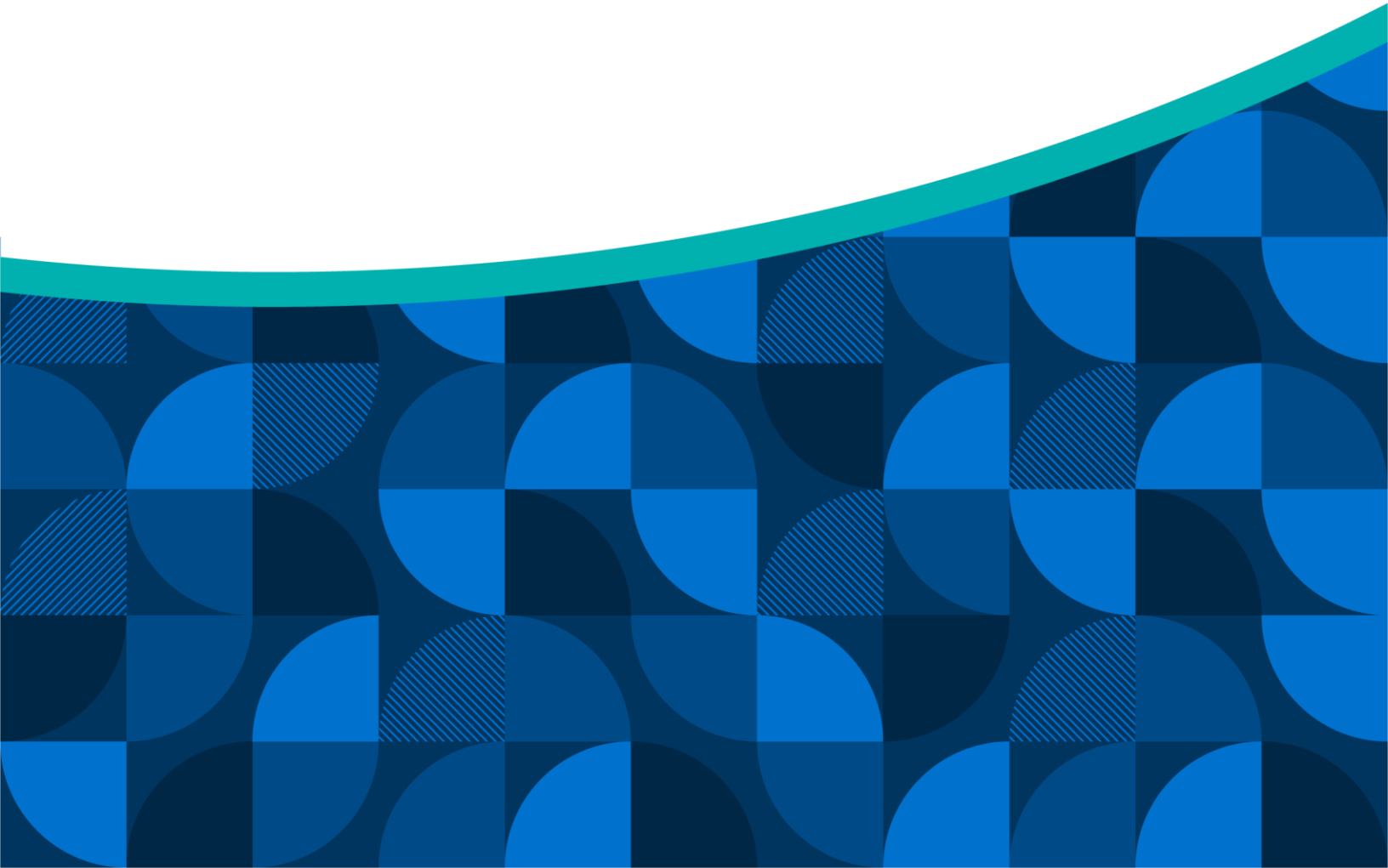# Student-Student Relationships

Connected Resource Toolkit

District Leadership Forum

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Table of Contents

Resources Address the Following Diagnostic Activities:

❑ Teachers and/or staff at my school organize team-building exercises and activities for their students each week.

❑ Teachers and/or staff at my school ensure students have weekly opportunities to develop interpersonal skills (e.g., active listening, speaking) by regularly (i.e., daily) integrating partner activities, group projects and/or full class discussions into student learning.

❑ Our school formally tracks that all students have at least one positive relationship with a peer in the building.

The Importance of Student-Student Connections

Positive student-student relationships refer to healthy, respectful, and cooperative connections between students within an educational context. These strong connections foster a sense of acceptance, trust, and validation for students. This, in turn, reduces the anxiety, loneliness, disengagement, and rejection that typically drive misbehavior.

How Student-Student Relationships Drive Behavioral Improvements

1 **Greater Belongingness Treats Student Anxiety at the Root of Misbehavior**

Students who have positive relationships with their peers feel psychologically safer and more supported at school than students who lack similar relationships.

2 **Higher Academic Engagement Leads to Fewer In-Class Disruptions**

Social support from friends can increase students' motivation and accountability while reducing academic stress and anxiety. Students who are engaged with course content are less likely to disrupt classroom lessons, group projects, or other learning activates.

> "Students with no friends receive lower grades and are less academically engaged compared to those with even just one friend.
>
> *Jaana Juvonen, Psychology Professor at UCLA*

3 **Improved Interpersonal Skills Promote Healthier Peer-to-Peer Interactions**

Maintaining positive connections requires communication, empathy, cooperation, and other social skills, meaning that students 'practice' these essential skills in their existing friendships. Doing so sets them up for healthier interactions with all their peers, including peers they may disagree with. Through disagreements with friends, students learn to communicate openly, express their concerns, and actively listen to others' perspectives.

