

2021

# BACK-TO-SCHOOL GUIDE



**STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL**

**2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR**



**APERTURE EDUCATION**



As we head into a new school year focused on learning recovery and hopefully returning to a sense of normal, we need all hands on deck. School and district leaders, teachers and other educators, and families must work together to ensure student success. As a team, we can support one another as we work to support student learning.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) will play an important role in supporting both educators and students this year. This Back-to-School Guide is packed with helpful SEL information, lessons, and activities. These articles are organized so you can quickly locate tips and strategies relevant to your area of focus.

Start by referencing the Table of Contents on the following page. As you flip through this guide, utilize the articles according to each role. Use the **Strengthening Students' Resilience** articles to build students' social and emotional skills; use the **Supporting Schools, Educators, and Staff** articles to build your own skills; and share the information and tips in the **Helping Families Build SEL at Home** articles with students' families.

We hope you find the resources in this guide helpful as you prepare for the coming school year. All educators play an important role in SEL, and all staff can benefit from learning about SEL, developing their own social and emotional skills, and becoming more effective at teaching SEL to students.

Have fun trying out the activities in this guide to ease back into school and to handle any challenges the rest of the year may bring. Have a great school year!





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# INTRODUCTION

## **Educators, you are all heroes!**

Teaching is one of the most stressful jobs on the planet, and last year was one for the record books. Yet, you found ways to continue teaching and persevere during remote and hybrid learning — all while dealing with the extra stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic. You tapped into your own resilience and found creative ways to continue students' academic instruction while nurturing their social and emotional competence.

This fall will bring about new challenges. Many schools will return to in-person learning, and students and educators will need to adjust. Teachers will also be tasked with making up for lost learning and helping students work through lasting impacts of the pandemic.

SEL can help! Last year showed us why social and emotional skills are so important. An essential part of learning, SEL helps adults and students manage stress, build confidence and self-efficacy, set meaningful goals, and foster relationships based on mutual respect and trust. With SEL, we have come out of this pandemic stronger.

This year's Back-to-School Guide is filled with resources, activities, and advice to help you improve and expand SEL initiatives in your classroom, school, and district. We have also provided resources to help families teach SEL at home.

Use this guide to set you and your students up for success during the first weeks of school and beyond. Pick and choose which articles are most relevant to your needs, and have fun improving student success with SEL!

For additional resources, [contact our experts](#) to learn more about how Aperture can help you and your students succeed this year. Together, we can create an SEL initiative that meets everyone's needs.





# THE STORY OF APERTURE EDUCATION



CENTER FOR  
RESILIENT CHILDREN



**APERTURE  
EDUCATION**

## Bringing the Whole Child Into Focus

Aperture Education empowers over 3,000 schools and out-of-school-time programs across North America to measure, strengthen, and support social and emotional competence in K-12 youth and educators. The powerful data districts receive enables education leaders to take strategic action about SEL within their organizations. The Aperture system includes the DESSA suite of strength-based assessments which is lauded by researchers for its high standards for reliability and validity, and appreciated by educators for its ability to easily and quickly identify each student's personal social and emotional strengths and areas of needed support. Aperture partners with industry curriculum leaders to deliver research-based, CASEL™-informed intervention strategies to bolster specific areas of needed growth. Paired with robust reporting in one easy-to-use system, Aperture is favored in districts nationwide. Aperture has supported over one million students in their social and emotional growth and continues to develop innovative solutions to bring the whole child into focus. To learn more, visit [www.ApertureEd.com/Why-Aperture](http://www.ApertureEd.com/Why-Aperture).

## Our Roots

Aperture originated from two organizations in 2017: the [Devereux Center for Resilient Children](#), a non-profit focused on creating resilient children, and [Apperson, Inc.](#), a for-profit focused on providing educators with good data to make great instructional decisions. To realize their shared goals, Aperture Education was born. In 2021, Aperture Education acquired Ascend. Ascend is the creator of goal-setting software for high school students, and this student-facing software is now part of Aperture's offering of SEL assessments and educator training.

We are a company rooted in the belief that our children hold the promise for a better tomorrow and that we have an obligation to ensure that students have the skills and mindsets to be good stewards of our future.

We are invested in helping educators, families, and communities learn more about SEL and the positive impact it has on our youth, educators, and out-of-school-time staff.

## Our Mission

The mission of Aperture Education is to ensure that all members of school and out-of-school communities, both children and adults, have the social and emotional skills to be successful, productive, and happy.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT APERTURE EDUCATION'S SEL SOLUTIONS FOR K-8, 9-12, AND EDUCATORS

A young boy with brown hair, wearing a pink, blue, and white plaid shirt, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. He is smiling and has his right hand raised high. On his desk is an open notebook and a white cup filled with colorful pens and pencils. In the background, other students are visible, some with their hands raised, and there are stacks of books and a green cup on the desk. The overall atmosphere is bright and positive.

# **STRENGTHENING STUDENTS' RESILIENCE**





## Getting Teachers & Students Back On Track in 2021-22 with SEL

The pandemic brought SEL to the forefront in districts, schools, and classrooms as a fundamental element of high-quality education. Strong relationship skills, the ability to manage stress and regulate emotions, problem-solving skills, and intrinsic motivation are just a few of the SEL skills that students and teachers need for success.

The coming school year will bring about new challenges, new areas of uncertainty, and new opportunities for growth. Teachers will need to help students make up learning loss, and many schools will need to adjust to in-person learning. SEL will be crucial for helping teachers and students meet these challenges and persevere.

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**FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE WILL HELP THE WHOLE SCHOOL FEEL CONNECTED AND SUPPORTED.**

# THIS FALL, WE MUST PRIORITIZE THE SEL NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS. HERE ARE FIVE KEY AREAS TO GET STARTED.

**1 Provide opportunities to build relationships, connect, and heal.** The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health and well-being of educators and students. Schools need to acknowledge and improve mental health to address ongoing concerns and start the healing process.

Schools can improve educators' overall well-being by focusing on initiatives that make them feel valued and supported. Educators should prioritize SEL instruction by [building meaningful teacher-student relationships](#) and [working through trauma](#). Efforts should be made to help [students](#) and [adults](#) effectively manage stress and anxiety. And [fostering a supportive school culture](#) will help the whole school feel connected and supported.

**2 Focus on the basics.** As many schools head back to in-person learning, teachers may start feeling overwhelmed. Now is not the time to introduce big, new initiatives. Instead, focus on programs you already have in place and make sure you are using those with fidelity. Now is a great time to make sure all programs, systems, and policies align with your district's mission and vision, and simplify things as much as possible.

In line with getting back to basics, *invest in your staff*. Ask educators what they need and do all you can to support them. Provide opportunities for staff to express their concerns and be heard, involve them in the decision-making process, and provide effective and empowering professional learning.

**3 Re-align supports as needed.** Pre-pandemic, schools operated knowing that their Tier 3 students had the highest needs, and these students generally received the most supports. Schools are now finding that students in Tier 2 and even Tier 1 have more intensive needs. To provide more supports to a larger group of students, schools and districts must get creative.

Many schools are taking an “all hands on deck” approach that hinges on cross-collaboration between support staff. For example assigning each department an “SEL Skill of the Month.” During their assigned month, the department is responsible for promoting the skill, planning activities around the skill, and working with school staff to provide more intensive support for students who need extra help.

Another example of an all hands on deck approach is

creating a task force focused on a particular priority, such as attendance. Find ways to get all staff involved. School counselors and social workers could conduct home visits. School admin and support staff could call students' homes to check in. Teachers could incorporate SEL lessons to engage students in their education and help them realize the importance of attending school. Getting the whole school involved will increase the impact of your SEL program.

**4 Plan a back-to-school SEL blitz.** The pandemic shook up so much in our routines, behaviors, and everyday aspects of the school and classroom. Start the 2021-22 school year with an “SEL blitz.” Plan a full week (or more) dedicated to the things that will get students reconnected and engaged. Consider spending the first days of school focused solely on SEL. This could include class or school-wide activities that help build a safe and supportive school culture, taking time to foster strong teacher-student relationships, planning fun icebreaker activities, meeting students' families, working with students to establish class rules and routines, etc.

