

Strategies for Integrating SEL into the School Day

As the school year comes to a close, it's an opportunity to reflect on all that you've accomplished and to think about your hopes for the next school year. As school leaders seek to provide for the needs of the whole child, there are many facets beyond academics that they're looking to address — including social and emotional development. Whether you're still exploring how to bring social-emotional learning (SEL) into your school or looking to improve some existing practices, read on for strategies on how you can weave SEL into the school day.

Over the past few years, there's been a surge of interest within the education community concerning SEL in the classroom. This is largely due to the fact that there is new data to support the claim that SEL is not only vital to students' development, but also to their academic, social, personal, and professional success ([Durlak et al, 2011](#)). CASEL's [Ready to Lead report](#), for instance, cites that having high-quality SEL instruction improves student achievement scores by an average of 11 percentile points. Moreover, having a greater proficiency can result in students being more prepared for life as adults — from college and career success to better mental health and more engaged citizenship ([Hawkins et al, 2008](#)). Adding to this, a [recent study from The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) revealed that a lack of SEL instruction consistently correlated with an increased chance of unemployment, poor health, and criminal behavior.

However, weaving SEL into instruction isn't easy or straightforward —

even for veteran educators. As school leaders across the country look to adopt SEL as a part of their curriculum, one question keeps popping up again and again: How can educators incorporate SEL into their day when they already have an over-full to-do list?

To help answer this question, the research and editorial staff at Teachers Pay Teachers drew upon industry research to help guide educators in this area. We invite you to use the following strategies as a starting point for your own SEL efforts.

Weaving SEL into the School Day

Under the framework created by [CASEL](#) — one of the leading authorities in the advancement of SEL in education — there are [five core competencies](#) that are critical for success in both school and the workplace. These competencies can be taught in many ways across many different settings. Here, we've included an overview of each competency along with specific examples of instructional strategies you can weave into your day.

1. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is defined as the capacity to understand one's own emotions, personal goals, and values. When students possess self-awareness, they're able to recognize how their thoughts and feelings influence their behavior. In addition, they can accurately identify the things they're good at and the things they may need to work a little harder on.

/ Sample Strategy: Start and end each day (or week) with check-ins

and check-outs.



Image concept inspired by [Making a Statement in SPED](#)

Commit to establishing at least one moment of connection each day by having a moment of connection and reflection with your students. This doesn't need to be a time-consuming activity. It could be something as simple as [morning or closing circles](#) or asking students a personalized question as you greet them. During a morning or closing circle, you might have each student call out the name of an emotion they're feeling, or reflect on the day together. These activities can offer your students the space to think about how they're feeling, recognize how it's affecting their actions, and set some goals for the future.

For a weekly activity, help students set individual goals at the beginning of each week. At the end of the week, ask students to reflect on why they did or didn't achieve their goals and to think about what changes they can make to overcome obstacles or improve their methods in order to achieve their goals.

TpT Teacher-Author Tip

"I have a small group of 3rd graders who have a lot of social-emotional needs (I'm a reading specialist in a Title 1 school). I have been using the Zones of Regulation to help them communicate what 'color' their current emotional state is in and how that might impact their ability to work with me. Once they identify their mood, if it's not green (ready to learn) I ask them what they need from me to get to green. Usually it's a fidget object, a 2-minute conversation about what is bothering them, or a hug. Once they get themselves into the green zone, we can get down to the business of reading and becoming super readers."

— Jill Nieman of [The Niemans' Nook](#)

2. Self-Management

Self-management speaks to students' ability to successfully regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in differing situations. With self-management skills, students are able to control their impulses, effectively manage stress, and motivate themselves under pressure to achieve their personal and academic goals.

/ Sample Strategy: Routinely practice age-appropriate self-management techniques as a regular part of the school day.

Life can be complicated for students (even for those still learning to count to 10), so it's important for them to learn how to manage their emotions in a positive way. Incorporating [brain breaks](#) and mindfulness exercises into the day can be a great way to provide your students with the opportunity to center their minds and bodies. Activities like slow breathing techniques, yoga, meditation, or brief physical activity

(such as jumping jacks or a dance break) are just a few examples of self-management techniques you can weave into PreK-12 instruction.

TpT Teacher-Author Tip

"I teach a few different calming down strategies: belly breathing; making your body tight, counting to 10, and releasing the emotion through the fingertips; stating your emotion; or walking away and getting a drink. Students can then choose which works for them, but I think the biggest impact happens when I actually model it in action. It sounds like, 'Please focus on me. Boys and girls, look at me. Can I have your attention? I feel angry because no one is listening...!' Then, I belly breathe at least three times. When I feel I need to raise my voice to be heard, belly breathing helps me calm down and shows the kiddos that even adults need it sometimes!"

