating the whole child. When students are in caring and supportive environments where they feel affirmed and have a sense of belonging—where they have learned to set and achieve goals, manage their emotions, persevere through challenges, and collaborate to solve problems—they are more engaged, resilient, and capable of succeeding in school and beyond (Greenberg, 2023). Moreover, because these environments also prioritize adults' socioemotional well-being and opportunities for supportive relationships with peers and students, educators experience less burnout and greater job satisfaction and joy (Sorrenti et al., 2024).

Despite these trends toward educating the whole child and prioritizing SEL, implementation often remains limited in scope. Insufficiently trained teachers may deliver a 30-minute SEL lesson once a week, students may attend a single mental health assembly, and a school district may try to rethink discipline policies without adequately supporting new ways of addressing conflict. To truly transform education, schools and districts must pursue a systemic approach to SEL. This means coordinating and aligning instructional practices, resources, policies, and communication to promote socioemotional competence throughout and beyond the school day (Mahoney et al., 2021).

3. Solution

The benefits of SEL are well documented, with evidence from hundreds of independent studies across multiple fields and sources demonstrating that an education that promotes SEL yields positive outcomes for students, adults, and school communities.

SEL leads to improved academic achievement. When students have supportive relationships and opportunities to develop and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across many different contexts, academic learning accelerates. Hundreds of studies involving students worldwide from early childhood through high school offer consistent evidence that SEL has a positive impact on students' academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2022). Students participating in SEL at school have higher levels of "school functioning," as reflected by their grades, test scores, attendance, and homework completion (Cipriano et al., 2023). SEL builds socioemotional skills that increase student engagement and lead to improved academic performance (Greenberg, 2023). Evidence shows that SEL interventions that address the five core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness) increased students' academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Moreover, SEL's positive impact on academics persists (Taylor et al., 2017).

SEL contributes to well-being and safe schools. While SEL does not replace the need for mental health intervention for students who need it, SEL can cultivate important "protective factors"—caring relationships, safe and supportive environments, socioemotional skills—that buffer against mental health risks. The literature has shown that participation in SEL programs is linked to decreased emotional distress, more positive attitudes about self and others, and fewer externalizing behaviors and discipline problems (Cipriano et al., 2023). SEL enhances young people's coping skills, resiliency, and emotion identification, which can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short term (Clarke et al., 2021). Also, students participating in SEL have reported an increased sense of safety and support, better relationships with teachers, and stronger feelings of belonging and inclusiveness in schools (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011). It also contributes to less bullying and aggression (Smith & Low, 2013).

SEL develops skills that promote future readiness. Students who engage in SEL programs see consistent improvements in socioemotional skills (Greenberg, 2023); stronger socioemotional skills contribute to positive lifetime outcomes up to 18 years later (Taylor et al., 2017). Students with stronger socioemotional skills are more likely to reach milestones including high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and completion, and full-time employment (Jones et al., 2015).

SEL is effective across cultural contexts. SEL is consistently effective across demographic groups (Jones & Khan, 2017), socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and urban, suburban, and rural communities both inside and outside the United States. But SEL is not one-size-fits-all: SEL approaches are most effective when the intervention is designed with a specific context or culture in mind (Wigelsworth et al., 2016).

SEL benefits adults, too. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that focusing on educators' socioemotional competence can improve their well-being, too. Jones and Khan (2017) and Greenberg et al., (2016) show that educators with strong socioemotional competence report higher levels of job satisfaction and less burnout, that focusing on SEL can help educators build and maintain stronger relationships with students and manage classrooms, and that teachers who teach SEL report feeling more effective at their jobs and less job-related anxiety.

SEL is a wise financial investment. Analysis of six evidence-based programs has demonstrated that the benefits of SEL significantly outweigh the costs, with an estimated $11 return for every dollar invested in SEL (Belfield et al., 2015).

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Based upon all this evidence, CASEL emerged in 1994 to make SEL an integral part of education. Its goal is to establish high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education. CASEL's multidisciplinary collaboration includes researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates who believe that schools must attend to all children's socioemotional needs.

For CASEL, SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. CASEL sees SEL as an integral part of education and human development.

CASEL's framework emphasizes that SEL should be implemented across multiple settings, including classrooms, schools, families, and communities, for a holistic (systemic) approach to socioemotional development. The model also highlights the importance of SEL in advancing educational equity and excellence by fostering trusting relationships, rigorous curriculums, and ongoing evaluation.

