

# SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING TOOLKIT FOR PARENT CHAMPIONS



## Purpose of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Toolkit

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This toolkit is a quick guide for parents and caregivers to share accurate information in support of SEL in our children’s schools and communities. Use these tools to ground conversations in facts and data, dispel misinformation, and advocate for high-quality social, emotional, and academic learning.

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# SEL Explainer

## What is social and emotional learning?



Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

In other words, it's how our children develop essential skills that help them succeed in school and navigate their lives. SEL has never been more important as families and schools work to support children's academic recovery, mental well-being, and safety.

Here are three core messages to communicate about the importance of SEL:

### SEL Core Message 1

#### Social and emotional learning improves academic achievement.

- Hundreds of independent studies show social and emotional learning contributes to academic performance and readiness.
- Social and emotional skills help students focus and persist through challenging content.
- Social and emotional learning makes classrooms more productive and engaging for all students.

### SEL Core Message 2

#### Social and emotional learning builds lifelong, future-ready skills that allow children to pursue their hopes and dreams.

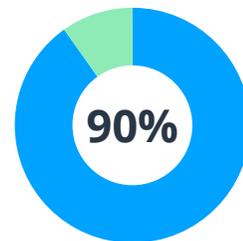
- Social and emotional learning helps students develop practical skills, such as teamwork and conflict resolution, that they need for:
  - College and career success
  - Happier, healthier lives
  - Stronger relationships and communities
- Social and emotional learning helps young people turn aspirations into plans.

### SEL Core Message 3

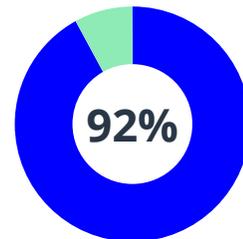
#### Social and emotional learning is a critical layer of prevention for children's mental wellness.

- If we care about the well-being of children, we must work together to support their social and emotional learning.
- With the rise of mental health concerns, cyberbullying, and school safety issues, social and emotional learning has never been more important. Our students' well-being and futures rest on what we do in this moment.

"Social and emotional learning is a true extension of our parenting values and our parent goals—at the very heart of them."  
—Mari Terczak (Michigan parent)



About [90 percent](#) of teachers agree that promoting social and emotional learning improves students' academic achievement.



92 percent of [employers](#) say social and emotional skills such as problem-solving and communicating clearly are equal to or more important than technical skills.



Research shows social and emotional learning helps young people [cope with stresses](#) and helps [reduce symptoms](#) of depression and anxiety.

## What does SEL look like in schools?

- Practicing social and emotional skills, like reflection and collaboration, during academic lessons. For example, working in groups to discuss different perspectives on how to approach a math problem.
- Opportunities for students to build supportive relationships with peers and adults, such as a “morning meeting” or a quick check-in with a staff mentor.
- Learning about and practicing social and emotional skills with age-relevant instruction, such as lessons on being a good friend or coping with stress.
- Adults modeling social and emotional skills and proactively looking for ways to support students.
- Families, educators, and students working together to plan and discuss strategies for promoting SEL.

## Now, imagine a school *without* SEL. It would be a place where:

- Students don’t develop practical skills that prepare them for their careers and lives.
- Students don’t know where to turn for help when they struggle with academic content.
- Students have little time for discussion and don’t feel connected to what they’re learning.
- Students feel like they don’t matter.
- Students are lonely, isolated, or bullied.
- Teachers don’t have tools to engage students and manage their classrooms.
- Parents don’t feel welcome in the school.

“I want my boys to be able to understand how they’re feeling in a moment and what it is that they need.”—April Williams (Georgia parent)



A school without SEL is a school without quality education and supportive learning environments. That’s why [95 percent](#) of school districts have already started prioritizing SEL!

**Parents and caregivers are strong SEL supporters:** Parents and caregivers know what’s best for their children’s education—that’s why they overwhelmingly support SEL in schools. In fact, [88 percent of parents and caregivers](#) want students to learn social and emotional skills in the classroom.

**So what’s the “controversy”?** Let’s be clear: There is no real controversy among the vast majority of parents who see SEL as essential to their children’s education. But in some communities, you may have heard that there are attempts to ban SEL. Most of these narratives have been driven by politicians looking to score points and politically motivated groups that are spreading misinformation. While many are vocal, these groups do not represent most parents. Let your communities know:

- Parents have an absolute right to have their voices heard. That’s why decision-makers should listen when they say: SEL belongs in schools.
- Parents are children’s first teachers, and SEL helps reinforce what we are already teaching our children at home.
- Parents and educators—not politicians—should determine what takes place in our children’s classrooms. Attempts to ban SEL are attempts to silence the majority of parents.

## What SEL is and is not

SEL boosts academic performance and deepens engagement with content.



It is not a distraction from academics.

SEL builds relationships and skills that promote healthy well-being.



It is not therapy.

SEL helps students understand different perspectives and share ideas.



It is not a way to teach students a specific political agenda.

SEL is shaped by local priorities set by schools, families, and communities.



It is not one-size-fits-all.

When misinformation spreads, it's important to separate fact from fiction. Download the fact vs. fiction [infographic](#) and share across your social channels.

