LESSONS FROM THE PARTNERSHIPS FOR
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING INITIATIVE
VOLUME 1

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Schools and Out-of-School Time Programs Implementing Social and Emotional Learning

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PREFACE

This report offers early lessons from an initiative focused on social and emotional learning (SEL) in elementary schools and out-of-school time (OST) programs. The lessons should be particularly valuable for leaders of school districts and OST intermediary organizations who are interested in implementing SEL programs in schools, OST programs, or both. The lessons are also relevant to leaders of individual schools and OST programs, technical assistance providers, funders, and researchers who are interested in understanding and supporting SEL.

In 2016, in an effort to gain knowledge about how to help children develop SEL skills, The Wallace Foundation launched a six-year project called the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative (PSELI). Wallace selected six communities—Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Palm Beach County, Florida; Tacoma, Washington; and Tulsa, Oklahoma—to explore whether and how children benefit when schools and OST programs partner to improve and align SEL, as well as what it takes to do this work. The findings and lessons outlined in this report are based on these six communities' experiences implementing SEL for elementary school–aged students during the first two years of PSELI.

This study was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decisionmaking. This study was sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices to improve learning and enrichment opportunities for children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit its Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report should be directed to Heather Schwartz at heather_schwartz@rand.org, and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.

Contents

Preface iii
Figures vii
Tables viii
Summary ix
Acknowledgments xxiii
Abbreviations xxiv

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction 1
- What Is SEL and Why Does It Matter? 2
- How Schools and OST Programs Promote SEL 4
- What We Know About Implementing SEL 9
- About PSELI 13
- Learning from PSELI Communities' Work 22
- Limitations 23

CHAPTER TWO

Executing System-Level Activities to Launch and Coordinate SEL Work Across Multiple Sites 25
- Research About System-Level Conditions That Influence Site-Level Activity 26
- How the PSELI Communities Started PSELI Work 28
- Findings and Early Lessons 29

CHAPTER THREE

Developing District-OSTI and School-OST Partnerships 39
- Research About District-OSTI and School-OST Partnerships 40
- How the District-OSTI and School-OST Partnerships Are Structured in PSELI 43
- Findings and Early Lessons 47

CHAPTER FOUR
Developing Adults' Capacity to Promote SEL 59
Research About How PD Can Promote Educators' Capacity to Support SEL 59
How the PSELI Communities Delivered SEL PD, Including Coaching 62
Findings and Early Lessons..65

CHAPTER FIVE
Improving Climate and Delivering SEL Instruction to Students...77
Research About Climate, SEL Instruction, and SEL Integration 78
How the PSELI Communities Supported Students' SEL 81
Findings and Early Lessons..86

CHAPTER SIX
Conclusion...97
Implications for District and OSTI Leaders........................98
Implications for School and OST Program Leaders and Staff 101
Implications for Policymakers, Curriculum Developers, Technical Assistance Providers, Funders, and State Education Agencies..104
Looking Ahead...106

References 109

TECHNICAL APPENDIX
Available for download at www.rand.org/t/RRA379-1

Figures

FIGURE S.1
The PSELI Timeline x

FIGURE 1.1
The PSELI Timeline 14

FIGURE 1.2
The Connection Between the System and Site Levels
in PSELI 16

FIGURE 1.3
The Sequence of Implementation That the PSELI
Communities Typically Followed 21

FIGURE 3.1
Perceptions of Respect Between School and OST Staff 54

FIGURE 4.1
Most-Common SEL PD Topics, School Staff 63

FIGURE 4.2
Most-Common SEL PD Topics, OST Staff 63

Tables

TABLE S.1
Implications for Staff in Key Roles xxii

TABLE 1.1
Typical Staff Roles and Other Supports for SEL Implementation at the System and Site Levels 17

TABLE 1.2
Wallace Foundation Supports for the PSELI Grantees in the First Two Years of Implementation.............................. 19

TABLE 2.1
School Districts' and OSTIs' Main Activities in the First Two Years of Implementation 30

TABLE 3.1
System-Level Partnerships in PSELI Communities................ 45

TABLE 3.2
Demographic Profile of the Schools and OST Programs in Phase 1 of PSELI 46

TABLE 3.3
PSELI Structures and Staff Roles That Can Increase School-OST Communication and SEL Coordination 49

TABLE 4.1
School and OST Program SEL Coaches in School Year 2018–2019 64

TABLE 5.1
SEL Curricula and Content Sequences in Use as of Spring 2019 84

SUMMARY

Schools and out-of-school time (OST) programs across the United States are increasingly prioritizing and implementing practices to support children's social and emotional development. This report provides early implementation lessons from six communities about how to enact social and emotional learning (SEL) in elementary schools and in OST programs. These communities participate in a Wallace Foundation–funded initiative called the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative (PSELI).

Through PSELI, The Wallace Foundation seeks to explore whether and how children will benefit if adults in schools and OST programs collaborate to improve climate and to foster SEL that is mutually reinforced during and outside the school day, as well as what it takes to do this work.

In what we believe is the most-comprehensive SEL implementation study to date, we summarize the on-the-ground lessons learned in 38 partnerships between schools and OST programs across six communities that are attempting to embed SEL throughout the school and afterschool day. These partners are engaged in a wide variety of SEL activities. To extract lessons from these activities, we draw on a trove of data that includes approximately 5,000 completed surveys, 850 interviews, and observations of more than 3,000 instructional and noninstructional activities in schools and OST programs. Although these data cannot provide a complete picture of how schools and OST programs are implementing SEL programs and other PSELI components, our inclusion of multiple data-collection approaches and the wide variety of stakeholder perspectives enable us to provide an unusually wide-ranging description of what implementation looked like on the ground during PSELI's first two years and the factors that supported or hindered it.

This report should be of interest to leaders of school districts and out-of-school time intermediary (OSTI)

What Is SEL and Why Is It Important?

There is no consensus definition of *social and emotional learning.* The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as "the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, undated-b). The communities we describe in this report relied primarily on this widely used definition to guide their work.

SEL is important for brain development and for ensuring that children are ready to learn. Social and emotional competencies help promote youth readiness to succeed and thrive in their adult lives. SEL relies on adults who build trusting relationships with children and who directly foster those children's social and emotional development, which then enables them to benefit from academic instruction and from participation in other school and afterschool activities.

organizations who are thinking of implementing SEL programs, as well as to leaders of individual schools and OST programs, policymakers, SEL technical assistance providers, funders, researchers, and others who are considering supporting youth social and emotional development. The field needs these experience-based lessons because the rapid expansion of SEL in schools and OST programs is outpacing the research on what it takes to do this work effectively. In this report, we provide the kind of much-needed implementation lessons that the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) has called for. And by sharing examples of implementation in schools and OST programs, we incorporate the perspectives of those who are promoting youth development in programs that occur outside the traditional school setting.

In short, the six communities described in this report are at the cutting edge of an integrated approach to SEL throughout the school and OST program day. As a result, the lessons learned from their experiences are valuable to those who wish to implement SEL in or across schools, OST programs, or both, as well as to those who wish to form school-OST partnerships more generally.

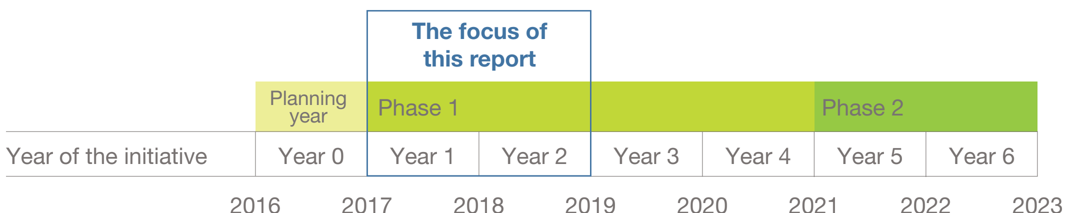
About the Initiative

As shown in Figure S.1, PSELI is divided into three stages (a planning year, Phase 1, and Phase 2), which we describe in more detail in this section.

Planning Year

The 2016–2017 school year, labeled Year 0, was a planning year in which The Wallace Foundation awarded grants to nine urban school districts and their OSTI partners to develop a plan to improve adult practices that support students' social and emotional skills. From these nine partnerships, six communities were

FIGURE S.1
The PSELI Timeline



selected to receive implementation grants that began in school year 2017–2018. Wallace chose the six communities because the school district and the OSTI (1) demonstrated a strong commitment to developing or had already developed a positive working relationship and (2) were committed to including SEL in their services to children but had not yet spread SEL throughout all of their elementary schools and OST program partners. The six communities that The Wallace Foundation selected are Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Palm Beach County, Florida; Tacoma, Washington; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Phase 1

Phase 1 of PSELI began in the 2017–2018 school year and is a four-year period for the implementation of SEL in elementary schools and each school's co-located OST program(s) in a combined total of 38 school buildings, which we refer to as *sites* in this report.[1] At a majority of the Phase 1 sites, there is one OST program, such as a city Parks and Recreation program. In several of the six communities, though, there is more than one OST program at the site that is participating in PSELI. For example, a Playworks program, a YMCA program, and a small teacher-led arts program might all operate at a single school site and all participate in a school-OST partnership to jointly implement SEL. About one-fourth of students enrolled in Phase 1 elementary schools were also enrolled in one or more of the OST programs as of spring 2019.

During Phase 1, each of the six PSELI communities launched and developed a whole-campus approach to SEL in five to seven elementary schools and in their OST program partners. The goal at each Phase 1 site is to gradually make SEL a part of both the instruction that students receive and their interactions with adults throughout the school and OST parts of the day.

Although each PSELI community is designing and implementing its own approach, and each site within a community has some flexibility in what practices to adopt, all 38 sites in the first phase of PSELI are supposed to focus on the following four approaches to providing SEL for students:

[1] There are two exceptions in which the participating OST programs were near the school and in their own facilities.

1. Set a positive climate.[2]
2. Offer explicit SEL instruction to students during the school day (via written lesson plans from an evidence-based curriculum); SEL instruction during OST programs is optional.
3. Integrate SEL into academic instruction and OST activities.
4. Pursue school-OST partnerships that mutually reinforce SEL practices across the school and OST program day.

Together, these four approaches to SEL align with the expansive view of "how learning happens" that is described in the final report of the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019). The fourth approach is what distinguishes PSELI from many other SEL efforts, and it is consistent with the Commission's recommendations to address learning both in and out of schools.

The Wallace Foundation funds the Phase 1 implementation work through annually awarded grants that started in summer 2017 and are split between the school district and the OSTI, which we refer to as the *system level* (as opposed to *site-level* activity at the 38 sites in Phase 1). The district and the OSTI use a portion of the grant for system-level staff and activities and distribute the balance among the five to seven Phase 1 sites in their community to fund SEL work at those locations.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of PSELI was designed to start in the 2021–2022 school year. The original plan was that, in Phase 2, a second set of 38 elementary schools and OST program partners would begin their SEL work, building on lessons learned from the Phase 1 sites.[3] Phase 2 sites were to conduct business as usual with no new SEL work until the 2021–2022 school year. However, in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, The Wallace Foundation allowed the Phase 2 sites to start SEL work in 2020–2021 (which

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[2] In this context, *climate* refers to the features of a school or OST environment that youth and adults experience. School climate can include aspects of the physical space, culture, norms, goals, values, and practices (Osher and Berg, 2018; Thapa et al., 2013).

[3] During the planning year, we worked with each district and OSTI to select Phase 1 and Phase 2 sites that were demographically and academically similar for the purpose of later comparing student and staff outcomes across the two categories of sites. A later report in this series will compare student and staff outcomes across Phase 1 and Phase 2 sites throughout the 2017–2018 to 2020–2021 period. We are using observations, surveys, and interviews to document the extent of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 sites' SEL activities during the four-year period.

is the fourth and final year of Phase 1) if they wished to do so. Wallace also released half of the Phase 2 implementation grant funding earlier than planned (i.e., in the 2020–2021 year) to allow for Phase 2 SEL implementation if desired.

Summary of Initial Implementation Findings and Selected Early Lessons

As shown in Figure S.1, this report focuses on the first two years of PSELI implementation. As a result, the report documents implementation in the 38 sites that were actively working on SEL as of spring 2019. We drew on the hundreds of staff interviews and documents and the thousands of observations and staff surveys to identify the findings and lessons.

Because not every finding and lesson will be relevant to each reader, we organized them into the following four topics:

1. executing system-level activities to launch and coordinate SEL work across multiple sites
2. developing district-OSTI and school-OST partnerships
3. developing adults' capacity to promote SEL
4. improving climate and delivering SEL instruction to students.

Because this report focuses on only the halfway point of the first phase of PSELI, the lessons we draw are necessarily early ones that we expect to evolve and, in some instances, change. We expect that the findings and the pursuant lessons will change as the six communities' SEL work deepens. For example, we anticipate that future reports will include findings and lessons about work that is currently nascent, such as differentiation of SEL in school and OST settings or SEL data use.

Executing System-Level Activities to Launch and Coordinate SEL Work Across Multiple Sites

Findings

- **A clearer vision for SEL, paired with desired "look-fors" could have supported a stronger launch.** Defining SEL, creating shared terminology, and establishing what successful implementation would look like took longer than planned in all six PSELI communities. By the second year, communities

had developed clearer guidance about which SEL skills to focus on and what practices sites should emphasize, and site leaders said this guidance was helpful.

- **Clear system-to-site communication required dedicated staff time.** The hire of a system-level SEL manager was instrumental to improved communication about the SEL work from the district and the OSTI to schools and OST programs. Principals' and OST managers' uneven consumption of written communication, such as emails, meant that the system-level staff needed to create a variety of mechanisms for successful communication, including phone calls, coaching visits, and in-person meetings.

- **Time constraints meant that this multi-part SEL project took more time to roll out than planned.** The number one barrier that each community mentioned was site and system staff having insufficient time available to execute plans. As a consequence, most communities did not execute all of their planned PSELI activities on the originally intended timeline.

- **Churn and unanticipated external events have been the norm, not the exception, requiring the communities to adapt their PSELI work to make it more resilient.** Unanticipated events, such as teacher walkouts, on top of recurring high rates of staff turnover slowed progress. Several communities have adapted by embedding SEL more permanently into their structures by, for example, housing SEL within the district's academics department or linking SEL to other priority areas, such as trauma-informed practices.

Selected Early Lessons

- Prior to launching a SEL initiative, define the targeted SEL skills, and then define success in terms of desired, observable behaviors by instructors, students, or both. Work backward to then determine system-level supports needed for the end users.

- Create a manager role for the SEL effort that will be responsible for specifying what sites are supposed to implement, how, and when.

- In anticipation of staff turnover, create onboarding materials about the SEL effort.

Developing District-OSTI and School-OST Partnerships

Findings

- **Being committed to SEL and taking the time to meet were important starting points for district-OSTI partnerships.** Schools and OST programs can function in parallel worlds with few points of connection. Although they bring complementary expertise, they also have large organizational differences and therefore need to develop shared norms, language, and trust. Institutionally, both the OSTI and the district in each community had made important commitments to SEL prior to the start of PSELI and once it began, which aided those partnerships. Although finding time could be challenging because of busy schedules, the system-level leaders whom we interviewed said that it was important to make the time to meet in person in at least the beginning stages of the initiative to build relationships and trust across the organizations.

- **School-OST partnerships benefited from new structures to support collaboration and some new staff roles that bridged both settings.** School-OST partnerships typically started with the principal and OST manager meeting regularly and then evolved into collaboration mechanisms, such as a SEL committee. But the PSELI sites also increasingly adopted staffing roles that bridged the school and OST day. Examples of these roles include an OST SEL coordinator and crossover positions that enable school teachers to work for the OST program and OST staff to work for the school.

- **Staff turnover posed serious challenges for district-OSTI and school-OST partnerships.** Recurring staff turnover has been the norm, especially in school district positions and among OST instructors. This turnover can stall the school-OST partnership formation. In response to OST staff turnover, one community developed onboarding materials to codify the OST partners' role in building strong connections with the school.

- **There was a perceived and actual power differential between schools and OST programs.** The difference in power tipped in favor of schools, and some OST and OSTI staff expressed that they were perceived as "babysitters" or as having less say in PSELI decisions. There has been some improvement over time, especially among the proportion of school staff who felt

respected by OST staff. Ways that schools and OST programs have reduced the power imbalance include improving space-sharing for OST program functions, hiring full-time on-site OST managers or coordinators who can attend school meetings, and establishing SEL steering committees with representation from both school and OST staff.

- **Joint professional development (PD) for school and OST staff was difficult to execute.** Because of opposing work schedules in which the school teachers' days end as afterschool instructors' days begin, it was hard to find mutually acceptable times when both staff could attend joint training. It was also challenging to find content that was equally applicable to both sets of staff. Instead of relying on joint PD sessions, school and OST staff suggested adapting the content of that PD to make it applicable to staff in both settings and delivering PD separately. In this way, PD can foster a shared understanding of the work without requiring members of each group to participate at the same time.

- **SEL rituals were a good starting point for OST and school staff to create continuity, which was deepened by use of consistent SEL curricula.** The use of SEL curricula, which we refer to as *content sequences* in OST settings, can be a tall order for OST programs, given that such materials are not readily available on the market. Using consistent SEL curricula also requires considerable coordination to jointly plan pacing schedules so that children receive instruction on complementary SEL topics in both settings each week. Short of consistent curricula, the joint use of SEL rituals or other brief SEL activities is a less demanding form of SEL coordination that may prove more practical, particularly for OST programs led by volunteers or those that are too brief to deliver full units of study from a SEL content sequence.

Selected Early Lessons

- Despite the challenges of limited time, consider the benefits of face-to-face meetings, especially in the first year of a SEL partnership, to develop trust and understanding of each other's organizations.

- Make space-sharing modifications as needed so that OST instructors can reasonably deliver SEL instruction to groups of students in a quiet space.
- Document and formalize SEL processes and routines so that these may live on even if specific individuals leave. Examples of formalized processes may include a short list of desired, observable behaviors and conditions, as well as a list of "do-now" activities for school and OST staff with guidance about when and how to use them.

Developing Adults' Capacity to Promote SEL

Findings

- **PSELI communities viewed adult SEL skills as a foundation for building student SEL skills.** Many interviewees viewed the development of adults' abilities to establish and maintain their own healthy relationships as the fundamental precursor to those adults effectively teaching their students how to do the same. The communities approached adult skill-building differently; some sites offered system-designed training and others developed their own approach.
- **Staff wanted SEL PD to include hands-on practice and, as their SEL work progressed, to focus on differentiation of SEL instruction.** Staff survey results indicated that differentiation was the topic for which the largest percentage of school and OST staff needed additional PD. Specifically, staff reported a need for PD to help them adapt SEL to meet the needs of students with disabilities or with cultural or linguistic differences.
- **Staff turnover posed a persistent challenge for PD delivery.** One way that PSELI communities tackled the staff turnover challenge was by offering some, but not all, PD in smaller chunks on a frequent basis. The communities also created calendars of scheduled PD for the entire second year of PSELI, indicating which PD activities were mandatory and what the purpose of each was, and distributed the calendars in advance so that sites could plan their schedules.
- **Although support for SEL was high among school and OST staff, they also expressed concerns.** One-third of school

teachers in PSELI and one-half of OST instructors agreed or strongly agreed that adults other than themselves (such as counselors, psychologists, or parents) should take primary responsibility for their students' SEL needs. PSELI system and site leaders also described what they termed *misperceptions* about SEL—for example, SEL is necessary only for students with behavioral challenges; SEL is appropriate for young children but not adults; and integrating SEL would mean that students would not incur any consequences for misbehavior.

- **Several PSELI communities have learned to centralize the delivery of at least some SEL PD for frontline staff, especially the PD about the SEL curriculum.** Although most communities have taken a train-the-trainer approach—whereby someone from the central office at the system level trains one or two people (such as a SEL champion) from each site who, in turn, relays training to site-based staff—many communities have recentralized the role of SEL curriculum training in particular after finding substantial inconsistencies among sites and undue burdens on site-level trainers.

- **SEL coaches have served a critical function in helping schools and OST programs deliver SEL instruction.** Coaching provides a way to customize PD to teachers' or instructors' needs and helps ensure that it is relevant to their day-to-day work. Coaches also played a key role in fostering communication between school and OST staff and explaining how to deliver SEL instruction. However, in some PSELI communities, staff expressed confusion about the coaches' roles and responsibilities.

Selected Early Lessons

- In recognition of staff turnover, include in a recurring SEL PD schedule both longer sessions about SEL instruction and more-frequent but shorter sessions on more-discrete SEL topics.

- Do not rely exclusively on a train-the-trainer model in which the responsibility for all SEL training falls solely on site leaders—especially for training about SEL curricula (or content sequences) and pedagogy; content expertise is critical for those topics.

- When using a SEL coach, develop a written document for coaches and site-level leaders that codifies the coaches' responsibilities, including minimum coaching requirements and number of visits, and discuss this document with each involved party.

Improving Climate and Delivering SEL Instruction to Students

Findings

- **SEL rituals and routines were a good starting point for promoting a positive climate.** The six communities adopted SEL rituals and routines in schools and OST programs, drawing primarily on CASEL's three signature practices: welcoming inclusion activities, such as greeting each student by name; engaging strategies, such as students working together; and optimistic closures to reflect on the day's activities. Some staff we interviewed reported that these rituals and routines had a positive effect on school and OST program climate.

- **Time for stand-alone SEL lessons was often cut short.** Across communities, most of the 38 schools had planned to offer at least 30 minutes of explicit SEL instruction each week during the 2018–2019 school year. And in three of the six communities, system leaders planned for OST programs to offer explicit SEL lessons, with frequency ranging from daily to weekly. But teachers and OST instructors were not always able to offer the full lessons because of interruptions or unexpected demands on school or program schedules.

- **Most of the schools adapted the SEL curriculum used.** According to interviews, common reasons for adapting a curriculum were to shorten the lessons or to adapt portions of the curriculum to meet the needs of specific groups of students, such as English learners or students with disabilities. Staff in all six communities expressed a need for curriculum materials that would be appropriate to a diverse student body.

- **SEL content sequences for OST programs were in an early stage of development.** OST programs had substantially fewer published SEL materials to choose from than schools did. The OSTIs took several approaches to address this gap: (1) working with sites to pilot new OST materials from developers that

had existing, established school-based curricula; (2) writing their own content; and (3) using existing school-based curricula. In our spring 2019 observations, we found that the highest frequency of SEL instruction in OST programs occurred in a community that had piloted OST lessons created by the developer of the SEL curriculum that schools were using.

- **Guidance about how to integrate SEL into academics and regular classes lagged behind guidance about how to deliver stand-alone SEL lessons.** PSELI communities had not provided formal guidance to instructors about how to integrate SEL into academics and activities by the end of the second year of PSELI participation. Yet most site-level interviewees described their own efforts to do this, primarily through pedagogical practices that they viewed as consistent with high-quality instruction. Although the interviewees typically did not attribute these efforts to PSELI or describe them as SEL, our interviews, observations, and survey data suggest that such practices were common.

Selected Early Lessons

- Create clear guidance documents that define SEL rituals and routines and provide explicit direction regarding how, when, and with what frequency to implement SEL practices.
- Include protected time for SEL in the master schedule, making a realistic allocation that reflects necessary transition times and arrivals, as well as student energy levels during the day.
- Provide explicit guidance to staff on how to integrate SEL instruction into school-day academics and OST activities, including specific pedagogical strategies and lesson content (such as how to collaborate effectively) that instructors can easily implement across subject areas and types of activities. SEL standards in schools and OST programs' continuous quality improvement processes can help frame this guidance.

Implications for SEL Practice and Policy

The ambitious and complex work that the six PSELI communities carried out over the first two years of the initiative provided numerous lessons for the broader field, many of which are especially relevant to staff in specific roles. In Table S.1, we pull together the overarching implications, organized by role.

At the time this report was written, the schools and OST programs we examine were still in the first half of their SEL work. Much was left to learn, including whether PSELI implementation activities would improve student SEL skills, academic achievement, climate, or adults' outcomes (such as staff retention and job commitment). Those topics are the focus of a later report in this series that will examine outcomes and the relationship between implementation and outcomes. The series will also include a how-to guide. Additionally, we are conducting in-depth case studies that will offer a more detailed picture of what PSELI work looks like on the ground and how it evolves over time. These future reports will revisit and build on the early lessons outlined here.

