

Social Emotional Learning Demonstration Sites in Washington State



Support for Districts: School Implementation of SEL

Schools and districts in Washington state are implementing the Washington Social Emotional Learning (SEL) standards and benchmarks. This includes using the [Washington SEL Implementation Guide](#) as a framework to address the four guiding principles (equity, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, and universal design) and the three essential elements of SEL (see sidebar).

Essential Elements

- Create conditions to support students' SEL
- Collaborate with families, communities, and extended learning opportunity (ELO) providers
- Build adult capacity that supports SEL for all

In response to the need for practical examples of SEL implementation, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has created a series of four briefs based on the implementation efforts at five demonstration site districts: Cape Flattery School District, Franklin Pierce School District, Renton School District, Richland School District, and Steilacoom Historical School District. This is the third brief in the series and answers the following guiding question:



Washington Office of Superintendent of
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How are local education agencies **supporting school leaders and staff members to implement SEL?**

In addition to the examples, you will find reflection questions that your school or district can use to guide your implementation efforts.

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Cape Flattery School District

Cape Flattery fosters collaboration within and across schools to support shared learning and provide holistic, culturally responsive support to students. Schools have prioritized hiring or engaging Makah cultural practitioners and language teachers to provide cultural programming and collaborate with non-Makah teachers to center their SEL work around cultural practices with the goal of affirming students' cultural identities. As one school administrator said, "Culture has been the purest form of SEL."

At the school level, teachers also meet to discuss ways to implement cultural practices and SEL implementation. Professional learning, provided by the district's SEL lead, educational service district staff members (e.g., school psychologists and counselors), and external experts has helped educators learn how to connect the practices. For example, a culture class focused on connecting SEL standards to Makah cultural practices, such as cold water bathing and morning meditation. The team also provided professional learning on trauma-informed practice to help teachers provide compassionate and effective responses to students who may have experienced significant trauma. This approach resonated with Makah elders.

"[The district SEL leader] is trying to work with the rest of the staff to say 'Focus on the kids. Read them when they walk in the room. Talk to them. See if they're having a good day or having some stress or difficulties that day.'"

—Makah Elder

The SEL lead helps schools and their partners select and/or adapt SEL curricula to be culturally sustaining and embedded throughout the day and in after-school activities. They also help the district and school secure grants for these partnerships. For example, what started out as workshops after school, turned into adjusting the high school master schedule to create a more stable opportunity for all students to engage in electives focused on Makah culture. Adjusting the school schedule also allowed specific time for SEL during English and social studies, integrating

Makah cultural practices with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and MTSS strategies, such as student of the month values and schoolwide events that celebrate Makah (e.g., Treaty Day or Indigenous People’s Day). This is part of how SEL is organically being integrated into the district.

ESD staff members regularly work with students in group or individual settings. Counseling interns and community-based organizations also facilitate small group sessions and workshops on SEL topics. These included gathering feedback from students, providing group counseling and social skills training, and engaging students in after-school activities like role-playing games that focus on SEL.

The district reviews multiple data points, including student academic, attendance, and behavioral data. Additional data includes feedback from students and community members about the value of programs, biannual climate surveys, the healthy youth survey, and a staff survey. The team is currently developing a family survey. The district is using this data to respond to the goals and priorities of the community, to secure additional funding for programs that are well-received, to determine where they need to focus more energy and provide professional development, and to triangulate across different data sources to ensure all voices are heard.

Franklin Pierce School District

Franklin Pierce works to integrate SEL across content areas and through existing districtwide structures, such as using daily advisory time in their high schools. While times and placements can vary, they tend to be about 25 minutes in the morning. This time is not dedicated to using a specific curriculum, but rather a focus on relationship building and working on the High School and Beyond efforts. Students receive credit for this and must **present a portfolio** with **documentation and reflections** on their experiences and growth as a learner, a planner, and a citizen. Throughout their high school career, they set goals, identify interests, learn employability skills, plan budgets for post-graduation life, and document a variety of community services. District and school staff members meet in design sessions to discuss ways to use data and improve SEL implementation across the middle and high schools.

