How to use SEL to benefit educators and learners

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While educators and learners aren't faced with the same stresses they had during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects still linger. The effects are even [more prevalent](#) for learners of color and those who come from low-income backgrounds. Educators are still working to make up for learning loss during the pandemic, and children and teens continue to need mental health support.

Before educators can support their learners' growth, they need to be supported too. Educators who feel equipped, confident and balanced are better positioned to help their learners. When educators have the right tools, they can save valuable time and energy while fostering their own mental well-being. These same tools can help them teach social and emotional learning (SEL) so learners can build the skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

This e-book is designed to show you how the right strategies and resources can transform SEL in classrooms.

So how can your school or district ensure that educators and learners get the support they need?

In this e-book we'll discuss strategies for:

- Creating a positive and equitable school culture with social and emotional learning (SEL)

- Incorporating SEL into the classroom without burdening teachers

Why does SEL matter in education?

Although academic instruction and curricular goals are absolutely still important, social and emotional learning also needs to be part of the educational experience.

According to CASEL, "SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation."

Learners and educators come from a variety of backgrounds and have unique skills and needs. SEL helps learners and adults better understand their emotions and empathize with those in their community.

Further, SEL can help educators create a stronger support system for learners and help learners become more self-aware and socially aware.

The five SEL core competencies from CASEL are:

1 **Self-awareness:** recognizing your emotions and their impact, as well as your strengths and weaknesses

2 **Self-management:** taking control of your emotions and actions, while setting and working toward goals

3 **Social awareness:** acting with empathy and ethics toward people who have a different background from you

4 **Relationship skills:** building and maintaining healthy relationships, listening to others, resolving conflicts, knowing when to seek help

5 **Making responsible decisions:** acting or responding based on ethics, safety, the well-being of yourself and others

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What are the facts surrounding teacher shortages?

According to a recent survey by the American Federation of Teachers, 75% of the educators surveyed would not recommend teaching as a career. On top of that, 40% want to leave the profession within the next two years.

Many educators have already left their positions and turned to other careers. While not every school district is experiencing a teacher shortage, many are having difficulty filling positions. This particularly affects low-income schools and schools with students of color. According to a 2022 federal survey, teacher vacancies in schools serving mostly students of color was 4.4. In schools with a predominantly white population, the vacancy number was 2.6.

Another federal report on teacher turnover was released a few years before the pandemic. Even then it found that twice as many teachers from high-poverty schools left for another campus than those from mid-low or low-poverty schools.

There is also a decline in the number of people joining teacher training programs, so there are fewer new candidates vying for open teaching positions. In addition, many school districts have actually added positions since the start of the pandemic to help narrow learning gaps. This has made it even more difficult for a school to be fully staffed.

So why are educators leaving, and why aren't as many people training to become teachers? According to some experts, it's a combination of exhaustion, low-pay and a sense that their profession isn't respected.

It's clear that something needs to be done to retain teachers so they feel supported and respected. Most importantly, learners need highly-qualified teachers that work with them consistently throughout the school year.

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How can you use SEL to create a more positive school culture and retain teachers?

People who build their social-emotional skills understand how to problem-solve, practice self-discipline, manage their emotions and handle challenges. SEL has lasting positive effects on adults and learners beyond the school experience.

Educators of course want to help their learners. But many educators become overwhelmed, and over time, they don't have reserves of empathy left. According to a 2017 study, those feelings can lead to teacher burnout and "compassion fatigue."

A 2016 study found that educators' emotional exhaustion had a direct negative effect on learners' grades and test scores. It also affected how the educators felt about their school and its support system. This, of course, was exacerbated by the pandemic. A 2022 federal survey found that 70% of public schools reported that since the pandemic started, more students have needed mental health services. Also, 29% of schools said that the number of staff members who sought mental health services increased.

Since educator well-being affects student well-being and achievement, it's important to prioritize a positive school culture with a focus on SEL. It's also crucial to keep equity in mind so that school staff members and learners from different backgrounds get the wellness support and resources they need.

You can begin by establishing trusting and collaborative relationships across your school or district. Staff members and learners need to feel supported, and they need to feel that their administration listens when they voice opinions. Transparent communication across campus is therefore essential.

One way to do this is to form a school or district team focused on SEL. The team should incorporate a range of backgrounds and ask for input from other staff members and families about SEL needs.

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There should also be dedicated time for staff members to reflect on their emotions and recognize what is causing them stress. The SEL team can form check-in questions that staff members can answer periodically to help them with self-awareness and create action steps to help with stress.

You should also meet educators where they are in regards to SEL training. Educators should have a clear understanding of SEL themselves before they can teach it to learners. Just like students, though, educators have different learning needs. It's best then to give educators a variety of options for training, such as online training, a self-paced course or mini courses that fit into scheduled PD time. SEL training may include strategies for managing stress, practicing self-care and demonstrating a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset.

Once staff members have an understanding of SEL, they can model strategies on a routine basis. When educators have practiced SEL skills themselves, they are able to build more positive relationships with their colleagues and learners. Learners will pick up on these strategies, too, and over time, the school culture will begin to transform.

In addition to making SEL strategies part of everyday school life, school leaders should also allow learners opportunities to voice their opinions and chances to build relationships. Opportunities to join diverse clubs and be recognized for positive choices can help create relationship-building experiences across the school.

How can educators maintain a balance of SEL and academics in the classroom?