TABLE S.1
Implications for Staff in Key Roles

Role	Implications
School district and OSTI leaders	• A specific vision for SEL, combined with frequent, clear communication with sites, can promote strong site-level implementation. • Clear and specific guidance from the system level to sites about desired practices can also facilitate strong implementation. • When planning a SEL effort, leaders should anticipate that lack of time, staff turnover, and unexpected events might slow implementation. • Staff can benefit from PD that is ongoing, customized, and provided by coaches with prior expertise in the relevant setting (school or OST program). • OSTIs can help OST programs adopt and innovate SEL practices.
School and OST program leaders and staff	• Site leaders need to be intentional about protecting time for SEL and conveying to staff the priority of delivering the intended SEL instruction. • When adapting an evidence-based SEL curriculum to meet local needs, retain features that contribute to the curriculum's effectiveness. • The integration of SEL instruction into academics and OST activities requires explicit guidance and resources, such as lesson plans and model activities. • SEL coaches can provide valuable support to school and OST staff who are implementing new SEL programs and practices. • Taking the time to meet, increasing the overlap of school and OST staff, and explicitly acknowledging the power differential that favors schools over OST programs are important ingredients for strong school-OST partnerships.
Policymakers, curriculum developers, technical assistance providers, funders, and state education agencies	• Because it can take several years to implement SEL efforts effectively, funders and policymakers should offer encouragement and incentives for educators to persevere and to craft realistic implementation plans. • High-quality, varied communication strategies can support site-level implementation, but system-level leaders might lack the capacity to develop these strategies on their own. • Because available SEL curriculum materials might not fully meet communities' needs for culturally relevant SEL or for teaching students with Individualized Education Plans, practitioners could benefit from collaborations with curriculum experts and developers to make these adaptations. • Funding and other resources to institutionalize new roles, such as SEL coaches, could promote sustainability of SEL efforts.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CQI	continuous quality improvement
ELA	English language arts
MOU	memorandum of understanding
OST	out-of-school time
OSTI	out-of-school time intermediary
PD	professional development
PLC	professional learning community
PSELI	Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative
RULER	recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating
SEL	social and emotional learning
SEL PQA	Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment
TA	technical assistance

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Since their inception, schools and out-of-school time (OST) programs have been places where young people develop skills, attitudes, and mindsets that they need to thrive in youth and adulthood. In recent years, schools and OST programs have increasingly adopted intentional strategies to build students' interpersonal competencies (such as collaboration and leadership) and intrapersonal competencies (such as self-regulation and resilience). The term *social and emotional learning* (SEL) has taken hold across the United States and around the world as a way to describe the process through which youth develop these competencies (Asah and Singh, 2019). SEL is a growing priority among educators and education policymakers, as evidenced by the increasing number of curricula, assessments, and guidance publications that address SEL (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019).

The widespread closures of schools and OST programs in spring 2020 as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic highlighted the urgency of addressing the social and emotional well-being of students who experienced anxiety, trauma, and loss of connections with peers and adults. Some educators found ways to support students socially and emotionally while delivering learning remotely (Opalka and Gill, 2020). Looking ahead, more than two-thirds of a nationally representative sample of public school teachers who were surveyed in May 2020 indicated that

Out-of-school time (OST) programs are supervised programs for children when school is not in session. They include before- and after-school, weekend, holiday, and summer enrichment programs. They can be thematically focused—for example, sports clubs or theater programs—or multipurpose programs offering a variety of activities, including supervised time for homework or free play. A wide variety of providers, including nonprofit and for-profit organizations and some school districts, run OST programs. The operators of these programs vary in size from small, community-based organizations to national chains. They are funded primarily by parent fees, but some also receive public funding (such as 21st Century Community Learning Center grants) or philanthropic investments (such as from the United Way). The OST programs examined in this report range from small to large and operate at or near an elementary school building.

supporting students' social and emotional well-being would be a higher priority in fall 2020 than it was the previous year (Hamilton et al., 2020).

Out-of-school time intermediary (OSTI) organizations play a networking and coordinating role, linking local OST programs across a city or community. OSTIs can take a variety of forms, ranging from a single nonprofit organization to a network of agencies that work together. Some OSTIs directly fund and oversee OST programs, but most function more as conveners of programs, such as by providing professional learning opportunities and access to data management systems. For example, an OSTI might be a local home office of a YMCA that oversees several branches or a stand-alone local organization, such as Providence After School Alliance, that contracts with providers and implements programs in schools across the city. Alternatively, some OSTIs—such as Sprockets in St. Paul, Minnesota, and four of the five OSTIs participating in the initial phase of PSELI—do not directly oversee programs.

Recognizing the importance of SEL and the potential contributions of both schools and OST programs to youth social and emotional development, The Wallace Foundation launched the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative (PSELI) in 2016. This initiative brings together school districts and out-of-school time intermediary (OSTI) organizations in six communities to develop and implement intensive, coherent SEL supports in schools and OST programs.

The RAND Corporation serves as the research partner on PSELI and is responsible for gathering implementation and outcome data from PSELI participants in each of the six communities. In this report, we present findings about the implementation of PSELI during the first two years of the initiative. In the rest of this chapter, we provide a more detailed discussion of what SEL is and summarize research on its importance and on how schools and OST programs can promote it. We also provide an overview of PSELI. In Chapters Two through Five, respectively, we review research and describe PSELI-related activities for the following four topics: executing system-level activities to launch and coordinate SEL work across multiple sites, developing district-OSTI and school-OST partnerships, developing adults' capacity to promote SEL, and improving climate and delivering SEL instruction to students.

What Is SEL and Why Does It Matter?

SEL is a widely used term that encompasses a broad range of interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)'s history of the field, the term was developed during a 1994 meeting of researchers looking to define a framework or phrase to organize the many related educational initiatives all focused on promoting positive youth development—including civic education, moral education, violence prevention programs, and character education (CASEL, undated-b).

Unsurprisingly, given the diversity and autonomy in how schools and OST programs operate and where they turn for guidance and support, no consensus definition of SEL exists among educators. Moreover, the frameworks that describe SEL competencies are nearly as varied as the organizations that support SEL; one 2017 study identified 134 different SEL frameworks (Berg et al., 2017).

Among this plethora of interpretations of SEL, many educators and researchers rely on the definition that CASEL developed:

> SEL is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, undated-c)

Although we use this definition in our research and throughout this report, partly because the PSELI communities adopted it to guide their work, our findings are relevant to SEL work in schools and OST programs regardless of what definition educators adopt.

The proliferation of SEL definitions and frameworks reflects the rapid uptake of SEL in schools and OST programs. One reason for its spread is that federal and state policies offer new funding and encouragement for youth-serving organizations to address SEL (Grant et al., 2017). Plus, schools now have access to an enormous variety of programs, assessments, and other supports for SEL activities (Jones, Brush, et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). There are fewer of these kinds of resources for OST programs, although these programs' long history of emphasizing youth development has led to a widespread emphasis on SEL despite having few published curricula available.

The popularity of SEL also stems from a growing body of research that demonstrates the importance of students' SEL skills for short- and long-term success and the ways that education settings from kindergarten to grade 12 contribute to this skill development. These education settings include not only schools but also OST programs, conducted when school is not in

SEL competencies are malleable. Research in education, psychology, and economics suggests that SEL competencies—such as one's ability to manage emotions, show empathy, persevere through challenges, and make responsible decisions—change over time and across contexts and can be influenced by students' exposure to instruction (Farrington et al., 2012; Heckman and Kautz, 2012; Jackson et al., 2020; Zins et al., 2007).

session. Programs that include explicit SEL activities can build students' SEL competencies and improve student behavior (Grant et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hurd and Deutsch, 2017; Mahoney, Durlak, and Weissberg, 2018). In addition, research suggests a positive link between students' SEL competencies and their academic achievement and long-term educational success (Jones and Bouffard, 2012; Weissberg and Cascarino, 2013). And programs that include SEL instruction can have a positive effect on students' SEL competencies and their academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). In the next section, we summarize research on how schools and OST programs are implementing SEL—and how they can do it effectively.

How Schools and OST Programs Promote SEL

Although SEL has become nearly ubiquitous in schools and OST programs across the United States in recent years, there is insufficient research on how to implement it effectively. Nationally representative surveys of school teachers and principals from 2018 indicate that nearly all schools have adopted programs and practices to promote SEL and that educators generally believe that these efforts will improve student achievement in addition to students' SEL skills (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019). Although there is less research documenting the prevalence of SEL approaches in OST programs, the history of these programs suggests that they have always been focused on SEL-related goals (Hurd and Deutsch, 2017). OST programs have their roots in the tradition of the youth development movement, which stresses the importance of creating safe and supportive environments to provide youth with a sense of belonging, positive relationships, shared norms, and opportunities for character development (Kauh, 2011; Lerner, 2005; Phelps et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2010; Vandell et al., 2004).

In this section, we briefly describe each of the "three essential elements" that the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019)

The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) identifies the following **"three essential elements" for supporting SEL:**

1. establishing safe, relationship-based, and equitable learning environments
2. teaching and practicing social, emotional, and cognitive skills
3. embedding social, emotional, and cognitive skills into academic learning.

In this report, we discuss these elements in the following terms: setting a positive climate, offering explicit SEL instruction, and integrating SEL into academic instruction and OST activities.

identified for SEL and the research that supports them. For more-complete research evidence, see Allensworth et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey, 2018; Grant et al., 2017; Jones, Brush, et al., 2017; and Yoder, 2014. To the Commission's list, we add and summarize a fourth approach: pursuing school-OST partnerships—a cornerstone of PSELI.

Although a school or an OST program might adopt just one or two of the Commission's three approaches, adopting all three can help ensure a coherent, consistent approach to supporting children's social and emotional development during their time in the school or program. Indeed, the premise of PSELI is that this three-pronged strategy, with the added fourth dimension of school-OST partnership, will reap more benefits for children than will schools or OST programs working in isolation on just one or two of these approaches.

Setting a Positive Climate

The first approach to promoting students', as well as adults', social and emotional development is creating a positive, supportive climate (Jones and Bouffard, 2012). Conditions that promote students' feelings of safety and their engagement in learning are fundamental to ensuring that students are able to benefit from instruction and other supports (Allensworth et al., 2018; Schweig, Hamilton, and Baker, 2019).

A positive climate is associated with the development of academic skills and SEL competencies (Thapa et al., 2013). In school settings, positive classroom climate—particularly, classrooms characterized by emotional warmth and support from teachers and positive peer-to-peer interactions—are associated with higher student engagement and learning (Hamre and Pianta, 2005; Pianta, Hamre, and Allen, 2012). Similarly, school-wide climate, including supportive, trusting relationships between students and adults, contributes to improved learning and engagement (Allensworth et al., 2018). Research conducted in OST settings yields similar conclusions: Youth in programs

Climate is "the collective phenomenon that both reflects and creates the conditions for the development of social, emotional, and academic competence in both adults and students" (Osher and Berg, 2018, p. 4).

SEL rituals and routines are quick, targeted practices that come in a variety of forms. Two common examples are to welcome students by name or with a specialized handshake as they arrive in a classroom or OST program every day and to perform a calming exercise to help transition from active time, such as recess or gym, to instruction for which students sit at desks.

with a positive climate and stable youth-staff relationships report more-positive experiences in their programs (Cross et al., 2010).

One way to build a positive climate is through the use of SEL-focused rituals and routines. These strategies aim to create inviting environments in which all students feel comfortable and focused and have a sense of belonging—conditions that are important to promoting youths' SEL competencies (Jones and Kahn, 2017). Some rituals can also build children's own SEL skills, such as emotion management and prosocial behavior.

Offering Explicit SEL Instruction

A SEL curriculum facilitates structured, sequenced, explicit SEL instruction designed to promote one or more SEL competencies—as distinct from curricula and practices that are geared primarily toward developing another outcome, such as mathematics achievement or painting.[1] School educators have access to a growing corpus of published curricula and lessons that directly address SEL (Grant et al., 2017). But, as we discuss later, there is a scarcity of SEL curricula for OST settings and instructors, which we refer to as SEL *content sequences*.

Explicit SEL instruction refers to "consistent opportunities for students to cultivate, practice, and reflect on social and emotional competencies" (CASEL, undated-a). **SEL curricula** facilitate explicit SEL instruction. For OST settings, we refer to curricula as **content sequences** to align with OST terminology.

Research indicates not only that several published SEL curricula achieve the primary objective of improving SEL competencies but also that some of them improve academic achievement, engagement, and other outcomes (Grant et al., 2017; Mahoney, Durlak, and Weissberg, 2018). For example, studies focusing on the Second Step curriculum indicated that its use is associated with improved teacher-reported SEL skills, as well as reduced absences (Low et al., 2015; Neace and Muñoz, 2012). A randomized study of another program, Positive Action, demonstrated effects on students' academic achievement and disciplinary outcomes (Snyder et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2013).

The six PSELI communities adopted SEL curricula that are among the most widely used in the United States,

[1] We discuss research about embedding SEL-promoting pedagogy in the next section.

such as Second Step, MindUP, and RULER (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019; Jones, Brush, et al., 2017). Although SEL programs exist for students from preschool to grade 12, there are more programs designed for the elementary school years than for middle and high school grades (CASEL, 2012; Grant et al., 2017). It is not surprising then that elementary school principals and teachers are more likely to report using formal school-wide SEL programs, while middle and high school educators are more likely to report using informal instructional strategies to support students' SEL skills (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019).

Compared with the plethora of SEL curricula available for schools, there is a dearth of SEL content sequences for OST programs. Several organizations are developing OST lesson plans, which are currently in the piloting phase. For example, the Committee for Children is developing Second Step OST lessons, and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence is creating RULER OST lessons that align with the organization's school-based programs but can also stand on their own. Of the 25 SEL programs reviewed in the compendium by Jones, Brush, and colleagues (2017), only three were specifically designed for OST programs—Before the Bullying A.F.T.E.R. School Program, Girls on the Run, and WINGs for Kids. Eleven programs either had successfully been adapted for OST settings or included some direction on how materials could be used in OST programs. The Silicon Valley Out-of-School-Time Collaborative found that the off-the-shelf SEL curricula it used for OST programs in 2014–2015 (specifically, Student Success Skills, SOAR Study Skills, and Brainology) needed major modifications, so the group chose to develop its own curriculum for the subsequent school year (Public Profit, 2016). To our knowledge, there are no national data sources with information reported by OST programs on their use of SEL content sequences. However, a 2014 national survey of more than 10,000 households indicated that about 50 percent of parents whose children were enrolled in after-school programs said that their children had the opportunity to develop SEL-related skills, such as teamwork, at their OST settings (Afterschool Alliance, 2014).

We define **SEL integration** in two ways:

1. **Using pedagogical practices that promote SEL skill development within academic lessons or other activities.** Examples include giving children opportunities to direct their own learning and providing children with guidance about how to collaborate productively, such as when completing a math assignment or jointly writing a short play.
2. **Embedding instruction about SEL-related topics, such as resolving conflict or naming emotions, within instruction that occurs outside of time set aside for explicit SEL lessons.** An example of such integration is when, during a basketball lesson in which children are learning new dribbling skills, the OST instructor pauses the lesson to discuss the importance of perseverance and provides students with strategies to persist through frustration.

Integrating SEL into Academic Instruction and OST Activities

The third approach to promoting SEL is to (1) adopt pedagogy that promotes social and emotional development as part of other activities, such as academic courses or OST enrichment activities, or (2) embed explicit SEL instruction into non-SEL courses. The integration of SEL strategies into regular OST activities and into academic content is important because students' academic skills and SEL skills are interdependent and develop together—particularly during the elementary school years (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). For example, research suggests that students' ability to acquire new language skills is tied to their ability to regulate their emotions and manage behavior during instructional time (Jones and Kahn, 2017). In this way, integrating SEL instruction into day-to-day activities aligns with how students naturally learn. Additionally, integrating SEL into academic instruction can improve student-teacher relationships, leading to better school climates and positive school experiences, particularly for students with behavioral issues (Hamre and Pianta, 2005).

Finding ways to marry academic and SEL instruction may lessen the instructional burden on staff in school and OST settings (Bailey et al., 2019). Educators often struggle to fit explicit SEL lessons into the school day or OST programming. As we discuss later in this report, this was a struggle for PSELI communities. When SEL instruction is embedded into existing academic curricula and OST activities, the practices may be more likely to be implemented and sustained as educators come to understand that these practices can support rather than detract from other goals of the school or OST program.

Pursuing School-OST Partnerships

Schools and OST programs can and do implement some or all three elements—a positive climate, explicit SEL instruction, and SEL integration with academics—on their own, but children who attend

both school and OST programs might benefit from a more consistent approach. The hypothesis that PSELI in particular is testing (and that we will examine in a future report) is whether children can benefit from schools and OST programs pursuing these three approaches in partnership with one another.

We are not aware of any source that documents the prevalence of school-OST partnerships to implement SEL in a coordinated way. But there are several theoretical reasons for school and OST settings to implement SEL-promoting approaches in tandem. First, students are more likely to build new competencies when they experience similar instructional approaches across settings and have multiple opportunities to practice the same skills (Little and Pittman, 2018; Weare and Nind, 2011). For SEL instruction in particular, using common language to refer to SEL concepts both inside and outside school settings may help promote students' development (Jones and Bouffard, 2012). Similarly, educators from both settings can provide consistent messaging to students about positive behavior expectations and cultural norms that contribute to a coherent, mutually reinforcing positive climate (Fagan, Hawkins, and Shapiro, 2015). In addition, student SEL occurs in the context of supportive relationships with both peers and adults. School-OST partnerships may provide a more diverse set of relationships and social interactions for students to build SEL competencies than would otherwise be available in only one setting (Fagan, Hawkins, and Shapiro, 2015; Garbacz, Swanger-Gagné, and Sheridan, 2015; Jones et al., 2016). Research suggests that partnerships between schools and community organizations, including OST programs, that have a common goal and shared resources can support positive youth development (Epstein and Sanders, 2000; Fagan, Hawkins, and Shapiro, 2015). However, there is limited research on school-OST partnerships that are specifically focused on SEL. To our knowledge, PSELI is the first national, multi-site initiative with an accompanying research study that will test the efficacy of such an approach.

What We Know About Implementing SEL

The research described in the previous section provides clear evidence that schools and OST programs can support youth social and emotional development in ways that lead to improvements on a variety of outcome measures. We know from research on education programs and practices, however, that high-quality

implementation is crucial for ensuring the effectiveness of these efforts. Research on implementation of SEL is still relatively nascent, but it suggests conditions that support success.

First, it is important for schools and OST programs to have a **clearly defined vision and set of goals** for the implementation of SEL practices and programs (Jones, Bailey, et al., 2017). A clear vision can help ensure that all stakeholders are working toward the same outcomes and can prevent the work from becoming disjointed or unfocused (Allensworth et al., 2018; National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019).

Second, school and OST leaders should establish **monitoring and data-collection practices** that allow educators to track progress toward reaching those goals (Toch and Miller, 2019). Useful data come in a variety of forms, including staff, student, and family surveys on their experiences with SEL; direct and indirect assessments of students' SEL competencies; and observational data on OST program and school climate (Allensworth et al., 2018; Hamilton and Schwartz, 2019; Taylor et al., 2018). These and other data sources can be used to inform decisionmaking regarding how to refine SEL practices and programs and improve their implementation (Toch and Miller, 2019).

Third, building **staff capacity** is crucial for ensuring that adults have the knowledge, skills, and beliefs that they will need to promote SEL (Allensworth et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey, 2018; Marsh et al., 2018). Staff with different responsibilities will likely need support with different skill sets. For example, OST, OSTI, school, and district leaders need support to build the skills to manage the overall direction for a SEL effort; leaders hold the primary responsibility for putting in place the organizational conditions for an initiative to succeed (Allensworth et al., 2018; Toch and Miller, 2019). All staff, particularly those who work directly with students in classroom or OST settings, may require professional development (PD) to build their own adult SEL skills and develop knowledge of student SEL and SEL-focused practices and pedagogy (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). Research suggests that educators who understand how students learn and how classroom practices affect students' experiences may be better able to promote students' SEL competencies and create positive learning environments (Allensworth et al., 2018; National

Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019; Marsh et al., 2018).

Fourth, well-trained staff may be better prepared to **differentiate SEL instruction**. Students have varying SEL needs, and a one-size-fits-all approach likely will not support all students (Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey, 2018). As a result, SEL instruction should be student-focused and tailored to address students' individual strengths and needs (Allensworth et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2016).

And fifth, although educators play a critical role in the implementation of SEL programs, research and theory consistently suggest that effective OST program and school-based SEL efforts will include **active partnerships with families and the community at large** (Allensworth et al., 2018; National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019; Learning Heroes, 2018). As with many skills, most students begin acquiring SEL competencies at home (Jones and Kahn, 2017). Creating open lines of communication between families and educators might help create strong home-school-OST connections and reinforce SEL-promoting practices across multiple settings (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). In addition, soliciting feedback and input from families is one way to ensure that SEL practices and programs are culturally relevant and reflect the values of the local community (Learning Heroes, 2018). SEL practices that reflect local context and culture—including references to students' racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and local history—may be more engaging for students and more effective in promoting a positive climate (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski, 2018; McCallops et al., 2019).

Despite these common themes in the literature, many questions remain regarding the specifics of how schools and OST programs should implement SEL programs. The final report of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) highlighted the need for research to monitor implementation and to link lessons from research to what actually happens on the ground in schools and OST programs. For example, researchers and practitioners in the field recognize that clear goals and a vision for implementation are key. Yet school and OST leaders might not know how to enact this vision. For instance, they might lack guidance on what kind of program or practices to start with or how to coordinate their work across the community. Similarly,

staff PD is critical to successful implementation; however, there is no clear guidance on how much training staff need or what forms of PD are most effective (e.g., large group sessions, one-on-one coaching, or peer-to-peer learning communities).

As noted in the previous section, PSELI is unique in its goal to test whether intentional partnerships between OST programs and schools can promote student SEL skills. Although research suggests that students learn in multiple settings and that connection across those settings might promote positive youth development (Fagan, Hawkins, and Shapiro, 2015), it is unclear exactly how students' experiences across different settings interact (Nagaoka et al., 2015). The jury is still out on exactly how schools and OST programs can coordinate SEL activities across settings or what degree of consistency—for example, instructors in both settings using the same SEL terms, using the same norms for managing student behavior, or teaching the same SEL concepts each week or each month—is necessary or practical to achieve positive outcomes for students.

Policymakers and educators who implement or support SEL in schools or OST programs also benefit from an awareness of potential risks and even harms that could arise from SEL implementation. Inadequate implementation supports and a lack of guidance for translating broad concepts into concrete practices can lead to uneven or low levels of implementation (Gonzalez et al., 2020). And although research strongly suggests that SEL can support academic learning (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019), critics have expressed concerns that SEL might detract from academic learning instead (Finn and Hess, 2019; Whitehurst, 2019). SEL measurement poses particular risks: Although it facilitates continuous improvement, it could also lead to inappropriate labeling of students, inaccurate inferences about student competencies resulting from a lack of culturally appropriate measures, and a sense of data overload that leaves educators feeling confused rather than supported (Hamilton and Schwartz, 2019; Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski, 2018; Taylor et al., 2018). Finally, unclear or inadequate communication and engagement with families could result in opposition to SEL (Finn, 2020). The intensive, nationwide focus on SEL is new enough that researchers do not yet know whether it will lead to lasting change or whether it will suffer the fate of other well-intentioned but relatively short-lived reforms (McShane, 2019).

With these gaps in implementation research and potential negative consequences in mind, we have focused this first PSELI report on the lived experiences of the PSELI communities as they implemented new SEL practices and programs. The report features data from the communities collected until approximately halfway through Phase 1 of the initiative. As a result, we offer findings and insights that reflect the communities' in-process thinking about and experiences with the initiative. In the next section, we describe PSELI and summarize the six PSELI communities' approaches to supporting SEL in schools and OST programs.

About PSELI

The Wallace Foundation's approach to PSELI draws on the developmental framework that the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research presented in its 2015 report (Nagaoka et al., 2015). The report's authors describe positive, caring adult relationships with children as a bedrock for children's healthy development. They also call for "integrating afterschool providers' lens of youth development with educators' knowledge of learning theory" and the "transformation of adult beliefs and practices within the existing institutions and structures that shape children's learning and development" (Nagaoka et al., 2015, p. 6).

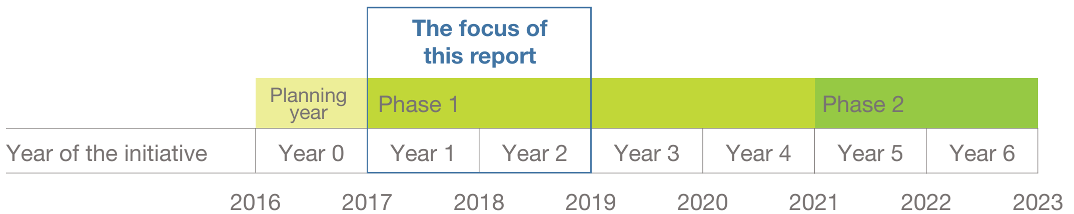
The distinguishing feature of PSELI is its support for both elementary school and OST programs to work together to put in place mutually reinforcing SEL across the in-school and out-of-school portions of the day. In summer 2017, The Wallace Foundation awarded implementation grants to each of the following six communities: Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Palm Beach County, Florida; Tacoma, Washington; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. These grants were awarded jointly to school districts and OSTIs in each community. OSTIs can take a variety of forms, including a single nonprofit organization or a network of agencies that work together. They carry out such functions as allocating funding, setting standards, monitoring programming quality, and communicating with the public. Some of them directly fund OST programming, but many do not and instead serve a coordinating and organizing function for a community's OST programs. Throughout the report, we refer to the school district and OSTI as constituting the *system* level, and we refer to the five to seven elementary schools per community and their OST program partners as constituting the *site* level.