There will be plenty of time to make up academic learning loss.



Prioritizing SEL will make it that much easier because students will be engaged and ready to learn.

## **5 Use data to create a sustainable SEL program to support students and staff all year.**

Keep your SEL program going strong all year with a quality SEL assessment and an effective action plan centered on data. Here are a few ways to use SEL data to support students and staff:

- **Formative assessment:** A universal formative assessment of students' social and emotional competence can be a useful way to understand students' needs and guide instruction accordingly.
- **Progress monitoring/ RtI:** Research shows that instruction improves when educators monitor students' progress in developing SEL competence throughout the school year. This way, educators can determine if interventions are working and make necessary adjustments.
- **Early Warning System (EWS):** Using SEL data in conjunction with academic risk indicators can help educators identify the root cause(s) of low performance.

- **PBIS and MTSS:** SEL data can guide educators in selecting student services and interventions and in moving students along the continuum of tiered supports.
- **Program evaluation:** Formative SEL assessment data can help you measure the effectiveness of your SEL program.
- **Continuous improvement:** To ensure the sustainability of your SEL program, it is important to continually measure success of implementation and progress toward your goals.

As many schools learned last year, quality SEL programs are essential for helping students succeed — especially during challenging and uncertain times. As we enter a new school year, help educators and students thrive by prioritizing SEL.



SEL4US is a grassroots network of state alliances promoting and supporting SEL in communities across the country. Membership is FREE!

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& JOIN NOW!**



Join CASEL for the can't-miss SEL event: the SEL Exchange Virtual Summit, October 14.

You'll gain practical ideas about when and how to lead, follow, and join young people on their journey to create change.

**LEARN MORE**



# 6 Ways to Build Strong Teacher-Student Relationships with SEL

Most of us remember a teacher who went above and beyond to engage us in learning. That teacher likely connected with us and made us excited to learn.

As an educator, one of the strongest impressions you can make on students is how you make them feel. When students feel you care about them and want what is best for them, they are more likely to engage, work hard, and cooperate.

The opposite is also true: When students lack strong, supportive relationships with their teachers it impacts their academic achievement, increases their likelihood to engage in disruptive behavior, and even factors into their decisions to drop out.

One of the most effective ways to increase student engagement and achievement is by building strong relationships with your students. And strong relationships are more important than ever after a year when we've all felt disconnected and have been physically distant from one another.



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**GIVING STUDENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE CHOICES CAN GO A LONG WAY IN BUILDING TRUST.**



The Character Effect™ is an evidenced-based, flexible, personalized social and emotional learning program that enhances the emotional IQ and improves the well-being of teachers and students alike. The K-12 program is unique, beginning with teachers first, delivering personalized, strength-focused coaching. 90% of teachers experiencing The Character Effect™ report feeling better equipped to manage student behavior.

**LEARN MORE**

## HERE ARE SIX SEL STRATEGIES TO BUILD STRONG TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS.

### 1 Show students you care.

An unfortunate trend among students — especially among those who make the decision to drop out of school — is the belief that their teachers do not care about them. A first step in creating strong teacher-student relationships is to communicate your feelings in a way that gets through to students and lets them know you care about them.

**Here are a few ways to show students you care about them:**

- Be mindful of how you talk to students, especially in front of their peers.
- Make a list of your students and rank how well you think you know them. Make a point of learning more about the students who are at the bottom of your list — often these students can benefit the most from extra attention.
- Say hello and goodbye to each student every day.
- Ask students about their lives outside of school. Host regular [morning meetings](#) where you invite students to share about themselves or any problems they are having.
- Listen to students and ask them questions to show you are interested in them. You can do this in class

discussions, or through individual or small group meetings.

- Pay extra attention to students who display high emotions, disrupt class, or seem withdrawn.

### 2 Develop mutual trust.

Mutual trust is important in any relationship. With students, educators often need to take the lead in building trust. One way to start building trust is to share about your own life. You don't have to get too personal, but telling students about yourself outside of school or sharing how you overcame an obstacle will help them see you as a real person, and they might feel like you value them because you opened up.

Giving students opportunities to make choices can go a long way in building trust. As often as possible, offer students choices. This could be in their assignments, how they demonstrate specific skills or knowledge, setting class rules/consequences, etc.

You can also build trust by asking students about the challenges and hardships they are facing and helping them take action to resolve or reduce those problems. For example, you might offer extra one-on-one support, direct students to needed resources (i.e. free school lunches or tutoring

services), and/or connect students with counselors and social workers.

Another way to build trust is to advocate for your students and consistently act in their best interests. This could mean sitting in on a disciplinary meeting to show support or collaborating with other educators on interventions like restorative justice circles.

### 3 Consider students' perspectives.

Just as we teach students empathy and encourage them to consider the perspectives of others, try to put yourself in your students' shoes to understand their experiences. Students may be dealing with hardships in their home or personal lives that you may not be aware of. Is the student bullying others because she was bullied? Is the student

habitually late because he works to support his family? Is the student unable to concentrate in class because she doesn't have enough money for food? Putting yourself in students' shoes can help you understand the root cause of an issue or problem behavior so you can better address their needs.

**To help consider students' perspectives, ask these questions:**

- What might be going on outside the classroom that is causing the problematic behavior?
- How often does the student receive positive or negative feedback?
- Does it seem like the student believes you care about him or her?
- How does the student feel about you?

The answers might surprise you! You also can try explicitly asking the student what the likes or dislikes about class, teachers, and the school environment.

## **4 Practice constructive discipline.**

Believe it or not, correcting behavior can be an opportunity to strengthen relationships with your students. The number one rule when it comes to discipline is to be respectful. Losing your temper and reacting with sarcasm, scolding, or anger can harm your relationship with a student. Instead, take a deep breath and administer a consequence that is fair and meaningful. Show that you respect and care for the student

and communicate in a way that preserves the student's dignity.

Be mindful of equity in your discipline and corrective behavior. [Research](#) shows that students of color receive significantly higher rates of disciplinary action. Take steps to reduce unconscious bias and make sure all students are being treated fairly. [Here](#) is a quick tip sheet to help you begin this process. You can then dig deeper by watching our webinar, [Promoting Educational Equity Through SEL Assessment](#).

## **5 Offer words of encouragement.**

Words of encouragement can go a long way in developing trust, mutual respect, and a strong teacher-student relationship. Consider this example from our [case study](#), Implementing and Sustaining SEL in Alternative Settings with New Visions AIM 1&2. In the case study, a teacher shared a story about a student with a reputation for being a troublemaker. Every day the teacher would go out of her way to write an encouraging note for the student. One day she forgot her notepad, and the student came up to her, nearly in tears, asking where his note was. He said his mom was so proud of the notes and would post them on the refrigerator. The teacher realized that the notes meant a great deal to the student as well. The student started opening up to the teacher and respecting her rules. He also became less disruptive and would make an effort in her class.

## **6 Get to know students' families.**

Introducing yourself to students' parents or caregivers, if you have not already, can encourage effective communication and can be particularly helpful with students who disrupt class or seem withdrawn. Connecting with families can help build strong teacher-student relationships because your efforts show students that you care enough about them to take interest in their home and family lives.

Additionally, when you are in close communication with students' families, you can alert one another if something is going on with a student that should be addressed. If something is affecting the student at home, you can talk with the student, offer support, and connect the student to outside resources.

Strong relationships are an important cornerstone of any SEL program and can improve student engagement and achievement. Take an active role in connecting with students to show them you care and are committed to their success. When students believe you care about them, they are more likely to enjoy school, perform well, and follow class rules and policies.

**Learn more about how SEL programs and efforts to build strong relationships contribute to positive student outcomes. [Contact our experts at Aperture Education to learn more.](#)**



# Reduce Chronic Absenteeism with SEL

The conditions for learning within a school or classroom are so important. A supportive, culturally responsive learning environment can motivate students to attend and can act as a buffer against external factors that may cause absenteeism. At the same time, when students lack strong teacher connections and don't feel safe and valued at school, and these conditions can increase chronic absenteeism.

