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**Coordinating SEL Work With Community Partners**

School communities can deepen the impact of systemic social and emotional learning by thoughtfully and intentionally leveraging community partnerships. Through prioritizing alignment – in language, in strategies, in practice and in communication around SEL – we ensure that youth have opportunities to deepen their SEL skills in seamless ways across all learning environments.

For school communities eager to begin building meaningful community partnerships, additional tools and guidance can be found in [Focus Area 3: Community Partnerships](https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-3/community-partnerships/).

Many school communities already have a complex web of community partnerships. Each may serve different youth populations, facilitate different programs, draw from different funding sources, and work toward different outcomes. Keeping track of the efforts and outcomes of each partner and maintaining effective communication and collaborative relationships can be a challenge in the busy school environment.

**This tool offers guidance on how an SEL team might leverage those community partnerships in a more intentional manner.**

* First, develop an inventory – or a comprehensive list – of all partnerships and document the function and nature of each partnership.
* Second, identify opportunities for deepening SEL practice and alignment.
* Third, establish structures to communicate with key partners about progress, continuous improvement, ongoing alignment, and wraparound support for students.

**Part I: Develop an Inventory of all Partnerships**

Brainstorm all of the partnerships that are currently working in/with your school community. This should be an exhaustive list of key partners that work with your students, in your school building or community, before or after school, during the summer, or even during the school day.

Community partners may include: out-of-school time providers (before school and afterschool programs), embedded direct service providers, community-based nonprofit organizations, health care providers, university research centers, colleges of education, mission-driven foundations, governmental agencies, and local businesses.

To efficiently kickstart the process, consider identifying a couple SEL team members to lead the brainstorming process. They can prepare a list of partners to share with the SEL team, who can then identify any additional partners who may have been left off the list.

Next, consider adding context around key community partnerships to create a reference document. Helpful information may include: mission and outcome goals, key contacts at the partner organization and the school, schedule/duration of supports, location of programming/supports/services, target audience/population, and other details about the history of partnership (years, funding source, etc.).

*Suggested template for documentation*

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| **Name of community partner** | **Mission** | **Outcome goals** | **Community partner point of contact** | **School community point of contact** | **Schedule and duration of supports** | **Location of programming, supports, or services** | **Target audience or population** | **Additional notes** |
| *Community Partner 1* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Community Partner 2* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Part II: Find Opportunities to Deepen SEL Alignment and Practice**

Levels of collaboration and engagement will vary among community partners. It is encouraged that school communities share their vision, goals, and priority initiatives for SEL with *all* community partners.

**Identify most relevant SEL partners**

From the full list of community partners, the SEL team can discuss who should be primary collaborators for SEL. During a team meeting, consider doing a card sort or charting activity to determine which category best fits each community partner:

1. Partners most clearly supporting SEL
2. Partners that can potentially support SEL
3. Partners with no apparent connection to SEL

**Discuss touchpoints and levers**

Consider the topics and questions below to explore how an SEL team might identify opportunities for deepening SEL collaboration. These suggestions are meant to inspire conversation and ideas that may shape the agenda for a collaborative meeting with partners. As partnerships are strengthened, revisit these questions periodically as a check-in.

Understanding SEL practices

* What opportunities exist in the partner’s setting for young people to grow and develop socially and emotionally?
* How do the partner’s goals align with supporting youth in the development of their social and emotional skills and competencies?
* How advanced is this partner in their knowledge and practice of SEL? What knowledge and practice can be shared across contexts?
* If there are aspects of the community partners’ work that promote SEL in subtle ways, are there opportunities to make this more intentional and explicit?

Creating a shared vision

* How can we best share our vision for SEL and learn from our partner about their vision for SEL?
* Should we develop a shared vision for SEL across contexts and work?

Spreading the word

* How can each side of the partnership share communications around SEL with their networks?
* How can families be engaged authentically? Are there family engagement sessions where SEL could play a role?

Fostering collaboration

* Is there a possibility of having joint professional learning opportunities with staff from all sides of the partnership?
* Are there opportunities for staff to cultivate their own social-emotional competence together?
* Could there be facilitated cross-site visits, where staff from the school community and staff from the community partnership have a chance to see one another in action and witness each other’s approach to SEL?

**Engage in collaborative planning**

In a joint meeting with the school SEL team and a given community partner, consider common SEL goals. Then, identify what practices are already happening in the school and in the partner’s work to support that goal. As a team, discuss what opportunities exist for alignment and identify what key personnel will be involved in implementation.

*This process for collaborative planning is adapted from* [*Beyond the Bell*](https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/In-School-Out-of-School-SEL-Connection-rev.pdf)*, a project from the American Institutes for Research.*

**Part III: Planning for Follow-Through**

Structures for communication and continuous improvement are critical for building an authentic, sustainable partnership. To maximize the impact of aligned efforts, schools and community partners must think about how they will communicate over time and work together to use data to continuously improve.

**Communicating for impact**

What structures will exist for communication between adults working in the school and in the community partner organizations that work with the same young people?

Consider the following questions:

How do we currently communicate?

Who needs to be informed, and what do they need to be informed about?

What communication needs to occur to achieve our outcome goals, and how often?

How can we communicate efficiently and consistently?

**Aligning continuous improvement**

To [practice continuous improvement](https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-4/overview/) is to establish a structured, ongoing process for collecting, reflecting on, and using data to inform decisions and drive improvements with SEL implementation. This requires tracking efforts, measuring progress, examining and reflecting on data, and adjusting the course as necessary.

In an authentic partnership, engaging in continuous improvement collaboratively can help deepen understanding of each other’s practice, leverage each party’s unique strengths, and foster open dialogue. In creating structures where school-day and community partners come together to share data, examine their progress together, and strategize about how to improve, SEL becomes a sustainable, integrated practice across contexts.

Consider the following questions:

* What kind of data will help us measure collective progress toward our shared goals?
* What data is already being collected by the school and by the partner? How frequently?
* Do we need to collect new data, or can we modify the way we currently collect data to better inform decisions about SEL implementation?
* What data would be important to share/can legally be shared? How frequently?
* How often should the school and community partner(s) come together to discuss continuous improvement efforts, and what meeting format would work best to promote equity of voice and solution-oriented discussion?