CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL

FOCUS AREA 3 > **SCHOOL** > FOSTER A SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Foster a Supportive School Climate

SEL implementation is intricately tied to school climate, defined by the National School Climate Center as the "quality and character of school life." SEL efforts both contribute to and depend upon a climate where all students and adults feel respected, supported, and engaged (Osher & Berg, 2017). Read more about how SEL and school climate are connected.

As you implement SEL, we recommend your school team regularly assess and intentionally cultivate a supportive climate in your school. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments provides a School Climate Improvement Resource Package and School Climate Surveys that can help your team develop a plan and engage in continuous improvement around school climate.

As you work to foster a supportive school climate, use the rubric or the questions below to identify areas for continuous improvement:

Does the SEL team regularly assesses climate (through observational data, surveys, etc.)?

Does the team meet regularly to plan climate improvement efforts based on data?

Do schoolwide norms, shared agreements, routines, and procedures support the school's SEL vision and climate?

Many of the areas you're working on through schoolwide SEL implementation also contribute to a supportive school climate. You can review or read more about strategies for supporting school climate throughout the School Guide:

- Interactions and relationships between members of the school community (discussed in Focus Area 2 and 3)
- Staff social, emotional, and cultural competence and how they model SEL (discussed in Focus Area 2)
- Instructional practices and academic rigor (discussed in Focus Area 3, Classroom)
- Student voice and engagement (discussed in Focus Area 3, School)
- Discipline policies and practices (discussed in Focus Area 3, School and Classroom)
- Family and community partnerships (discussed in Focus Area 3, Family Partnerships and Community Partnerships)

Additionally, school climate is heavily influenced by the norms, routines, and procedures that guide daily school life. We discuss these below.

Schoolwide Norms

Norms are a set of agreed-upon expectations of how everyone will behave and interact. Schoolwide norms help operationalize and create common language around how all staff and students will contribute to a positive school climate.

Your school may already have a set of rules or expectations that set parameters around behaviors and help create a safe environment. Norms also contribute to a sense of safety, but are distinct from traditional rules in that norms are created and upheld by the school community—rather than an authority figure. In this way, norms have a deeper potential to be internalized and support school climate and SEL.

Norms are most likely to have the desired impact and be culturally responsive if they are developed collaboratively with staff, students, and community partners. The best norms are brief and memorable and reflect the cultural identity of the schools' staff and students. Once established, norms can be revised as needed.

You'll find some suggested approaches for collaboratively developing schoolwide norms in the tool below.

Download Tool
Developing Schoolwide Norms

This tool provides suggested approaches for developing schoolwide norms.

If you already have established traditional schoolwide rules or expectations, consider refreshing them using the Guiding Questions for Developing Culturally Responsive Schoolwide Norms.

Guiding Questions for Developing Culturally Responsive Schoolwide Norms

1. Within the last school year, have all students, staff, and families been given opportunities to suggest new norms or recommend that certain norms be removed?
2. Do schoolwide norms align with the messages that students hear at home and in their community? How do you know?
3. Could these norms potentially single out specific groups of students?
4. Have you asked for student feedback about how the norms impact them? If not, how can you accomplish this? How can you use this feedback to refine your schoolwide norms?

Routines and Procedures

In addition to norms, routines and procedures shape how students and staff interact and behave throughout the school day. Routines are the way that students and staff engage in regular school activities, such as how students move through the hallways. Procedures are a set of steps that guide how staff and students carry out certain actions, such as how staff will respond to disciplinary issues.

Your school's routines and procedures are also important opportunities to reinforce SEL lessons and programs. For example, a school routine in which all teachers greet students at the door before class can help promote social awareness and relationship skills. It can also help foster a warm and responsive school climate. Disciplinary procedures, discussed later in this section, can also provide ripe opportunities to teach students about self management, conflict resolution, and responsible decision-making.

As your team fosters a supportive school climate, consider how to develop routines and procedures that support positive relationships and SEL. You may want to start by developing a list of all the routines and procedures that occur during a school day. For those that occur frequently or are high priority, you can observe and take notes on how staff and students interact during the routine or procedures. Then, as a team, reflect on the following questions:

- To what degree does this routine/procedure reflect our schoolwide norms and support our school's vision?
- How do students and staff communicate and interact with one another during this routine/procedure?
- To what degree does this routine/procedure promote the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and/or responsible decision-making?
- How can we improve this routine/procedures so that it better supports our schoolwide norms, contributes to positive relationships, and promotes SEL?

You'll also want to consider how your schoolwide routines and procedures connect to those in the classroom. You may want to develop new routines or procedures that connect to your school's SEL program or what students learn through explicit SEL instruction. For example, some schools have planned morning meetings or other structured routines that help build community and provide regular opportunities to practice social and emotional skills.

Trauma-Sensitive Schools

A supportive school climate that promotes all students' social and emotional learning is a key feature of a trauma-sensitive school.

According to the National Survey of Children's Health (2013), at least 50% of the nation's children have experienced or witnessed incidents of trauma. It's important for all adults to be able to recognize students' attempts to cope with trauma and create an environment that minimizes potential triggers and provides support.

The Trauma Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) recommends a whole-school approach that promotes:

- An understanding among all staff that trauma can impact a child's learning, behavior, and relationships at school.
- School and classroom environments that are physically, socially, emotionally, and academically safe.
- Opportunities for all students to learn and practice social and emotional competence.
- Inclusive policies that enable students to be full members of the classroom and school community and avoid removing students from the learning environment whenever possible.
- A staff culture that encourages shared responsibility for the well-being of all students.
- Careful preparation for potential crises, planning ahead for changes in staffing and policies that may impact students' experiences.

Always consult with a school-based mental health professional if you're concerned about a student's well-being.