To select the schools and OST programs that would participate in PSELI, we worked directly with each school district and OSTI in spring 2017. Staff from each district-OSTI partnership nominated at least ten elementary schools for participation in PSELI, first soliciting agreement to participate from school principals and the managers of OST programs (hereafter, *OST managers*). All nominated sites were Title I elementary schools that (1) had an existing school-OST partnership in which the OST program operates in the school building (there are a few exceptions in which the OST partners host programming in separate buildings close to the school) and (2) had room to grow in SEL, in the sense that they had not implemented extensive SEL programming prior to PSELI.[2] We then worked with the school district to identify five to seven elementary schools from this list that, collectively, were demographically and academically similar to another five to seven elementary schools. The process resulted in a set of 38 school-OST partnerships that started their SEL work in the 2017–2018 through 2020–2021 school years.

PSELI Timeline

As shown in Figure 1.1, PSELI is divided into three stages. In the planning year, labeled Year 0, The Wallace Foundation awarded grants and selected the six communities that would participate in the initiative, as discussed earlier.

FIGURE 1.1
The PSELI Timeline



[2] To assess whether a school-OST partnership had room to grow in SEL, we developed a four-tier coding scheme to identify schools' SEL programming as early, lower middle, upper middle, or veteran. Using information that the districts provided about schools, we deemed schools progressively more advanced in SEL depending on the number of explicit written SEL curricula the school had adopted, the number of school years that had implemented those curricula to date, and whether classroom teachers (as opposed to guidance counselors) implemented the curricula. For example, we coded a school as being in the veteran category if it met all four of the following criteria: (1) The school implemented two or more formal, packaged SEL curricula or programs, such as Second Step or Zones of Regulation; (2) the SEL curricula or programs served more than half of the students in each of at least two grade levels; (3) the school implemented these curricula for at least two school years; and (4) at least one of the curricula was led by classroom teachers as opposed to school counselors or other staff. By contrast, a school that we code as being in the early category may have had informal practices, such as a welcome circle, but no explicit SEL curricula or program.

Phase 1 is a four-year period for the implementation of SEL in elementary schools and the partnering OST programs. At a majority of the Phase 1 sites, there is one OST program, such as a city Parks and Recreation program. In several of the six communities, though, there is more than one OST program at the site. During Phase 1, each of the six PSELI communities launched and developed a whole-campus approach to SEL in five to seven elementary schools and in their OST program partners. The goal at each Phase 1 site is to gradually make SEL a part of both the instruction that students receive and their interactions with adults throughout the school and OST parts of the day.[3]

Phase 2 of PSELI was designed to start in the 2021–2022 school year. The original plan was that, in Phase 2, a second set of 38 elementary schools and OST program partners would begin their SEL work, building on lessons learned from the Phase 1 sites.[4] Phase 2 sites were to conduct business as usual with no new SEL work until the 2021–2022 school year. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Wallace Foundation allowed the Phase 2 sites to start SEL work in 2020–2021 (which is the fourth and final year of Phase 1) if they wished to do so. Wallace also released half of the Phase 2 implementation grant funding earlier than planned (i.e., in the 2020–2021 year) to allow for Phase 2 SEL implementation if desired.

PSELI Elements and Supports Shared Across the Six Communities

The Wallace Foundation's intention is for each of the six PSELI communities to establish an integrated approach with dedicated system-level leaders at the school district and the OSTI who provide consistent guidance directly to school and OST program site staff as they implement reinforcing SEL practices throughout the day. As the following discussion explains, PSELI operates on two levels (system and site) and across two settings (school and

[3] Throughout PSELI's four-year Phase 1 period, our team is conducting staff surveys, observations, and staff interviews at both Phase 1 and Phase 2 sites. We use these data to provide annual formative feedback to the Phase 1 sites (but not Phase 2 sites), and we will use them to compare student and staff outcomes in Phase 1 versus Phase 2 sites in a later report. Because we are only halfway through the first phase of PSELI, this report covers the first two years, when only the 38 Phase 1 sites were actively implementing SEL. Therefore, all discussion in this report of school and OST program implementation refers only to Phase 1 sites' activities, not those of Phase 2 sites. For ease of reading, we omit *Phase 1* from these discussions in the remaining chapters.

[4] During the planning year, we worked with each district and OSTI to select Phase 1 and Phase 2 sites that were demographically and academically similar for the purpose of later comparing student and staff outcomes across the two categories of sites. A later report in this series will compare student and staff outcomes across Phase 1 and Phase 2 sites throughout the 2017–2018 to 2020–2021 period.

OST). Figure 1.2 shows how PSELI connects both of the levels and settings.

Across the six communities, there are 38 sites working during Phase 1 of PSELI to implement SEL programs and processes site-wide via the following four-pronged approach:

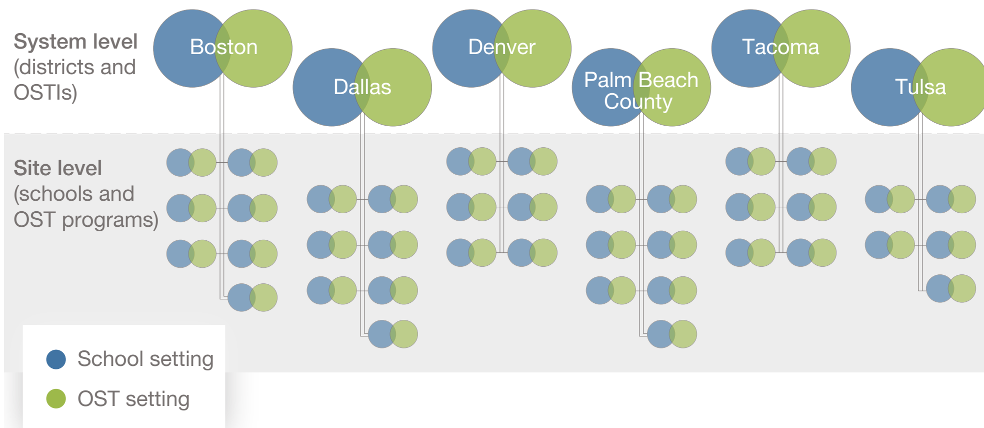
1. Set a positive climate.
2. Offer explicit SEL instruction to students during the school day (via written lesson plans from an evidence-based curriculum); SEL instruction during OST programs is optional.
3. Integrate SEL into academic instruction and OST activities.
4. Pursue school-OST partnerships that mutually reinforce SEL practices across the school and OST program day.

The Wallace Foundation specified that, to participate in PSELI, each community must include school-OST partnerships that adopt these four elements. It encouraged, but did not require, communities to provide further supports, such as hiring SEL coaches, convening professional learning communities (PLCs) for the five to seven sites, implementing a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process at each site, and forming a SEL committee at each site that would use a data-informed continuous improvement approach to its work.

Reflecting their organizational and cultural differences, some of the PSELI communities elected to use PSELI funding for intensive

FIGURE 1.2

The Connection Between the System and Site Levels in PSELI



SEL coaching; some have offered more-extensive staff workshops and PD; and some have organized dates for site staff to visit each other's sites. Likewise, some PSELI communities have taken a more top-down approach by selecting a single evidence-based SEL curriculum for the five to seven schools and using a single SEL content sequence for the participating OST programs. Others have taken a more bottom-up approach whereby each participating school chose its own evidence-based SEL curriculum, and the school's OST partners elected whether to implement SEL lessons.

To enact these four strands of work, the PSELI communities have typically offered the supports listed in Table 1.1. The majority, but not all, of the communities offer all of these supports.

As outlined in the table, at the system level, most communities were offering six main types of supports by the second year of PSELI implementation. Each community used its PSELI funds to hire PSELI managers—typically at least one from the school district and one from the OSTI. These are the day-to-day managers of the initiative who plan it out, create policies and procedures, manage the work of other PSELI team members (e.g., SEL coaches), and communicate with the five to seven site leaders. We provide more details on the system-level staffing and teams in Chapters Two and Three. Each of the system-level district and

TABLE 1.1
Typical Staff Roles and Other Supports for SEL Implementation at the System and Site Levels

Staff Role or Other Support	2017–2018	2018–2019
System level		
PSELI managers (usually one from the school district and one from the OSTI) who set direction and guidance for sites	✓	✓
PD about SEL for staff	✓	✓
PLCs for principals and for OST managers that meet 1–4 times per year	✓	✓
Newsletter about PSELI (distributed 1–4 times per year)		✓
SEL coaches (usually one or more for all participating schools and one or more for all OST programs)		✓
Annual, written plan for the system's participation in PSELI	✓	✓
Site level		
Annual, written plan for the site's participation in PSELI	✓	✓
SEL steering committee that meets at least monthly		✓
SEL champion (usually a teacher with a stipend or release time to deliver PD at the site level or spread PSELI practices)	✓	✓

OSTI teams also arranged for PD on a variety of topics for school and OST staff working in the Phase 1 sites (see Chapter Four for details about PD).

Furthermore, to communicate across the sites, system-level leaders typically held quarterly or biannual meetings to plan and to share scheduling information, as well as to give site leaders an opportunity to learn from each other. Some of these assembled leaders have formed PLCs, which are groups of school or OST educators that convene to organize collaborative practice-based professional learning. Most communities found it challenging to provide streamlined, effective communication from the system level to sites in the first year, but by the second year, most had begun some kind of e-newsletter to share deadlines, communications, and celebrations. We explore lessons about system-to-site and cross-site communications in Chapter Two. Critically, by the second year (and for a minority of communities, in the first year), PSELI communities had hired one or more SEL coaches (see Chapter Four for more details). Coaches have been a vital link between systems and sites.

At the site level, an annual plan guided sites' participation in and implementation of PSELI components. In addition, there was typically a SEL steering committee composed of primarily school staff and at least one OST representative that would generally meet monthly to review SEL implementation and enact continuous improvement. The makeup of these committees varied by PSELI community. Often, the committee included a *SEL champion*, who is typically a school-based staff person (often a teacher or counselor) with a stipend or paid release time from teaching to attend system-level train-the-trainer sessions, the content of which the SEL champion is then expected to relay in his or her building. Although the responsibilities vary and not every site has one, the SEL champion also typically encourages the use of SEL curricula, rituals, or other activities among instructors in the building.

To strengthen the PSELI communities' capacity, Wallace provided the series of supports listed in Table 1.2. The first two rows of the table show the direct financial grants to communities, and the remaining rows show Wallace-sponsored nonfinancial supports. The first row refers to the annual grants allocated to each district-OSTI partnership for both its system-level work and the five to seven sites' work as part of Phase 1. To help expand the number of slots and to improve the quality of OST services, The

TABLE 1.2
Wallace Foundation Supports for the PSELI Grantees in the First Two Years of Implementation

Form of Support	2017–2018	2018–2019
Annual PSELI implementation grants to districts and OSTIs	✓	✓
Additional grant to expand OST enrollment and enhance the quality of OST services in Phase 1 sites		✓
Weekly newsletter emailed to PSELI system-level managers	✓	✓
Annual day-long meetings with system leaders and Wallace program staff to discuss the community plan for implementation	✓	✓
Technical assistance (TA) from CASEL, the Forum for Youth Investment, Crosby Marketing Communications, and Education First	✓	✓
Learning communities		
For PSELI system leaders from the six communities (twice per year)	✓	✓
For staff from the 38 sites (once per year)		✓
Role-alike retreats for school principals, SEL coaches, and OST site leaders[a]		✓
RAND formative feedback reports for each PSELI community	✓	✓
Website that contains each community's PSELI-related data (surveys, observations, SEL student assessment data, RAND reports)	✓	✓

[a] *Role-alike* meetings or retreats bring together educators that hold similar positions or roles and encourage PD and networking.

Wallace Foundation also issued additional grants to each community starting in 2019. Because of the high volume of emails and activity in the first year, Wallace instituted once-per-week communications (as shown in the third row) to identify deadlines, announce upcoming PSELI activities, celebrate PSELI communities' accomplishments, and share notable facts or events related to SEL.

The fifth row of Table 1.2 refers to the TA that The Wallace Foundation enlisted from CASEL, the Forum for Youth Investment, and Crosby Marketing Communications for the six communities. The first two are national nonprofit organizations; CASEL historically focuses on TA to help school districts implement SEL, and the Forum for Youth Investment focuses on positive youth development in OST programs. These two organizations work as thought partners to Wallace and provide support to the PSELI communities. As of spring 2019, TA providers maintained contact with system PSELI teams through weekly to monthly phone calls and in-person visits ranging from multiple times per month to periodically throughout the year. The TA providers engaged in a variety of support activities, including providing group PD, assisting system leaders and coaches

with planning for cross-site PLCs, and conducting walkthroughs of sites.[5] A third partner, Crosby Marketing Communications, also serves as a thought partner to Wallace and aids communities as needed on messaging, communications strategy and planning, and development of communications materials. A fourth partner, Education First, helped design and facilitate the learning community and run some of the role-alike retreats.

The next rows of the table refer to the two- to three-day learning communities that Wallace hosts twice per year. Between five and 16 system-level staff from each community—such as PSELI system leaders, SEL coaches, a principal supervisor, and SEL PD coordinators—attend the twice-per-year meetings. One of these two learning communities also involves a much larger set of site-level staff, including school principals and OST managers from the 38 sites participating in Phase 1. These meetings might incorporate role-alike pre-sessions with professional learning about SEL for SEL coaches, OST managers, or principals. They also include breakout sessions for communities to showcase their PSELI innovations and time for community staff to work on their plans to implement PSELI components.

As the last two rows show, we have been providing annual, nonpublic formative feedback to the communities and collaborating with the TA providers to support communities' use of RAND feedback for continuous improvement. The formative feedback consists of several documents each year. The first is an approximately 25-page report for system-level leaders that summarizes strengths and weaknesses of PSELI implementation in that community, paired with recommendations. We then also provide reports for each site that summarize highlights from the observations, interviews, and staff surveys about SEL implementation at that campus. Finally, as shown in the last row, RAND hosts a website for each community where staff can view and download the PSELI-related data about their sites.

The PSELI structures and supports shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2 encapsulate the shared aspects of PSELI. But there are important differences across the communities and 38 sites that shape how PSELI is implemented. We summarize these differences in Chapter Three.

[5] Most communities also elected to use a portion of their PSELI grant to procure the assistance of Crosby Marketing Communications and Education First to help develop annual plans and monitor SEL implementation.

Typical Chronology of PSELI Implementation

With Wallace's input, each community developed a plan to implement the various PSELI components year by year, generally following the sequence shown in Figure 1.3. However, there were notable exceptions, which reflected important differences in the communities' starting places and local needs. After the 2016–2017 planning year, most communities instituted three major activities:

1. SEL-related PD for adults working in the 38 sites, which helped adults define SEL, build their own SEL skills, and develop SEL activities to use in class (starting in 2017–2018)
2. SEL rituals and routines with students or in staff meetings (starting in 2017–2018)
3. an evidence-based SEL curriculum for use in the 38 schools (starting in 2018–2019); some, not all, OST programs selected a SEL content sequence.

Offering PD to build staff's own SEL skills and using rituals and routines were the most common ways the 38 sites sought to improve climate—one of the core elements of PSELI.

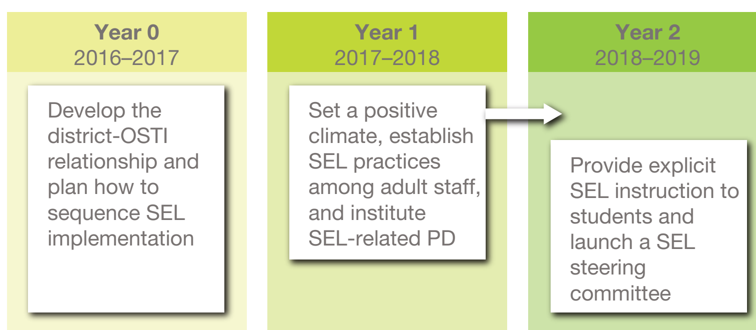
In Year 2 (2018–2019), the 38 schools and a minority of OST programs started to use an *evidence-based SEL program*—that is, an approach or framework for providing explicit SEL instruction, which typically includes a

Each of the communities identified SEL rituals for school and OST program staff to enact. Five of the six communities selected CASEL's three signature practices:

- welcoming inclusion activities, such as greeting each student by name or holding morning meetings
- engaging strategies, such as taking a brief break to stand and stretch or asking students to partner with each other
- optimistic closure, such as using a reflective prompt asking students to identify what they learned that day (CASEL, 2019).

The sixth community identified its own three methods: warm welcomes, community circles, and emotion check-ins during which students can describe their emotions.

FIGURE 1.3
The Sequence of Implementation That the PSELI Communities Typically Followed



curriculum and other tools, such as aligned PD. This was also the year that a majority of sites started to convene some type of SEL steering committee composed of primarily school staff but also typically at least one OST representative. The SEL steering committee and ongoing one-on-one meetings between the principal and the OST manager were the main ways the schools and OST programs started to coordinate their SEL activities. In Year 3 (2019–2020), which falls outside the scope of this report, the schools and OST programs were expected to deepen their implementation of the SEL curriculum or content sequence and start to integrate SEL into academic instruction and OST enrichment activities.

In summary, the goals of PSELI are for students to experience reinforcing rather than contradictory messages about SEL both in and out of school; practice social and emotional skills across the two settings; and experience consistent, supportive relationships between adults and students. To help achieve these goals, school districts and OSTIs have partnered to develop complementary, and sometimes joint, PD about SEL for school and OST staff; help schools and their named OST partners develop closer working relationships; and implement reinforcing SEL practices and instruction across both settings.

Learning from PSELI Communities' Work

A combination of three factors—the collection of data from both schools and OST programs, the four-year span of data collection, and the inclusion of multiple sources of data on student academic and SEL outcomes—makes this the most comprehensive SEL implementation study performed to date. In conducting this study, we followed basic implementation research principles, including involving multiple stakeholders in the research (from site-level actors to system leaders) to understand the initiative's strengths and areas for improvement (McKay, 2017). In addition, we designed the study so that our findings could help each community build internal capacity and allow the communities to adjust their plans for PSELI implementation. This approach follows a long history of implementation science and is guided by leading frameworks in the field (e.g., Fixsen et al., 2005).

To gather the early lessons derived from the first two years of PSELI implementation, we collected observation, survey, and interview data in three waves: fall 2017, spring 2018, and spring

2019. Cumulatively, we had collected the following four types of data by spring 2019:

- observations of more than 3,000 instructional and noninstructional activities at the 38 Phase 1 sites to gather evidence on school and OST program climate and SEL instruction
- approximately 850 interviews of school principals, OST managers, teachers, and OST instructors, as well as school district and OSTI staff in the six communities, to understand each community's and site's approach to PSELI and to identify barriers and enablers of implementation
- approximately 5,000 survey responses of staff working in the 38 sites to gauge staff perception and knowledge of SEL, PD received, self-reported SEL practices, and site climate
- hundreds of documents from communities and sites (e.g., implementation plans, PD schedules) to understand the SEL approach at each.

In the technical appendix to this report, available online at www.rand.org/t/RRA379-1, we explain the data we collected and how. By systematically analyzing these data, we bring an empirical lens to help the broader field learn from the six PSELI communities' early experiences.

Limitations

Despite the unusually large scope of implementation data that underlie the findings in this report, we note several limitations. The most important one is that we do not yet know whether the PSELI-related implementation activities will improve climate; students' outcomes, such as SEL skills and academic achievement; or adults' outcomes, such as staff retention and job commitment. These topics will be the focus of a later report that will examine outcomes and the relationship between implementation and outcomes.

A second limitation is that, as of this mid-point of PSELI, the report necessarily focuses on the early stages of a SEL initiative, such as its launch and initial design and the formation of school-OST partnerships. There are several important themes that we intend to cover in the final implementation report, such as family engagement, differentiation of SEL to incorporate students'

cultural references or adapt to students' backgrounds and learning needs, continuous improvement, and involvement of noninstructional staff in SEL. We also plan to revisit and refine the lessons we offer here based on the outcomes and on the accrued experience over four, rather than two, implementation years.

Furthermore, although we have extensive data from multiple sources, they still provide incomplete evidence on how systems and sites implemented PSELI. Data from surveys and interviews rely on self-reports that we cannot independently verify and that might be subject to biases. The observations complement the survey and interview data by providing an external perspective on implementation, but their limited number cannot represent the activity that occurred over each full school year. We provide a more complete discussion of limitations in the technical appendix.

Finally, these communities had access to grant funds that other systems and sites that are enacting SEL might lack. Therefore, their experiences do not necessarily generalize to all districts, OSTIs, schools, and OST programs that are implementing SEL. Recognizing that many communities likely would not launch a SEL initiative as large as PSELI, we identify findings and lessons that could apply to a variety of situations, from single schools or OST programs up to multi-site, multi-year SEL initiatives.

CHAPTER TWO

Executing System-Level Activities to Launch and Coordinate SEL Work Across Multiple Sites

School districts and OSTIs have the potential to enact change at individual schools and OST programs through policy development and CQI efforts that include an articulated series of professional learning opportunities for site-level staff, coaching for staff, and monitoring of implementation activities. Some school districts directly influence site-level activities by mandating the use of specific curricula or instructional techniques in schools. Similarly, the OSTIs that directly fund or oversee OST program implementation often have authority to prescribe specific activities or curricula. However, many OSTIs—including many in PSELI—do not directly fund or oversee OST programs, so OSTIs' influence over OST programs can be more limited than districts'. Thus, OSTIs often play more of a convening role to foster

communication among OST programs and incentivize the spread of best practices.

Regardless of the degree of influence and oversight that districts and OSTIs exert, these systems play an indispensable role in supporting site-level implementation of multi-part initiatives. In this chapter, we briefly summarize research about system-level conditions that can influence site-level activity, and we devote the rest of the chapter to related lessons learned from PSELI activities to date. The lessons are loosely chronologically ordered from the pre-launch planning to the rollout of systems' multi-campus work.

Research About System-Level Conditions That Influence Site-Level Activity

It is challenging and time-intensive to successfully roll out and implement multi-campus SEL efforts that involve substantial system-level support for site-level activity. Some of the challenges stem from competing priorities and resource constraints. For SEL efforts in particular, school districts face pressures related to academic instruction and test-based accountability that can take priority over SEL. Additional system-level challenges, such as leadership turnover and financial constraints, can influence both system-level and site-level implementation (Kendziora and Osher, 2016).

The ways that systems adopt and communicate about a multi-campus project are likely to influence the degree to which new practices can take root at the site level. For instance, the prescriptiveness of the initiative is important: Specifying too little detail may not be clear enough for the sites to implement, but specifying too much may make it difficult for the sites to adapt the initiative to their individual contexts (Cohen and Ball, 2007). Just as critical are the resources and supports that systems provide to sites as they adopt SEL practices (Meyers et al., 2015). Research on comprehensive school reform initiatives suggests that school-level implementation is more successful when districts provide high-quality PD, particularly coaching to teachers and site-level staff, and when someone (e.g., a site-level coordinator) monitors implementation (Rowan et al., 2009). Similarly, research on effective OSTIs demonstrates the need to collect high-quality data on OST program attendance and enrollment to drive continuous improvement at the site level (Bodilly et al., 2010; Russell and Little, 2011).

Ideally, communication and trust should reach through to all levels of the nested educational system—which, in the case of districts, refers to the central office, school, and classroom (Elmore, 2009). Similarly, OSTIs that serve as conveners of OST programs and provide guidance on program implementation need to promote understanding, trust, and communication between system and site leaders. This is all the more needed when OSTIs do not directly fund OST program delivery and thus need to lead by influence or by incentives, such as OST quality assessment and improvement systems for OST providers. Without this system-level effort put into building communication and trust with site-level staff, site staff understanding of the intended change in practice can become distorted (Spillane, 2009.) For example, a school teacher or OST instructor implementing a SEL activity, such as delivering a particular lesson plan, might not implement the activity as intended because of how information is passed down from the system level.

A large body of education research highlights the challenges of system-initiated changes reaching all the way into the classroom or activity space where educators and youth interact, and these reforms take time. Although SEL holds benefits for frontline instructors and other adults who work with children (Collie, Shapka, and Perry, 2012), and although educators typically perceive benefits of SEL for their students (Bridgeland, Bruce, and Hariharan, 2013; Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019), research suggests that adults need substantial training before implementing the intended changes in their practice (Cohen and Ball, 2007; Elmore, 2016).

