



# K–12 Social and Emotional Learning Across Connecticut: A Statewide Landscape Scan

## Executive Summary

This report, based on a survey described below, provides eight recommendations for supporting students in developing social and emotional learning (SEL). The recommendations include strategies that district and school personnel can incorporate into their district and school strategic planning and school improvement plans to address the need for SEL supports. Collectively, the recommendations offer a coherent, systemic approach to plan for and communicate to school- and district-based practitioners, leaders, and professionals the importance of SEL and ensure that SEL becomes and remains fundamental in kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) public education.

Although not a comprehensive list, the recommendations correspond to the findings of the statewide landscape scan of Connecticut public school districts and follow-up practitioner focus groups, conducted during fall 2020. The survey scan findings and responses from the focus groups provided a snapshot of the work that is taking place, current trends, emerging issues, and programmatic initiatives related to SEL in K–12 public schools across the state. The first two recommendations are strategies for meaningful family and community engagement in supporting SEL. The third, fourth, and fifth recommendations offer guidance for strategic planning and funding opportunities for the systemic integration of SEL and academic instruction. Systemwide professional learning is the focus of recommendation six, which includes ancillary staff to support students' SEL development beyond the school day. The seventh recommendation emphasizes the use of an assessment to monitor students' development of SEL competencies and to guide SEL supports and efforts at the district and school level. The final recommendation provides guidance for responding to increased demand for SEL support due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Summary of Findings and Key Recommendations

- 1. District Efforts to Address SEL:** While nearly all districts reported that they address SEL for students through ongoing districtwide engagement efforts, four out of 10 districts do not publicly display information about SEL on their website. *To make SEL efforts truly effective, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) recommends that districts provide detailed information about SEL initiatives and programming on district websites as one way to provide information to families and communities.*
- 2. SEL Integration:** Districts report that they are committed to SEL, but they need information on SEL principles, a common language for SEL, and guidance on integrating SEL into academic instruction. *CSDE recommends that SEL be included in board policies and strategic operating plans so that resources are allocated toward developing a systems approach to SEL.*
- 3. SEL Resources and Support:** Most districts report that they have at least a part-time or full-time equivalent (FTE) devoted to SEL. SEL is primarily funded through local budget allocations and is less often funded through state or federal grants. *CSDE recommends that all districts that receive federal title funds (e.g., Title I, Title II, and Title IV, Part A and the temporary Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief [ESSER] funds) to use these resources to support SEL activities and SEL-related professional development, as appropriate. Connecticut also requires all districts to have a districtwide school climate coordinator (Connecticut General Assembly, Public Act 11-232).*
- 4. SEL Activities for Staff and Students:** Districts report that they have a variety of activities that support student SEL and strengthen the social and emotional competencies of the adults who support them. Nearly all districts report having free-standing lessons designed to explicitly enhance students' social and emotional competencies and at least one support for adult SEL. *CSDE recommends that activities related to student SEL, a positive school climate, and adult SEL be part of a tier 1 (universal) tier of a multitiered systems approach designed to help achieve a positive school climate. CSDE also recommends instituting an ongoing program that supports adult SEL and psychological well-being, perhaps through partnerships with local community mental health agencies.*

- 5. Professional Development:** Districts report that they are providing professional learning related to SEL; however, they also report that the trainings are not always tailored to the needs of participants. *CSDE recommends a systematic approach to professional learning that is driven by needs and informed by districts' SEL goals and outcomes for students and adults. Paraeducators and noninstructional staff such as school resource officers, bus drivers, custodians, and cafeteria staff should also receive SEL training so they are better prepared to reinforce classroom SEL instruction.*
- 6. Use of Data and Needs Assessment:** Few districts report that they are using SEL needs assessments to guide their implementation. *CSDE provides, at no cost to districts and schools, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) and the DESSA-mini screening tools, both strength-based assessments of students' SEL competencies.*

CSDE recommends that districts use the [School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation \(SHAPE\)](#) to drive SEL efforts. The SHAPE is a free resource that collects information and provides a snapshot of the multitiered services and supports, staffing, financing, and data systems of school and district comprehensive school mental health systems.

- 7. SEL Priorities and the COVID-19 Pandemic:** Most districts report significant changes in their SEL programming due to COVID. Many districts are requesting support and guidance on how to execute strategies in a coordinated fashion. *CSDE recommends that districts use existing title funds and the federal ESSER funds to support SEL work. The CSDE's [AccelerateCT](#) document cites SEL as one of the priority areas. Additional information is available in the [SEL section](#) and [COVID-19 Resources for Families and Educators](#) pages of the CSDE website.*