Attendance rates have long been used as a metric for measuring early warning and student performance. Chronic absenteeism goes a step further by measuring the number of days a student misses as well as the number of students who miss 10% or more of the school year. Not surprisingly, chronically absent students are at-risk of academic failure, dropping out, and even criminal behavior.

The pandemic has increased chronic absenteeism in schools across the country. This fall, schools will be focused on getting students comfortable in the classroom again, and these efforts are going to require all hands on deck. As part of a multifaceted plan to increase attendance rates, SEL can help.

## Chronic Absenteeism: A Problem Made Worse by the Pandemic

Chronic absenteeism is a problem that has only gotten worse because of the pandemic. Since March 2020, student absences in some districts have doubled. Student enrollment has also significantly declined in many areas. An estimated [3 million](#) of the “most educationally marginalized students” nationwide have lost access to their education or have stopped attending school.

The coronavirus outbreak caused many stressors for students and families such as unemployment, inadequate technology and internet access, and food and housing insecurity. In addition, online and distance learning impacted many students' ability to form strong relationships with their teachers,

feel connected to school, and engage in learning.

Schools are doing their best to tackle this problem. Efforts include programs where school staff reach out to every student on a regular and ongoing basis to check how they are doing. Schools are also conducting door-to-door home visits, sometimes supported by members of the community like police officers, community-based organizations, and social workers.

## SEL's Role in Solving Chronic Absenteeism

SEL can help schools reduce chronic absenteeism and improve attendance rates. Much research shows that improving a school's climate and culture is an important way to achieve this goal. For example, a study by the [Hamilton Project](#) found that schools have lower



absentee rates when students feel their school climate and culture is caring and supportive of them.

SEL programs can play an integral role in improving school climate and culture, especially in schools with diverse student populations. This, in turn, can reduce chronic absences. In addition, SEL can increase student achievement and promote prosocial behaviors such as kindness, empathy, sharing, and compassion. SEL programs also can engage students in learning, get them excited about school, and reduce depression and stress — all factors critical to student attendance.

SEL also helps schools dispel a culture of chronic absenteeism by creating safe, caring, and supportive environments where all students feel accepted and can thrive.

## Using SEL to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Your Schools

There are many ways schools and districts can start using SEL to improve climate and culture within school- and district-wide practices, classroom instruction, assessment, and family and community outreach. Activities may include:

- Forming a workgroup tasked to improve a school's climate and culture through SEL
- Making efforts to promote strong and positive educator-student, educator-educator, and student-student connections
- Integrating SEL into multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) — counselors, social workers, psychologists, etc., should work together to promote and reinforce a school's overall SEL framework
- Teaching educators about SEL and how to teach it to students

- Addressing students' and teachers' mental health
- Eliciting students' input through student voice and choice initiatives
- Establishing school-wide norms, expectations, and values around SEL
- Developing bullying prevention programs
- Taking time for SEL assessment and instruction

Even though educators have their work cut out for them to reduce chronic rates of absences this fall, this crisis does present an opportunity to make schools stronger and more conducive to learning. Building a positive school climate and culture with SEL can create positive learning environments that have long-lasting impacts on student engagement and achievement.

[Contact our experts](#) at Aperture Education to learn how to reduce chronic absences through SEL in your school or district.

## DOWNLOAD OUR WHITEPAPER

**Tackling chronic absenteeism requires a multi-pronged approach. Building a positive and caring school climate and culture with SEL can increase attendance and student motivation. Read our whitepaper, “Chronic Absenteeism: A National Crisis” to learn more.**

[DOWNLOAD WHITEPAPER](#)



The Second Step® family of programs creates

brighter futures for kids through social-emotional learning (SEL), with curricula for Grades K-8 and new programs for out-of-school time and adult SEL.

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# Manage Your Students' Stress This Year With SEL



## 10 SEL Activities to Help Students Manage Anxiety and De-Stress

As an educator, you are in a unique position to provide stability and care to your students and their families. One of the best ways you can support students during these uncertain times is by teaching them ways to effectively manage and reduce stress.

Just like adults, unmanaged stress in students can lead to anxiety, depression, irritability, poor concentration, aggression, physical illness, fatigue, and sleep disturbance. It can also increase tobacco, drug, and/or alcohol use.

### HERE ARE 10 ACTIVITIES TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS LEARN EFFECTIVE STRESS MANAGEMENT.

#### 1 Be a listening ear.

Encourage students to talk to you about their feelings and problems so you can work through any concerns they may have. Keep in mind that some students don't have an adult at home whom they feel comfortable turning to in times of need. Also, many students were isolated from their normal environments, peer groups, relatives, etc., last year. It is

going to take some time for them to adjust to our "new normal."

*Why it works:* We've all been through a lot during the pandemic, and an important way to help students process and work through their emotions, experiences, and problems is by listening. This is an important first step in helping students work through and manage stress.

#### 2 Host morning meetings.

Start the school day with a [morning meeting](#) to check in with students. This can be a time to address any issues they may be facing, talk through their feelings and emotions, and practice social and emotional skills.

*Why it works:* Morning meetings are an important way to stay connected with your students and address any issues they may be having. They also can strengthen student-teacher relationships, increase social awareness and self-efficacy, and reduce stress.



### 3 Promote a growth mindset.

Help students develop a [growth mindset](#) by teaching them to focus on the positive and view challenges as opportunities for growth, rather than threats.

*Why it works:* [Research](#) shows that a growth mindset can help students maintain a sense of control over their lives, and it addresses the cognitive causes of stress within the brain. Growth mindsets allow us to see the world through a lens of growth, which means we have the power to turn our thoughts from a negative focus induced by stress to a positive focus striving toward improvement.



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MINDSET POSTER

### 4 Help students practice deep breathing.

Teach students [deep breathing techniques](#) to calm down and reduce stress.

*Why it works:* Deep breathing works just as well for students as it does for adults. It can

have a powerful and immediate physical effect in reducing tension, relaxing the body, and limiting the production of harmful stress hormones. [Clinical research](#) also shows that regular deep breathing exercises benefit the heart, brain, digestion, and the immune system.

### 5 Teach mindfulness.

Teach students [mindfulness](#) — the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around us.

*Why it works:* Mindfulness can reduce the negative effects of stress by increasing our awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations and how they can impact our actions. This framework has been proven to help students recognize triggers and changes within their bodies, which can help them calm and regulate their emotions before they act on a trigger in a negative way.

### 6 Encourage students to get enough sleep.

Help students understand why getting enough sleep is important for their physical and mental health and encourage them to prioritize it.

*Why it works:* According to the [CDC](#), younger children need 10-12 hours of sleep each night and high school students need around eight to nine hours. Getting enough sleep helps students stay focused, improves concentration, and increases academic achievement. At the

same time, children who do not get enough sleep have a higher risk for health problems like obesity and poor mental health, and are more likely to have attention and behavior problems which can contribute to poor academic performance.

### 7 Promote a healthy diet.

Teach students the benefits of eating a healthy diet and drinking enough water. Help students get access to free or reduced lunch programs, and spread the word that free meal programs made available during the pandemic [have been extended](#) through the 2021-22 school year.

*Why it works:* Just like with adults, a balanced diet helps students in many ways. Focus and concentration increases, they are less moody, they have more energy, and their sleep improves. A healthy diet also can reduce anxiety and stress and regulate blood sugar.

### 8 Teach through games.

Games are a fun and interactive way to teach students social and emotional skills like self-management. Here are a couple of our favorites:

- [Coping Skills Bingo](#): This free game teaches students how to manage anger and cope with stress in a fun, interactive way.
- Candy Crush: Believe it or not, games like Candy Crush, Tetris, and Flow Free can help the mind relax. Note that the basic levels of these games are simple and relaxing. Students should



not rush to progress too quickly, as this can increase stress as the games become more challenging.

- **Stress Management Escape Room:** Students engage in hands-on, interactive puzzles that explain the biological stress response and how to manage stress by getting organized, doing exercises or yoga, relying on social supports, etc.
- **Color:** Some experts believe that 10 minutes of coloring can provide the same benefits as meditation. Coloring can take place nearly everywhere, and it can even be done on a smart device with a coloring app.