“The most useful resources are each other. The team getting together and sharing in our own space and connecting as humans and educators has been important. Sharing takeaways and work, having time for conversations about the schools and efforts in context”

—Franklin Pierce School District leader

Renton School District

Renton organized a cohort of elementary teachers to develop a set of culturally responsive practices. The educators also identified appropriate universal practices, such as calm corners or safe spaces for students to practice self-management skills. Staff members supported implementation across classrooms through training and providing supplies. The district has also had dedicated intensive learning sites since 2019. This effort is supported by district central office staff members who worked directly with school-based SEL teams to implement key practices as part of their targeted [pillars of district success](#). In the first year, the district identified and provided targeted support to three sites. This initiative has yielded great success. Since its beginning, the number of schools participating in the intensive learning sites initiative has doubled. While all schools across the district are required to have a social emotional learning goal, the intensive learning sites create a team to work with the SEL facilitator to write a vision, conduct a needs assessment, set goals, write an action plan, and use a continuing improvement process to monitor the goals. As the schools are implementing SEL, the district reviews the efforts and successes annually to adjust for any needed changes. Schools that are not designated as intensive learning sites still benefit from the support of the district through professional learning, including training for non-certified staff members.

In addition to the intensive learning sites, the team organized a districtwide two-day virtual conference with breakout sessions that gave staff members from across the district—including paraeducators, food services, front office staff members, and bus drivers—the opportunity to celebrate and share their SEL successes with others. Classified staff members worked with the SEL facilitator to organize and review proposals for breakout sessions and to choose keynote speakers. The team organized a pre-conference through Google Classroom to participate in pre-reading activities. Post-conference feedback was overwhelmingly positive, such as “Oh my gosh I hadn't thought of it that way!” and “I hadn't felt included in that sort of thing until now.” The following year they continued supporting classified staff members with post-conference activities through Google classroom. The SEL facilitator and a workgroup set up several book studies and identified additional SEL leaders from across the district, from varying roles, to lead the effort. While the books and participants vary, the structure of using Renton Signature Practices remains consistent.

“We had a couple of different book studies as part of bringing people back together, and we talked about these books that they've been reading. We found other leaders that kind of came out of that. This will be our second year of having some of our district employees leading book studies.”

—Renton SEL Facilitator

Richland School District

Richland School district has been engaged in the [OSPI MTSS](#) cohort and the [Inclusionary Practices Project](#). A team from the [University of Washington's SMART center](#) has been working with administrators and leaders to address well-being and mental health supports across the system. In addition, the district shifted its curriculum adoption process to incorporate SEL implementation. The SEL curriculum adoption team included administrators, teachers, counselors, and family members from across the district to understand and articulate the priorities and strategies of Richland schools in order to implement a curriculum and training supports districtwide. Previously, schools had a variety of resources, training, and practices in how and when to teach SEL skills.

During the adoption process the leadership and committee suggested a K–12 program to include consistent language and scope across the district. They also focused on ensuring that all educators had the training, time, and resources to teach the curriculum with their defined fidelity. After developing a rubric that included key values such as the skills focus, instructional methods, pacing, family and community extensions, and implementation support, the team reviewed multiple evidence-based programs from the [CASEL program guide](#) and [Navigating SEL from the Inside Out](#) from the Wallace Foundation. The team identified multiple programs that could meet their criteria, so they participated in presentations from the providers, ultimately narrowing the selection to three providers. To determine how both the educators and students perceived the lessons, curriculum programmers developed a trial unit for educators to implement over a five-week period. After the sample curriculum lessons were taught and evaluated as a group, they chose their final curriculum, and the associated training supports.

Reflection Questions and Considerations

- How are the policies and expectations around SEL implementation at the schools connected to the support provided by the district?
- How might your district identify SEL leaders and champions to build influential teams and address equity?
- How might your district connect SEL to other initiatives and efforts such as MTSS or High School and Beyond?
- When choosing resources for instruction or integration of SEL skills, how does the district address the diversity of needs and experiences?
- How might the culture of your students inform the development of goals and strategies for SEL implementation?
- How are resources such as staffing, time, and funding allocated across the district to address individual school strengths and needs?

To Learn More

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is committed to supporting schools, districts, and community partners in implementing SEL that is equitable, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and universally designed. Read more about SEL in Washington and access additional resources here: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/social-emotional-learning-sel>

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