It is often easiest for educators to adopt elements of a reform that are most aligned with their existing practices, because those elements require the smallest degree of modifications (Spillane, 2009). For instance, instructors might layer surface-level activities and tools, such as simply asking how everyone is feeling, onto their current routines rather than making more-substantial pedagogical changes, such as systematically embedding SEL lessons and deeper instruction about problem-solving strategies into academic instruction (Coburn, 2004). Professional learning is equally important in OST programs, where step-by-step training for frontline staff is a key characteristic of programs that successfully focus on students' social and emotional skills (Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan, 2010). The widespread and long-standing use of CQI

systems in OST programs can serve as the starting point for introducing new practices and ways of measuring those practices that feed into the CQI process.

Finding time for implementing new initiatives is a common challenge because it typically involves adding further tasks and duties without removing existing ones (Malen and Rice, 2004; Rutledge, Brown, and Petrova, 2017). By rolling out all components of a program simultaneously, there is a risk of straining implementers' capacity, which limits their ability to enact dimensions of the initiative as intended (Malen et al., 2015). One approach to managing the burden of time and attention required is by implementing only portions of the planned activities at a time. Some research suggests that, when it comes to implementing change in educational systems, less is more, and that taking on too many changes too soon might hinder implementation (Bodilly, 2001; Connell and Klem, 2000).

How the PSELI Communities Started PSELI Work

Each PSELI community's initial plans for its work included four to six broad activities in the first year of implementation (i.e., the 2017–2018 school year). Although communities' approaches varied, partly as a function of local context and preexisting activities, we observed several commonalities, as summarized briefly in Chapter One. For example, all six communities intended to hire new system-level staff during the first year, offer SEL-related PD, and select (or, in some cases, start implementing) SEL curricula. Other common first-year planned activities included forming site-level SEL teams or steering communities, designing a process for continuous improvement, and developing PLCs for cross-site collaboration. Similarly, each community planned five or six activities in the second year of PSELI implementation. Table 2.1 provides community-specific details on planned activities for Years 1 and 2.

These first- and second-year plans were ambitious, and once communities began implementing their planned activities, they found that adopting multiple new activities simultaneously was often not feasible because of late starts and hires, limited staff time, and the time required to develop a district-OSTI partnership. In the first year, only one community fully accomplished all of its planned activities; each of the other five communities had one or two activities that were addressed only partially. Year 2

was even more challenging; each community had three or four activities that were either partially completed or not addressed at all. Communities were more likely to complete activities that involved mostly system-level staff (e.g., developing PD, creating more-coherent communications from systems to sites) than activities that relied on site-level staff (e.g., convening a campus-based SEL steering committee, integrating SEL into academics). Details about the degree of completion of each activity, based on our data collection, appear in Table 2.1.

Findings and Early Lessons

After analyzing the data we collected and relevant literature on launching system-level activities to form and then support SEL efforts across several campuses, we identified four findings, outlined in this section. For each finding, we offer evidence for our assessment and conclude with early lessons learned from the first two years of PSELI implementation.

A clearer vision for SEL, paired with desired "look-fors," could have supported a stronger launch

It is crucial that, prior to launching SEL in a community, those who are implementing the SEL programs and practices identify specific SEL goals that will help achieve the shared vision and then set an overarching strategy for achieving those goals. Although school district and OSTI applicants had the opportunity to start developing a shared vision in their joint proposal in the planning year, all six PSELI communities struggled in the first year of implementation to establish what successful implementation of SEL would look like and even, in many cases, how SEL should be defined. As one system-level leader remarked, "We do speak different languages in school and out of school. And so, we've had to learn a new language. . . . It took a long time to use that different language." We heard differing definitions of SEL both within and across OST and school settings. Some site-level staff whom we interviewed in spring 2018 defined SEL using specific skills and competencies (e.g., social awareness, the ability to identify and regulate emotions, the ability to display empathy), while other staff described SEL as a method (e.g., a way to welcome students, a way to be sensitive to student needs). In addition, some staff defined the term as the SEL curriculum or practices to be adopted in their community.

TABLE 2.1

School Districts' and OSTIs' Main Activities in the First Two Years of Implementation

Community	Main Activities Planned for Year 1, 2017–2018	Main Activities Planned for Year 2, 2018–2019
Community A	✓ Hire or appoint key system-level staff. ✓ Deliver PD to all PSELI stakeholders. ✓ Select explicit SEL curricula. ✓ Implement continuous improvement processes in OST programs. ✓ Establish a leadership team at each Phase 1 site. ✓ Host a PSELI pep rally at Phase 1 sites.	✓ Continue Phase 1 site leadership teams and OST PLCs. ✓ Implement explicit SEL curricula and practices at Phase 1 sites. ½ Deliver PD to all PSELI stakeholders. ½ Continue improvement processes at OST programs and initiate them at schools. ½ Establish youth teams at Phase 1 sites.
Community B	✓ Hire key system-level staff. ✓ Implement SEL PD for Phase 1 staff. ✓ Select explicit SEL curricula. ½ Create a shared definition of and buy-in to SEL. ½ Establish a leadership team at each Phase 1 site. × Establish SEL data-use practices.	✓ Strengthen district-OSTI collaboration. ✓ Create the structure for and monitor Phase 1 site leadership teams. ½ Deliver mutually reinforcing SEL PD across schools and OST programs. ½ Implement and monitor explicit SEL curricula across sites. × Build structure in continuous improvement efforts. × Cultivate family engagement.
Community C	✓ Hire or appoint key system and site-level staff. ✓ Deliver mutually reinforcing PD to school and OST staff. ✓ Select explicit SEL curricula. ✓ Establish an appropriate data-sharing agreement to support continuous improvement. ½ Create site-level steering committees.	✓ Deliver mutually reinforcing PD to school and OST staff that is based on the SEL curriculum. ✓ Add structure to collaborative efforts within and across Phase 1 sites. ✓ Establish an appropriate data-sharing agreement to support continuous improvement. × Integrate SEL into academics. ½ Fine-tune internal and external messaging about PSELI. × Cultivate family engagement.
Community D	✓ Hire key system and site-level staff. ✓ Establish PSELI work teams. ✓ Conduct OST program landscape analysis. ✓ Select explicit SEL curricula for piloting in Year 2. ✓ Select signature practices for schools and OST programs.	✓ Develop a system to select and implement OST programs in Phase 1 and 2 sites. ✓ Pilot SEL curricula at Phase 1 sites. ½ Launch a data system that integrates OST program data. ½ Implement SEL signature practices. ½ Provide PD (including coaching) to Phase 1 staff.
Community F	✓ Hire or appoint key system-level staff. ✓ Implement SEL PD for Phase 1 staff. ✓ Select explicit SEL curricula. ✓ Implement adult SEL PD. ½ Implement morning and afternoon meetings at Phase 1 sites.	✓ Align SEL work across partners and multiple stakeholders. ✓ Increase stakeholder understanding of SEL. ✓ Implement adult SEL PD. ✓ Implement OST coaching protocols. ½ Collaboratively implement SEL curriculum and practices. ½ Integrate SEL into both the school day and the OST day. ½ Implement continuous improvement practices.
Community G	✓ Hire or appoint key system-level staff. ✓ Establish an OSTI. ✓ Implement SEL PD for Phase 1 staff. ✓ Launch PLCs. ½ Implement a SEL program in Phase 1 sites. ½ Implement continuous improvement processes in Phase 1 sites.	✓ Hire additional system-level staff. ✓ Continue Phase 1 PLCs. ✓ Increase internal communications about PSELI. ½ Increase external communications about PSELI. ½ Deliver SEL practices and explicit curricula at Phase 1 sites. ½ Provide PD opportunities for Phase 1 staff. ½ Continue improvement practices at OST programs, and introduce some at schools.

SOURCES: Community plan documents provided to the authors; staff interviews conducted by the authors.
NOTES: Throughout the report, when listing results about a community's implementation of PSELI, we mask the community names to protect their anonymity.
All listed activities were planned.
✓ indicates that the activity was successfully completed during that school year.
½ indicates that the activity was partially completed.
× indicates that the activity was not completed.

The PD sessions, which occurred approximately three times in the first year (2017–2018), were the primary means by which PSELI communities hoped to reach commonly stated goals, such as "gain common understanding of, and buy-in to, SEL practices among key stakeholders," which proved insufficiently defined and too broad. Site-level principals and OST managers whom we interviewed in spring 2018 told us that the PD was often too abstract or else focused excessively on logistics. One principal said in spring 2018, "We need to know what we're doing, . . . [and] we don't know."

By the end of the first year, interviewed site leaders in many communities expressed confusion about what was expected of them, their role, and the overarching goal of the initiative. By the second year of PSELI, several communities had developed clearer, more-concrete guidance about expectations and had prioritized activities for principals and OST managers. These site leaders indicated that the clearer expectations and guidance—for example, from kickoff meetings, one-pagers on the initiative, and handbooks describing initiative activities—greatly improved the clarity of PSELI. The development and sharing of this guidance might be one reason why, by the end of the second year of PSELI implementation, 84 percent of school staff and 87 percent of OST staff agreed on the survey that their sites had "a clear vision for SEL."

Early Lessons

- Prior to launching a SEL effort, define the particular SEL skills on which to focus (e.g., emotion recognition and growth mindset), and then define success in terms of desired, observable behaviors by staff, students, or both (e.g., daily use of a SEL rituals during a morning meeting about emotions, students making statements that reflect a growth mindset). Work backward to then determine system-level supports needed for the end users.

- Develop a common language for SEL that can aid in a shared understanding between and among system- and site-level staff.

Clear system-to-site communication required dedicated staff time

Clear communications from the system to the site level about PSELI was a challenge for all six communities in the first year, with some notable improvements once communities staffed their teams. Although PSELI communities' Year 1 plans often included creating an internal communications plan, in practice, this work was not accomplished until a SEL manager was hired and given responsibility to articulate the expectations of sites in a clear and practical way.

In the first year, PD and email were the main means of communication between the system and site levels. Staff at both levels expressed during interviews that email was not always effective. As one principal noted, "When I see them [emails], it's not a relief; it's more like a frustration, because it's so piecemeal." By spring 2018, site-level interviewees described unclear expectations, unclear communication, and inconsistencies in information from the school district and OSTI. Each community team struggled to boil down who needed to know about what.

By the second year, communities established staffing structures, particularly full-time PSELI managers (see Chapter One), that supported more-adequate system-to-site communication. It was generally the system-level SEL manager who had dedicated time to map out how, when, and about what the system communicates to site-level staff. The forms of system-to-site communication expanded to include not only emails and PD but also, in most communities, in-person communication at sites (e.g., from a SEL coach or SEL champion), short written materials for sites, and cross-site PLCs.

In many cases, the SEL coach role emerged as the central means for system-to-site communication. Although the job title and responsibilities of this position varied by community, the role was typically a district or OSTI employee who was in communication with sites as often as weekly in some communities. We discuss SEL coaches in more detail in Chapter Four.

With more-adequate system-level staffing in place, communities developed a variety of written materials that helped distill information for sites. Many developed "cheat sheets" for the 2018–2019 school year, which site-level interviewees told us clarified

expectations. These summary documents clarified and prioritized—and, in some cases, limited the number of—activities that sites were supposed to implement. One school leader called the use of the documents a "turning point." Several communities also created guidance documents to be used as quick instructional references on signature practices or SEL curricula.

Two keys to these documents being perceived as effective by site-level leaders were their brevity and their inclusion of actionable steps. In consideration of the autonomy of sites, system-level communications tended to provide a frame of minimum system expectations while also allowing for site flexibility—for example, allowing sites to choose how to meet or exceed the required number of minutes each week for SEL instruction using a specific SEL program.

Monthly or biweekly newsletters were another communications strategy in Year 2 that proved popular with site leaders. These newsletters contained initiative updates, featured site SEL work, and often had a "what you need to know" section communicating essential deadlines and expectations. Several communities also created a PSELI website where sites could access SEL resources and important communications, although site leaders rarely mentioned these websites as a resource.

By working across schools and OST programs, communities learned of the need for common language and consistency in the separate messages written to different sets of staff and the need to communicate the same information via multiple channels, including face-to-face (e.g., when SEL coaches made site visits). Site-level staff were not always able to make time to read written material, just as attendance at in-person meetings was not always feasible for site leaders. The limitations of each communication mode made the task more demanding for districts and OSTIs than originally envisioned. As one system leader articulated, "there's lots of communication that's important for different audiences and at different times."

Short overview documents convey priority information in a way that is easy for site staff to consume. In fall 2018, the PSELI team in Dallas provided each of its seven sites with a two-page summary of the following requirements for the initiative:

1. Implement a campus SEL steering committee.
2. Implement explicit skills instruction with Sanford Harmony, a SEL program.
3. Select and implement at least three signature practices.
4. Integrate SEL into instructional content.

The sites had latitude to determine the timing and composition of each requirement. Dallas site-level staff used this guidance to ensure fidelity to the initiative while tailoring implementation to each site's needs. The Dallas overview document also linked to a campus road map, which was a template for each site's SEL steering committee to document goals and progress toward each of the four requirements.

Finally, as the PSELI communities developed more-robust cross-site PLCs for site staff in Year 2 to communicate PSELI activity deadlines, site-level leaders across communities consistently requested in our interviews that the PLCs provide more cross-site sharing and more time for site leaders to learn what their peers were doing. School principals, SEL champions, and OST managers rated role-alike PLCs as a more effective way to share and plan compared with the more-general PLCs. To share information across sites, two community teams also established "walk-throughs," in which staff from different sites could directly observe each other's practices.

Early Lessons

- Clarify what schools and OST programs are expected to do by developing a concise summary of no more than a few pages, and use it as the anchor for communication with sites about the initiative. In the summary, define what success looks like, and focus on the few highest-priority actions and outcomes expected of staff and ultimately of students.
- Create a role for a manager of the SEL effort who will be responsible for specifying what sites are expected to implement, how, and when.
- Create a wide variety of communication methods, such as printed copies, emails, telephone calls, in-person coaching, PD sessions, and role-alike PLCs. In addition, system staff can attend site-level SEL meetings. This variety could help mitigate low and uneven consumption of written communications.

Time constraints meant that this multi-part SEL project took more time to roll out than planned

Lack of time to execute plans was consistently the top constraint that system-level and site-level staff named when we asked about barriers to implementation. All six communities told us in numerous ways that there is "not enough time in the day." In practice, such activities as designing and launching PD, training trainers, or working with principals and OST managers to select and map out SEL instruction took longer than planned. Plus, PSELI managers and site leaders had other non-PSELI responsibilities

that limited their time. In the first and second year of PSELI, communities often tried to tackle too many things and typically implemented only some of what they had originally planned (see Table 2.1). In that sense, the six communities' implementation experiences comport with literature summarized in the introduction to this chapter regarding the rollout of centralized reforms at the site level.

Looking across the six communities, we found that the system-led rather than the site-led activities typically occurred first, even when that was not the original intention. For example, PD that the system-level staff created and delivered was the most common first component to be implemented as part of PSELI (see Figure 1.3). By contrast, the site-based activities planned for the first year—for example, creating a SEL champion role and steering committee, instructing students in SEL, monitoring sites' PSELI work, and assigning a SEL coach to work with frontline staff—typically took longer than a year, as communities worked to identify staff, clarify roles and expectations, and set up structures.

Early Lessons

- Divide the work of a multi-part SEL effort year by year, thinking of a two-plus-year trajectory, rather than trying to launch each component in the first year. Communicate the general sequence so that sites know what to expect.
- Focus the work on one or two top-priority components per year rather than potentially scattering focus across three or more components and risking incomplete or low-quality implementation.

Churn and unanticipated external events have been the norm, not the exception, requiring the communities to adapt their PSELI work to make it more resilient

In the space of just two school years, each of the six communities experienced one or more major external events that influenced its PSELI work. Three of the six communities had teacher walkouts protesting budget cuts and had to put school districts' PSELI work on hold. Student enrollment was declining in three communities, which shrank school district budgets and caused school mergers. The 2018 school shooting in Parkland increased the focus on, and state funding for, student mental health programs in Florida,

which created new SEL opportunities in Palm Beach County. In Texas, a new law requiring character education programs (i.e., programs that stress positive character traits) influenced the planned sequence of Dallas's SEL work. Meanwhile, the district superintendent changed in three communities, which caused changes to district priorities, structure, or both.

These shocks to the system occurred on top of ongoing, and often elevated, rates of staff turnover at both the system and the site levels. For example, as few as 62 percent to as many as 81 percent of staff working in schools in a given community in 2017–2018 were working in the same school in 2018–2019. (We lack the same longitudinal data to track turnover among OST staff in PSELI.) Turnover affects the foundations of the SEL project, including leader priorities, institutional knowledge of staff, and the trust built between the managers of the SEL effort. Interviewees from the community with the greatest year-on-year continuity in PSELI system-level staff noted in spring 2019 that this was a real strength of the initiative; that is, the consistent leadership aided the development of shared knowledge and understanding.

In response to turnover and to unexpected events, PSELI communities have taken several steps over two years to make the work more resilient to changes. First, several districts have moved SEL efforts into their academic departments (from, for example, departments focused on health and well-being) to garner more-stable, sustained resources and attention, because academics are historically the core mission of school districts. Second, several PSELI communities are trying to embed the initiative within budget lines or priority areas that either pre-dated or will likely post-date PSELI (e.g., trauma-informed or culturally responsive education) or are building on values and shared terminology that pre-dated PSELI. For example, in one community, PSELI is embedded within a preexisting initiative focusing on the whole child. Third, some PSELI communities are developing written or video content to create rapid onboarding materials, including repeatable micro-PD that belongs to a series rather than being a one-off event. See Chapter Four for details about the development of onboarding materials and short-form PD.

Early Lessons

- Consider housing SEL efforts in the school district's academic department to help ensure sustained district support.
- In anticipation of staff turnover, create onboarding materials about the SEL effort.
- Clearly link the SEL project to ongoing priority areas, such as trauma-informed practices, as a way to sustain its funding.

CHAPTER THREE

Developing District-OSTI and School-OST Partnerships

Partnerships between schools and OST programs provide a promising approach to supporting youth development, particularly by creating opportunities for schools and OST programs to collaborate on a vision, develop reinforcing approaches to youth development, and leverage their resources (Little and Pittman, 2018). These partnerships matter because they are widespread and because children's development and learning, including SEL, occur across all the settings they inhabit on a daily basis (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). In short, partnerships between schools and OST programs to implement reinforcing SEL practices for children have the potential to accelerate children's social and emotional development (Albright and Weissberg, 2009; Jones and Bouffard, 2012; Nation et al., 2003; Weare and Nind, 2011).

In this chapter, we discuss available research on school-OST partnerships and their relatives at the system level (district-OSTI partnerships). We then describe our findings and early lessons learned on this topic.

Research About District-OSTI and School-OST Partnerships

Although there are no exact data on the number of schools that partner with OST programs, a nationally representative survey of parents indicates that a majority of schools house afterschool programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Co-location does not necessarily involve a school-OST partnership, however. As we outline in this chapter, the barriers to partnership are prodigious.

School-OST partnerships are theoretically important because children's development and learning occur across all settings, not just during school hours. These partnerships can matter for students' SEL in particular. Research suggests that SEL outcomes are positively associated with the following conditions:

- **Stable and safe environments**. By providing a safe environment during the school day and after school, schools and OST programs can create the necessary conditions for SEL (Nagaoka et al., 2015).
- **Strong and supportive relationships with multiple adults**, which provide a key avenue for learning and the development of competencies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Li and Julian, 2012; Nagaoka et al., 2015; Search Institute, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). SEL occurs in interaction with other people, and supportive relationships with school and OST staff can allow children to learn from a more diverse set of social interactions than they otherwise would during only school or only OST (Fagan, Hawkins, and Shapiro, 2015; Garbacz, Swanger-Gagné, and Sheridan, 2015; Jones et al., 2016).
- **Consistent messages—particularly about expectations for positive behavior—across settings** (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson, 2001; Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson, 2007; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, and Leaf, 2012; Horner and Sugai, 2015; Johansson and Sandberg, 2012; Jones and Bouffard, 2012; Jones, Brown, and Aber, 2008; Jones, Brush, et al., 2017; Nagaoka et al., 2015).
- **More practice in SEL**, because practice is essential for skill mastery. School-OST partnerships can provide children with additional opportunities to practice SEL throughout the day

and be acknowledged for doing so, which can reinforce their learning (Bond and Carmola-Hauf, 2004; Hawkins, Smith, and Catalano, 2004; Nation et al., 2003; Weare and Nind, 2011).

Although school-OST partnerships have a lot of potential to help students' social and emotional development, there are numerous barriers to partnering. Structural differences in these two types of organizations explain many of the challenges. For instance, schools operate within a more structured set of requirements than OST programs do, because schools have state-mandated minimum days or hours per year, extensive reporting and accountability requirements, and limited funding fungibility (Coburn, Toure, and Yamashita, 2009; Moroney, 2016). OST programs tend to operate for between one and four hours per day and between one and five days per week, compared with the seven to nine hours daily of a five-day school week (Murchison et al., 2019). OST programs also tend to serve a small fraction of the students that schools do. In addition, OST staff are typically part-time employees with second jobs or other time commitments, such as college enrollment. These staff members are often paid on an hourly basis for the time spent directly with students but might not receive additional compensation for planning or evaluation activities (Murchison et al., 2019). Few OST programs provide their staff with organizational email addresses, which can make communication challenging, and few OST programs have management information systems in place to systematically track attendance on a daily basis like what is mandated for schools (Murchison et al., 2019). Even fewer OST programs have the capability to share these data electronically with other organizations, such as school districts. Finally, funding for OST programs is not as stable from year to year as it is for schools, which receive local, state, and federal funds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Thus, to cover costs, OST programs rely on a variety of funding sources, including public and private funds, in-kind contributions, and parent fees (Grossman, Walker, and Raley, 2001).

Rates of staff turnover at OST programs are high: A 2018 study found a 62-percent turnover rate during the 2016–2017 school year among the frontline staff of a national afterschool program provider serving 30,000 students across ten states and Canada (Wilkens, 2018). Another study of OST staff in Massachusetts found that 25–34 percent of staff leave their programs annually

(Dennehy and Noam, 2005). In schools, typical teacher turnover rates are lower—16 percent across the United States in the 2011–2012 school year (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Logistical factors also create barriers to coordination. Although OST programs may be located within school buildings, school-based staff often leave for the day as OST staff arrive, limiting communication. Furthermore, OST programs' use of a school's physical space is frequently restricted to common areas, such as gyms, cafeterias, or hallways, which do not lend themselves to quiet and calm venues for small-group instruction (Grossman, Walker, and Raley, 2001). Therefore, school-OST partnerships that involve each entity leading complementary SEL instruction may necessitate a greater amount of space-sharing so that OST instructors have quiet spaces in which to lead SEL activities with students.

Like schools and OST programs, school districts and OSTIs differ in their typical organizational structures and the constraints their leaders face when trying to enact major changes to programs or practices. The most obvious difference is that all traditional public schools belong to a district (notwithstanding charter schools in some states that operate as their own district), whereas most OST programs operate in a locality that does not have an OSTI. Districts directly fund their public schools, yet OSTIs often do not directly fund OST programs. OSTIs also have a more diffuse coordinating function than districts do; that is, OSTIs tend to work with a variety of organization types, including small direct-service providers, national social service agencies (e.g., United Way and YMCA), and regional and state youth-serving networks that themselves comprise many smaller community agencies.

Districts are typically much larger organizations than OSTIs are and have larger budgets and more regulatory mandates. Given the smaller size and flatter hierarchical structures that are typical of OSTIs, these organizations can sometimes move more quickly than can school districts. In particular, large districts typically have numerous departments or divisions, which can create uncertainty for OSTIs about who in the district to partner with and how work should be coordinated (Coburn and Stein, 2010). School districts also can have high staff turnover, which can disrupt the continuity of district-OSTI relationships. For instance, 15 percent of superintendents do not return to their placements from one school year to the next (Burkhauser, 2015).

Given all these differences, schools and OST programs can function in parallel worlds with few points of connection. So, although schools and OST programs—and school districts and OSTIs—bring complementary expertise and other strengths to a partnership, their staff need to develop shared norms, language, and practices, and they must build trust with one another and respect for the roles and contributions that each organization and person brings to the partnership. Given these structural differences, staff of both organizations also need to understand the respective functions of each system, as well as the systems' similarities and differences, so the staff can identify the roles that each side can play in achieving shared goals.

How the District-OSTI and School-OST Partnerships Are Structured in PSELI

In Chapter One, we explained the shared structure across the six PSELI communities, and in this section, we highlight local differences to illustrate why and how the partnerships differ from community to community. At the system level, there are important organizational differences among the district-OSTI partnerships in each community that influence how they implement PSELI components. Perhaps the most significant difference is among the OSTIs. Some communities have a mature OSTI with decades of experience that offers centrally run PD, quality assessment, and improvement systems for the community's OST programs. Other OSTI organizations were brand new when the initiative began. In fact, two of the six communities lacked an OSTI at the time of the planning phase in 2016–2017. Since then, as shown in Table 3.1, Tulsa created an OSTI, and Tacoma was in the planning phases for creating an OSTI at the time this report was written. In the meantime, a Tacoma-based community foundation was providing the coordinating function for OST programs participating in PSELI in that community. Across all OSTIs, the number of OSTI employees ranged from eight to 68, and only one OSTI was directly running OST programming. Likewise, some school districts had intermediary capacities, such as CQI support for extended learning programs or directly run OST programs, and others did not.