## 9 **Encourage students to be smart about social media.**

We are realistic — we know that no matter what adults tell students, there is little chance they will stay off social media. But we can teach them to be smart about using it. Help students understand that too much media exposure (especially on social media) can increase stress and anxiety. Teach them how to access reputable news sources like the CDC and World Health

Organization to get accurate information, and teach students how to be safe online.

*Why it works:* Being smart about using social media can keep students safe and grounded and can reduce negative effects like stress and low self-esteem.

## 10 **Foster a positive school culture.**

Take a look at your school culture. Are teachers and students overly stressed about catching up on learning loss caused by the pandemic? Is there too much focus on state exams and college acceptances? Do students and educators feel high levels of pressure to perform academically or succeed in extracurricular activities like sports? Ask students and staff about their experiences and make a whole-school effort to create a more supportive school culture.

*Why it works:* A supportive school culture can reduce stress for students and educators alike. Additionally, when students feel safe, connected, welcome, supported, and engaged in their learning,

attendance increases, bullying decreases, and academic achievement improves.

Effective stress management is a crucial SEL competency for students. It will help students improve academically and they will be able to lead healthier, happier lives. Teach these de-stressing activities to your students and help them learn how to effectively manage stress and anxiety before they become overwhelmed.



Taproot Learning provides the market's most robust and engaging online SEL educational suite, boasting more than 500 multimedia activities surpassing the most rigorous state and CASEL standards.

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## 10 Social and Emotional Learning Activities for Grades K-8

Did you know that SEL skills can be taught to students K-8 right alongside core academic instruction in classrooms or afterschool programs? From reading, writing, and arithmetic, SEL can be woven into nearly any subject. In fact, SEL often makes teaching core instruction easier because when students have strong social and emotional competence, they are more engaged, motivated, and ready to learn.

We promise that it is easy to teach SEL in your core instruction! Here are 10 activities and lesson ideas — organized by subject area and grade level — to get you started.

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**INCORPORATING SEL ACTIVITIES IN CLASSROOMS AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS CAN MAKE LESSONS MORE ENGAGING AND HELP STUDENTS FIND DEEPER MEANING IN CORE SUBJECT AREAS.**



## STEM

*Grades K–6*

### Saving Sam: A Team-Building Activity

Oh no! Sam the Worm's boat has capsized, and his life jacket is trapped underneath it. Can your students use teamwork and collaboration to get him back in his boat without touching him? This fun activity promotes creative problem-solving and teamwork to reinforce engineering skills.

*Grades K–6*

### Identifying Emotions Activity: Chameleon Moods

Helping students learn how to identify physical signs of escalating emotions can be an effective way to teach self-regulation. In this activity, students build this important skill while they learn about chameleons and why they change colors.

## Language Arts

*Grades 4–6*

### Books Give Us Wings

Books can help students understand the world from different points of view by exploring unfamiliar cultures and societies. Books can also help students rise above bullying and peer pressure and overcome loss or adversity. Foster a love of reading by teaching students that books are not just entertaining — they can also “give us wings.”



*Grades 3–8*

### Conflict Resolution Vocabulary: “-ate” Words

Communicate, negotiate, mediate. Teach students the many words that end in “-ate,” and explore how to use these words to resolve conflicts.

*Grades 1–5*

### Conversation Skills: Staying on Topic

Listening skills are important for effective communication and also for demonstrating respect for others. Practice communication with this fun game.

*Grades 7–8*

### Empathy and the Persona Poem

A persona poem is written from another person's perspective

and can be a powerful way to teach empathy. This activity works well in either Language Arts or History class, and this particular lesson is better for 7th or 8th grade students (though you can modify for younger students by selecting an age-appropriate topic).

*Grades 6–8*

### SEL Lessons and Activities to Enhance Social Studies

Social Studies is an excellent platform to teach social and emotional skills such as self-management, relationship building, social awareness, and responsible decision-making. Enhance your Social Studies and History lessons with these activities and teaching practices.

## Physical Education and The Arts

Grades K-8

### Art Activities for SEL

Artistic expression goes hand-in-hand with SEL. Check out this site for lots of ideas for reinforcing SEL through drawing, collages, and other craft activities.

Grades K-8

### Charades for Kids: Feelings and Empathy

Acting out emotions and engaging students in role-playing can promote kindness and empathy. Let students' creativity flow while encouraging them to explore feelings and empathy through dramatic expression.

Grades 4-8

### Music and Mood

Listening to music increases the amount of dopamine (a mood-enhancing chemical) in the brain, which means it can have a positive effect on our



mental health. This is especially important to help students work through high levels of stress, anxiety, and isolation. Use this free lesson to teach students how music can improve their emotions and perceptions.

Incorporating SEL activities in classrooms and afterschool programs can make lessons more engaging and help students find deeper meaning in core subject areas. At the same time, students learn the critical social and emotional skills needed to succeed in school and in life. To learn even more strategies for incorporating SEL into instruction, [contact](#) our experts today.



Branching Minds is a K-12 services & technology company that leverages the learning sciences and technology to help districts effectively personalize learning through enhancements to their MTSS practice

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## Centervention®

Centervention® provides online games to help students in grades K-8 improve social emotional skills. These online games are research and evidence-based and they also include a library of over 75 free supplemental lessons. You can learn more about the programs and request a free trial [here!](#)

**LEARN MORE**







# 10 Social and Emotional Learning Activities for High School Students

Between balancing core instruction, administering assessments, grading homework, and ensuring students are prepared for college and career, high school teachers have a lot on their plates. SEL can make your jobs easier!

When students have strong social and emotional skills, they are more motivated, engaged, and understand the value of their learning. SEL also helps reduce disruptive behavior and office referrals, which allows teachers to spend more time on their instruction. Additionally, SEL can improve high school students' college and career readiness and help them set goals for life after high school.

We promise that it is easy to integrate SEL in your core instruction! Here are 10 activities and lesson ideas for high school students — organized by subject area — to get you started.

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**SEL PROMOTES COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS AND EQUIPS STUDENTS WITH THE SOFT SKILLS EMPLOYERS ARE SEEKING IN CANDIDATES.**





## STEM

*Grades 9–12*

### Seed Keepers – Native American Agriculture

Teaching students the farming traditions of Native Americans can be a fun way to reinforce social and emotional and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. In this FutureFit™ project, students explore the “three sisters” growing technique and how to save heirloom seeds.

*Grades 9–12*

### Design and Launch Soda Bottle Rockets

STEM projects are a natural fit for SEL because they require students to work together, communicate their ideas effectively, problem-solve, and overcome obstacles. This bottle rocket activity encourages older students to practice these important skills while trying not to get a soda shower!

*Grades 9–12*

### Stuck Strategies: A Math Lesson About Grit (& Data)

For many, learning math requires patience, perseverance, and grit. Students need to have confidence that they can work through the concepts and solve the problems. Use this lesson to help students identify proactive strategies before they get stuck, and build a culture of grit and resilience.

## Language Arts

*Grade 9–12*

### Developing Social and Emotional Skills Through Literature

Literature is a natural fit for exploring and developing social and emotional competence. Novels and short stories are filled with emotions. As we read along, we also experience emotions — both about the characters and the story and about ourselves. Use these guiding questions, tips,

and prompts to make the connection between SEL and analyzing literature.

*Grades 9–12*

### Writing Prompts for Teen SEL

Daily writing prompts can be a fun and effective way to practice SEL. This site provides free writing activities to address self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

*Grades 9–12*

### What Goes Around Comes Around

If students exhibit a pattern of negative language and actions, this can be a great activity to help them understand the consequences of their negative and positive thoughts. You can teach this as a standalone lesson, or it can easily be integrated into Language Arts, i.e. as a character analysis or writing prompt.

## Social Studies, History, and Global Learning

*Grades 9–12*

### SEL Activities That Promote Global Learning

Teaching SEL alongside global learning can deepen students’ interpersonal skills while increasing their knowledge and awareness of world issues. Global learning (sometimes referred to as global citizenship instruction) and SEL both help students develop respect, collaboration, and responsible

decision-making while helping learners become responsible and active global citizens. Use these activities with your high school students to improve their global learning.