By integrating SEL into various aspects of education and community life, CASEL's model aims to empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities. CASEL's systemic SEL implementation is a comprehensive approach that integrates SEL across multiple levels of the education system.

As shown in the following section, CASEL's framework has been used by various organizations in Latin America to promote the development of SEL.

4. The Education Model in Detail

As shown in Figure 1, CASEL's SEL framework has five core socioemotional competencies at its center—broad, interrelated areas that support learning and development. Circling them are four key settings where students live and grow. School-family-community partnerships coordinate SEL practices and establish equitable learning environments across these various contexts.

With a systemic approach, SEL can advance educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting, collaborative relationships and rigorous, meaningful curriculum and instruction. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.

Figure 1. CASEL intervention is at the school level or higher—that is, in the education system at the local or national level. To achieve a systemic SEL implementation, schools must consider all aspects of the system that can be leveraged for promotion of SEL. Specifically, as shown in Figure 2, CASEL has defined 10 indicators of schoolwide SEL as evidence of high-quality, systematic implementation. Rather than a fragmented "to-do" list of tasks to check off one by one, these indicators are cultivated over time. When all the indicators are met, the school has fully embedded SEL into its system.
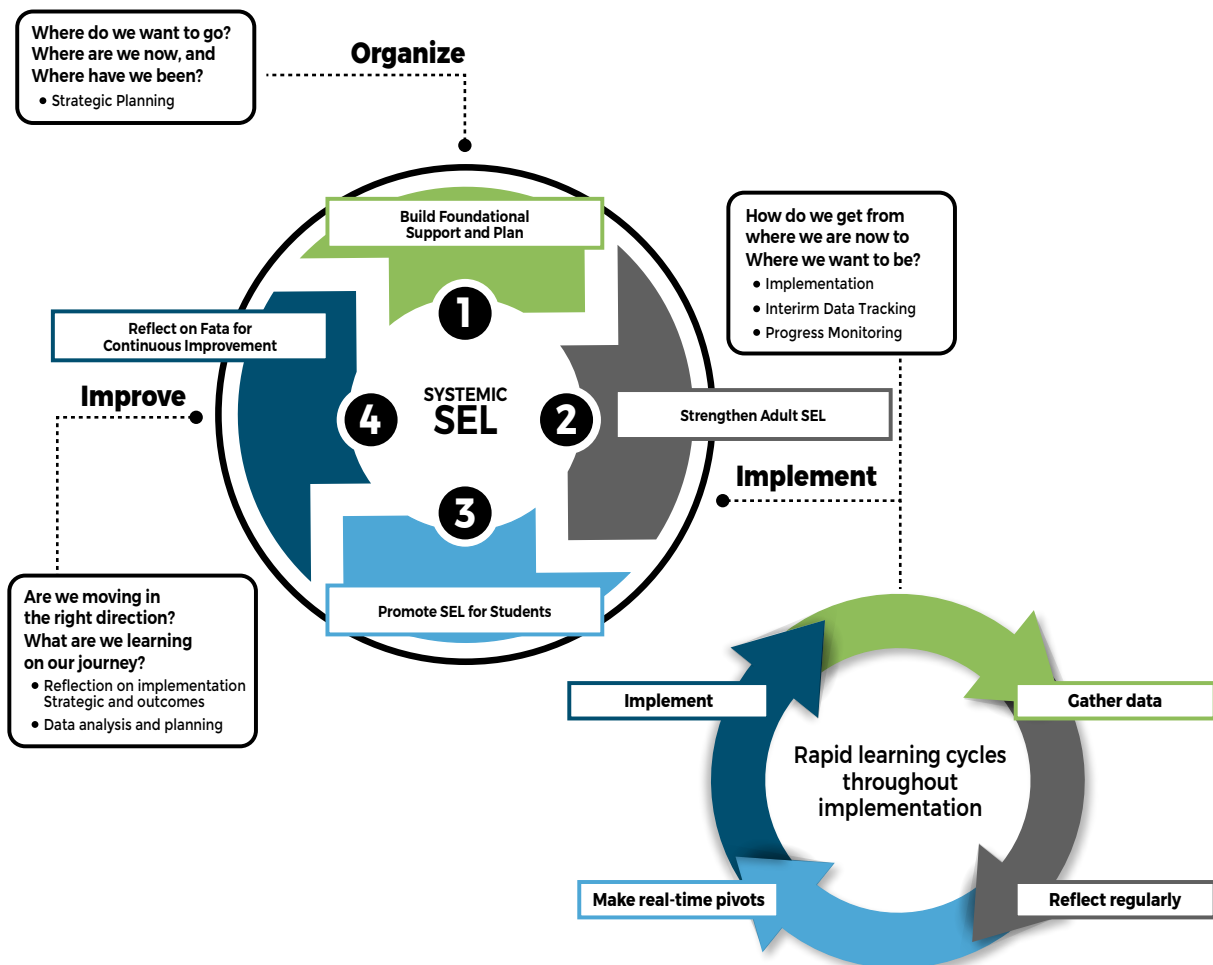
Figure 2. **How To Implement SEL?**