Although some district-OSTI relationships were positive and trusting in the first two years of PSELI, others were less so, and this became evident under the stress of the PSELI partnership requirements, which were more intensive than these systems had

previously experienced. As shown in Table 3.1, in four of the six communities, the district and OSTI had worked together on other education initiatives prior to PSELI.

Because the six school districts in PSELI are large urban districts, they have more commonalities with one another than the OSTIs had with each other. Nevertheless, the demographics in the six communities' student populations differed (see Table 3.2). And, although all six of the PSELI communities had SEL or SEL-adjacent initiatives that pre-dated PSELI, these took a variety of forms, such as the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports framework, anti-bullying programs, restorative justice programs in which victims and the accused work together for a solution, programs that include students' cultural references in learning, trauma-informed practices (e.g., giving students access to mental health services), and other initiatives to promote equity. Furthermore, as shown in Table 3.1, the PSELI work was housed under a different department in each community, which resulted in various supervisory structures and had ramifications for PSELI (as discussed in Chapter Two).

In Table 3.2, we provide a demographic profile of the school-OST partnerships at the outset of PSELI. In many cases, partnerships existed prior to PSELI, and additional partnerships formed in the first two years of Phase 1. Just like at the system level, some of these site-level partnerships have been marked by tension and others by high levels of trust and cooperation.

As shown in the table, the 38 schools are distributed across the six communities; the smallest number of schools participating in Phase 1 of PSELI in any one community was five and the largest was seven. In each community, about three-fourths or more of the schools' student body qualified as low income, and about three-fourths or more were non-white. The largest student demographic difference across the communities was the percentage of students who were English learners, which ranged from as few as 9 percent to as many as 57 percent of the student body. Collectively, the 38 schools enrolled about 17,000 students in October 2017.

The more than 100 OST programs participating in PSELI differed more than the 38 elementary schools did, except that all but two of them operated in the school. Most of the 38 sites had one OST program partner participating in PSELI, and the partner might be

TABLE 3.1

System-Level Partnerships in PSELI Communities

	Boston	Dallas	Denver	Palm Beach County	Tacoma	Tulsa
School district	Boston Public Schools	Dallas Independent School District	Denver Public Schools	School District of Palm Beach County	Tacoma Public Schools	Tulsa Public Schools
OSTI	Boston After School and Beyond	Big Thought	Denver Afterschool Alliance	Prime Time Palm Beach County	Greater Tacoma Community Foundation[a]	Opportunity Project
Other local organizations involved in the partnership	PEAR Institute: Partnerships in Education and Resilience	Dallas Park and Recreation; Dallas Afterschool	StandUp	—	School's Out Washington; Graduate Tacoma; University of Washington at Tacoma	—
Year the OSTI was founded	2005	1987	2012	2000	—	2017
Number of staff employed by the OSTI	11	68	12	35	—	8
Did the OSTI directly operate one or more OST programs?	No	Yes	No	No	—	No
Did the district-OSTI partnership have experience working together prior to PSELI?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Was there district-run OST programming involved in PSELI?	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
School district department in which PSELI activities resided	Health and Wellness, Social Emotional Learning and Instruction Department	Social and Emotional Department, Teaching and Learning Division	Culturally Responsive Education Program, Academics Department	Teaching and Learning Department, Academic Office	Whole Child	Student and Family Supports

NOTES: Details in this table were current as of spring 2019, except for the school district departments, which we updated as of summer 2020. The department in which PSELI activities resided changed for several districts through the first two years of PSELI implementation; the department listed in this table was current as of the writing of this report.

[a] The Greater Tacoma Community Foundation is not an OSTI but was providing a coordinating function for OST programs in PSELI.

TABLE 3.2

Demographic Profile of the Schools and OST Programs in Phase 1 of PSELI

Site Details	Boston	Dallas	Denver	Palm Beach County	Tacoma	Tulsa
Schools						
Number participating in PSELI	7	7	6	7	6	5
Percentage of students who qualified for a free or reduced-price meal	78	79	89[a]	96	74	78
Percentage of non-white students	87	99	93	90	78	70
Percentage of students who were English learners	38	57	56	39	30	9
OST programs						
Number participating in PSELI[b]	18	7	6	7	70[c]	6
Percentage of students in school who were enrolled in one or more of the PSELI-participating OST programs[c]	19	17	38	14	26	30

NOTES: The details in this table are from the 38 Phase 1 schools and the PSELI-participating OST programs. Counts of OST programs were current as of spring 2019. The numbers were calculated based on students enrolled in kindergarten through fifth grade on October 1, 2017.

[a] Denver did not provide us with student-level data on the percentage of students who qualify for a free or reduced-price meal. This number is based on publicly available data from the 2017–2018 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

[b] Most communities adopted the following definition of PSELI-participating OST program: a program in which the OST staff are trained in SEL and asked to deliver SEL activities daily or weekly.

[c] This is an approximate count of OST programs that operated for one or more of the three eight-week sessions in school year 2018–2019. Because some OST programs changed their name from one session to the next, we do not have a precise count of the unique OST programs that operated in that year.

a city Parks and Recreation program, an OSTI-run or district-run program, or a chapter of a national organization (e.g., YMCA or Boys & Girls Clubs of America). But many of the 38 schools had two or more OST program partners participating in PSELI; in Tacoma, a single school had, at most, approximately 25 OST program partners (these were small clubs that were led by volunteer staff and operated for eight-week sessions). In addition, the OST programs ranged substantially in size: Some served fewer than ten enrollees, while others served as many as an entire school's enrollees. The programs operated for as few as two days to as many as five days per week. In three of the six communities, the participating OST programs ran for the whole school year; in another two communities, the programs ran for two-thirds to three-fourths of the school year; and in the sixth community, a variety of OST programs operated for up to three eight-week sessions during the 2018–2019 year. Programmatically, the OST programs ran the

gamut. For instance, some had few structured activities; others had weekly schedules with particular days focused on specific activities, such as science experiments, basketball, or board games; and other programs followed a specific curriculum with scheduled classes on a variety of topics, such as career exploration, leadership and responsibility, and academic enrichment.

Findings and Early Lessons

After analyzing the data we collected and relevant literature on developing district-OSTI and school-OST partnerships, we identified six findings, outlined in this section. For each finding, we offer evidence for our assessment and conclude with early lessons learned from the first two years of PSELI implementation.

Being committed to SEL and taking the time to meet were important starting points for district-OSTI partnerships

Prior to and during PSELI, both school districts and OSTIs have taken concrete actions demonstrating an institutional commitment to SEL; in many cases, these actions have helped form strong system-level partnerships in this initiative. For example, several districts adopted SEL standards and integrated SEL into the district's department for academics. As we noted in Chapter Two, housing SEL with academics can help highlight the importance of SEL to a district's core mission. In addition, at least three districts and one OSTI board of directors began using SEL practices by, for example, starting a meeting with a warm welcome or ending it with a reflective activity.

OSTIs have also demonstrated their commitment to SEL in a variety of ways, such as tasking the director of PD with creating SEL PD trainings for OST staff and school SEL champions; engaging employees at all levels of the organization, from communications managers to board members, in PSELI implementation; embedding SEL in the organization's long-term strategic plans; enacting OSTI-wide quality improvement efforts, such as using the Forum for Youth Investment's Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA) tool (Forum for Youth Investment, 2019); and developing or planning to develop SEL standards for OST programs.

When asked to reflect on what is essential in implementing a collaborative district-OSTI SEL effort, interviewees in all six

communities emphasized the need to make time for meetings and communication to build relationships and trust across the organizations at the outset, despite the challenges of finding that time. As one district leader indicated, "you need to take the time to build the trust before you can move on to trying to change systems."

In PSELI, the avenues for collaboration between school districts and OSTIs have typically taken the form of biweekly or monthly district-OSTI meetings for a larger implementation team and near-daily communication between the district's and the OSTI's SEL managers. Several communities have developed parallel job tracks beyond just the district and OSTI SEL manager roles; for example, in some communities, SEL coaches and data analysts work together. These role-alike district and OSTI peers have been meeting to ensure that the messages they present to sites are consistent. Over time, several communities have learned the importance of using brief documentation, such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU), to formalize their shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and the top priorities of the partnership.

Early Lessons

- Despite the challenges of limited time, consider the benefits of face-to-face meetings, especially in the first year of a SEL partnership, to develop trust and understanding of each other's organizations.
- Spend time at the outset of the partnership clarifying roles and responsibilities. Develop a short document, such as an MOU, that spells out which organization is supposed to do what, which is especially helpful for new staff. The short document should also distill the top priorities of the district-OSTI partnership.

School-OST partnerships benefited from new structures to support collaboration and some new staff roles that bridged both settings

Table 3.3 lays out the newly defined structures and staff roles that PSELI sites have used to collaborate. In addition to formal collaboration mechanisms, such as a SEL committee, the PSELI

communities are also increasingly exploring site-level staffing structures to bridge school and OST staff. Although several of these roles (e.g., school principal, OST manager) obviously pre-date PSELI, they have been redefined to include heavier emphasis on school-OST information-sharing and, increasingly, coordination of SEL instruction and pedagogy.

TABLE 3.3

PSELI Structures and Staff Roles That Can Increase School-OST Communication and SEL Coordination

Structure or Staff Role	Function
Structure	
SEL steering committee	Most sites formed a steering committee that met monthly and included at least one OST representative to discuss SEL implementation across both school and OST settings.
Reciprocal class observation and staff meeting attendance	At one site, OST instructors observed teachers' classes to see SEL instruction, and teachers likewise attended OST instructors' afternoon class to observe. An OST staff member also attended school grade-level monthly meetings. When describing the benefit of this type of staff integration, the OST manager said, "Teachers see us more often; teachers have an awareness of what we're doing."
Staff role	
School principal	Communication between the principal and the OST manager is the most common way that schools and OST programs worked together before and during PSELI. Many principals and OST managers met one on one as often as weekly or as rarely as monthly to share information about students and about logistics, such as space-sharing and staffing. Increasingly, these meetings included discussions about SEL.
Full-time OST manager	Three communities had a full-time OST manager in at least some of their OST program sites. Staff we have interviewed highly endorsed this role, although it is costly. Being on campus during part of the school day allows for coordination with school staff.
Part-time OST manager	Three communities had OST managers who split time across multiple OST programs.
Full-time OST SEL specialist	One community hired a full-time OST SEL specialist for each PSELI campus. This person was separate from and in addition to the part-time OST manager. The SEL specialist would meet each Monday with the OST instructors to preview that week's SEL lessons and provide coaching. The SEL specialist also attended the school-OST SEL steering committee.
SEL champion	Two communities identified school-based staff to serve in a SEL champion role. The SEL champions received a stipend or a reduced teaching load to collaborate with OST managers.
OST staff hired to work during the school day	Some schools in three communities hired OST staff to work as paraprofessionals, classroom aides, lunch monitors, or recess monitors during the school day.
School teachers hired to lead OST programs	Some school teachers were hired to lead small OST programs that meet for one or two days per week.

Principals and OST managers can work together over time to increase ties between the school and OST program(s). At Newlon Elementary School in Denver, the OST manager and the principal have a close working relationship. By the second year of PSELI implementation, they met monthly to discuss integrating SEL into both the school and OST day. They also looked for ways to increase instances of staff working in both settings. By spring 2019, one OST staff member worked lunch duty during the school day. Budget constraints, staff turnover, and scheduling for staff who work in both settings have been challenging, but the two leaders have worked to get around roadblocks and found ways to increase the number of overlapping staff members in the 2019–2020 school year.

At the site level, formal school and OST collaboration typically started with the one-on-one relationship between the principal and OST manager and, in three communities, expanded by 2018–2019 to include a site-based SEL committee that would meet about monthly. School staff typically constituted the majority of the seats on the SEL committee, and one OST manager or representative joined. Broader OST representation in these committees has been lower because of the nonoverlapping schedules of school teachers and OST instructors, which generally prevented in-person attendance at joint SEL committee meetings. (Nonoverlapping work schedules also largely precluded joint PD during the school year, as we discuss later in this chapter.) During our interviews, principals and OST managers across all six communities discussed the challenge of scheduling meetings with both school and OST staff but also acknowledged that regular communication and joint meetings have been essential in improving school-OST relationships.

The establishment of SEL committees occurred gradually. Few interviewees who participated in these committees reported using those team meetings during the first year of the initiative to discuss how to reinforce SEL across both settings. Instead, the most-frequent topics of discussion included logistics, particular students, attendance, and staff coordination. By the second year, system-level staff, such as SEL coaches, in several communities would attend most or all of these committee meetings, and several PSELI managers had developed guidance, such as planning templates and suggested recurring agendas, to help sites structure the SEL committees. These guidance documents helped improve SEL committees. By spring 2019, fewer site-level interviewees reported confusion about when and how they were expected to collaborate with their school or OST partners, and many site leaders reported regular school-OST meetings that focused specifically on SEL implementation across both settings.

In addition to having staff who can bridge both school and OST time, sharing physical space for staff

and instruction is a good starting element on which to build school-OST partnerships. For example, schools in several communities have provided OST programs with office space where staff can have meetings and keep materials and have allowed the programs to use classrooms after school. As noted earlier, it is easier to run small-group activities, which might require desks or a quiet environment, in a classroom than it is to do so in a school cafeteria or gymnasium, which are commonly used spaces for OST programming.

Early Lessons

- Rather than expect communication between schools and OST programs to form organically, provide district and OSTI guidance—such as suggested frequency, agenda items, and planning templates—for a SEL steering committee or other recurring group that has representatives from both the school and OST program.
- Explore ways to create crossover staff roles that bridge the school and OST day—especially an on-site OST manager—to increase communication, trust, and mutually reinforcing SEL programming between schools and OST programs.
- Make space-sharing modifications as needed so that OST instructors can reasonably deliver SEL instruction to groups of students in a quiet space.

Staff turnover posed serious challenges for district-OSTI and school-OST partnerships

At both the system and site levels, recurring staff turnover created a barrier to a strong partnership. For example, turnover in district offices led to unfilled positions, which in turn halted progress for OSTI staff charged with creating joint communications or data analysis plans. Staff turnover and departmental reorganizations in district offices also made it hard for OSTI staff in some communities to know who would be co-leading PSELI activities, whether the district would dedicate sufficient resources for collaboration, and whom to contact for specific requests. In one community, there was also staff turnover among SEL coaches, which stalled progress on creating complementary PD opportunities for school and OST staff as originally planned.

At the site level, we also found that staff turnover made relationship-building between school and OST staff more challenging. When asked about challenges in collaborating with their school or OST program partners, site leaders and staff in four communities mentioned staff turnover as a barrier to building relationships across the organizations and to the joint use of reinforcing SEL practices. As one teacher explained, "It's been really hard to align [when] staff keep changing, which makes it hard to get people on the same page."

In response to OST staff turnover, one community developed onboarding materials to codify the OST program's role in building strong connections with the school. Specifically, the community's OSTI developed a document for new OST managers that displays a checklist of daily and weekly job expectations, and "connecting with teachers" was one of the first daily tasks for this role.

Early Lessons

- In anticipation of staff turnover, develop onboarding materials about the partnership and the desired, observable forms of coordination between the district and the OSTI, as well as between the school and OST program. The materials could address, for example, the SEL committee, forms of recurring communication, mutual data collection, and desired SEL practices for both in and out of school.
- Document and formalize SEL processes and routines so that these may live on even when specific individuals leave. Examples of formalized processes may include a short list of desired, observable behaviors or conditions, as well as a list of "do-now" activities for school and OST staff with guidance about when and how to use them.

There was a perceived and actual power differential between schools and OST programs

Real and perceived power differentials affect the district-OSTI and school-OST relationships. As a TA provider described, the two types of organizations can be on an "uneven playing field," which has slowed the development of partnerships. However, the first two years of PSELI suggest that partnerships can improve through

deliberate efforts to promote mutual respect and understanding between these groups.

Since the outset of PSELI, system-level interviewees in three communities have reported struggling to address power imbalances between their organizations that have impeded an effective partnership. More specifically, interviewees in two communities have reported feeling as though the school district's preferences had a stronger weight in decisionmaking and that OSTIs had to make more concessions, such as using a school-based SEL curriculum, as starting points for joint planning. During the first year of implementation, OST staff in at least four communities reported that school staff did not always see them as valuable members of the team. For example, one interviewee mentioned that OST staff were perceived as "babysitters" rather than educators. Meanwhile, some school staff felt that OST staff did not respect the norms and culture of the school.

The power imbalance that interviewees perceived corresponds to a real power imbalance between the two organization types and their employees. In many ways, the OST programs and OSTIs in PSELI (as in the field more broadly) operate within school and district structures and not vice versa. For example, as documented in this chapter, OST programs in school buildings rarely have use of classrooms. And school staff generally have teaching credentials, higher pay, benefits, more job security, and other advantages over OST staff, who are often younger, part-time hourly employees with less-prestigious credentials. Unsurprisingly, the differences in job conditions and funding create real power imbalances that can make collaboration more challenging.

Notwithstanding these challenges, schools and OST programs in PSELI have worked to level the playing field by, for example, providing OST programs with permanent office space in the school building and creating some of the crossover staffing structures listed in Table 3.3. Furthermore, in spring 2018 and spring 2019, interviewees reported that the relationships between school and OST staff were notably better as a result of PSELI. By spring 2019, an OST staff member said, "they see us like equals now," and that outlook was shared by OST staff in several communities.

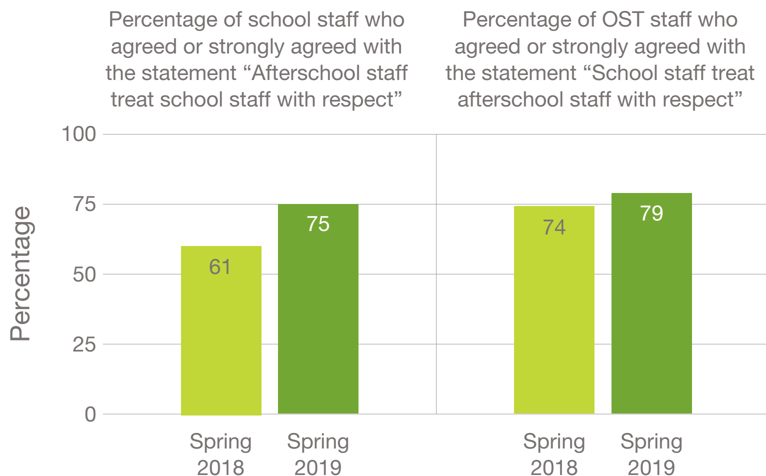
Our survey data suggest that the perceived sense of mutual respect has improved over time, mostly among school staff and less so among OST staff, as shown in Figure 3.1. In five of the six

communities, the percentage of school staff who agreed with the statement that “Afterschool staff treat school staff with respect” increased from spring 2018 to spring 2019. (In the sixth community, the percentage remained flat at about 67 percent.) Overall, the percentage agreeing with that statement increased by 14 percentage points in that year.

By contrast, there was only a 5-percentage-point increase in afterschool staff who agreed with the statement that “School staff treat afterschool staff with respect.” Although the rates of OST staff who agreed with this statement improved in two of five communities with available data in both 2018 and 2019, it was flat in a third community and declined by 21 and 13 points in the other two communities. The school staff responses and, to a lesser degree, the OST staff responses suggest that the perceived quality of these relationships can improve. But school staff especially may need to make more-explicit efforts to improve the relationship in the eyes of OST staff.

FIGURE 3.1

Perceptions of Respect Between School and OST Staff



SOURCE: Spring 2018 and 2019 RAND staff survey.

NOTES: The total number of school staff respondents in spring 2018 was 1,483 and in spring 2019 was 1,482. The total number of OST staff respondents in spring 2018 was 245 and in spring 2019 was 262.

Early Lessons

- When first planning for a district-OSTI or school-OST partnership, explicitly acknowledge the differences between OST programs and schools, including the constraints on each, the perceived and real power differential between them, and their separate strengths.
- Track the quality of school-OST relationships by, for example, adding questions about the relationships to an annual staff survey and discussing the findings (and solutions) with school and OST staff.
- To make transparent for staff the value their counterparts add, outline the roles of both school and OST staff and what each group contributes to the joint project of developing students' SEL.

Joint PD for school and OST staff was difficult to execute

In PSELI, many communities started out with the intention to provide joint PD for frontline school and OST staff. And in every community, at least one-third of school staff indicated on the spring 2019 staff survey that they had attended at least one instance of SEL PD where counterparts were present that year. In two communities, about 95 percent of OST staff reported this.

Yet interviewees told us that it was hard to carry out repeated joint school-OST PD, primarily because of frontline staff's nonoverlapping schedules. Typically, OST staff are not available to attend trainings held after school hours, when students transition to the afterschool program, and school teachers are not available to attend trainings held during school hours. One community's poll of OST staff showed that neither nights nor weekends were desirable options for delivering PD.

When joint PD did happen for frontline school and OST staff, it often occurred during evening hours once afterschool programs closed or during the summer, on staff development days when both the school and afterschool programs were closed for students. For example, one community held a joint two-day summer institute and eight evening trainings mainly for OST staff, although school staff were invited to attend these sessions also.

School and OST staff highlighted the need to adapt the content of joint training sessions for frontline staff so that it applied to both settings. For example, OST staff in one community felt that what were billed as joint PD sessions applied more to school teachers. For the one community whose attendees reported successful joint PD for school and OST staff, the sessions addressed foundational topics that applied equally to both settings, such as what SEL is, why it matters, self-care, and responses to trauma.

Early Lessons

- When holding joint training and PD for school and OST staff, focus on topics that are applicable to both settings, such as shared SEL instruction, SEL terminology, SEL rituals and routines, and student behavior management, to help make a consistent student experience throughout the day.
- When delivering training and PD separately to school and OST staff, design the content so that it is reinforcing across school and OST settings. For example, promote use of the same SEL terms while tailoring the content to the school or OST context, or provide context for how lessons are applicable in both school and OST settings.

SEL rituals were a good starting point for OST and school staff to create continuity, which was deepened by use of consistent SEL curricula

The joint use of SEL rituals or other brief SEL activities was a natural starting point for joint SEL practice across schools and OST programs. Compared with the use of a coordinated school-day curriculum and consistent content sequence for OST programs, the joint use of a SEL ritual (e.g., a warm welcome) is a less demanding form of coordination that may prove more practical, particularly for OST programs that are led by volunteers or that have short sessions that prevent the use of full units of study. Routines and rituals are a realistic first step for implementing mutually reinforcing SEL in both OST programs and schools because they require minimal training and can apply to a wide range of ages and activities.

In spring 2019 observations, we looked for evidence of continuity of practices between schools and OST programs by assessing

whether school and OST staff used the same SEL terms or practices (which might be embedded in rituals or instruction), whether school and OST staff ever met together during the days we observed, and whether OST staff referred to school day activities during their interactions with students or vice versa. In more than half of the days we observed, we identified some continuity between the school and OST contexts in every community, most often in use of SEL terms and practices. We observed school and OST staff meet together or OST staff reference school activities in less than one-fourth of the days we observed, and we never observed school staff refer to OST activities. The most-common evidence of continuity that we observed was the use of shared SEL terms or practices. For example, we observed that all six communities' OST programs and schools used at least one SEL routine and ritual, such as a warm welcome, an engaging student activity, or an optimistic closure.

In three of the PSELI communities, the OST programs began delivering explicit SEL instruction in addition to using SEL rituals. These three communities are at the forefront of piloting and developing SEL lessons for use in OST programs—a topic we discuss in more detail in Chapter Five. We observed consistent SEL practices across the schools and OST programs most frequently in these three communities—not surprisingly, given their adoption of written SEL lessons.

One of the PSELI communities went further: The OSTI with its partner local afterschool organization created a 36-week SEL content sequence to complement school-day lessons and an accompanying pacing guide to keep instructors on track. These two organizations also created weekly SEL lesson plans that served as guides that reinforced the school-day themes. For example, in one school week, the in-school lessons were about "avoiding jumping to conclusions." The OST programs then used lessons that the OSTI and its partner had written that were also about not jumping to conclusions. These lessons included reading the students a book and doing a hands-on activity related to the topic. In practice, this kind of school-OST continuity in this community began by the middle of the second year. It involved coordination among the district-based SEL coaches and OST leaders to ensure that both school and OST staff were working on complementary SEL units (e.g., focusing on empathy during both the school day and OST in a given week). Although some site leaders reported

SEL rituals can be a starting point for joint school and OST work on SEL. In the second year of PSELI, Tacoma began implementing the following three SEL rituals in schools and OST programs:

1. Warm welcome. An instructor greeted or checked in with each student individually at the start of a class or OST session.
2. Community circles. Children and their instructor sat in a circle and had the opportunity to share their feelings or experiences in response to a prompt.
3. Emotion check-ins. Instructors used the Zones of Regulation framework (a SEL curriculum designed to foster self-regulation and emotional control) to help students identify or describe their own emotions.