## Physical Education and The Arts

*Grades 9-12*

### 4 Ways to Use Athletics to Promote SEL and Character Development

Healthy athletic competition is a natural vehicle for building students' social and emotional competencies. Here are four ways you can help students learn teamwork, cooperation, goal-setting, and confidence in Physical Education classes and school athletic programs.

*Grades 9-12*

### Smithsonian Folk Ways Recordings

Music can be a fun way for students to explore other cultures and customs. By learning about different musical traditions, students learn to accept differences in others and celebrate diversity. Have fun exploring music from around the world with this wonderful resource that includes lesson plans for a range of age groups.

*Grades 9-12*

### High School Art Lessons

Giving students the ability to express themselves and explore their emotions through artistic expression is an excellent way to build social and emotional

## move THIS WORLD

Move This World is the leading provider of SEL multimedia experiences for PreK-12 students, educators, and families, strengthening the skills that foster wellbeing through creative expression and participatory movement.

**LEARN MORE**

competence. This site has many art lessons for high school students, and many can be adapted around SEL. Try "Life Documentation Through Design," "Your Eye From a Mirror," "Where is Your Refuge?," and more!

Incorporating SEL activities into high school core instruction and afterschool programs can make lessons more engaging and help students find deeper meaning in core subject areas. It also reduces behavior incidents and gets students ready to learn. SEL also promotes college and career readiness and equips students with the soft skills employers are seeking in candidates. We hope you have fun incorporating these SEL activities into your core instruction!

To learn even more strategies for incorporating SEL into instruction, [contact](#) our experts today.







## Seen and Heard: 4 Examples of How to Incorporate Student Voice, Choice, and SEL

Research shows that giving students agency and influence in their learning makes them more engaged and invested in their education. It also empowers them to take control, show initiative, and adopt leadership roles. Giving students voice and choice also helps them feel valued, encourages them to realize their interests and potential, and can improve their academic outcomes.

Student voice/choice and SEL go hand-in-hand. SEL helps students develop agency because it teaches them to engage authentically as leaders, problem-solvers, and decision-makers. It also improves

students' communication skills and their ability to advocate for themselves.

Below are four ways schools can incorporate student voice, choice, and SEL in students' learning.

### Example 1: Student Voice/ Choice and Leadership

Involving students in designing their instruction can be a great way to promote student voice/choice, and it also fosters leadership skills, motivation, and investment in their education. Invite students to design all or part of their SEL instruction, perhaps during an advisory period. Have students define what the instruction will

include, how it will be facilitated, and how they can measure program impacts.

### Example 2: Data-Driven Decision-Making

Inviting students to examine and reflect on their SEL data can improve their self-efficacy and goal-setting skills. This could be a simple conversation about their data, like asking students if they agree with it and helping them brainstorm ways they can improve. This is an effective way for students to express their own voice, set goals, and work toward their growth opportunities in a personalized and effective way.



Programs like the [Aperture Student Portal](#) allow high school students to complete a self-assessment on their social and emotional competency, and then take on challenges and set personal goals based upon their results, putting them in the driver's seat of their own growth.

### Example 3: Adult/Student Collaboration

Creating opportunities for adults and students to collaborate not only promotes student voice/choice, but it also strengthens teacher-student relationships. Within SEL, this could mean including students in the administration of the SEL program, involving them in analyzing SEL data trends, and making collaborative decisions around how to improve school climate based on aggregate SEL survey results.

### Example 4: Student Expression

Hosting town halls is an excellent way to give students a platform where they can speak about topics that are important to them. The town halls can center on topics of the students' choice, such as learning challenges, celebrating areas of strength, equity, etc. Giving students meaningful ways to express their strengths and concerns, while also eliciting feedback from teachers and peers, will go a long way toward building self-confidence and self-efficacy and will make them feel valued.

There are many ways to integrate student voice/choice within a school, and they can range from simple classroom activities to highly involved initiatives that address foundational school or district educational

practices. SEL assessment data can enhance student voice/choice frameworks and can give students and teachers the data they need to facilitate conversations, examine strengths and areas for improvement, and guide instruction and supports.

Aperture Education is committed to helping schools empower students through student voice/choice. Read our whitepaper, "[Seen and Heard: Benefits of Incorporating Student Voice, Choice, and SEL Into the Academic Framework](#)" to learn more about this important practice. Then, contact our SEL experts to discuss how the DESSA and the Student Portal can strengthen your SEL and student voice/choice frameworks.



The Devereux Center for Resilient Children aims to promote social and emotional development, foster resilience, and build skills for school and life success in children (birth through five), as well as to promote the resilience of the adults who care for them.

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**The Urban Assembly**

The Urban Assembly (UA) is a non-profit model provider of school support solutions that boost school and student performance. Under the mission of advancing students' social and economic mobility by improving public education, the UA provides schools and districts with innovative data-driven, student-centered approaches to career and technical education, academics, social-emotional learning, and postsecondary access and success. The (UA) founded a network of unique, small public secondary schools throughout NYC. UA schools are open to all students, and our goal is to prepare 100% of UA graduates for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

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**SUPPORTING  
SCHOOLS,  
EDUCATORS,  
AND STAFF**







# Manage Your Stress This Year With SEL

## 10 SEL Activities Adults Can Use to De-Stress

Educators, we know last year was tough. You are truly rockstars for getting your students (and yourselves) through a difficult year. This year will likely bring about new challenges and obstacles, and we know at times you will feel stressed.

When not addressed, stress can lead to harmful health concerns like anxiety and depression, reduced attention, impaired self-regulation, and decreased learning readiness. It can also lead to negative well-being factors, such as sleep and eating disorders. Extended exposure to toxic stress also can have lasting mental and physical health effects.

### Be proactive about keeping your stress levels in check with these 10 de-stressing activities.

#### 1 Identify your stress triggers.

Make a list of all the stressors in your life, noting those you have control over and those you do not. Are your biggest stressors long hours, watching too much news media, or frustrations around school policies? Begin tackling the list by choosing one or two items you have

some control over that cause you the most stress. Make a plan to manage the stressor(s), write down a goal, and create accountable measures to help you follow through.

*Why it works:* Knowing your stress triggers and having a plan to cope is an important step in managing your stress. When you are faced with a trigger, you will be much better equipped to deal with the stress before it becomes overwhelming.

#### 2 Do deep breathing exercises.

Try the equal breaths exercise. Breathe in for a count of four, hold it for a count of four, and breathe out for a count of four. Continue this for a few rounds, and then try adding an extra count (in for a count of five, hold for a count of five, and out for a count of five). You can continue this exercise until you feel your stress levels decreasing and your heart rate slowing.



*Why it works:* [Clinical research](#) shows that regular deep breathing exercises can have immediate results. Deep breathing reduces the production of harmful stress hormones and helps your body relax. This can be useful when you experience a stressful moment during your day. It also has long-term benefits for your heart, brain, digestion, and immune system.

### **3 Get enough sleep.**

Do your best to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Set an alarm for bedtime and stick to it. Most smartphones have a feature that reduces blue light in the evenings — try putting your phone on this setting after 10 p.m. to help your eyes relax. Maximize the sleep you do get by “unplugging” (i.e. turning off the computer, phone, TV, etc.) at least an hour before bed.

*Why it works:* The link between stress and sleep is complex. Stress can lead to sleep loss, and not getting enough sleep can cause stress. Stress can reduce the quality of sleep, and chronic stress can increase insomnia, occurrence of nightmares, and teeth grinding. Getting enough sleep is critical to your health and to reducing stress.

### **4 Watch what you eat and drink plenty of water.**

Eat nutritious foods and cut down on processed, fried, and sugary foods that can deplete your energy. Also be sure to drink plenty of water. An estimated 75 % of people in the

U.S. are chronically dehydrated. A good rule of thumb is to drink half of your weight in ounces each day (for example, a person who weighs 150 pounds would drink 75 ounces of water per day). You may need more or less depending on the climate you live in, your body type, or how much you exercise.

*Why it works:* A balanced diet does wonders for your health and state of mind. When you eat healthy foods like avocados, eggs, lean meats, nuts, and blueberries, and drink enough water, your brain functions better, your moods are more regulated, you are able to get restful sleep, and you can maintain sufficient energy levels.