To achieve systemic SEL, schools should carefully scaffold their approach to engage the whole school community and to build on and continuously improve the work already in progress. Schoolwide SEL fosters environments, skills, and relationships that enhance social, emotional, and academic learning for all students. With engagement and buy-in to a shared vision for success, school communities can work together to achieve a systemic approach that yields positive outcomes for students and adults. Figure 3 shows four focus areas of implementation, outlined in CASEL's comprehensive guidance to achieve a systemic approach.

Explicit SEL instruction

SEL integrated with academic instruction

Youth voice and engagement

Supportive school and classroom climates

Focus on adult SEL

Supportive discipline

A continuum of integrated supports

Authentic family partnerships

Aligned community partnerships

Systems for continuous improvement

Figure 3.

Where do we want to go? Where are we now, and Where have we been?
- Strategic Planning

Organize

Build Foundational Support and Plan

How do we get from where we are now to Where we want to be?
- Implementation
- Interirm Data Tracking
- Progress Monitoring

Reflect on Fata for Continuous Improvement

Improve

SYSTEMIC SEL

Strengthen Adult SEL

Implement

Promote SEL for Students

Are we moving in the right direction? What are we learning on our journey?
- Reflection on implementation Strategic and outcomes
- Data analysis and planning

Implement

Gather data

Rapid learning cycles throughout implementation

Make real-time pivots

Reflect regularly

▶ Focus Area 1: Build Foundational Support and Create a Plan

To launch SEL implementation, schools should build an SEL team, offer foundational learning that enables all stakeholders to understand the importance of SEL and their role in promoting it, and develop a communications strategy. Next, schools can plan for implementation by developing a shared vision, assessing areas of strength and the need to set goals, building a yearlong action plan, and allocating the resources—including time, people, and funds—to support their SEL effort.

▶ Focus Area 2: Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity

Schools are more effective at nurturing SEL and well-being in students when they also cultivate SEL competencies in adults and prioritize their well-being. It is important to nurture a work environment in which staff feel supported and have opportunities to build trust in one another, collaborate effectively, and sharpen their own skills. This focus area encompasses what the SEL team does to prepare professional learning in adult SEL and cultural competence, foster skills in promoting and modeling SEL, and develop structures that increase staff collaboration and community-building.

▶ Focus Area 3: Promote SEL for Students

As schools implement SEL systemically, they build aligned, coherent strategies that promote SEL across the various settings students experience throughout the day. In classrooms, schools provide opportunities for explicit SEL instruction, integrate SEL into academic content and learning structures, and build supportive classroom environments. In the school more broadly, schools foster a supportive climate, adopt evidence-based SEL programs and practices, elevate student voice and engagement, and align student support structures and disciplinary policies and practices with SEL. To support students at home and in community settings, schools build meaningful partnerships and two-way communication to gain insight, align SEL goals, and share resources.

▶ Focus Area 4: Reflect on Data for Continuous Im provement

This is not a final step in implementation, but rather the ongoing process of setting goals, measuring progress, addressing challenges, and adjusting plans to improve SEL implementation and impact. The school launches the continuous improvement cycle by setting measurable goals and identifying data sources to monitor implementation and outcomes. While the implementation plan is underway, the school reviews data regularly to learn if SEL strategies are driving toward their intended outcomes and makes course corrections as needed. When SEL goals are reached, the process continues with the school planning ways to sustain success and setting new goals.

How Does CASEL Help Schools and Districts To Implement Systemic SEL?

To help districts and schools achieve this systemic approach, CASEL offers in-person, virtual, and hybrid professional learning opportunities that support school and district leaders.