A 2017 meta-analysis of 82 studies found that SEL interventions increased learners' academic performance by 11 percentile points. It's clear that building SEL into classroom instruction benefits learners in multiple ways.

Educators are busy and overwhelmed, though. How can they prioritize SEL and academic content?

One way to promote SEL in the classroom is for educators to create positive student-teacher relationships. Educators can check in with learners about how they are feeling. Whether young learners point to an emotion on a poster as they enter the classroom, or educators post a reflection question, consistent check-ins can help learners better understand their emotions. Learners may also need chances to express worries or discuss issues they're reading about online.

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Another way is to have students learn about new cultures and perspectives and recognize and celebrate the cultures across the school. Educators can embed this into the content they are already teaching.

As mentioned, educators should also model SEL best practices during instruction. This helps learners feel safe sharing their own feelings and gives them a clear understanding of how to use SEL in the classroom and beyond. The good news is that these strategies don't take extra planning.

For example, educators can model SEL in these ways:

- **Admit when they make a mistake**
- **Identify their emotions in the moment**
- **Ask learners for feedback about an activity they just completed**
- **Discuss their own strengths and weaknesses**
- **Give an example of a time they used a growth mindset**
- **Talk through how they are managing a moment of stress**
- **Relate a goal they have and the steps they are taking to achieve it**
- **Show appreciation of other cultures**
- **Give specific encouragement or praise**
- **Intervene when they hear disrespectful or harmful language**
- **Incorporate learners' suggestions**

Educators can also create explicit lessons about SEL skills. A team of educators can collaborate on these lessons so the burden isn't on individual teachers. Once students learn these specific skills, educators can give them opportunities to practice them throughout the school year.

How can Hāpara classroom management tools help you implement SEL practically?

Hāpara's classroom management tools empower educators to easily support SEL day to day. With Hāpara Highlights, teachers can monitor learners' digital activity in real time, offering guidance to nurture positive digital citizenship.

Whether it's redirecting a learner's focus with a private message or praising their productive online behavior, these tools enable educators to promote accountability and self-awareness in students. Educators can create personalized browsing experiences and use feedback to guide learners toward responsible online habits.

Hāpara Teacher Dashboard also supports SEL by helping educators streamline their workflow and focus on the needs of each learner. The dashboard gives educators visibility into learners' Google Drives and recent Google Drive assignments, providing insights into their progress. This allows teachers to deliver timely formative feedback, encouraging growth and improving organization skills. This helps build positive teacher-learner relationships and reinforces learners' executive functioning skills like task management. By simplifying these processes, Hāpara ensures teachers can dedicate more time to meaningful academic and SEL instruction.

Sean Lougheed, Director of Learning at Wolf Creek, said, "Equitable access has changed the landscape for learners at Wolf Creek, and Hāpara has helped us improve educational equity because it lets us adapt to learners' lives."

Building self-awareness

To support SEL skills, an educator or a team can build interactive lessons that directly teach learners how to recognize their emotions and their impact. Educators can also create an SEL check-in Google Form and share the file with learners directly from Hāpara.

Improving self-management skills

Hāpara Highlights helps educators guide students online and embed digital citizenship as learning is happening. With Highlights, educators are able to view learners' browsing activity and provide the support they need, whether they are at school or at home. If an educator sees that a learner is distracted, they can start a digital citizenship conversation. After that conversation, the educator and learner may decide to block a particular website for a certain amount of time, teaching learners how to self-manage their online activity.

Hāpara Teacher Dashboard saves educators' time by allowing them to easily access learners' Google Drive assignments and give consistent personalized feedback. That timely feedback promotes growth and can help learners' self-manage their progress and better understand their strengths and weaknesses.

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Developing social awareness

Educators can address social awareness skills by sharing videos, images, audio clips, informative texts and narratives about empathy, ethics and cultures. With Hāpara, educators can share the websites directly to learners' devices or create a guided browsing session that focuses learners on those resources.

Strengthening relationship skills

Group collaboration is easy to implement with Workspace because educators can quickly create student groups and share resources, files and activities by group. In Workspace, learners see their group's materials and can work together on digital assignments and projects.

Educators can also use Highlights to monitor group activity and provide interventions when a group needs help.

On top of that, Hāpara offers relationship-building opportunities for educators and their peers. The Hāpara Community is an excellent resource for networking, learning and sharing ideas with educators across the world.

Learning how to make responsible decisions

The Hāpara Highlights browser monitoring tool helps students learn how to make responsible decisions online. For example, educators can use it to focus learners on specific websites and then gradually give them more online responsibility. They can also send messages with encouragement or feedback in the moment to learners, groups or the entire class about browsing activity.

Hāpara also offers Gaggle Web Filter. It is a dynamic cloud-based web filter that works in real time to protect digital learners by blocking inappropriate and harmful websites and URLs.

When paired with Hāpara's classroom management solution, Gaggle Web Filter It also allows learners to practice responsible decision-making. If they find a website that is blocked and want to use it for learning, they can send an unblock request to their teacher. The teacher will see the alert in Hāpara Highlights and can then choose to unblock the site or have a conversation about digital citizenship with the learner.

Gaggle also offers Gaggle Safety Management, a student wellness tool. It allows your school or district to proactively support learners' mental health with real-time machine learning and human review of students' digital content.

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Want to learn more about how Hāpara Highlights can build digital citizenship in your school district?

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