At the same time, processed, fried, and sugary foods cause blood sugar levels to spike and then crash, which increases anxiety and stress.

\*Keep in mind that when you are stressed, your body increases hormones that can cause you to crave unhealthy or comfort foods. Don't feel bad about eating a serving of potato chips, but do your best to keep portions under control and opt for healthy options whenever possible.

### **5 Exercise.**

Get enough exercise. Go for a run/walk/hike, do some gardening, practice yoga, or join a gym.

*Why it works:* A little exercise can go a long way toward stress management. According to [the Harvard Medical School](#), regular aerobic exercise (like

walking) can boost memory and critical thinking, improve sleep, and reduce anxiety. Regular exercise will help you feel more energized and much less stressed.

### **6 Tap into your support network.**

Lean on your colleagues for advice, trade ideas, and create mentoring relationships. Friends and family can also provide invaluable support by lending an ear on especially difficult days. You can further expand your network through [educator-based online support networks and learning communities](#).

Join one or more, and share in a wealth of knowledge from educators across the country.

*Why it works:* Sometimes our connections with others can be the best stress reliever. Establishing a good support network is critical to maintaining healthy stress levels.

### **7 Stay organized.**

Set an organization plan — and stick to it — to reduce stress, improve efficiency, and be a more effective educator.

*Why it works:* Just think about how much time you waste searching through email or computer files to find what you need, rewriting misplaced work, or trying to manage your calendars. Being organized is a proactive way to reduce stress.

### **8 Meditate.**

Meditate on a regular basis to train your mind to dispel negative thoughts and anxiety and reduce stress during times when you feel overwhelmed.

Try this [10-minute](#) meditation activity to quickly calm your stress and clear your mind.

Why it works: Meditation, or mindful awareness, can have a tremendous impact on your ability to de-stress. Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years and can bring clarity to your thoughts and promote peace and balance. Even a few minutes of meditation can significantly reduce stress.

## 9 Practice progressive muscle relaxation.

Breathe in and tense your [muscle groups](#), one at a time, for 4-10 seconds. Breathe out and completely relax the muscle group. Be mindful of how the muscles feel when they are tense and after they become relaxed.

Why it works: Progressive muscle relaxation is a deep relaxation technique that helps you relieve tension in your body, control stress and anxiety, relieve insomnia, and reduce some types of chronic pain. This technique also helps you

become more in-tune with your body, which in turn enables you to identify signs and signals of stress and tension.

## 10 Laugh.

Even (and especially) during trying times, you need to find humor. It will do wonders for relieving stress. Find ways to laugh every day — share a funny meme or joke with colleagues or watch a favorite funny movie or television show.

Why it works: [According to the Mayo Clinic](#), laughter promotes a stronger immune system, increases your ability to cope with difficult situations, and can improve your mood by lessening depression and anxiety.

A big lesson learned from last year and the pandemic is that stress-management skills are crucial for both students and adults. Be sure to continue focussing on your health and well-being and finding ways to effectively manage stress.



We Are Resilient™, developed by Dovetail Learning, provides educators with practical, researched-based skills to cope with stress, strengthen resilience, and find joy. Digital resources are available for free or physical copies can be purchased.

[LEARN MORE](#)

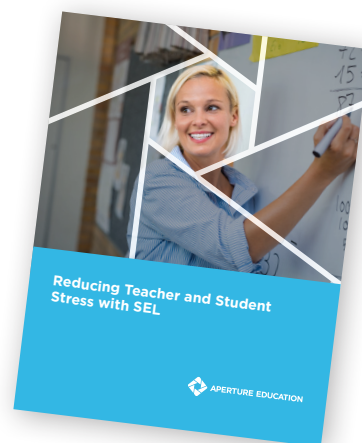


Aperture Education's SEL Tips & Tools resource center is updated weekly with new ideas, resources, webinars and more!

[LEARN MORE](#)

**LEARN MORE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE STRESS MANAGEMENT. DOWNLOAD OUR WHITEPAPER, [REDUCING TEACHER AND STUDENT STRESS WITH SEL](#).**

[DOWNLOAD WHITEPAPER](#)



A photograph of a female teacher with long brown hair, wearing a white button-down shirt and dark pants, smiling and high-fiving a young male student. The student is wearing a grey hoodie over a blue and white striped shirt. They are standing in front of a green chalkboard. On the chalkboard, there are some math problems written in chalk, including  $2 + 2 = 4$  and  $5 + 2 = 7$ .

# Revitalize Student Engagement With an Inclusive, Supportive School Culture

Top of mind for most educators as they head into the new school year is, “What do my students need to re-engage in their learning?”

While there are many priorities to address, one of the first should be creating an inclusive and positive school culture — a space where staff, students, and families feel connected, supported, and involved in ensuring every student’s learning needs are met. Where teachers have enough time to plan their lessons, where educators have access to opportunities for collaboration and mentoring, and where students feel welcome and engaged in their learning.

School culture can sometimes be an afterthought, but it is

actually an integral piece of a successful school or program — especially as educators work to re-engage students after a difficult year caused by the pandemic. It takes inspired, engaged teachers and staff to ensure students thrive. It takes a safe and supportive environment to nurture student growth. And it takes strong social and emotional skills for students to be positive and active participants in their learning.

Learn more about the benefits of a positive school culture and get practical tips for building morale, inclusivity, strong relationships, and a sense of safety and support within your building.

## Benefits of Building a Positive School Culture

An inclusive and supportive school culture has many benefits and can support many areas you are likely prioritizing this school year. Developing a positive school culture can:

- **Decrease chronic absenteeism.** [Research](#) shows that schools have lower absentee rates when students feel their school culture is caring and supportive of them.
- **Improve educational equity.** A quality SEL program — that includes quality professional development, coordination with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and



equitable SEL assessments — can promote equity so all students are treated fairly and receive the resources they need to achieve.

- **Reduce bullying.** Studies show anti-bullying campaigns are most effective when they include school-wide training and awareness, classroom instruction and activities, and intervention.
- **Increase academic performance:** Many studies have found evidence that quality SEL programming promotes higher test scores and GPAs; increased graduation rates; meaningful connections between educators and peers; positive social behavior; and improved attitudes toward self, school, and others.

## Build a Positive School Culture With SEL

Here are a few ways to keep students connected and learning in a safe, caring, and inclusive environment.

### What School Leadership Can Do:

It is important to keep a close reading on the culture of your school. How are educators, parents, and students dealing with extra pressures caused by the pandemic, returning to in-person learning, etc.?

Here are some ways to support each group:

- **Teachers and staff:** Provide quality professional development that helps your staff build critical social and emotional skills. Support new teachers by pairing them with a veteran mentor teacher. Set up dedicated and regular times to ask for feedback, address concerns, and problem-solve challenges.
- **Parents and families:** Host in-person or virtual parent nights to help families continue to feel connected to the school. Conduct regular surveys to check in on how they are doing and ask for their feedback on areas that could use improvement.
- **Students:** Take time to address students' social and emotional needs. School-wide activities may include whole-school assemblies where you address a particular social and emotional skill and give out personal achievement awards. Additionally, a school-wide competition can build morale and keep students connected. Contests can be anything from writing and sharing a poem to a community service project.

After you get a sense of your school culture, show staff, parents, and students you care about them by taking action to address and resolve concerns. Continue regular communication to keep connected with staff, families, and students and build school-wide morale.



### THE CHARACTER TREE

The Character Tree is a character development & SEL video subscription series for K-2 classrooms. Find out why students love Miss Sara, Gray Squirrel, & the classroom puppets! Watch a sample episode!

**LEARN MORE**

### What Teachers Can Do:

One of the best ways to keep students engaged and learning is to show them that you care. Empathize with students and consider all they have had to deal with because of the pandemic and in their normal lives. Some students might be experiencing financial hardship or increased domestic abuse, and students who were vulnerable or at-risk prior to COVID-19 are probably even more so now.

Here are some additional ways to promote a positive school culture:

- **Prioritize building relationships with students.** Strong teacher-student relationships matter now, more than ever. Some ways to build strong relationships include hosting regular morning meetings, making a point to get to know students, and providing

opportunities for them to share their experiences, ask questions, or address a personal problem.