For districts or regional networks of schools, CASEL offers an SEL Strategic Planning series and coaching that provide a highly interactive experience focused on CASEL's Theory of Action (consisting of 16 essential activities for SEL implementation) and District Resource Center. CASEL facilitators guide a leadership team through key steps to create a strategic plan for SEL.

Following 18–20 hours for learning and collaboration, with additional time allocated for the district SEL leader, team members apply and deepen the learning by working collaboratively on pieces of the SEL strategic plan. CASEL also provides one-on-one support for an SEL leader from the team to prepare for each engagement, facilitate team collaboration, and plan for implementation and sustainability.

When the engagement is complete, the district has an impactful plan for SEL implementation tailored to their goals and priorities, and a team prepared to drive the work forward. The team's robust SEL strategic planning document includes a unique SEL vision connected to their strategic efforts and goals, identified SEL priorities that will guide long-term work, and a one-year action plan and aligned evaluation measures to track progress.

For schools, CASEL offers a Leading Together workshop series, which provides an in-depth, multi-session course for school-level SEL teams that are ready to lead SEL strategic planning and implementation in a school setting. Learning is structured around CASEL's Guide to Schoolwide SEL. Throughout the course, participants assess their school's strengths and areas for growth, develop a shared vision and measurable SEL goals, define action steps, and explore tools they can use with their school community. Participants can take this course online with a live instructor or as a self-paced experience that includes opportunities to share ideas and ask questions of the CASEL team and other participants on discussion boards and to attend monthly drop-in conversations.

The cost for CASEL's support can either be a fixed price for a self-paced course or tailored to a customized experience for a district or network of schools.

What Are the Outcomes of CASEL's Systemic Implementation in the United States?

A systemic SEL implementation is more pervasive and complex than the introduction of a single lesson or class period. It permeates all aspects of the school experience from classroom instruction and school climate to staffing, professional learning, school and district policies, family engagement, and more (Mahoney et al., 2021). In 2011, CASEL launched the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) to study the impact of this approach on quantitative and qualitative outcomes in 13,332 U.S. districts. After 10 years of implementation, it reported meaningful results.

Academic achievement improved. The three U.S. districts (Austin, Chicago, and Cleveland) that use the National Assessment of Educational Progress all improved their reading and math scores during the years of CDI implementation. In Anchorage, Austin, Chicago, Cleveland, Oakland, and Nashville, GPAs were higher at the end of the 2015 school year than before the CDI started. The improvements were particularly noticeable in Chicago, rising from an average of 2.19 in the three years before the CDI to 2.65 in 2015, an increase of nearly 21 percent. In Nashville, the only district that used the same standardized tests across all the CDI years, students showed improvements in both English and math achievement. All districts with relevant data showed gains in English and math in at least one grade band (elementary, middle, high). Chicago's graduation rate increased 15 percent during the CDI years (CASEL, 2021).

Student engagement and behavior improved. Attendance improved in four of six districts that collected these data. Chicago improved overall attendance by 8 percentage points from before the CDI started through 2015. Anchorage (elementary, middle) and Nashville (middle, high) showed gains at two of three levels. Suspensions declined in all five of the districts that collected these data. For example, suspensions in Chicago declined 65 percent in two years. This translates to 44,000 fewer students suspended from school in one recent year alone. In Sacramento, suspension rates declined in the five years of systemic SEL implementation, by 24 percent district-wide and 43 percent in high schools (CASEL, 2021).

Student's socioemotional competence improved. Districts also reported that students' socioemotional competence improved, based on student and teacher surveys. In both Chicago and Nashville, elementary school students improved in all five socioemotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. In Austin, where only middle and high school data were collected, students at both levels also significantly improved in all five competencies. Middle and high school students in Cleveland also experienced growth, particularly in self-awareness and self-management. Sacramento (elementary

only) and Anchorage (elementary, middle, and high school) collected an average measure of students' overall socioemotional competence. For Sacramento, elementary students experienced gains in overall competence since the start of the CDI. Anchorage students experienced significant growth in overall competence even before the start of the CDI and maintained the same positive trajectory during the CDI years (CASEL, 2021).

Washoe County in Nevada documented that students with higher SEL competencies perform better on multiple measures: higher academic achievement, attendance, GPAs, and graduation rates, and fewer suspensions. For example, students with high socioemotional competence had a math proficiency rate 21 percentage points higher than their counterparts with low socioemotional competence. Also, students with higher competence were 20 percentage points higher in English. Findings also showed that having high socioemotional competence might have buffered students from the negative impact of factors such as suspensions, transiency, and weak attendance, which often place them in a "high-risk" academic status (Meyers et al., 2020).

