SEL Case Study Compilation

One-page summaries of eight documented district SEL implementations, plus a blank template for writing your own

For: District SEL leads, principals, school leadership teams and SEL coaches

How to use this compilation

Each summary gives the context, main actions, reported results and source for one district's SEL implementation. Results are mostly district-reported trends, not causal findings. Use the cases to judge what is feasible in a setting like yours, then use the blank template to document your own work.

1. CORE Districts, California

Context	Network of large urban California districts serving more than 1 million students; six districts used a 2013 federal waiver to build an alternative accountability system
Actions	Chose four skills (growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, social awareness); piloted 2013-14; field tested with 450,000+ students in grades 3-12 in 2014-15; 25-item spring survey for grades 4-12; measures counted for 8 percent of the school index in 2015-16
Results	About 390,000 students surveyed each year; self-efficacy and social awareness decline through middle school; girls' self-efficacy falls behind boys' from grade 7; schools in Long Beach used results to add curricula, parent nights and an algebra-plus-SEL course
Source	PACE, Trends in Student Social-Emotional Learning (2018); Brookings, West (2016); The 74 (2019)

2. Austin Independent School District, Texas

Context	About 85,000 students, 129 schools; 59.7 percent economically disadvantaged (2015)
Actions	Joined CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative in 2011; rolled out by vertical team (high school plus feeders) from 26 schools in 2011-12 to all 130 in 2015-16; Second Step in K-8, School-Connect and a ninth-grade transition course in high school; steering committee and SEL specialist at every school; specialists grew from 2 to 13

Results	SEL budget rose from $690,416 (2011-12) to $2,020,693 (2014-15); $1 million donor challenge yielded $2.4 million; middle and high school students improved on all five competencies; NAEP reading and math and GPAs improved during implementation years (district-reported)
Source	CASEL District Resource Center case study (2015); AISD Department of Research and Evaluation summary (2016); Bridgespan profile (2016); CASEL CDI insights report (2017)

3. Chicago Public Schools, Illinois

Context	400,545 students, 664 schools, 85 percent free or reduced lunch (2015)
Actions	SEL task force in 2012; Second Step for K-8; Office of Social and Emotional Learning created September 2013 with MTSS, climate, behavior and mental health, restorative practices and discipline policy under one umbrella; 14 network SEL specialists funded at about $2 million a year from 2014-15; restorative practices coaching in about 100 schools
Results	Suspensions down 65 percent in two years (44,000 fewer students suspended in one year); attendance up 8 percentage points; average GPA 2.19 to 2.65; graduation rate up 15 percent during CDI years (CASEL-reported). Independent UChicago Consortium study: students at high schools strong on social-emotional development were 2.41 points more likely to graduate and 2.57 points more likely to attend college
Source	CASEL District Resource Center case study (2015); CASEL CDI insights report (2017); The 74 on UChicago Consortium study (2023)

4. Oakland Unified School District, California

Context	85 schools, about 35,000 students, 2,100 staff; predominantly Black and Latino/a students from low-income households

Actions	Partnered with CASEL in 2012 and created an SEL department; a cross-role team wrote Pre-K to Adult SEL standards over one year, drawing on Illinois and Washoe County standards; standards used in instructional rounds and in teacher and principal performance frameworks; Lead Learner teacher leaders; Three Signature Practices in every meeting; Transformative SEL workshops from June 2022
Results	97 percent of educators attending Transformative SEL workshops said the work felt more sustainable or effective and that they were more likely to stay; GPAs higher by 2015 than before the initiative (CASEL-reported)
Source	CASEL District Resource Center case study; EdPrepLab brief (2026); CASEL CDI insights report (2017)

5. Anchorage School District, Alaska

Context	Adopted K-12 SEL standards in 2006; founding CDI district in 2011
Actions	15 standards across four competencies; three-year elementary pilot producing lessons, indicators and rubrics; standards integrated into the health curriculum with about 30 Health/SEL Specialists; posters in every school; a university credit course on infusing SEL into academics taken by 130 teachers in 2013-14; deliberate pause to focus on adult SEL
Results	Three to six years for standards to be widely understood; after the course, teachers intentionally planning for SEL rose from 31 to 100 percent and those connecting lessons to the standards from 12 to 98 percent; staff survey participation rose from 30 to 79 percent after data were used to reset priorities
Source	CASEL District Resource Center, Anchorage SEL standards case study; CASEL CDI insights report (2017)

6. Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Ohio

Context	Founding CDI district in 2011; SEL work branded Humanware

Actions	Class meetings; PATHS curriculum for pre-K to grade 5; Planning Centers staffed by an instructional aide as the last stop before removal and first stop on return from suspension; weekly Student Support Teams; restorative practices; Conditions for Learning survey on safe and respectful climate, challenge, student support and SEL, processed by AIR and given twice a year
Results	NAEP reading and math improved during implementation years; GPAs higher by 2015; climate improved on district surveys; middle and high school students grew in self-awareness and self-management (CASEL-reported)
Source	CMSD Humanware pages; CASEL CDI insights report (2017); CASEL 2021 release

7. Washoe County School District, Nevada

Context	About 63,000 students, 91 schools (2015); 43 percent economically disadvantaged
Actions	Joined CDI in February 2012; SEL standards written in a three-day session; 12 pilot schools; MindUP for K-8 and School Connect for 9-12; train-the-trainer model (three-day training for each school's SEL leadership team, quarterly PLCs, specialist coaching) reaching all 93 schools by January 2016; free, open-source WCSD-SECA competency assessment developed with CASEL and the University of Illinois at Chicago, given to about 24,000 students a year
Results	Staff reporting their school follows an SEL curriculum rose from 43 percent (2012-13) to 80 percent (2016-17); graduation rate up 20 points since 2012 (district-reported); students with higher competencies had reading and math scores about 8 points higher, higher GPAs and lower suspension and absenteeism after controlling for background; Nevada built statewide standards with Washoe's team
Source	CASEL District Resource Center case study (2015) and snapshot; WCSD-SECA FAQ (2018); K-12 Dive (2022)

8. Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts

Context	Russell Elementary (about 400 students) and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester (nearly 4,000 members), half a mile apart with no prior relationship; districtwide SEAD coaching launched 2017

Actions	Shared MindUP curriculum and rituals across school and club; from fall 2018 all 400 students attended the club twice a week during the school day; frequent principal and club director communication; districtwide SEAD coaches (five in 2024-25, each with up to five schools) supporting signature practices, Think Spaces and SEL in academics
Results	School staff agreeing the school-club relationship was respectful rose from 11 percent (2018) to 71 percent (2019), with 100 percent of club staff agreeing in 2020; district School Health Profiles 2022-2024: +12 points principals comfortable with SEL training, +10 points all staff trained on competencies, +19 points schools implementing staff SEL practices
Source	RAND for the Wallace Foundation, Expanding SEL Beyond the School Walls in Boston (2022); Rennie Center, SEAD Coaching in Boston Public Schools (2025)

Cross-cutting lessons

1. Leaders carry the vision through turnover; a stable SEL director matters as much as the superintendent.
2. Standards become real through years of modeling, posters, debriefs and evaluation frameworks.
3. Phase the rollout and fund coaching before coverage.
4. Attend to adult SEL early.
5. Build low-stakes data systems and keep them running.
6. Braid general funds, grants and Title funds; plan the exit from grant money from day one.
7. Tie SEL to outcomes the district already tracks: attendance, discipline, graduation.

Blank case study template

Complete one section per box, each as a short paragraph or list.

Section	Your notes
1. Title and timeframe	
2. Context (enrollment, demographics, schools, goal or problem)	
3. Starting conditions (standards, programs, data, staffing before)	
4. What was done, by year (programs, training, structures, data systems, who decided and why)	
5. Resources (annual budget, funding sources, positions, partners)	
6. Measures (what, how often, baseline values)	
7. What changed (results against baseline; comparison if any; district-reported or independent?)	

Section	Your notes
8. What did not work	
9. Lessons for others (three to five, each tied to evidence)	
10. Sources and contact	

Checklist before you publish

- Every number has a baseline and a year.
- Results are labeled district-reported or independently evaluated.
- What did not work is named.
- A reader elsewhere could tell what it cost.
- Every source is linked and a contact is named.

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