- **Assess students regularly.** Conduct a baseline SEL assessment to get an idea of students' needs. You can use class data to determine one or two social and emotional skills you should prioritize. Individual student data can be used to tailor instruction and interventions. Throughout the year, conduct regular progress monitoring and quick checks for content comprehension. Be sure to use a quality SEL assessment, like the [DESSA](#) suite of assessments from Aperture Education.
- **Encourage innovation in the classroom.** For example, consider [game-based learning](#), incorporate multimedia, and utilize assignments that promote student creativity. The [Aperture Student Portal](#)

combines social and emotional self-assessment and gamified challenges and goal-setting for high school students.

- **Incorporate Student Voice and Choice.** Giving students voice and choice in their learning helps students feel valued and improves the school climate and culture. It also increases student engagement, empowers students to take control of their learning, and promotes positive outcomes. Learn more about student voice and choice and [get four tips](#) on how you can incorporate it in students' learning.

Teachers play an important role in building a positive school culture by being a rock of support, a source of much-needed routine, and advocates for students' needs.

By working together, we will get through the challenges this school year. Developing a positive school culture will make things easier. It will not

only boost morale for students and staff, but also increase connectedness within the school, increase engagement, and improve academic performance.



Partnership4Success (P4S) is a community of equity-driven practitioners focused on strengthening the social, emotional, and academic achievement of youth in Central Ohio.

**LEARN MORE**

## BINGE-WORTHY WEBINARS AROUND BUILDING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Watch these webinars to learn more tips, tricks, and strategies for building a supportive and inclusive school culture.

- [Promoting Positive School Climate: A Social-Emotional & Character Development Approach](#)
- [Roadmap to Strategic Culture Planning](#)
- [Improving Schoolwide Social Climate](#)
- [Implementing and Sustaining SEL in Alternative Settings](#)



## 8 Tips for Leading Highly Effective SEL Professional Development

This past year has emphasized the need for high-quality professional learning. Teachers and staff have dealt with so much, and more than ever they need effective professional learning that is flexible and responsive to their needs, enhances their instruction, and prepares them for re-entry to in-person learning.

Quality SEL professional development in particular is crucial for educators right now. This training will not only improve SEL instruction — which in turn will promote positive outcomes for students — but it also will help educators strengthen their own social and emotional competence. At a time when teachers and staff have been pushed to (and often beyond) their limits, SEL will help them handle feelings of stress and anxiety, increase their motivation, and give them the skills needed to work through these challenging times.

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**CARING FOR YOUR STAFF WILL NOT ONLY IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND RETENTION RATES, BUT IT WILL ALSO HELP STUDENTS.**



## HERE ARE EIGHT TIPS TO ENSURE YOUR SEL TRAINING IS ENGAGING, INSPIRING, AND EFFECTIVE AT PREPARING YOUR STAFF FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS.

### 1 **Gather feedback and listen to staff's needs.**

As you get started planning SEL training, be sure to start by considering your staff's perspectives. What does your staff need in terms of support and resources? What are their biggest pain points? How is their motivation/engagement and overall health and well-being? Avoid making any assumptions, do the legwork to understand what resources they need, and really *listen* to their feedback and concerns.

Short surveys are a quick, effective way to collect feedback. You can also host full staff meetings where you ask educators to share about what is working/not working. Have a school climate specialist visit with teachers and other staff, and be sure to get input from the teacher union.

### 2 **Embed SEL in the school and district plans.**

Clearly aligning SEL to school goals and priorities and integrating it within your school improvement plan will let staff know that SEL is a priority, and it could increase staff buy-in for teaching SEL to students. Go a step further and ask district leaders to integrate SEL into your district's strategic plan. Share your vision, goals, and

expectations during the training, and ask school/district leaders to attend to show admin endorsement.

### 3 **Start every training session with a success story.**

Sharing personal experiences and success stories can be a powerful way to connect with staff and help them see how powerful SEL can be.

Consider inviting:

- At-risk students to share how SEL helped them overcome obstacles
- Teachers or counselors to share how SEL helped improve their teaching and connections with students
- Administrators to share how SEL helped improve school climate and culture

### 4 **Don't just tell — show.**

Minimize lecture time and instead present the material in ways that support a variety of different learning styles. Show staff how SEL works and model how to teach it to students. For example, play a video of a teacher modeling a lesson and/or share photos of how a school is embedding SEL within day-to-day activities.

Using confidential self-

assessments and engaging digital learning tools like [Educator Social and Emotional Reflection and Training \(EdSERT\)](#) from Aperture Education is another unique way to support educators in their personal SEL journey. Programs like EdSERT help educators grow in their self-awareness, develop stress management skills, and set personal goals for social and emotional growth.

Also be sure to use data to demonstrate how SEL improves achievement and reduces behavior incidents, and obtain feedback throughout the session with surveys and quick polls.

### 5 **Provide practice opportunities.**

The best SEL instruction is delivered by teachers who are confident and have a solid understanding of SEL. Some teachers may need time to develop these abilities.

Give educators lots of opportunities to practice teaching SEL. During the training, break out into small groups and have staff take turns practicing content delivery with one another. Encourage them to provide constructive feedback and collaborate to make improvements. Follow up with teachers who need additional help and give them extra practice opportunities. For example, pair up teachers new to SEL with veteran SEL teachers and provide time where they can continue to hone their instructional skills.

## 6 Offer ongoing coaching and support.

In addition to modeling, practice, and feedback, ongoing coaching and support is critical to the success of any implementation. Throughout the year, provide:

- Mini follow-up training sessions to refresh and reinforce SEL
- SEL practice sessions with low-stakes feedback
- Opportunities for classroom observation (either recorded or in-person sessions)
- Resources for staff to collaborate, share ideas, and ask for help (i.e. create a Facebook group where you post resources and encourage staff to share tips, tricks, funny messages, hobbies, etc.)

EdSERT offers ongoing support and coaching and it features learning modules based upon the eight social and emotional competencies measured by Aperture Education's flagship assessment, the DESSA. The modules are designed to be visited one at a time so staff can develop their SEL skills progressively.

## 7 Respect staff's time.

Training, lesson-planning, coaching, collaboration, and feedback sessions all require time. Allocate sufficient planning time for your staff — not just for the initial training, but throughout the year to meet their ongoing implementation needs.

Get creative and overhaul your schedules if needed. This could mean shuffling students' lunch breaks so staff get a dedicated block of time each day to focus on directed study and planning.

EdSERT was designed with teachers' busy schedules in mind. The modules can each be completed in about an hour. The lessons are flexible and can be completed by educators on their own, or they can be facilitated within a group setting.

## 8 Prioritize SEL and self-care for staff.

As part of SEL training for staff, be sure to focus on their own mental health and well-being and help them develop their own social and emotional competence. This could include providing mental health supports, hosting video chats or in-person meetings where educators can talk

to one another about how they are feeling, or providing resources to help them build their own social and emotional competence.

Caring for your staff will not only improve their health, well-being, and retention rates, but it will also help students. After all, engaged teachers foster engaged students.

Aperture Education can help your school or district create and implement effective, engaging SEL professional learning that will improve SEL instruction and will help educators improve their own social and emotional competence. Learn more about our professional learning services and check out our newest tool, [EdSERT](#), which is designed to support educators' social and emotional competence and well-being.

### TO SUPPORT EDUCATORS' SEL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, WE ARE OFFERING A FREE, SPECIAL EDITION OF OUR EDSERT EDUCATOR GUIDE: **OPTIMISTIC THINKING.**

#### This guide includes:

- A free Optimistic Thinking self-assessment
- A guided reflection and review of your self-assessment ratings
- A Growth Strategy that teaches how to align your work activities with your sense of purpose, approach work with positivity and optimism, and enhance work satisfaction and self-efficacy

**Use our free resource to help staff learn about, develop, and practice optimistic thinking.**



# SEL Funding: Using CARES Act and The American Rescue Plan Funding for SEL



The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act are not only providing historic levels of funding for K-12 schools and districts, but also providing an opportunity for schools and districts to secure a long-term and sustainable foundation for SEL.