School climate improved. Climate, as measured by district surveys in Chicago and Cleveland, improved during the CDI years. In Anchorage, the climate began an upward trajectory before the CDI and sustained significant growth during the CDI years. In Chicago, the only district in which elementary school climate data was available for analysis, students reported significant improvements on the "supportive environment" scale compared with the start of the CDI in 2010–2011 (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

In sum, by focusing on systemic SEL, schools can provide more equitable learning environments designed to help each student thrive. When every student feels known, valued, and cared about, when they feel a sense of belonging, when they feel the learning is meaningful and relevant, then attendance and engagement improve, leading to greater academic achievement. And when educators feel they can connect with their peers and students in meaningful ways, job satisfaction improves.

Historically, schools have underestimated the importance of SEL. Even many schools that have established it as a priority often have a limited view of SEL implementation, choosing to incorporate isolated lessons or climate strategies. To truly disrupt the education systems that are not meeting students' needs—especially in locales where students have the least opportunity—a systemic transformation is needed to help students reach their potential and thrive. CASEL has proven to be an effective model of the systemic transformation that schools can go through to help students succeed.

What Is the Experience of CASEL in LAC Countries?

In early 2023, CASEL released a free, self-paced course, An Introduction to SEL. In this one-hour experience, participants learn about CASEL's framework for SEL while also focusing on their personal experience of building relationships and a supportive environment for young people. Through reflection, discussion, and scenario-based activities, they practice their own skills in modeling socioemotional competencies in daily life.

In the first year of its release, the course had more than 15,000 enrollments, and more than 30 percent of enrollees were from outside the United States. Countries with high enrollment include Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, and Argentina. As a result of this and other data about the need for additional SEL resources in Spanish, CASEL published the course in Spanish, translated the most frequently used implementation tools on the Guide to Schoolwide SEL site, translated an in-depth course that supports school teams in developing a strategic plan, and is considering translating materials into Portuguese.

Although not explicitly adopting the CASEL model, organizations across Latin America have already applied the CASEL framework in various educational settings, highlighting its adaptability and effectiveness in promoting SEL and improving educational outcomes for students in diverse cultural contexts. Here are a few examples:

Colombia seems to be the country with the most SEL initiatives based upon CASEL'S framework. The Alianza Para el Fomento del Aprendizaje SocioEmocional en Colombia (AFSEC) is a community of learning and practice aligned around socioemotional strengthening. AFSEC encompasses more than 40 Colombian organizations that have worked on SEL for years, such as Fundación Empresarios por la Educación (ExE), which integrated the CASEL framework into its educational programs for students. ExE collaborates with schools and educational institutions to implement evidence-based SEL practices, focusing on creating supportive learning environments and fostering students' holistic development. Another AFSEC member is Coschool, a social enterprise that also employs the CASEL framework in its efforts to enhance SEL. Coschool focuses on developing leadership and socioemotional skills in young people through a range of programs and workshops. By working directly with schools and educators, this institution implements practical SEL strategies that help students build resilience, empathy, and effective communication skills, ultimately preparing them for success in both personal and academic endeavors.

Educación 2020, a Chilean nonprofit organization, has implemented the CASEL framework in its educational reform initiatives. The organization works with schools to develop SEL programs that align with CASEL's competencies, focusing on improving students' emotional well-being and academic performance through comprehensive SEL strategies.

Fundación Karisma in Argentina has utilized the CASEL framework to design and implement SEL programs in schools. The foundation provides training for teachers and school leaders to integrate SEL into their teaching practices, aiming to create inclusive and supportive learning environments that foster students' social and emotional growth.

Educación Responsable, a program developed by Fundación Botín, operates in Spain and several Latin American countries, including Colombia, Mexico, and Chile, and uses the CASEL framework to promote emotional, social, and creative development in students. It provides training for educators and implements SEL activities in schools to build students' emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills.

5. Looking Forward: Implications

What Has Worked Well?

In its 30 years of existence, CASEL has made significant contributions to the definition of, research about, and practice of SEL. SEL is now a major field of study, one that is backed by research and data that demonstrate its effectiveness and that has garnered support from around the world.