These three signature practices were Tacoma's primary mechanism for establishing continuity in SEL between the school day and OST programming. To help ensure that continuity, school and OST staff received joint PD on each of the three signature practices on a rolling basis throughout the year.

that there were challenges in keeping the school and OST program pacing consistent with each other, most also reported that pacing was consistent to at least some degree.

Creation of a high-quality SEL content sequence for OST programs requires staff with curriculum development experience, which typically only high-capacity OSTIs or larger OST programs possess. Furthermore, even those with the capacity to develop a SEL content sequence may have limited ability to influence OST programs' use of it, because OSTIs often do not directly fund OST programs. Nevertheless, OST programs' history of adopting CQI structures and emphasis on supporting youth development bode well for OST adoption of SEL instructional materials, as long as they are adaptable and well suited to their target audiences.

Early Lessons

- To increase SEL continuity across school and OST settings, develop or adopt either the same or reinforcing SEL rituals, such as a warm welcome activity, as a place to start. Developing SEL content sequences for OST settings that track with the school-day SEL curriculum sets the stage for more-extensive mutually reinforcing SEL instruction.
- Given the current lack of SEL curricula developed expressly for OST settings, OST programs interested in creating SEL content sequences will largely need to develop materials themselves. High-capacity OSTIs and OST programs can perform this function.

CHAPTER FOUR

Developing Adults' Capacity to Promote SEL

To support students' social and emotional development, adults in schools and OST programs need to develop a knowledge base and skill set that will allow them to provide high-quality instruction and create a welcoming climate. One crucial area of focus for adult PD is relationships.

Research About How PD Can Promote Educators' Capacity to Support SEL

Research suggests that supportive adult relationships with students are critical for students' social and emotional development (Allensworth et al., 2018; Goswami, 2012; Jones et al., 2019; Whitehurst, 2019). Positive, warm, caring relationships between adults and children confer benefits on students' academic achievement (Birch and Ladd, 1997), their adjustment to elementary school (Baker, Grant, and Morlock, 2008), and their relationships with other students (Kiuru et al., 2015).

Research also suggests that it is important for adults to develop their own SEL skills (Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd, 2013). Researchers have theorized that a classroom teacher's own SEL skills have a direct impact on youths' skills because these skills help teachers manage their classrooms, model positive behaviors, and become more self-aware (Jennings and Greenberg,

2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers with strong SEL skills can provide supportive classroom environments through their communication with students—for example, by being emotionally supportive, acknowledging student feelings and perspectives, and appropriately handling conflicts among students or between students and teachers (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

Targeted PD in the areas of mindfulness, stress reduction, and well-being can have significant positive effects on teachers and the classroom environment in a relatively short amount of time. Teachers who participated in the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) for Teachers PD program—a two-and-a-half-month intervention to improve teachers' mindfulness—showed improvements in their overall well-being and mindfulness (defined as being observant while being unassuming and nonjudgmental), as well as reduced stress related to burnout (Jennings et al., 2013). In another study of the CARE for Teachers program, researchers found improvements in the emotional support that teachers provided to students, indicating that the effects on teachers' well-being, mindfulness, and stress had a direct impact on the classroom environment (Jennings et al., 2017). Another intervention for improving teacher's mindfulness also showed positive effects after eight weeks (Frank et al., 2015).

No exact recipe exists for effective PD (Guskey, 2003), but research about PD generally and SEL PD specifically has identified several key ingredients (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner, 2017; Desimone, 2011; Garet et al., 2001; Kendziora and Yoder, 2016; Yoder and Gurke, 2017). This research suggests that PD about SEL should do the following:

- Foster active learning.
- Support collaboration between instructors.
- Provide coaching to foster adults' own SEL skills and to support instructors' work with students.
- Allow for feedback and reflection.
- Be sustained over time rather than delivered via a single event.
- Help participants understand why SEL matters, including how it connects to academic instruction and achievement.

- Clearly define what SEL is and is not up front because definitions of SEL are wide-ranging, vague, and not shared.
- Provide participants with opportunities to practice what they have learned, preferably right away rather than much later in the year.

SEL coaching is one approach to SEL PD that often includes many of these features, and research suggests that SEL coaching can improve teachers' instruction and student achievement (Wei et al., 2009). Authors of a 2018 study found that the quality and focus of coaching may be more important for effectiveness than the number of coaching hours alone (Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan, 2018). The hallmarks of effective coaching, like effective PD more generally, are ongoing observations, feedback, modeling, and hands-on practice (Kretlow and Bartholomew, 2010). And teachers particularly value ongoing coaching support in the forms of modeling lessons, facilitating personal reflection on practice, and voicing encouragement, and research suggests using a small-group format when training in new instructional practices (Vanderburg and Stephens, 2010). Finally, it is essential for coaches to have prior teaching experience and knowledge of the topic (e.g., SEL, math) (Coggins, Stoddard, and Cutler, 2003; Knight, 2006; Matsumura, Garnier, and Resnick, 2010).

However, in schools especially, there are some barriers to coaching, such as insufficient time to individually coach large numbers of teachers in a building. This is especially true because coaches often perform other administrative tasks, such as ordering and prepping materials and providing coverage for staff (Knight, 2006). There is also a history of using coaching to evaluate teacher performance (Galey, 2016; Marsh, McCombs, and Martorell, 2012), which can engender resistance from teachers and a culture of teacher autonomy in which teachers operate independently behind classroom doors and sometimes resist outside help (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Elmore, 2000; Houchens and Keaster, 2015).

Typically, instructional coaching in schools includes the identification of teacher needs, ongoing observation, modeling, feedback, joint planning, use of data, and resource-gathering (Gallucci et al., 2010; Huguet, Marsh, and Farrell, 2014; Knight, 2006; Neufeld and Roper, 2003). However, in practice, the job responsibilities of coaches in education are not always clearly defined or

communicated to all parties involved (Gallucci et al., 2010; Mraz, Algozzine, and Watson, 2008). This lack of clarity can contribute to coaches spending less time with teachers and negative perceptions about coaching efforts, which can affect the coach's relationships with school personnel (Knight, 2006; Mraz, Algozzine, and Watson, 2008).

By contrast, OST programs typically have fewer staff to coach than schools do, and coaching has tended to focus on improving program quality rather than individual instructors' practices (Baldwin and Wilder, 2014). There has been widespread use of observation and quality-rating tools as the basis for coaching in OST settings (Baldwin and Wilder, 2014; Yohalem, Granger, and Pittman, 2009). Several states use program quality assessments, such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment and the Assessment of Afterschool Program Practices Tool (an observation and program questionnaire), as part of quality improvement, and some of these quality improvement systems include coaching as part of PD (Yohalem, Granger, and Pittman, 2009). One of the OSTIs participating in PSELI, Prime Time Palm Beach County, has studied the use of a quality improvement system and quality advisers (who provide ongoing coaching support) and found that the pairing can improve program quality (Lindeman et al., 2019).

How the PSELI Communities Delivered SEL PD, Including Coaching

PD has been a central component of PSELI, generally coming first in the multi-year sequence of implementation and then recurring annually (see Figure 1.3). In our annual surveys of staff at the 38 sites, the large majority reported receiving some kind of PD about SEL, whether it be a course, a visit to another site, coaching, or a learning community. In fall 2017, shortly after PSELI Phase 1 had started, 71 percent of school staff and 86 percent of OST staff reported having received some kind of PD about SEL. These percentages rose to 87 percent in spring 2018 and 91 percent in spring 2019 for school staff and to 92 percent and 98 percent for OST staff at the same respective time points.

In Year 1 of PSELI, the primary focus of PD was to define and give an overview of SEL. After explicit SEL instruction was introduced during Year 2 of the initiative, school and OST staff reported receiving more PD on the use of SEL lessons, strategies to build adults' SEL skills, and strategies to integrate SEL into academics

(see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Interviews and PSELI documents confirmed this shift. Likewise, staffs' stated needs for additional PD also shifted away from definitions and overviews of SEL (from 55 percent in spring 2018 to 42 percent in spring 2019) and toward differentiation of SEL for students from different cultural backgrounds or learning needs (results not shown), reflecting an evolution in PD needs over time.

FIGURE 4.1

Most-Common SEL PD Topics, School Staff

FIGURE 4.2

Most-Common SEL PD Topics, OST Staff

The most substantial shift that occurred in PD by Year 2 was the introduction of SEL coaches, which typically coincided with the beginning of explicit SEL instruction to students. On the spring 2019 staff survey, 60 percent of school staff and 86 percent of OST staff reported receiving coaching or mentoring two to six times, on average, during that school year. Table 4.1 provides the number of coaches and intended frequency of contact for each of the six communities. In that second year, four of the six PSELI communities planned for coaching to occur weekly or every other week per site, and the other two planned for coaching to occur as needed or about monthly.

In practice, though, coaching occurred less often than planned in at least some sites in five of six communities. Interviews with coaches, principals, and OST managers indicated that the two

TABLE 4.1
School and OST Program SEL Coaches in School Year 2018–2019

	Boston	Dallas	Denver	Palm Beach County	Tacoma	Tulsa
Schools						
Number of coaches	3 full time across 7 schools	1 full time across 6 schools; 1 part time at 1 school	3 full time across 6 school and OST program sites	1 full time across 7 schools	1 full time across 6 schools	1 full time across 5 school and OST program sites; 1 full time at 1 site
Intended frequency of contact	Weekly school visit	Visit once every 10 days	Site visits twice a month	Monthly site visits with additional support as needed or requested	Weekly 4-hour site visits in fall; as of January 2019, an 8-hour visit every other week	Visits as needed or requested
OST programs						
Number of coaches	2 part time across 18 programs	1 full-time SEL specialist at each of 7 programs; 1 full time across 7 programs	Same 3 coaches across the 6 program sites	1 full time and 5 or 6 quality advisers for 7 programs	1 full time to consult with 6 half-time OST site coordinators	3 part time across 5 programs
Intended frequency of contact	Visit site once every 4–6 weeks	Weekly on-site training	Site visits twice a month	Monthly site visits	Same schedule as schools	Visits as needed

SOURCE: Spring 2019 interviews of system-level staff.

primary reasons for this were a lack of buy-in to the initiative from some site leaders and a lack of understanding of the SEL coach's responsibilities among both the coaches and site leaders.

In addition to delivering SEL PD, coaches met with site leaders; provided resources; conducted observations; and, in some cases, attended staff and grade-level meetings. Site-level staff in all PSELI communities spoke about their SEL coaches delivering PD, providing encouragement and resources, being a sounding board, and modeling lesson plans.

Findings and Early Lessons

After analyzing the data we collected and relevant literature on developing adults' capacity to promote SEL, we identified six findings, outlined in this section. For each finding, we offer evidence for our assessment and conclude with early lessons from the first two years of PSELI implementation.

PSELI communities viewed adult SEL skills as a foundation for building student SEL skills

Interviewees in each of the six PSELI communities highlighted the importance of building adults' own SEL skills. Interviewees used the phrase "adult SEL skills" in multiple ways but typically to refer either to adults' ability to demonstrate their own social or emotional competencies (e.g., emotion regulation) or to adults' emotional well-being.

Most interviewees treated adult SEL skill development as a necessary precursor to those adults delivering instruction about SEL to students. For example, interviewees referred to the importance of adults developing the ability to establish and maintain their own healthy relationships as a precursor to effectively teaching their students how to do the same. As a principal from one community explained, "It doesn't matter what you try to do for kids if your adults aren't okay." Research suggests that teachers' well-being and their social and emotional competencies are associated with their ability to promote students' social, emotional, and academic learning (Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli, 2016; Hoglund, Klingle, and Hosan, 2015; Oberle and Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

High numbers of both school and OST staff agreed there was a need for PD on strategies to build their own SEL skills in the first

year, and there was some indication that staff felt their skills had developed by the second year. In the spring 2018 survey, about three-quarters of school and OST staff respondents indicated that building their own SEL skills was a PD need. By spring 2019, that proportion had declined to about two-thirds of school and of OST staff.

Most of the six communities have taken at least some explicit steps to develop adults' SEL skills, although this occurred at varying degrees and consistencies. For example, one community highlighted adult SEL skill development as a major Year 1 goal and developed PD sessions that focused on adult learning of SEL competencies. For many of the other communities, however, building adult SEL skills instead happened on a site-by-site basis. Principals and OST managers described a wide range of steps they were taking to focus on supporting adults' own SEL competencies, increasing adult emotional well-being overall, or both. Such steps included increasing teachers' voice in decisionmaking, making consistent time for SEL instruction, modeling SEL at the administrator level as an example for teachers, starting a SEL book club, creating a staff charter that outlines what staff need to feel safe and supported at school, and using warm welcomes and optimistic closures or other SEL practices in staff meetings. Site leaders also described a focus on improving adult relationships at their schools or OST programs.

Early Lessons

- Include explicit efforts to build adults' SEL skills into the SEL PD plan. This could be done by focusing entire PD sessions on adult SEL competencies or by including adult-relevant content in a PD session that also addresses building student SEL skills.
- Consider how efforts to improve school climate take not just students' but also adults' social and emotional well-being into account.

Staff wanted SEL PD to have hands-on practice and, as their SEL work progressed, to focus on differentiation of SEL instruction

Consistent with the research about effective PD, site-level interviewees in both spring 2018 and spring 2019 shared that they appreciated PD that had hands-on learning about specific SEL practices and lessons that they could implement in the classroom or during OST activities. In fact, school and OST staff across half of the communities expressed that SEL trainings would be further improved by focusing even more on the practical application of SEL on the ground—either through modeling or opportunities for practice. Without that practical, hands-on element, one principal explained, "It'll just be another set of content that goes into a binder . . . that sits somewhere because it's not something that's ready for tomorrow."

Furthermore, by spring 2019, differentiation was the topmost topic for which both school and OST staff reported wanting more PD: About four out of five surveyed staff indicated the need to adapt SEL for students with disabilities and for students with different cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

Training to improve adult SEL skills and interactions was well received. In 2017–2018, the School District of Palm Beach County and its OSTI partner, Prime Time Palm Beach County, provided the "Bringing Yourself to Work" training, which focused on adult skills and practices, such as self-awareness, relationships, and group interactions. Trainees included school and OST program staff, both certified and noncertified, and all received an hourly stipend to attend. The training provided staff with tools and direct practice to develop connections with colleagues. System leaders whom we interviewed in spring 2018 felt that training school and OST program staff together emphasized the value of OST programs in children's lives.

Early Lessons

- Regardless of the SEL PD topic, include modeling of the skills that participants are learning and time for participants to engage in hands-on practice.
- In SEL PD, provide concrete strategies for differentiating SEL curricula and practices for a diverse student body, including examples of SEL adaptation for students with disabilities and for students with different cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

Staff turnover posed a persistent challenge for PD delivery

A common challenge that PSELI communities faced was staff turnover, which necessitates the repetition of PD for incoming staff. Staff turnover surfaced as a top-of-mind concern for both system- and site-level interviewees across several communities each implementation year, particularly for OST programs, which

may have especially high staff turnover rates. As one OST manager explained in fall 2017, "the greatest challenge for afterschool would be . . . keeping the same staff member for those years because when you get them trained, they're gone."

It is difficult to efficiently and effectively maintain a SEL-trained workforce in the midst of staff turnover. For example, if an OSTI structures a series of trainings that builds on itself over the course of a school year—starting perhaps with a SEL 101 training over the summer and then introducing specific SEL practices throughout the fall and winter—how does that OSTI ensure that an OST instructor hired to fill a vacancy in March is brought quickly and thoroughly up to speed on SEL expectations and practices?

Thus far, three PSELI communities have tackled the staff turnover challenge by offering some, but not all, PD in smaller chunks on a frequent basis. One community, for example, offered "quick bites" of 30-minute PD on specific SEL topics, such as problem-solving or mindfulness, delivered in early morning hours at some school campuses on a monthly basis throughout the 2018–2019 school year. The brevity of these trainings also lends itself to repeatability, enabling new staff to get up to speed quickly and with minimal burden on system-level staff. A second community offered the "SEL Academy," which was a series of eight courses made available twice in the year. An OSTI in a third community approached the problem by focusing training resources on OST managers and other OST personnel whom they thought might stay in the organization longer than would frontline staff, who turn over more quickly. However, this still left the question of whether and how frontline staff would ultimately receive the training needed to implement SEL.

So that sites could plan their schedules, PSELI managers and PD designers in several communities created calendars of scheduled PD for the entire second year of PSELI, indicating which trainings were mandatory and what the purpose of each was. Doing so can help eliminate redundancy in the content of the training sequence, which was a frustration for a small number of interviewees across three communities that did not implement a full-year PD calendar. In a community without such a calendar and that had some redundant trainings, one interviewee commented, "I hate to say it, but it's stuff I already know."

Although frequent and easily repeatable PD may be an important strategy for onboarding new staff, several communities also

felt that it was important to retain a longer training before the school year or semester started to cover foundational PD about SEL instruction and rituals that adults would be carrying out with students.

Early Lessons

- Establish a calendar of SEL PD for an entire school year to provide plenty of advance notice and map out a progression of SEL PD topics.
- In recognition of staff turnover, include in a recurring SEL PD schedule both longer sessions about SEL instruction and more-frequent but shorter sessions on more-discrete SEL topics.

Although support for SEL was high among school and OST staff, they also expressed concerns

Staff buy-in to SEL in the six PSELI communities has been high from the outset of the initiative. For example, virtually all school teachers agreed that SEL would improve students' academic performance in spring 2019, as teachers had in the prior waves of the survey. Likewise, each time we posed the survey question, a large majority of instructors in both schools and OST programs agreed that they felt confident that they could improve students' social and emotional competencies. Interviewees said much the same. One principal explained in fall 2017, "[My teachers are] willing and just so open. They want to do this [SEL] work. . . . They don't see it as a soft skill. They see it as important for life success and academic success." Another principal told us in fall 2017, "[My staff] believe in social emotional learning. It's like what we've been waiting for. . . . It's not another program to teach; it's just a way to be."

However, when we asked instructors about who was primarily responsible for students' social and emotional needs, opinions differed.[1] By the end of the first year of PSELI, 33 percent of school teachers and 50 percent of OST instructors agreed or strongly agreed that professionals other than themselves (such as counselors or psychologists) should take primary responsibility for their students' social and emotional needs. Fewer staff agreed with the

[1] On the survey, we asked instructors (not site leaders or noninstructional staff) about their agreement with the following statement: "I think professionals other than myself, such as counselors or psychologists, should take primary responsibility for my students' social and emotional needs."

same statement by spring 2019, when only 28 percent of teachers and 38 percent of OST instructors reported the same. Although agreement with this item may reflect instructors' varied interpretations of the wording—for example, some staff may feel that they are partially, but not fully, responsible for their students' social and emotional needs or that they are responsible for students' learning but not their needs (which they might interpret as referring to specialized mental health needs)—it still indicates that a substantial portion of school and OST instructors feel that other staff roles should be more responsible than instructors are for students' social and emotional needs. As a principal told us in fall 2017, "I still have a few teachers who . . . believe in the traditional mentality [of] . . . 'I shouldn't have to do all that [SEL] stuff.'"

In addition to discussing various interpretations about who is responsible for students' social and emotional needs, PSELI managers and site leaders also described what they called misperceptions about SEL that they said they were still working to dispel. For example, interviewees in all six communities had encountered the belief among instructors that SEL is not for everyone (i.e., in school parlance, that SEL is not a Tier 1 intervention appropriate for all students); rather, some instructors believe that SEL instruction should be given only to students identified as needing extra supports (i.e., that SEL is a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention). One community was also working against the perceptions that SEL is appropriate for young children but not adults and that the use of SEL means that there are no negative consequences for student misbehavior.

- Finally, survey responses suggested that school staff especially felt that SEL was in competition with academics. The majority of school teachers agreed that pressure to improve academic achievement makes it hard to focus on SEL (73 percent in 2018 and 68 percent in 2019). Fewer, but still the majority of, OST instructional staff agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (59 percent in 2018 and 55 percent in 2019). Although SEL and academics might feel like competing pressures, it will be important for communities to frame SEL and academic efforts as working in concert with—and not in opposition to—each other.

- To address these perceptions and reservations about SEL, local PSELI managers have marshalled evidence from the CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL, which builds the case for

SEL by outlining the positive impacts of SEL on students' academic and nonacademic outcomes, as well as the benefits of SEL for adults and the demand for SEL across sectors (CASEL, undated-a). The PSELI managers have also used some data from their own communities to make the case. As one PSELI system leader explained, the schools in that community were taking on SEL work because "they see that it works. They see that it's making a difference for students."

Early Lessons

- In PD and communication about the SEL work, make it clear that the site leaders or system leaders believe that supporting student SEL is a foundational element of each adult's role in the school or OST program.
- During SEL PD, explicitly discuss common concerns about SEL and its implications for student behavior management. Discuss research showing that building SEL skills benefits the general adult and student population—not just those with behavioral challenges.
- If available, use local data about the positive impact that SEL has already made in the local community, which can be a particularly powerful way to encourage buy-in to SEL.

Several PSELI communities have learned to centralize the delivery of at least some SEL PD for frontline staff, especially the PD about the SEL curriculum

PSELI communities have taken one of two approaches to PD:

- a centralized approach led by a system-level staff person or an outside consultant for staff from multiple sites
- a train-the-trainer approach, in which a central office person or a consultant trains one or two people from each site who, in turn, relay training to site-based staff.

Most of the PSELI communities have implemented the train-the-trainer method as at least one component of their PD strategy and have encountered challenges along the way.

The primary challenge with the train-the-trainer approach, according to system- and site-level interviewees, was the inconsistent amount and quality of PD that the site-level trainer, who is often a school teacher or counselor from the building, ultimately delivered to site-level staff. For example, in a community that used the train-the-trainer structure as its primary mode of delivering SEL PD, some of the site leaders who were responsible for receiving training and then relaying it to other staff felt as though they did not have enough direction or support at the system level in developing quality training for teachers and OST instructors. One site leader described the community's training model as "a game of telephone" in 2017–2018. In spring 2019, site-based staff in this community requested that SEL content experts deliver more-direct SEL training for teachers and OST instructors. In another community where a train-the-trainer model was used for Year 1, the approach placed a large burden on the staff person at each site and led to substantial inconsistencies across sites; thus, the community eventually changed its PD strategy.

By the second year of the initiative, some of the PSELI communities had adopted a hybrid model of PD delivery, implementing both centralized PD and some train-the-trainer PD for site-specific needs. The hybrid models were implemented after system leaders realized that training in using the chosen SEL curriculum in particular required the trainer to have more experience with that curriculum than the site-level trainer necessarily possessed. In four communities, central office staff, such as system-level SEL coaches or curriculum experts, delivered all PSELI-specific SEL curriculum training in a central location, at each individual site, or both. Two of these communities identified a particular coach from the SEL coach team to be the expert on a given SEL curriculum (e.g., MindUP, Second Step, Open Circle), and that coach then delivered the related training to any site using that curriculum, regardless of whether the coach was formally assigned to that site. When done well, implementing either a centralized approach or a hybrid model of PD could allow for the delivery of consistent content by someone with SEL expertise while also leaving room for addressing site-specific questions or needs.

Early Lessons

- Do not rely exclusively on a train-the-trainer model in which the responsibility for all SEL training falls solely on site leaders—especially for training about SEL curricula (or content sequences) and pedagogy; content expertise is critical for those topics.
- Reserve the train-the-trainer method of PD delivery for areas in which site-based differentiation is most appropriate and valuable. For example, rely on site-based training for the most context-reliant topics, such as improving climate at a site or engaging with families.
- When using a train-the-trainer model, communicate clear expectations for, and provide ample support to, site-based leaders who deliver the site-based training.

SEL coaches have served a critical function in helping schools and OST programs deliver SEL instruction

In Phase 1 of PSELI, coaches have served as the glue between the system and the sites, enhancing communication and promoting coherence in several communities. In our interviews, site leaders endorsed SEL coaches more often and to a greater degree than they did other forms of support provided as part of PSELI. District and OSTI interviewees spoke highly of the work that SEL coaches carried out, and they highlighted the importance of coaches to the initiative; one interviewee referred to SEL coaches as a "huge success."

The majority of the PSELI coaches working in school year 2018–2019 had prior relevant experience; for example, school coaches had experience as teachers, and OST coaches had experience as OST instructors. And all but one community had at least one coach with SEL curriculum experience, although not necessarily the same SEL curriculum that the site or system had selected for PSELI. System leaders in two communities commented on the importance of coaches having SEL-specific expertise. For example, one community hired a coach with expertise in adult mindfulness to facilitate PD for OST staff to help them focus more on mindfulness and adult practice. Another community hired a coach with prior experience teaching a SEL curriculum.

With few exceptions, coaches concentrated on either the school or the OST setting, but not both. For example, coaches interviewed in five of the six communities said that they directly interacted with school and OST staff at the same time only in group settings, such as PD sessions, PLCs, or site-level team meetings. Coaches in several communities did, however, coordinate with each other and, in two communities, sometimes conducted walk-throughs together to observe school and OST SEL lessons.

