

Washington SEL Implementation Brief: For Parents and Families

Social Emotional Learning: Families, Schools, and Communities Working Together

Social emotional learning (SEL) starts at home. Parents and families are a child's first teachers of SEL. As children grow, parents and families are integral in supporting the social emotional lives of their children.

SEL continues at school. For school-age children, classrooms and environments throughout a school offer the opportunity to build awareness of their emotions, show empathy for others, and contribute to the well-being of the community.

Why focus on SEL at school? Learning is inherently social and emotional. When students feel connected to their teachers, peers, and school, the neurological networks in their brains become stronger. Emotions and relationships can either motivate students to engage in learning or, if unnurtured, interfere with learning, memory, and positive behaviors. Decades of research tell us that social emotional skills are critical to both academic learning and the competencies our children will need to be successful in career and civic life. Children's social emotional development is best supported when parents, families, schools, and community partners all work together.

SEL continues in the community. Community organizations play an essential role in supporting healthy child development and in allowing student learning to continue across many settings.

What Is Social Emotional Learning?

Social emotional learning (SEL) is broadly understood as a process through which people build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life. (See Washington state's SEL Implementation Guide)

SEL is **not** a way to "grade" or identify deficits, and it is not just a curriculum or add-on. Rather, SEL is an intentional approach to building student assets.

SEL supports **education equity**¹ in multiple ways: emphasizing whole-child development, drawing attention to the social nature of learning, advancing the belief that all children can learn, developing young people's skills to navigate social contexts, and improving relationships between students and educators—a key protective factor for **all** students.²

¹ Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential. Retrieved from the National Equity Project website: <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/education-equity-definition>

² Jones, S. M., & Kahn, J. (2017). *The evidence base for how we learn: Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development. Consensus statements of evidence from the Council of Distinguished Scientists.* Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.



Washington State's SEL Standards³

Self-Awareness:	Individual has the ability to identify their emotions, personal assets, areas for growth, and potential external resources and supports.
Self-Management:	Individual has the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
Self-Efficacy:	Individual has the ability to motivate themselves, persevere, and see themselves as capable.
Social-Awareness:	Individual has the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
Social Management:	Individual has the ability to make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.
Social Engagement:	Individual has the ability to consider others and show a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community.

Washington State SEL Framework: Essential Elements and Guiding Principles

1. Create the conditions to support student SEL through climate and culture.
2. SEL requires collaboration among families, educators, community partners, and young people in its design and implementation.
3. Build adult capacity.

Equity: Each child receives what they need to develop their full potential.

Culturally sustaining: Culture is viewed as a resource for learning, not a barrier.

Universal design: Learning differences are planned for and accommodated.

Trauma-informed: Knowledge of the effects of trauma is integrated into policy and practice.

How can Families Support SEL?

- ✓ Build relationships with school partners, community members, and other families to learn together and build cultures that support SEL for everyone.
- ✓ Ask the teachers and principal at your child's school what they are doing to support students' social emotional competencies. Are there opportunities for parents to engage with the school to support schoolwide SEL?
- ✓ Learn more about SEL in Washington state. Visit the SEL resource page on the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's [website](#).

³ Social and Emotional Learning Benchmarks Workgroup. (2016). *Addressing social emotional learning in Washington's K-12 public schools*. Retrieved from <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2022-12/selbworkgroup2016report.pdf>



- ✓ Connect with other parents to talk about how to support the academic and social emotional well-being of your children.
- ✓ Promoting SEL was the Washington State Parent Teacher Association's (WSPTA) number-one legislative priority for 2018–20. Check out the [WSPTA](#).

Promoting SEL at Home

You can support SEL skill development at home by encouraging your child to:

- Identify and name their emotions, feelings, and thoughts.
- Identify positive and negative consequences of actions.
- Demonstrate the ability to follow routines and generate ideas to solve problems.
- Create a goal and track progress toward achieving that goal.
- Identify feelings expressed by others.
- Identify ways that people and groups are similar and different.
- Demonstrate attentive listening skills without distraction.
- Identify and take steps to resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
- Demonstrate a sense of community responsibility.

Involving Parents and Families in SEL

Educate — Communicate — Participate — Celebrate

- ⇒ Create infographics about SEL with students to share with their parents and families.
- ⇒ Maintain open communication in a variety of modes: Use texts, make phone calls, hold video conferences, and establish parent and family support groups.
- ⇒ Develop SEL newsletters with tips for getting involved, games and activities, school and community events for parents and families, and strategies for talking about feelings, emotions, and behaviors.
- ⇒ Establish traditions or routines to celebrate successes in growth, engagement, and participation.



Resources for Building SEL for Families

[EQ 101 for Parents](#)

An online module that parents can take to understand what SEL is and ways to support SEL.

[Educating the Heart](#)

Resources for parents and educators that discuss how to support the heart and mind.

[Parenting Cue Cards](#)

Cards that address common challenges parents might have around various social emotional issues.

[NBC Parent Toolkit](#)

A website that provides tools, resources, knowledge, and advice for child development at any age.

[Families in the Driver's Seat: Parent-Driven Lessons and Guidelines for Collective Engagement](#)

A culturally responsive, asset-based curriculum that can be adapted by schools to build capacity and relationships between parents and educators.

[Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement](#)

A resource that provides an overview of evidence-based strategies that schools and districts may use to promote equitable family engagement practices. It includes examples of school and district practices across the country, with information from seven Washington state districts.

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