▶ **Raising Awareness About and "Expanding the Table" for SEL**

CASEL's founders coined the term socioemotional learning, developed its most-cited definition, and took the field from a glimmer of an idea to a movement that has attracted international attention. This work continues as CASEL convenes conferences and round tables, drives research, develops informational resources and guidance, partners with organizations and school systems around the world, and supports messaging about the field to policymakers and the wider public.

▶ **Conceptualizing, Researching, and Promoting Systemic SEL Implementation**

CASEL's research and guidance promotes the idea of systemic SEL implementation, in which SEL serves as a foundational framework for all work done in the system, from classrooms to schools to district offices. In this vision, SEL is deeply embedded in the social, administrative, and educational experiences of all students and staff in the education community, rather than being isolated in a standalone course that is taught sporadically. As shown earlier, the CASEL SEL framework represents systemic SEL implementation as pervading all settings where students learn and grow.

▶ Collecting and Disseminating Data About the Effectiveness of SEL

As noted earlier in this report, research has uncovered wide-ranging benefits of SEL for students and adults. With SEL, relationships are stronger, and the school climate is healthier and more supportive. Students who experience SEL have a greater sense of belonging, feel more supported, and build better relationships with their teachers and peers. Emotional distress, bullying, and aggression decrease. SEL has also proven to be a powerful means of ensuring that classrooms and schools are places where learning can happen and students can thrive academically. Educators experience similar benefits: they build stronger relationships with students, feel more supported and satisfied at work, and have lower levels of stress, burnout, and anxiety. SEL provides a pathway to cultivate schools with well-being at the center—schools with welcoming, safe, inclusive environments for every student and adult.

▶ Developing Resources and Partnerships To Support and Learn More About Systemic SEL Implementation

CASEL first began to learn about the best practices and benefits of systemic SEL when working with Collaborating Districts Initiative. This network of U.S. district partners offered an opportunity to work with practitioners to develop, implement, and assess SEL strategies, initiatives, and practices. That original initiative has evolved into CASEL Network Partners, a network of organizations, educators, and education leaders across the United States, and the work continues by supporting these partners while learning from their efforts.

From and for these communities, CASEL has developed a wide array of resources, including the CASEL Guide for Schoolwide SEL and the District Resource Center, which offer tools and guidance for achieving and continuously improving systemic SEL. By working with them, CASEL has gained more knowledge about how systemic SEL can be tailored to meet the needs of a wide array of communities.

What Are the Remaining Challenges?

▶ **Lack of Understanding of Systemic SEL and How To Implement It**

When educators, policymakers, families, students, and communities truly understand what SEL is and what it offers, they want it. However, while SEL has popular support in many quarters, there is room to raise more awareness. Around the globe, educators and communities are still just learning about SEL; even fewer are equipped to implement it fully and systemically.

▶ **"Initiative Fatigue": Concerns About Schools' Capacity for SEL Implementation**

A major challenge that has come to the fore in CASEL's work with U.S.-based partners is "initiative fatigue." Teachers and school leaders are often tasked with competing goals and initiatives, new endeavors, and multiple areas of responsibility. Implementing SEL can feel like too much on an already full plate. This concern typically manifests itself in unwillingness of teachers to embrace SEL. It requires a coordinated effort led at the district/system level to ensure that SEL supports teachers in their many other responsibilities. From CASEL's standpoint, this requires collaboration with and support of school and district leaders to create structures that facilitate this work.

▶ **A Need To Deepen Support of SEL Outside the English-Speaking World**

Thus far, most of CASEL's research has been U.S.-based, and most of its resources and guidance are in English. That is not a bar to promoting SEL worldwide. Indeed, one of CASEL's central tenets is that SEL itself is not one-size-fits-all. SEL can and must be tailored to meet each community so that it can support local goals and specific cultural settings.

The time is now to deepen this work, given the growing hunger for SEL around the world. That is reflected in increasing numbers of international attendees and presenters at CASEL's annual SEL Exchange conference and rising numbers of international enrollees in CASEL's Introduction to SEL course (including from several Latin American countries). CASEL has begun to address this need by translating its resources into Spanish but recognizes that true global support of SEL requires deeper knowledge of the communities it serves. Learning about and guiding international SEL efforts would require educators, education leaders, and policymakers to invest funding and expertise in building the pool of knowledge and resources that make this work possible.