SEL coaches can help schools and OST programs craft a plan for high-quality SEL instruction. In Boston, three SEL coaches hired by the district visited each of their assigned schools once each week. Each coach had previous experience in at least one of the explicit SEL curricula implemented in Boston sites, and the coaches' work varied based on needs identified by school and OST leaders. In collaboration with each site's SEL team, the coaches created a joint agreement that formalized which dimensions of SEL implementation each school and each OST partner would prioritize during the year. Interviewees at both schools and OST programs found the district SEL coaches valuable and regularly cited them as their greatest resources for SEL implementation support.

Although SEL coaches have been vital to PSELI, there have been several implementation challenges, particularly for school teachers, who reported meeting with a coach at lower rates than OST instructors did. Some coaches had insufficient time to support all or some school-based instructional staff, and principals in some schools restricted coaches' access to teachers because of low buy-in for PSELI or perceptions of coaching as punitive. In one community, following teacher walkouts to protest budget cuts, one interviewee told us that teachers were "very sensitive to what responsibilities they're taking on that are not compensated." Instead of having direct contact with teachers, PSELI SEL coaches who worked for the district tended to work more with school leaders (e.g., principals and SEL champions or coordinators), even when coaches supported small numbers of sites.

Three PSELI communities struggled to define a clear role for SEL coaches, and this confusion filtered down to site-level staff. One coach remarked, "we are just told to be there and be visible." Another coach felt that the job description was intentionally broad so as to enable the coach to cater to each site's unique needs but that, as a result, it lacked clarity. In a third community, a coach felt that it was challenging to perform all of the expected activities and that system leaders did not fully understand the day-to-day tasks required. Site-level staff in two of these communities also expressed confusion about what type of coaching support they could request or who would provide the coaching. In several communities, it was unclear to some coaches,

instructors, and site leaders where the school SEL coaches and OST SEL coaches' respective roles stopped and started. Should school SEL coaches observe OST instructors, and vice versa? Do they have authority and sufficient relevant experience to do so?

Going into the third year of PSELI, staff across school and OST settings still desired targeted coaching for frontline staff that included explicit modeling of SEL lessons, guided hands-on practice in delivering SEL lessons, support for adapting lessons for students with disabilities, and provision of specific feedback after observations. All six PSELI communities continue to explore ways to enhance access to and quality of coaching. For example, in one community, the school-based coaches have created an MOU to be signed by school principals and coaches, which codifies the coaches' roles and responsibilities for the year. In one community, where sites view OST coaching as particularly successful, coaches engaged directly with frontline staff to preview the upcoming SEL lessons and provide PD specifically related to those lessons. This is in contrast to other communities where coaches spent more of their time with site leaders than with instructional staff.

Early Lessons

- If hiring SEL coaches, hire those who have prior teaching experience in the relevant setting (school or OST program) to help promote relationship-building with frontline staff.
- If using a SEL curriculum in a school setting, hire coaches who have SEL curriculum content knowledge.
- If using a SEL coach, develop a written document for coaches and site-level leaders that codifies the coaches' responsibilities, including minimum coaching requirements and number of visits, and discuss this document with each involved party.
- Plan for coaches to have direct contact with frontline staff, including observations, feedback, and modeling of lessons (e.g., by attending grade-level teacher meetings to model lessons).

CHAPTER FIVE

Improving Climate and Delivering SEL Instruction to Students

As described in Chapter One, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) identified three core approaches to implementing SEL for students, which we discuss in the following terms:

1. Set a positive climate.
2. Offer explicit SEL instruction to students.
3. Integrate SEL into academic instruction and OST activities.

These approaches, along with school-OST partnership (see Chapter Three), are the four primary mechanisms through which the 38 PSELI sites work to improve students' SEL outcomes. Because evidence suggests that SEL work is more successful at improving climate and student outcomes when it is implemented school- or program-wide (Allensworth et al., 2018), it is important to take a whole-site approach to implementing the Commission's three core approaches. The distinctions among them are not always clear, and certain practices might fit in more than one category, depending on how they are implemented. In this chapter, we summarize the research about each of the three

approaches, describe how PSELI sites have implemented them, and then present our findings about their implementation and early lessons learned.

Research About Climate, SEL Instruction, and SEL Integration

Setting a Positive Climate

As noted in Chapter One, *climate* is "the collective phenomenon that both reflects and creates the conditions for the development of social, emotional, and academic competence in both adults and students" (Osher and Berg, 2018, p. 4). There are numerous ways to improve climate, but we focus here on the use of SEL rituals and continuous improvement processes. We chose these two because, in addition to the development of adults' SEL (see Chapter Four), they are the main climate-related activities identified in interviews with site staff and in their written SEL plans.

SEL rituals are low-cost, targeted strategies or routines, such as songs or short breathing exercises, that can be used across educational settings and might promote specific SEL competencies (referred to as *kernels* by Jones, Bailey, et al., 2017). Some PSELI schools and OST programs adopted CASEL's three signature practices: welcoming inclusion activities (e.g., greeting each student by name or holding morning meetings), engaging strategies (e.g., offering students opportunities to share their ideas with a partner or to take "brain breaks" from academic learning), and optimistic closure (e.g., using a reflective prompt asking students to identify what they learned that day) (CASEL, 2019). A benefit of these kinds of rituals or routines is that most any adult (e.g., classroom teachers, hallway monitors, OST instructors, administrators) can institute one or more of them. In addition, because the practices are brief, they can occur throughout a day instead of at just one time point. Through repetition, they can help students know what to expect and thereby create a sense of security for students. Rituals or short routines like these may also promote school connectedness, which is related to such positive student outcomes as academic achievement and reduced absenteeism (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Jones, Bailey, et al., 2017).

Schools and OST programs often turn to data to measure and improve key aspects of a positive climate (Yohalem, Granger, and

Pittman, 2009). For example, many OST programs have an established practice of performing self-assessments using such tools as the SEL PQA or the SAYO-Y, a youth self-report survey focused on OST program experiences (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, undated; Stavsky, 2015). Although these tools can also be used to monitor explicit SEL instruction and integration, many surveys and other assessment tools are designed primarily to measure aspects of climate, such as high-quality relationships (Hough, Kalogrides, and Loeb, 2017; Jordan and Hamilton, 2020).

Offering Explicit SEL Instruction

As we explained in Chapter One, written lesson plans contained in curricula or content sequences are designed to deliver high-quality explicit SEL instruction to students. Researchers have identified the following four characteristics of effective, high-quality SEL programs, summarized with the acronym SAFE (Durlak et al., 2011):

1. **S**equenced set of activities to teach skills
2. **A**ctive learning strategies to practice new skills
3. **F**ocused time on one or more SEL skills
4. **E**xplicit targeting of specific and defined (not general) SEL skills.

A review of afterschool programs found that those with the SAFE features were more likely to be associated with positive youth outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan, 2010).

High-quality, explicit SEL curricula that have these characteristics can help guide educators' work and create continuity, consistency, and common language and routines among educators serving the same children (CASEL, 2012; Whitehurst, 2009). Yet high-quality SEL instruction and programs are diverse in their offerings. For example, a 2017 review of 25 widely used SEL curricula showed a range of instructional methods, targeted SEL skills, and components (Jones, Brush, et al., 2017).

It is also important to consider the context in which SEL instruction is delivered. SEL instruction will be most effective when delivered in a setting in which students and educators feel safe and have strong trusting relationships—that is, in a positive

climate (Jones, Brush, et al., 2017). Research suggests that effective SEL instruction in the OST space encourages staff to communicate high expectations to youth about what they can achieve and incorporates opportunities for youth to have a say in the focus of program activities (Granger et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2016). In addition, SEL instruction should be relevant and responsive to the cultural and linguistic context of the neighborhood, city, state, and country that surrounds the educational setting (Jones, Brush, et al., 2017; Jones and Kahn, 2017). Thus, school or OST staff sometimes adapt curricular materials to their unique contexts—for example, by supplementing the content with materials that address local history and celebrations.

Although there are few models of published OST-specific SEL content sequences, some school-based SEL programs have been successfully implemented in the OST setting or offer guidance for how school-based lessons can be modified for OST settings. When adapting a SEL curriculum for an OST setting, it is important that the curriculum aligns with the mission of the OST program and the pedagogical approaches already in place (Jones, Brush, et al., 2017).

Integrating SEL into Academic Instruction and OST Activities

Because SEL integration is a dense concept, we first elaborate on the two ways that we defined SEL integration in Chapter One:

1. **Using pedagogical practices that promote SEL skill development within academic lessons or other activities.** Teachers' instructional practices are key predictors of children's learning, including the development of their social and emotional competencies (Allensworth et al., 2018; Hamre and Pianta, 2005). Research suggests that several pedagogical strategies support SEL, including giving students the opportunity for responsibility and choice in their learning (e.g., by allowing students to design some of the lessons), providing guidance to students about how to collaborate effectively, and creating space for group discussion and shared reflection (Allensworth et al., 2018; Yoder, 2014). These are pedagogical strategies that instructors can use across academic and content areas as a way to integrate SEL into school-day and OST activities.

2. **Embedding instruction about SEL-related topics, such as resolving conflict or naming emotions, within academic content that occurs outside time set aside for explicit SEL lessons.** Like SEL-promoting pedagogical strategies, SEL content can be incorporated across content areas, such as mathematics or English language arts (ELA), to support students' skill development (Rivers and Brackett, 2010). For example, beginning a math lesson with a mindfulness exercise on concentration and perseverance can provide students with the skills needed to persist through frustrating word problems (Zakrzewski, 2014). Or ELA teachers might lead a discussion of characters' emotions (e.g., what the emotions are, why the character feels them) during a literature lesson.

Practice-based research about OST settings indicates that one effective way to integrate SEL into content or academic activities is to design a parallel SEL content sequence alongside the OST project content sequence (Smith et al., 2016). The OST project sequence defines skills and content-based goals and activities for youth in the program. For example, if the content sequence involves students performing a theatrical play, the identified SEL skills could be the relationship skills needed for a group to achieve a common goal, including teamwork, conflict resolution, and effective communication. Program staff might scaffold students' skills with targeted instruction, such as helping students define various roles in the play and facilitating productive discussions and group decisionmaking. Exemplary OST programs focused on promoting youth SEL competencies have successfully employed the practice of parallel project and SEL content sequences (Smith et al., 2016).

How the PSELI Communities Supported Students' SEL

Setting a Positive Climate

In PSELI, climate-related work started before explicit SEL instruction or integration. The six communities thought about climate improvement in a variety of ways, such as fostering collaboration and strong social ties between educators in the schools and OST programs and encouraging positive behavior by recognizing students who showed leadership.

Implementing SEL-focused rituals and routines was one of the most common ways that the communities worked to improve climate according to our interviews and sites' written plans for SEL. The communities, in consultation with their CASEL TA providers, generally started with rituals and routines, because these can be quickly adopted, help improve climate, require little training, and are applicable in a wide variety of settings (e.g., school classes, OST activities, staff meetings). Some PSELI communities selected and implemented rituals and routines in 2017–2018, such as holding a morning meeting for schools or an afternoon meeting for OST programs to encourage a warm and positive start to the day; others adopted such practices in 2018–2019.

In spring 2019, we observed the use of rituals or routines in more than one-fourth of the OST program and school sessions we visited, on average. Although most communities adopted practices inspired by CASEL's guidance (i.e., welcoming inclusion practices, engaging strategies, and optimistic closure), one community opted to implement practices that were more aligned with some of the pedagogical strategies already in place in the schools. In this community, the customized signature practices were warm welcomes, community circles (group circles with community-building discussions or personal sharing), and emotion check-ins. In another community, signature practices were implemented in all central office meetings and all PD sessions, as well as in classrooms and OST programs. As a result, the staff in this community employed the signature practices not only with students but also during interactions with other adults, thus reinforcing the practices as part of the community's culture. In a different community, the adopted curriculum included classroom tools and rituals that help promote a positive climate. One ritual involved creating charters for the school-day classrooms and OST programs. *Charters* establish shared norms for, expectations for, and understanding of how students and adults can behave to promote a positive climate and a sense of belonging for everyone in the community.

Our observations of the sites in spring 2018 and 2019 suggested that the 38 schools and OST programs had positive climates overall, as measured by student-to-student interactions, student respect for staff, and staff's warm and active supervision of students. Similarly, on the surveys, staff reported positive aspects of school climate; for example, the large majority of staff agreed that students and staff had positive relationships.

There were still some common areas for growth across some of the six PSELI communities. Student behavior—which contributes to and can be a product of climate—was sometimes challenging during school-day transitions (e.g., recess and in the hallway) and during OST activities. For example, in one community, student misbehavior disrupted instruction in half of the OST sessions we observed in spring 2019. Site-level interviewees in these OST programs noted various reasons for student misbehavior, including staff's inexperience in effectively managing student behavior and challenges with student focus and motivation to participate in SEL lessons. In one group interview, OST instructors highlighted students' desire to play outside before engaging in SEL lessons, and OST instructors in another group said that the failure of school staff to implement scheduled SEL lessons during morning meetings at the start of the school day reduced students' motivation to participate in SEL lessons during the OST program in the afternoon.

Offering Explicit SEL Instruction

Reflecting the design of PSELI, five of six communities began offering explicit SEL instruction in schools in Year 2 (the sixth community adopted a SEL program in Year 1). These SEL curricula and content sequences are listed in Table 5.1.

Almost all of the 38 schools adapted their master calendars to offer at least 30 minutes per week of stand-alone SEL lessons from the curricula and content sequences shown in Table 5.1. Some schools offered lessons as often as daily. In some schools, specials teachers (e.g., of music or art) or classroom teachers were responsible for delivering explicit SEL lessons. At other schools, a guidance counselor or social worker delivered the SEL lessons. Some lessons were in a longer block of 30–45 or up to 60 minutes, while other communities shortened the lesson to as little as ten minutes per day delivered most days of the week. Even schools with longer SEL blocks tended to still shorten the lesson to fit into a scheduled 30-minute morning meeting block. On the staff survey, 16 percent of school instructional staff reported using written SEL lesson plans in 2018, which increased to 37 percent in 2019. The fact that only a minority of teachers reported this by the second year of PSELI implementation could reflect low prevalence of SEL lesson delivery across classrooms or could simply reflect that, in some

TABLE 5.1

SEL Curricula and Content Sequences in Use as of Spring 2019

	SEL Curricula and Content Sequences	
Community	**Schools**	**OST programs**
Boston	• Second Step (5 sites) • Open Circle (1 site) • MindUP (1 site)	• No formal SEL content sequence in 2018–2019, but some OST programs used SEL language similar to that in the school curricula • Boston After School and Beyond plans for OST staff to be trained in the curricula in the 2019–2020 school year
Dallas	• Sanford Harmony (6 sites) • Leader in Me (1 site)	• Big Thought and Dallas Afterschool created a SEL content sequence that covered the same weekly SEL topics that are in the Sanford Harmony curriculum (7 sites)
Denver	• Second Step (5 sites) • Open Circle (1 site) • Leader in Me (1 site)	• Second Step pilot OST lessons (6 sites)
Palm Beach County	• Second Step (7 sites)	• Second Step (2 sites) • No formal SEL content sequence (5 sites)
Tacoma	• Caring School Community (6 sites piloted for one-third of the year) • Getting Along Together (6 sites piloted for one-third of the year) • Second Step (6 sites piloted for one-third of the year) • School-created curriculum (1 site) • Generation Wellness (1 site) • Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) Strategies (1 site, in some classrooms only)	• No formal SEL content sequence in 2018–2019
Tulsa	• RULER Anchor Tools (5 sites) • RULER Feeling Words (2 sites)	• RULER Anchor Tools (5 sites) • Peekapak (4 sites)

SOURCE: Spring 2019 site-level interviews with principals and OST managers.

schools, a guidance counselor or other specialized nonteacher delivered the lessons.

The delivery of explicit SEL lessons was less common in OST programs than in the schools, although we observed approximately equal frequency of brief moments of SEL instruction (not necessarily from written lessons) in both OST and school settings. Whole-group SEL instruction occurred in an average of 36 percent of the OST activities and in 34 percent of the school classes that we observed in spring 2019.

The lesser use of written lessons in OST settings also partly reflects the fact that there were simply few readily available SEL content sequences, as noted previously in this report. As of the 2018–2019 school year, OSTIs in two communities had adopted or written a SEL content sequence for use by OST instructors, but implementation varied across sites and communities. Three communities opted for OST programs not to deliver explicit SEL lessons, and the sixth community expected OST instructors to write their own lessons.

When we saw explicit SEL instruction, it was most often about naming emotions, followed closely by emotion regulation (e.g., deep-breathing exercises). This held true for both schools and OST programs. When SEL instruction occurred, it was typically of good quality; that is, students and teachers appeared engaged in the content, and the lessons ran smoothly in both school and OST settings, although this varied by community and site. That said, we observed less student engagement during OST lessons compared with engagement during school-day lessons. And, compared with school teachers, OST staff tended to have slightly choppier lesson delivery with multiple pauses, misspeaks, and corrections.

Integrating SEL into Academic Instruction and OST Activities

As of Year 2, no community had yet developed guidance about expected frequency, topics, or suggested activities or lessons to help integrate SEL throughout the school day, beyond using a SEL curriculum or content sequence and establishing rituals and routines. District-level interviewees told us about district-wide policies to integrate SEL into the regular school day, but they had not yet provided guidance to schools about how to enact those policies. The following examples indicate how districts integrated SEL into academic instruction:

- Three districts adopted SEL standards for use in SEL and academic lessons.
- The Teaching and Learning Department in one district worked with teachers trained in writing curricula to embed SEL practices in math, ELA, science, and social studies curricula.
- One district selected a literacy curriculum that includes SEL content.

Although there was not yet explicit guidance from systems to sites about what SEL activities to integrate into regular activities or how, some schools did so on their own. For example, one school used a SEL-infused ELA curriculum. In a second community, one school had grade-level teams that focused on specific SEL standards; a district SEL coach helped the teams construct morning routines based on these standards. Another school in this community required that teachers identify weekly academic and SEL goals.

In our staff survey, the percentage of teachers who reported making connections to SEL competencies through their academic instruction was higher in spring 2019 (43 percent) than in spring 2018 (36 percent). ELA was the academic subject in which we independently observed the highest proportion of SEL integration, compared with math, writing, and science. A common example of SEL integration in an ELA class was for a teacher to ask students to identify how a character felt and what events in the text gave the students reasons for their answers. We observed whole-class explicit SEL instruction on at least one SEL topic in 31 percent of ELA classes and in 19 percent of math classes across the six communities.

Similarly, some OST instructors integrated SEL into such activities as music, free play, and crafts. We saw the most integration of SEL into regular OST activities in one community that had adopted an explicit SEL content sequence, which provided content for the OST instructors to use in regular activities. For example, we observed an OST activity in which students created abstract paintings about their feelings and named their emotions while making their art.

Findings and Early Lessons

After analyzing the data we collected and relevant literature on improving climate and delivering SEL instruction to students, we identified five findings, outlined in this section. For each finding, we offer evidence for our assessment and conclude with early lessons learned from the first two years of PSELI implementation.

SEL rituals and routines were a good starting point for promoting a positive climate

One community developed a guide on SEL rituals and the SEL program's activities. To encourage consistent implementation of SEL practices and pedagogy, Tulsa developed and distributed a SEL playbook for all sites. The playbook included examples and ideas for implementing three SEL signature practices in both school and OST settings, as well as tips for using the activities and tools in the RULER curriculum.

As described earlier, all of the PSELI communities used SEL rituals and routines in some capacity as of spring 2019 to improve climate in OST and school settings. PSELI interviewees in many of the six communities reported that the implementation of SEL rituals and routines had a positive effect on climate. In one community, for example, a site leader described that using the same practices throughout the site served to create positivity and continuity between the school day and OST setting, noting that the practices are "seamless from the [school]-day into the afternoon space." This community used community circles and emotion check-ins—incorporating aspects from the Zones of Regulation SEL curriculum, which is designed to foster self-regulation and emotional control—during both the school day and OST programs to promote a positive climate. To help support the implementation of SEL rituals and routines, some communities developed written guidelines with suggestions for when and how school and OST staff can use the practices.

Early Lessons

- Create clear guidance documents that define SEL rituals and routines and provide explicit direction regarding how, when, and with what frequency to implement SEL practices.

Time for stand-alone SEL lessons was often cut short

In spring 2019 interviews, it was common for instructors to mention that interruptions or cancellations caused them to have less time than planned for explicit SEL instruction. For example, school and OST staff mentioned that other priorities, such as test prep and completion of homework assignments in OST programs, cut into or superseded the planned time for SEL. Interruptions included student arrivals during morning meetings or dismissals during OST afternoon meetings, overhead announcements during SEL lessons, overlapping activities within the SEL lesson block (e.g., student breakfast, OST clubs), and a lack of transition time causing a SEL lesson to start later or end earlier than scheduled. An OST staff member in one community also highlighted

challenges with student focus and motivation to engage in SEL lessons that were scheduled at the start of the afterschool program: "They're very antsy and they want to go outside. They want to go do something that's more active rather than sitting down, listening, and kind of talking about how they feel."

Finding protected time for SEL lessons was more challenging in sites that did not formally include SEL lessons in the master schedule, leaving staff to figure out on their own how to fit the SEL lesson into their other scheduled activities. As one principal explained, "it's a matter of changing our mindset on, okay, this is important to us, and how do we go about teaching it on top of all the other pressures that we have with academics?" A clear signal from leadership at all levels that time for SEL instruction is important is a key enabler of ensuring protected time for SEL in the master schedule.

Early Lessons

- Send a clear message from the system to site leaders that protected time for SEL is important.
- When communicating expected practices from system to site leaders or from site leaders to instructors, set the minimum expectation for the amount of explicit SEL instruction per week, and offer sites or teachers some flexibility in how to meet that minimum.
- Include protected time for SEL in the master schedule, making a realistic allocation that reflects necessary transition times and arrivals, as well as student energy levels during the day.

Most of the schools adapted the SEL curriculum used

Most of the PSELI districts or schools modified the SEL curriculum that had been selected. Systems and sites adapted these curricula in one of three ways:

1. District staff or site leaders shortened the written lessons.
2. Instructors used only parts of the written lessons.
3. School staff and coaches differentiated the instruction materials to meet the needs of specific student groups.

On the one hand, some SEL coaches noted that adapting the curriculum was a way for district staff or site leaders to take ownership of the SEL program, understand its content, and commit to its use. On the other hand, the evidence on SEL curriculum effectiveness is based on the use of intact lessons implemented largely as the developer planned. We do not know whether modified lessons would have the same effects.

As an example of a modification to shorten lessons, one district infused Second Step activities into schools' daily morning meetings. To do this, district staff split up the typical 45-minute Second Step lesson into 10-minute segments and incorporated these into the planned morning meeting lessons across the week (e.g., a Second Step empathy story was presented during the group activity portion of morning meeting on Day 1, and students participated in a Second Step empathy activity on Day 2). However, in our observations of these classes, teachers in this community did not always deliver even these shortened lessons at the intended frequency, and the quality of the abbreviated SEL instruction varied.

Teachers and OST instructors, meanwhile, tended to use only parts of the curriculum, for various reasons. First, as is common when starting the use of a curriculum, instructors tended to use the overall SEL program's most-straightforward, quickest activities, such as discussing a key vocabulary word (e.g., empathy) or posing a short check-in question (e.g., What are some things you can do to be a good friend?) rather than implementing full SEL lesson plans, which take more time and preparation. By the second year, more instructors used more elements of the curriculum. Another reason that staff used only parts of a curriculum was a lack of buy-in. For example, teachers in two communities felt that the SEL curriculum content was sometimes viewed as "silly" by students in the older fourth and fifth grades, some of whom did not take seriously the SEL activities or the concept of SEL in general. OST program instructors also thought that the content of SEL lessons tended to be more appropriate for younger students, in kindergarten through third grade, and less developmentally appropriate for the older elementary grades. In addition, teachers and OST staff noted that the following barriers caused them to use only parts of the curriculum: competing site-level priorities (e.g., test prep, homework), insufficient coaching support or guidance on use of materials, and delayed receipt of SEL curriculum materials.

The third way in which schools modified their SEL curricula was to differentiate it to meet the needs of specific student groups. In spring 2019 interviews, one or more district or school staff members from each of the six communities expressed the desire for materials that would allow them to adapt SEL lessons and activities to a more diverse student body. Coaches in three of the communities said that they wished the selected SEL curriculum could be more differentiated to make it more culturally responsive or better suited to students with special needs. In two communities, some teachers felt that the Spanish curriculum materials were not as engaging or as high quality as those in English. Another community continues to have discussions about how to adapt a curriculum with potentially Eurocentric views of education (e.g., the message that learners behave by having their eyes watching, ears listening, voice quiet, and hands down). One SEL coach referenced a need for significant modifications for students with intellectual disabilities.