— [*Debora Marines TeachMagically*](#)

3. Responsible Decision-Making

Responsible decision-making involves students learning how to make constructive choices concerning their personal behavior and social interactions. When students engage in responsible decision-making, they take actions that consider rules and ethical norms, protect the safety and well-being of themselves and others, and evaluate the consequences that their choices might bring about.

/ Sample Strategy: Offer choices throughout the school day to encourage a sense of autonomy and promote decision-making skills.

Presenting students with choices in a number of different learning

contexts helps them develop responsible decision-making. It can be hard to imagine incorporating student choice into an already hectic classroom, but when possible, here are some ideas that may fit into your existing routine:

- Allow students to choose whether to work independently or with other students. To help students be thoughtful about picking their partners, ask them to consider who they'll be most productive with (rather than who they'll have the most fun with) and have them write a brief reflection on the success.
- Give students the option to choose topics by creating a list of prompts they can respond to and/or having them answer open-ended questions.
- Let students choose the format for submitting their creative work (e.g. as essays, videos, slide decks, podcasts, or blog posts).

TpT Teacher in Action

"At the beginning of the year, we start a respect agreement. We have a discussion about respect, how to treat other students, how they want the other students and the teacher to treat them, and how to treat the school. Then we all sign the agreement in the middle of the chart."

— *Amy Walker, 4th Grade Teacher*

4. Relationship Skills

Relationship skills refer to students' ability to make and keep healthy relationships with others, regardless of whether or not those

individuals are from similar backgrounds or cultures. Having these sets of skills means that students will be better able to express themselves, listen to and cooperate with others, resist peer pressure, and resolve conflicts.

/ Sample Strategy: Give students opportunities throughout the day to work together with a variety of peers on projects, either in groups or with partners.

By having the chance to work together, students can learn first-hand how to negotiate with others, and how to leverage their strengths to contribute to the team. Plus, by making group activities a regular part of your classroom culture, you may end up finding it easier to implement SEL into your instruction overall.

Prior to starting any group work — whether it's reading groups, science labs, think-pair-shares, cooperative learning games, or writing partnerships — take the time to review and/or model how students should be interacting with and collaborating with one another. If conflicts arise, use those moments as opportunities for your students to reflect on how their actions have consequences on others.

TpT Teacher-Author Tip

"I teach learners to write, debate, and communicate with good tone across opposing views. This is so much fun as it involves the art of kindness and the rigor of mindfulness. We tend to go deeper as we even take our robust debates online with the same awesome tone."

— [Ellen Weber – Brain Based Tasks for Growth Mindset](#)

5. Social Awareness

Social awareness involves being able to empathize with, take the perspective of, and feel compassion for others — even if the individuals are from different cultures or backgrounds. When students are socially aware, they have an understanding of social and ethical norms and can behave accordingly.

/ Sample Strategy: Discuss characters in literature or figures in history to better understand their motivations and perspectives.

While discussing a passage in a book, historical occurrences, or current events, use the characters or the real-life figures to highlight and discuss social skills and behavior. Ask students questions like: “Why do you think he or she made that choice?” or “How did his or her actions affect others?”

TpT Teacher-Author Tip

“I use a 3-column chart to teach character development. We’ll take a trait such as respect and list what it looks like, what it sounds like, and how it feels (to both give and receive it).”

— *Melissa Bonito of [Peas in a Pod](#)*

In closing, just remember: SEL implementation is not a linear process. It takes time to build in the classroom. However, even the smallest investments in SEL can prepare students for long-term success in life.

TpT Resources

Here are just a few popular TpT resources that address these topics:

- [Morning Work Binder for Empathy](#)
- [Whiteboard Morning Meeting {40 Weeks}](#)
- [Bundle: Creating a Positive Classroom Culture](#)
- [Addition & Subtraction to 20 Math Facts Fluency & Fitness® Brain Breaks](#)
- [Character Education: Kindness](#)
- [Social Emotional Learning SEL Writing Prompts and Conversation Starters](#)

Further Reading List

Want to dive deeper into SEL? Here's a curated reading list of the sources that we cited and referred to while writing this piece.

- [CASEL](#)
- [Committee for Children](#)
- Durlak et al, 2011. [The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions](#). *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- DePaoli et al, 2017. [Ready to Lead: A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools](#). A report for CASEL.
- [Edutopia](#)
- Hawkins et al, 2008. [Effects of Social Development Intervention in Childhood 15 years Later](#). *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 162, 1133-1141.
- Jones et al, 2015. [Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social](#)

[Competence and Future Wellness](#). *American Journal of Public Health*, e1–e8.

- [Social and Emotional Skills: Well-Being, Connectedness and Success](#). A report for OECD.

This post is also featured on [Medium](#).