## How to spot and respond to misinformation

If you hear a false tradeoff, such as:	If you hear a conspiracy theory, such as:	If you hear someone cherry-picking, such as:
<p> Claims that SEL will harm other priorities, such as academics, are inherently flawed.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> "SEL is a distraction that takes time away from academics."</p>	<p> Sensational claims such as "psychological manipulation" or "indoctrination" may grab headlines, but they aren't based in reality.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> "Schools use SEL to groom children into LGBTQ lifestyles."</p>	<p> Random anecdotes and out-of-context quotes are often grossly misleading and inauthentic.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> "This SEL lesson is teaching children [an outrageous claim]."</p>
<p> <b>Respond by saying:</b> Research shows clearly that SEL enhances academic achievement, mental wellness, and long-term outcomes.</p>	<p> <b>Respond by saying:</b> That's not at all what I'm seeing in my child's school (or in any school). Here's what SEL really looks like in actual classrooms and schools... (<a href="#">example</a>)</p>	<p> <b>Respond by saying:</b> That's <u>not</u> SEL. SEL helps students develop skills to reflect on and communicate their own perspectives, listen to others with vastly different viewpoints, and work together toward common ground.</p>

## Questions to ask your children's school or school board members about how they're supporting students' social, emotional, and academic learning:

- What practices or programs does our school use to teach social and emotional skills like conflict resolution, showing understanding and empathy for others, and being aware of emotions?  
How do you know these approaches work?
- How are students taught to cope with frustration, anger, and other challenging feelings?  
Who teaches these skills and what are the strategies they teach?
- Whose job is it to ensure that all students feel safe and secure and treat each other well?
- How can students tell teachers when they are feeling upset or in need of support without the rest of the class knowing?
- How do teachers and other staff know what they are supposed to do when they see bullying or other hurtful behavior?
  - How are they trained in how to stop bullying or other hurtful behavior when it happens?
  - How are they trained in how to keep it from happening in the first place?
- How can parents provide feedback to school leaders and staff?

*\*Adapted from Making Caring Common Project. [Read more here.](#)*

## Steps to organize your community and fellow parents around supporting SEL at school board meetings

### STEP

# 1

### ORGANIZE YOUR COMMUNITY

- **Find out** the date of the next school board meeting and call five friends and bring them with you.
- **Narrow in** on your goal for the next public hearing or meeting—and understand the power your local school board has in the debate.
- **Encourage** students and teachers to also share public comments at school board meetings.

STEP  
**2**

**EQUIP STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND TEACHERS AS MESSENGERS**

- **Share** core messages:
  - **Reframe** the issue around the need for students to have access to skills that prepare them for life.
  - **Explain** that students are most likely to reach their full educational potential in classrooms where they feel accepted and valued.
  - **Highlight** the real-world harm of attacks on SEL and use supporting research.
- **Craft** multiple testimonies that help bring people’s personal stories to light and ultimately end with the same or related call-to-action.
- **Create** fliers, posters, or social media graphics to advocate the points of your speakers using accessible language and information.

STEP  
**3**

**PRESENT AND CHAMPION SEL AT LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS**

- **Present** testimony at school board meetings to advance your specific local goal:
  - Make sure each person in your group, as well as students and educators, sign up for public comment to share a testimony. Find out what the process is for speaking during Open Forum, as well as how long you will have to speak. This can usually be found out by calling the main district office or looking on the board’s website.
  - If students and educators can’t join as speakers, reference their perspectives and speak to what they need to be successful in education environments.
- **Close out** all questions and statements with a clear “call to action” for your specific school board.
- **Have** extra materials on hand, including model testimony and fliers/posters for folks who show up at the meetings and would like to speak but are less prepared with what to say.

STEP  
**4**

**AMPLIFY WHAT HAPPENS AT THE MEETING**

- **Take photos and record** testimonies on your phone and share them on social media to increase visibility, engage your community, and connect with allies and advocates. Make sure to thank the school board members for their willingness to hear your issues and tag them on social media.
- **Connect with** grassroots organizations in your area that are advocating for SEL to continue the conversation. Recap with those who are unable to attend the meeting to get them engaged, and share materials that you have created as well as any next steps that arose from the meeting.
- **Forward** your great work to CASEL at [comms@casel.org](mailto:comms@casel.org) so we can amplify and share with our partners or folks in similar situations.

STEP  
**5**

**FOLLOW UP**

- **Follow-up** with each individual board member and ask for a meeting or phone call to discuss the issue one on one or with a small group. Not every school board member will take you up on this, but many will, and personal one-on-one conversations are the most effective form of advocacy if you can get meeting or phone call scheduled.

## Who We Are

The Leading with SEL Coalition is composed of organizations representing parents, caregivers, educators, and others who support quality education, SEL, and whole child development. Our organizations are committed to sharing clear, accurate information about students' social, emotional, and academic learning.

For more information about the coalition and additional resources for parents, caregivers, and advocates, visit [LeadingWithSEL.org](http://LeadingWithSEL.org).

If you're interested in sharing your SEL story (e.g. writing an op-ed or blog, speaking to media, being featured in videos, etc.), please email [comms@casel.org](mailto:comms@casel.org).