SEL is getting much-needed and well-deserved priority in how the dollars can be spent!

Learn about the funding that is available for SEL and read our tips to make sure your school or district secures your share of the allocated dollars. We've also created a downloadable resource your grant team can use when writing funding applications that includes specific language about how your SEL plans and the use of Aperture Education's tools fit within the relevant ARP and CARES expenditure categories.



## Types of Funding Available for SEL

The 2020 CARES Act provided \$13.2 billion to elementary and secondary schools and districts to address COVID-19's impact. The ARP ESSER includes the following:

- \$123 billion for K-12 state education agencies. Of these funds, \$800 million is earmarked for children experiencing homelessness and those hardest hit by the pandemic.
- \$2.75 billion is available to governors to assist private schools.
- \$3 billion is allocated for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The good news for SEL is that *at least **20% of district funds** must be used to address learning loss through evidence-based interventions that support students' academic and SEL needs.*

## Tips for Securing SEL Funding

Below are some general tips that will help your school or district find and attain SEL funds.

### Consider These Guiding Questions

As you prepare to apply for SEL funding, be sure to answer these questions:

1. How can you use federal and state funds most effectively?
2. What data, evidence, and protocols are needed to justify specific funding areas?

3. How will you coordinate efforts and adopt the most coherent approach across many funding streams, including ARP ESSER and CARES Act funds?

### Figure Out Your SEL Budget

Whether you are just beginning an SEL pilot or small-scale implementation, or if you are providing SEL assessments and curriculum across your entire district, you will need to map out a budget to support your plan. A great resource to guide you through this process is the CASEL ["Roadmap to Financial Sustainability."](#) Included are actual site SEL budgets, handy budget calculators, and case studies about a variety of districts' SEL implementations. Review these models and use them to help craft an SEL program that will work for your district and resources.

### Broaden Your SEL Research Vocabulary

When looking and applying for funding, it's important to keep in mind the broad range of areas that SEL supports. Here are a few terms to consider broadening the net:

- Social and emotional skills
- Social and emotional competencies
- School climate and culture
- MTSS
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Character education
- Conflict resolution
- Restorative justice

- Equity
- Bullying prevention
- Resilience building
- Trauma-informed practices
- Mental health
- School safety
- Positive youth development
- 21st century skills
- Chronic absenteeism
- Personalized learning
- College- and career-readiness
- Adult health and well-being
- Professional development
- Continual improvement



North Carolina Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

The North Carolina Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (NCASCD) is a long established, well organized association and is the premier organization which cuts across job titles in enlisting all categories of educators in the improvement of educational opportunities for children. The resulting synergy ignites a common goal - the best interest of students everywhere.

**LEARN MORE**



GrantsAlert.com is your one-stop for finding current grant funding opportunities. It has helped thousands of K-12 teachers and schools find funding to enrich classroom learning. Powered by the extensive RFPMatch.com database, GrantsAlert.com includes help with finding applicable grants, using fundraising, finding a grant writer, writing proposals, and uncovering grant secrets, as well as an option to ask the Funding Doctor for advice. GrantsAlert brings the best of education funding matchmaking and delivers premier funding knowledge and insights to the education community it serves.

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### Resources for Your Grant Team

The requirement that at least 20% of district funds be reserved for addressing learning loss through evidence-based programs that support students' academic, social, and emotional needs means there is a big slice of the pie that is available to support SEL.

As your grant team applies for funds, keep in mind several key funding expenditure areas within ARP ESSER and CARES that are applicable to SEL:

- Evidence-based SEL programs
- SEL programs that support educators' health and well-being
- Professional learning

- SEL assessments
- Summer, afterschool, and other extended learning and enrichment programs
- Staff retention (including counselors, social workers, etc.)
- Mental health services

We are excited that SEL is finally getting the recognition — and funding opportunities — it deserves. Our staff at Aperture Education understands the importance of long-term funding of your SEL program, and we are happy to help you explore funding resources and programs that will increase its longevity and sustainability. [Contact us](#) if you would like more information about our SEL products and services.



**DOWNLOAD THIS TABLE FOR LANGUAGE AROUND HOW YOUR SEL PROGRAM AND USE OF APERTURE EDUCATION'S TOOLS ALIGN TO EACH FUNDING EXPENDITURE CATEGORY. YOUR GRANT TEAM CAN USE THIS INFORMATION WHEN APPLYING FOR FUNDING.**



**HELPING**

**FAMILIES**

**BUILD SEL**

**AT HOME**





## SEL Resources for Families

Last year made clear that social and emotional skills are crucial for success — for students and their families.

Families felt the burden of helping their children learn through remote and hybrid learning, all while juggling work and managing their daily routines. SEL helped many students and families push through a difficult time and helped with things like stress management, goal-setting, and developing relationship skills.



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**WHEN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES  
WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE AN  
SEL FRAMEWORK THAT EXTENDS  
BEYOND THE CLASSROOM, BIG  
THINGS CAN HAPPEN.**

**This year presents an opportunity to increase family involvement in your SEL program. Below are three ways parents and caregivers can start building students' social and emotional skills at home.**

### **1 Encourage parents to promote a growth mindset.**

Help parents and caregivers understand that how we talk about students' abilities can have a profound impact on their beliefs. Statements like "You are so smart." or "You were born to do this!" promote a fixed mindset. Explain that children with a fixed mindset tend to believe abilities are something they were born with or without.

A growth mindset, on the other hand, helps students know they can increase their abilities through hard work, and it helps create the desire to do so. Let parents know they can promote a growth mindset by focusing on their children's efforts in solving a problem or working

toward a goal. They may say something like "You worked so hard to solve that problem!" or "You don't understand yet but you just need some more practice."

Share this [handy chart](#) with parents to provide additional tips on language that promotes a growth mindset.

### **2 Help families find ways to de-stress.**

Parents and families are especially stressed right now. Explain that effective stress management skills can be taught, and benefits include improved quality of life, mental and physical health, and self-esteem. [Share resources](#) with parents and caregivers on how they and their children can de-stress.

### **3 Practice, practice, practice.**

Explain to families that just like learning a math or reading concept, children need time and opportunities to practice social and emotional skills. Encourage caregivers to provide many opportunities for their children to practice SEL and remind them that making mistakes is an important part of the learning process and can be opportunities for growth.

Families are an integral part of student learning. When schools and families work together to create an SEL framework that extends beyond the classroom, big things can happen. Help parents foster their children's social and emotional growth by sharing these tips for developing social and emotional skills at home.

## **#SELday**

The Urban Assembly and SEL4US invite communities across the globe to celebrate the importance of social emotional learning (SEL) on the third annual International SEL Day on March 21, 2022. [Click here](#) to join the celebration

**LEARN MORE**

## **SEL RESOURCE TO SHARE WITH FAMILIES**

We created a helpful resource to help you get parents and caregivers involved in teaching SEL at home. This letter is available in English and Spanish and can be downloaded and shared with families. The letter includes:

- A description of SEL and why it is important
- 3 easy ways families can get started teaching SEL at home
- 3 free SEL activities parents can use to teach SEL to their children

Download and email this letter to families to help them start teaching SEL at home.

**DOWNLOAD LETTER**



# CONCLUSION

Educators, you've got this! With the help of SEL, the transition to in-person learning and the challenge of making up learning loss will be so much easier!

We hope you find the resources in our Back-to-School Guide helpful as you prepare for the coming school year. All educators play an important role in SEL, and all staff can benefit from learning about SEL, developing their own social and emotional skills, and becoming more effective at teaching SEL to students.

Have fun trying out the activities in this guide to ease back into school and to handle any challenges the rest of the year may bring.

Have a great school year!

We invite you to learn more about the Aperture SEL System and how it impacts districts and organizations across the country. Visit [ApertureEd.com](https://ApertureEd.com) or [email](#) us anytime!



The need for formative classroom assessment is more crucial than ever. Join more than 10,000 schools that have upgraded to obtain better assessment results and saved money in the process.

**LEARN MORE**

## SEL VISION SUMMIT 2022

Join industry leaders across the social and emotional industry at the Annual SEL Vision Summit March 10th, 2022.

**LEARN MORE**





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