▶ Measuring Socioemotional Skills

Measuring socioemotional skills cost-efficiently remains a challenge. On one hand, most of the available instruments are self-reported or reported by someone who knows the person being evaluated, such as parents or teachers—entailing a limited capacity to reflect the individual's actual skill level. These instruments, however, are easy to apply and not very expensive. On the other hand, some work has been done to develop performance-based tools using various resources, such as behavioral observation, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG), gamification, and artificial intelligence. Although performance-based measures are more complex, costly, and time-consuming, they produce objective information using real-world situations or tasks. To explore this topic further, check out the IDB's Skills for Life Series, which covers 21st century skills, including socioemotional competencies like mindfulness, resilience, and empathy. Additionally, the IDB is preparing to launch CLIC (Connect Without Limits: Invent Yourself, and Get Certified), an online platform aimed at enabling users in LAC countries to assess their transversal skills.

6. Concluding Remarks

CASEL has established a robust foundation and a significant body of knowledge about SEL, paving the way for further growth in this critical field. Over the past few decades, SEL has evolved from a nascent concept to a well-defined and widely recognized framework for fostering the socioemotional development of students. As CASEL continues to expand understanding and responds to the evolving needs of educators and students, one key insight has emerged: SEL is most effective when it is implemented systemically and tailored to the specific communities in which it is applied. CASEL's work across diverse U.S. educational settings—rural, suburban, urban, and in districts of all sizes—has consistently demonstrated that systemic, community-responsive SEL yields the best outcomes.

The evidence is clear: when SEL is integrated into every aspect of the educational experience—from classroom instruction to school-wide policies—it creates environments where students and educators alike can thrive. Students who participate in systemic SEL programs not only show improved academic performance but also exhibit stronger socioemotional skills, better relationships with peers and teachers, and greater resilience in the face of challenges. Educators, too, benefit from this holistic approach, reporting higher levels of job satisfaction, reduced stress, and a deeper connection to their work. This comprehensive impact underscores the importance of continuing to advocate for and implement SEL on a broader scale.

However, while CASEL has made significant strides in advancing SEL within the United States, the work is far from complete. There is a growing need to extend SEL beyond U.S. borders, adapting and tailoring approaches to meet the diverse needs of communities around the world. The demand for SEL is evident, with growing numbers of international educators and policymakers seeking to incorporate SEL into their educational systems. Yet, as CASEL embarks on this global expansion, the approach should be with a deep sense of cultural humility and a commitment to understanding the unique contexts in which SEL will be implemented.

CASEL has begun this expansion by providing guidance and resources in languages other than English, an essential first step in making SEL accessible to a broader audience. This includes translating key materials, developing culturally relevant examples and case studies, and collaborating with international educators to co-create resources that resonate with their specific contexts. Additionally, CASEL is investing in research to explore how SEL can be effectively adapted and scaled in diverse cultural settings, ensuring that the approaches are not only effective but also respectful of local traditions and values.

Deeper collaboration with communities around the world is central to this effort. By working closely with educators, students, and families in various cultural and socioeconomic contexts, IDB and CASEL learn from their experiences and insights, enriching understanding of how SEL can be most effectively implemented. This collaboration will also help us identify and address any potential challenges or barriers to SEL implementation, ensuring that strategies are both practical and sustainable.

Moreover, expanding SEL globally presents an opportunity to address some of the most pressing challenges facing education today. In many parts of the world, students are grappling with issues such as poverty, violence, and social inequality, which can significantly impact their ability to learn and thrive. By integrating SEL into educational systems, IDB and CASEL can help equip students with the socioemotional skills they need to navigate these challenges, fostering resilience, empathy, and a sense of agency. This, in turn, can contribute to broader social change, as students who are empowered through SEL are better positioned to become active, engaged citizens who contribute to the well-being of their communities.

In conclusion, while CASEL has made significant strides in advancing SEL, the journey is far from over. The challenges ahead are substantial, but so too are the opportunities to create educational environments that foster the holistic development of students. By embracing a systemic approach to SEL, IDB and CASEL can ensure that every student is equipped not only to succeed academically but also to thrive as a compassionate, resilient, and engaged member of society. The time is now to deepen our commitment to this transformative work, ensuring that the benefits of SEL are felt by students and educators everywhere, contributing to a healthier, more equitable world.

CASEL's vision is clear: a world where every child can reach their full potential, where schools are nurturing and inclusive environments, and where education serves as a powerful force for social good. Through continued efforts, this vision can become a reality—one school, one community, and one student at a time.

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