Some communities have taken steps to differentiate SEL content in response to these concerns. One community started to make videos to replace the outdated SEL curriculum videos and to make the lessons more reflective of students in that community. In two communities, teachers did their own translations to Spanish when needed. A third community offered site-level staff trainings on equity to inform SEL work with deaf and hard-of-hearing populations. Coaches in one community also referenced teachers' use of visual charts and nonverbal cues to support multiple types of learners. Across most communities, coaches referenced the importance of coaching support to differentiate SEL instruction. Site staff reported that coaches or others with expertise in SEL curricula provided helpful guidance about whether and how to adapt the SEL materials. As one coach explained, "it can 100 percent be taught in a way that is culturally responsive and supportive to students with disabilities and students that are English learners; however, it takes a skilled teacher to be able to do that. So, without [instructional coaching] support, I would say it would be much more difficult."

Early Lessons

- Expect that teachers will modify the intended SEL curriculum. Monitor teachers' and OST instructors' use of the SEL lessons to understand the reasons for those deviations, such

as lack of time, buy-in, materials, or knowledge of the curriculum. Work with staff to address the barriers and improve implementation.

- Provide extensions to the SEL curriculum (from SEL coaches or others with curriculum expertise) to support differentiated instruction for students with disabilities, English learners, and students from different cultural backgrounds.
- Expect a progression in SEL curriculum and content sequence use, with relatively shallow use in the first year and progressively more-faithful implementation as PD supports and staff familiarity with the curriculum increase.

SEL content sequences for OST programs were in an early stage of development

Unlike schools, OST programs do not have a lot of SEL content sequences to choose from. The PSELI OSTIs approached this issue in several ways, including writing their own content, piloting OST curricular materials from curriculum developers, and using school curriculum activities.

We observed the most SEL instruction in spring 2019 in a community that used pilot OST lesson plans created by developers of the SEL curriculum that schools were using. This community received the weekly SEL lessons for OST programs as they were being developed, leaving few days between staff receipt of lessons and use. Although OST staff felt that this timeline made it challenging to prepare to implement the lessons, they implemented them at the intended frequency.

According to interviews and our observations, OST instructors generally needed SEL lesson plans if they were to successfully deliver SEL instruction. One OSTI developed a starter set of 30 lessons for OST instructors to use during the daily afternoon meetings that started the program day and paired it with lesson-plan writing assignments as part of the OSTI's ongoing OST staff training series. The OST instructors were expected to develop new SEL lessons of their own after exhausting the 30 starter lessons. In practice, the OST instructors did not write their own lessons, for the most part, and instead reused the same starter lessons. In another community, the OST programs adopted the same SEL program as the school day, which did not include

One community created a SEL content sequence that reinforced the school-day SEL curriculum. Big Thought and Dallas Afterschool co-developed a 36-week SEL content sequence, based on Sanford Harmony units and lessons, that provided a weekly SEL theme (e.g., being respectful or having empathy) and activities for OST instructors to implement at least once per week. Each week's OST pacing guide comprised four activities:

1. one SEL explicit instruction activity
2. one literacy session during which instructors read and discussed a SEL-related text with students
3. an associated SEL literacy extension activity
4. related guiding questions that staff could use to integrate the weekly theme into other enrichment content.

The guide reinforced, but did not duplicate, that week's explicit lesson in the school's SEL curriculum. Pacing coordination was challenging to maintain as schools and OST programs struggled to stay at similar places in the curriculum. A full-time on-site OST SEL specialist met with OST instructors each week to walk through the guide and co-plan the SEL activities for the following week. OST instructors whom we interviewed in spring 2019 appreciated the guidance and predictable SEL lesson routine that the pacing guide provided. Future revisions will adapt the SEL activities for older and younger students.

written SEL lessons and instead included SEL-focused instructional tools, strategies, and short activities. Although OST staff responded positively to the tools, they struggled with the lack of a SEL content sequence, and the OST instructors requested explicit lesson plans.

Whether using a SEL content sequence, using SEL tools, or writing their own SEL activities, nearly all communities faced general challenges associated with building OST staff capacity to deliver SEL lessons. In communities where staff were encouraged to adapt or develop SEL lessons for the OST space, some interviewees said that staff lacked the experience with lesson planning necessary to effectively take on these tasks. Furthermore, staff turnover in OST programs hinders SEL instructional capacity because new staff require training when they begin. In addition, not all OST programs have consistent daily student attendance. The fluctuations in student attendance from day to day can make it difficult to ensure that all students are exposed to the intended instruction, and it is harder to progress through a sequence of activities in which the content builds on previous activities.

Early Lessons

- When expecting SEL instruction in OST programming, provide OST instructors with ongoing training—for example, through once-per-week meetings to model and practice that week's SEL activities or lessons.
- When linking school curricula and OST content sequences for SEL, anticipate the need for ongoing monitoring throughout the year to adapt the SEL instruction schedule so that schools and OST programs can remain in sync.
- Do not rely solely on OST instructors (or school teachers) to write their own SEL activity plans; instead, use evidence-based SEL content sequences (to the extent that they exist) as they are intended, or rely on someone with curriculum expertise to design the lessons.

- If staff from the OSTI or OST program create SEL content sequences, plan to revise them over time as staff gain experience using them.

Guidance about how to integrate SEL into academics and regular classes lagged behind guidance about how to deliver stand-alone SEL lessons

As of Year 2, PSELI managers had not yet provided formal guidance for the sites on integrating SEL into academic lessons. In practice, though, a majority of site leaders and instructors whom we interviewed in spring 2019 described enacting good teaching practices that promote students' SEL without necessarily attributing those practices to PSELI or identifying them as SEL activities. This indicates a missed opportunity for the initiative to provide a comprehensive definition of SEL that includes the practices that many teachers already understand to be simply sound teaching. Providing such a definition may have helped avoid staff feeling that SEL was "one more thing" to add to their already packed instructional schedule.

Therefore, one way to achieve an early win when integrating SEL into academic instruction is to identify the SEL practices that teachers are already using and provide guidance on how to deepen those practices. For example, the majority of principals, OST managers, and teachers cited using practices that promote SEL, such as

- "turn and talk" moments, in which students discuss a topic in pairs and then share with the group
- "accountable talk," such as student discussion with active listening and reasoning
- discussion of emotions during ELA lessons
- a school-wide focus on project-based learning, which promotes teamwork and other SEL skills
- opportunities for student leadership.

As teachers in one community explained, "[We use] 'turn and talk' . . . almost every single day. . . . But I feel that's just a teaching strategy. . . . [It's not] implemented because of SEL."

Our observations of the PSELI sites in spring 2019 confirm frequent instances of student collaboration. We observed staff providing youth opportunities to work together (whether in a quick turn-and-talk activity or in longer group activities) in about 40 percent of school-day sessions and about 30 percent of OST sessions across the communities. However, instructors did not always provide explicit SEL instruction during these activities; for example, group work was not always accompanied by guidance on how to collaborate effectively. Without such explicit instruction, students are missing opportunities to improve their skills in this area.

Coaches in three communities commented on the need for more coaching and training in pedagogical strategies that promote students' SEL skills and ways to integrate SEL instruction in academic classes. The potential is there: In a community that had adopted SEL standards, a district SEL coach helped teachers design standards-aligned SEL instruction to include in academic classes. As one coach explained, "I just think [teachers] need more information on what it [SEL integration] is. . . . I just don't think we've provided them with enough training and practice and modeling in that area yet."

The OST programs' CQI processes offered another opportunity to integrate SEL instruction into OST programming. Staff in all but one community described using data in some way to identify and improve SEL instruction during regular OST activities. The five communities that used data implemented a variety of tools. Some tools, such as the SEL PQA, were SEL-focused. Other tools, such as the Assessment of Afterschool Program Practices Tool, targeted program quality more generally. System and site leaders used data collected with these tools to identify opportunities to encourage staff to use SEL-promoting pedagogy, although using the data for this purpose did not occur consistently across sites or communities.

Early Lessons

- In training, achieve an early win by explaining that SEL integration encompasses many of the practices that teachers already understand and incorporate in what they consider good teaching (e.g., encouraging collaborative student

groups). Offer ways to build on those good teaching practices to include instances of more-explicit SEL instruction.

- Provide explicit guidance to staff on how to integrate SEL instruction into school-day academics and OST activities, including specific pedagogical strategies and lesson content (such as how to collaborate effectively) that instructors can easily implement across subject areas and types of activities. SEL standards in schools and OST programs' CQI processes can help frame this guidance.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The six PSELI communities have undertaken an ambitious approach to supporting the social and emotional development of their students in both schools and OST programs. In this report, we described the community's experiences during the first two years of the initiative, drawing on what the communities learned so far to provide early insights for educators and policymakers who are interested in enacting new programs or practices to support SEL. With support from The Wallace Foundation and TA providers, each community launched the initiative with ambitious plans that included numerous activities at both the system and site levels. The findings we discussed in this report make it clear that, although this initial investment was valuable, site-level SEL implementation could have been faster and stronger if districts and OSTIs had provided guidance and strategies that were more tightly focused and specific.

Our research also highlighted the ways in which a large number of groups, including the local initiative leaders, TA providers, and curriculum developers, can contribute to site-level implementation of SEL. In this chapter, we discuss implications of our early lessons, organized in three categories of groups: school district and OSTI leaders; school and OST program leaders and staff; and policymakers, curriculum developers, TA providers, funders, and state education agencies. Some of the implications are relevant to multiple groups, so we encourage readers to consider the full set in this chapter.

Implications for District and OSTI Leaders

Although SEL-related benefits for children ultimately occur as a result of site-level activity, the leadership provided at the system level can be essential for helping ensure that site-level staff are well prepared and understand what they are expected to do. We use the term *system-level leaders* to refer to senior school district and OSTI personnel, such as superintendents, curriculum coordinators, PD directors, and principal supervisors; SEL directors and OSTI leaders, such as chief executive officers and directors of research; and OSTI staff who oversee the implementation of SEL programs and practices. In this section, we present implications that draw on both system- and site-level findings but that are primarily relevant to actions that system-level leaders might take.

A Specific Vision for SEL, Combined with Frequent, Clear Communication with Sites, Can Promote Strong Site-Level Implementation

In retrospect, when launching PSELI, the communities could have better defined the *specific* goals of the initiative and then outlined the desired actions that sites should take year by year to achieve those goals. A crucial component of this work, which communities solidified in the second year, was a strategy for communicating with sites about what the initiative is and expectations for site-level activities and goals. Hiring a SEL manager was critical to increasing and systematizing communication with sites. Our findings point to the need for both a well-defined vision that includes the desired observable behaviors that system-level leaders ultimately hope to see and clear, explicit communication; having one without the other is unlikely to result in strong, coherent site-level changes in practice.

Clear and Specific Guidance from the System Level to Sites About Desired Practices Can Also Facilitate Strong Implementation

An important component of a clear communication strategy was providing guidance about what specific practices educators should adopt to support children's social and emotional development. Schools and OST programs support SEL by promoting a positive climate, explicit SEL instruction, and integration of SEL into academics and OST activities, and being successful necessitates

specific guidance for each element. For example, the lack of guidance about the expected frequency, amount of time, and type of SEL instruction and practices left site-level staff with significant flexibility but also the burden of figuring out important aspects of SEL implementation on their own. Educators value some degree of autonomy, but school and OST staff in the PSELI communities expressed a desire for clearer guidance and for lessons or practices that the sites could adopt. Such guidance could present descriptions of SEL routines and rituals, along with examples and suggestions for when to use them; expectations regarding the minimum amount of time to devote to explicit instruction; and specific examples of pedagogical practices that support SEL integration. In addition, staff requested guidance about how to differentiate their practices to support diverse student needs. As we discuss later, system-level leaders can work with support providers to develop and disseminate such guidance.

When Planning a SEL Effort, Leaders Should Anticipate That Lack of Time, Staff Turnover, and Unexpected Events Might Slow Implementation

Each of the PSELI communities developed ambitious plans to implement multiple elements of the initiative during the first two years. None of the communities successfully rolled out its full set of proposed activities during this time frame, largely because of insufficient site- and system-level staff time to plan and execute all of the activities during Years 1 and 2. Another factor that influenced the rollout of PSELI was staff turnover at both the system and site levels. Turnover resulted in activities that were either only partially implemented or postponed until later years of the initiative. Furthermore, unexpected events, such as teacher walkouts and changes in enrollment and budget, hindered implementation.

The combination of limited staff time, staff turnover, and unexpected events required communities to reevaluate some of their PSELI-related plans and led them to find ways to make the work more resilient to change. These steps included connecting PSELI to other priority areas in the district and OSTI (e.g., by linking PSELI work to an equity initiative or housing SEL in the district's academics department); creating onboarding materials and shorter, more easily repeatable PD to help new staff get up to speed quickly; and breaking up the work into discrete, manageable

chunks that allowed communities to adopt new practices incrementally rather than all at once.

Staff Can Benefit from PD That Is Ongoing, Customized, and Provided by Coaches with Prior Expertise in the Relevant Setting (School or OST Program)

In interviews, site-level staff told us that they valued PD that involved hands-on learning opportunities and that was directly relevant to their classroom or OST program contexts. Interviewees suggested that future PD should focus more on practical applications and include more content about how to differentiate SEL instruction, and it should include modeling and opportunities for staff to practice what they learned.

One PD delivery method that site-level staff highly valued was SEL coaching. Unlike one-time workshops or classes, coaches can provide PD that is ongoing and customized to staff needs, and the one-on-one nature of coaching provides a mechanism to support modeling and hands-on practice. Staff especially valued support from coaches who brought relevant practical experience—classroom instruction for school coaching and OST instruction for OST coaching. Coaches can also support frontline staff who need to modify or customize SEL curricula and practices, so coaches with relevant SEL curriculum expertise can be an asset. At the same time, system-level leaders should prepare for the possibility that site-level school staff will resist coaching, given that school coaches sometimes evaluate school personnel for performance reviews. If coaches work for the district or the OSTI, an MOU that spells out the coach's role and visitation schedule would help set expectations and clarify for everyone what the coach's focus at the site is.

OSTIs Can Help OST Programs Adopt and Innovate SEL Practices

Even within an environment of funding constraints and high staff turnover, OSTIs can capitalize on the relative agility of the OST sector to try out new SEL practices, drawing on OST programs' history of CQI and youth development. The combination of relative programmatic freedom and small size give OST programs flexibility to test, amend, and generally innovate new practices, including SEL practices. Although limited program hours,

more-sporadic student attendance, and other constraints can inhibit OST programs' ability to execute sustained units of study, OST programs in PSELI have tried successfully and are refining some SEL practices, such as rituals and shortened SEL activities. The OSTIs in PSELI moved relatively quickly to create guidance documents, PD series, and (in one case) SEL content sequences for OST programs to try. Although OSTIs that do not directly fund OST programs lack the ability to mandate that those programs implement certain practices and content sequences, many OST programs want and need SEL resources, which are scarce. OSTIs can play a key role in meeting this need.

Implications for School and OST Program Leaders and Staff

The effects of any SEL effort depend largely on the work of OST instructors, school teachers, and other educators who interact directly with students on a day-to-day basis. These staff, in turn, benefit from supportive site-level leadership provided by OST managers and principals. In this section, we present implications that are most relevant to staff working in schools and OST programs.

Site Leaders Need to Be Intentional About Protecting Time for SEL and Conveying to Staff the Priority of Delivering the Intended SEL Instruction

Finding protected time for SEL instruction—particularly stand-alone SEL lessons—is a persistent challenge, especially for schools. We found that interruptions and shortened time for SEL instruction were common in both schools and OST settings. Many instructors implemented only elements rather than full SEL lessons from a SEL curriculum or content sequence. To help instructors deliver the lessons as intended, site leaders (and, by extension, their managers at the district and OSTI levels) should convey in word and action the importance of preserving time for SEL instruction. For example, in the master calendar provided to teachers and OST instructors, site leaders can clearly identify time for SEL that does not get overwritten. In addition, to help address barriers to SEL implementation, site leaders can monitor implementation and collaborate with teachers and OST instructors to determine solutions and supports, such as offering hands-on SEL

coaching, having experts modify lessons, and better distributing materials.

When Adapting an Evidence-Based SEL Curriculum to Meet Local Needs, Retain Features That Contribute to the Curriculum's Effectiveness

Teachers and OST instructors reported a lack of existing curriculum materials or content sequences that met all their students' needs. For example, staff in several communities reported that materials in a non-English language were either unavailable or of poor quality. Staff also mentioned that some SEL curricula were not culturally relevant or responsive and that the curricula often lacked adequate supports for students with disabilities. Some school staff reported adapting materials not just to meet students' needs but also to fit with the school schedule and other constraints. They often did this by shortening lessons or incorporating parts of a curriculum into morning meetings or other activities. OST staff faced a different challenge because many of the SEL content sequences that were available were in an early stage of development. In some communities, OST staff had to write lessons or adapt existing materials to fit the program context. Although writing lesson plans can be rewarding for teachers and OST instructors, these staff sometimes lacked the training to do so effectively, and time was also a constraint. In addition, these adaptations could threaten the integrity of programs that communities selected based on research evidence. Communities found that coaches or others with expertise in SEL curricula provided helpful guidance about whether and how to adapt these materials. When a SEL curriculum is adapted to meet local needs, it is important to retain the key features that contribute to the curriculum's effectiveness.

The Integration of SEL Instruction into Academics and OST Activities Requires Explicit Guidance and Resources, Such as Lesson Plans and Model Activities

In PSELI, system-level plans to integrate SEL into academic instruction and regular OST activities trailed behind the introduction of SEL rituals (to set a positive climate) and then stand-alone SEL lessons (to offer explicit SEL instruction). At the same time, many teachers and instructors described typical SEL activities (e.g., giving students time to collaborate) as simply

good teaching and reported that they engaged in such practices frequently but did not connect them to SEL. Site leaders could increase the prevalence and quality of integrated SEL by helping teachers and instructors understand how their existing practices connect to SEL and by providing concrete guidance on, and examples of, how to do this.

SEL Coaches Can Provide Valuable Support to School and OST Staff Who Are Implementing New SEL Programs and Practices

Site-level staff valued on-the-ground, customized supports, which is one reason why teachers and OST instructors gave high praise to SEL coaching in several communities. Frontline staff benefited from direct contact with coaches who could observe instruction, provide feedback, and model lessons. Having a SEL coach with SEL content knowledge and prior experience working in the relevant (school or OST) setting was an important way to help teachers and OST instructors learn the SEL instructional materials and begin integrating SEL into regular classes and activities.

Taking the Time to Meet, Increasing the Overlap of School and OST Staff, and Explicitly Acknowledging the Power Differential That Favors Schools over OST Programs Are Important Ingredients for Strong School-OST Partnerships

Leaders at the site and system levels told us that, especially at the beginning of a partnership, it was important to take time to meet face to face. This held true even though opposing school and OST program schedules make it hard to find time to meet. Despite these challenges, school and OST leaders and instructors did find ways to collaborate, often beginning with the leaders of the OST program and the school and gradually expanding to include additional staff from each setting in a SEL steering committee.

A related challenge that site-level staff described was the lack of mutual respect for, and understanding of, counterparts in the partner setting (school or OST program). Our interviews suggested that OST staff sometimes felt that they were viewed as babysitters rather than educators, and some school staff were concerned about how to get OST staff to adopt the norms that the school had embraced. These perceptions improved over time,

and school and OST staff found ways to collaborate on a more level playing field by increasing communication and interaction. This was achieved by, for example, having staff from one setting also employed by the other, having staff observe instruction in the other setting, and establishing SEL steering committees with at least some representation from both the school and the OST program.

Implications for Policymakers, Curriculum Developers, Technical Assistance Providers, Funders, and State Education Agencies

The implications presented so far in this chapter have been geared toward actions that system- or site-level educators can take as they implement new SEL efforts. In this section, we turn our attention to the groups who support these educators—TA providers, developers of SEL curricula, professional groups (e.g., the School Superintendents Association, the Afterschool Alliance), and even state education agencies that set policy and allocate resources to school districts. This section is also relevant to funders as they consider how to develop guidance to grantees and what type of SEL work to invest in. The implications discussed in this section pertain to ways that guidance and resources from these kinds of organizations and partners might be tailored to support SEL efforts in school and OST contexts.

Because It Can Take Several Years to Implement SEL Efforts Effectively, Funders and Policymakers Should Offer Encouragement and Incentives for Educators to Persevere and to Craft Realistic Implementation Plans

The implementation of a new reform or program is often accompanied by expectations about immediate changes to practice and benefits for students that may be unrealistic. The PSELI communities' experiences corroborate other work in education that has shown that it takes significant time for multi-part efforts to be fully implemented—and even longer for them to take hold at the classroom level. These findings highlight the need for funders, state education agencies, and others who monitor educational outcomes to set realistic expectations about improvement. In recognition of the fact that it takes years to get this kind of work right, funders and others who support SEL implementation should consider ways to offer encouragement or incentives for

schools and OST programs to persevere in their SEL work rather than move on to something new when immediate results do not materialize. At the same time, funders, state education agencies, and local leaders (e.g., superintendents, school boards) should also encourage system leaders to winnow down long lists of plans to the few topmost priority goals for each year to better ensure that system and site leaders can accomplish them fully and well.

High-Quality, Varied Communication Strategies Can Support Site-Level Implementation, but System-Level Leaders Might Lack the Capacity to Develop These Strategies on Their Own

Effective communication was a critical component of implementation in the early years of PSELI. System-level PSELI managers typically lacked the time and expertise to develop the necessary communication strategies and materials that would support not only site-level implementation but also broader buy-in for SEL. Communications consultants and TA providers served as helpful resources for system-level leaders, assisting in the development of communication strategies. Models of useful communication products, such as a how-to guide or communication plan, were particularly valuable. Consultants and TA providers can also offer concrete strategies for rolling out elements of the work at the site level to ensure consistency in messaging in both the OST and school settings.

Because Available SEL Curriculum Materials Might Not Fully Meet Communities' Needs for Culturally Relevant SEL or for Teaching Students with Individualized Education Plans, Practitioners Could Benefit from Collaborations with Curriculum Experts and Developers to Make These Adaptations

Across all communities, staff at the system or site level reported a need to modify SEL curricula and content sequences to help ensure that SEL instruction was culturally responsive and relevant to all students, including students with Individualized Education Plans. Curriculum developers cannot necessarily fully meet the needs of every school or program that adopts their materials, but our data suggest that it could be beneficial for developers to collaborate more closely with prospective users of their materials to identify opportunities to develop lessons and other resources that

both build on the strengths and address the needs of the diverse students whom these communities serve. Likewise, district and OSTI staff with curriculum expertise, rather than frontline instructors, should be the ones to adapt off-the-shelf SEL curricula or content sequences to retain as much fidelity to their design as possible.

Funding and Other Resources to Institutionalize New Roles, Such as SEL Coaches, Could Promote Sustainability of SEL Efforts

New staff roles and support providers helped the PSELI grantees tackle many of the activities they proposed for the first two years. Converting these grant-funded roles into permanent positions could help sustain the work, but communities might not have the financial resources to do this. Funders or policymakers could provide long-term financial support or modify staffing policies to enable the continuation of these roles. And TA providers could develop guidance about how to find experts to fill these roles and how to define and structure the roles to ensure long-term success.

Looking Ahead

Building on the strengths of both schools and OST programs to develop a multi-pronged strategy for promoting SEL, the PSELI communities are putting into practice several of the tenets that SEL scholars and advocates have suggested are crucial for effective SEL. This work is challenging and ambitious. After analyzing the data we gathered during the first two years of implementation, we identified numerous successes, as well as areas for growth, and our findings point to ways that funders, TA providers, and other supporting organizations and partners can help schools and OST programs implement high-quality SEL.

These lessons are especially relevant now that COVID-19 has disrupted school and OST programming on an unprecedented scale. The pandemic has amplified the urgency of addressing students' social and emotional well-being along with their academic learning.

The PSELI communities' work will continue to inform the broader field, and we will share additional implementation lessons as the communities' SEL efforts mature. Future reports will document these additional findings; provide a how-to guide; offer case

studies that present more-detailed portraits of school-OST partnerships; and analyze the effects of the PSELI work on students' SEL skills and academic achievement, site-wide climate, and staff retention and job commitment. Collectively, these can offer much-needed details and lessons for schools and OST programs about what it takes to implement SEL environments, instruction, and supports.

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In 2016, in an effort to gain knowledge about how to help children develop social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, The Wallace Foundation launched a six-year project called the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative (PSELI). The goals of PSELI are for students to experience reinforcing messages about SEL both in school and in out-of-school time (OST) programs; practice social and emotional skills in both settings; and experience consistent, supportive relationships between adults and students. To achieve these goals, school districts and out-of-school time intermediaries have partnered to develop professional development about SEL for school and OST staff; help elementary schools and their OST partners develop closer working relationships; and implement reinforcing SEL practices and instruction across both settings. In what the authors believe is the most-comprehensive SEL implementation study to date, they draw lessons than can help school districts and OST providers carry out their own SEL programs.

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