Offer Explicit and Implicit Connection Opportunities

There are several ways that teachers can strengthen student-student relationships in their classroom. Teachers should balance more explicit team and relationship-building exercises with more subtle ways to structure classroom time and provide opportunities for meaningful student relationships to form.

Structured Socialization Provides Relationship Training Wheels and Drives Home Explicit Lessons on Interacting with Others

These usually include a clearly stated lesson to help students understand why they are being asked to interact with their peers in a specific way. Less developed students benefit from this introductory behavioral practice. Keep in mind that more structured, formal activities are often better suited for younger students, while older students likely prefer more informal and/or embedded activities.

1:1 and Class-wide Collaborative Team-building Activities

These are intentional and explicit team-building activities that help foster deeper student-student connections and can contribute to a positive classroom culture. These should help teach students collective responsibility, appreciate the unique contributions of their classmates toward a common goal, and form deeper peer bonds. See pages 6-7 for examples.

Direct SEL Instruction to Develop Relationship-Building Skills

Use intentional curriculum that directly instructs students on various prosocial and relationship building skills. It is crucial that schools use a curriculum that is age appropriate and provides their students with the skills they need the most. See pages 8-15 for support on selecting and using a direct socio-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum in the classroom.

Embedded and Facilitated Student Connection Opportunities Allow for Relationships to Grow Organically

There is such a thing as too much structured relationship-building, as student-student relationships take time to develop and grow organically. Asking students to engage in activities every day can cause students to dread these activities, nullifying the potential benefits.

Embedded into Academic Time

Providing opportunities within academic lessons for students to practice interpersonal skills can help facilitate student relationship building. Ensure that students have opportunities to speak and listen to each other during such activities to promote more natural, age-appropriate interactions, particularly for secondary students. Additionally, teachers can use classroom time to subtly subvert common barriers to friendship. See pages 18-19 for more information.

Protected Time for Recess

Unfortunately, time for free play during school has decreased due to pressures to increase instructional time. However, play is vital for students to develop prosocial skills. Schools that prioritize this time throughout the day see improvements in student focus and behavior in the classroom. It is also a time for peers to interact and develop positive relationships with each other. See pages 20-21 for details.

Source: EF Education First, "13 fail-safe icebreakers to use in class today"; Science of People, "23 Best Icebreaker Games for Kids in ANY Situation"; EAB interviews and analysis.

EAB

Explicit Relationship-Building Activities

Use this list to brainstorm relationship- and team-building activities teachers can use in the classroom.

Activities to Build Community in the Classroom

Practice & Description	Optimal Grade Levels
Find a Friend Bingo Distribute a Bingo card and pencil to each student. Tell students that the goal is to find peers who match the descriptions in the squares. Each peer found will put an "X" in their descriptor square. First student to get BINGO wins. Link: Example BINGO card for upper elementary students	K-12
Beach Ball Toss Before class begins, write icebreaker questions on a beach ball with a permanent marker. Positioned in a circle, students continuously throw the ball to each other, hot potato-style. When the teacher says "stop," the student with the ball must answer the question closest to their left thumb. Repeat until each student has answered at least one question.	K-5
Compliment Circles Sitting in a circle or multiple circles, each student randomly draws another student's name, then offers a compliment to them.	K-5
Gratitude Tree Each week, students write down something they are grateful for on a small paper. These weekly papers comprise the "leaves" of the gratitude tree that grows across the year. The tree can be 2D or 3D.	K-5
Kindness Chains Teacher prints the word "Kindness" (or another word, if specific theme in mind) and several strips of colored paper (or cut sheets into 3" x 8" strips). Post "Kindness" strip to a wall in your classroom and keep strips of paper on hand. When students experience kindness from another student, they can ask the teacher for a "caught being kind" strip, on which they write down their experience. Create a paper chain (see image here) and add a new link every time a student catches their classmate being kind.	K-5
Whole Class Mystery Reward Teacher writes a sentence, word, or phrase on a white/chalkboard, then completely covers the phrase with sticky notes. Each note contains a positive behavior (individual or class-wide). When students follow this behavior, the teacher removes the corresponding note (see image here). Any student can help solve the mystery through positive behavior that reveals pieces of the phrase.	K-5
Weekly Class Behavioral Goals Teacher sets weekly goals and accompanying rewards, helping students focus on single, short-term tasks. First, choose one positive behavior for the week, then outline the requirements that students must meet during the week (e.g., all students are completely silent during reading time for at least 3 of 5 days). Display the goal, reward, and updated progress on a wall in the classroom. Teachers can co-design weekly goals/rewards with upper elementary students.	K-5
Character Trait Venn Diagram Pairs (or trios) of students create Venn diagrams of the traits, interests, talents, etc. that make them unique from their partner and the characteristics they share with their partner. Teachers post Venn diagrams on the wall after each pair presents to the class.	K-8

eab.com

Activities to Build Community in the Classroom

Practice & Description	Optimal Grade Levels
Shout-Out Container Across the week, students write down shout-outs of their classmates and drop them in a designated container, or they can email shout-outs to the teacher. Teachers spend the final 10-20 minutes of each week reading shout-outs to the class. Students can sign their name on the shoutout or remain anonymous (double check that students who sign their name wish to be named to the class). Students can also share their shout-out verbally during the reading session, even if they have not submitted a written shout-out.	K-8
Face to Face Before the game, set up two lines of chairs facing each other and prepare age-appropriate conversation topics on index cards. Ask students to pair up and sit across from their partner. Select an index card and set a timer for 30 seconds to allow each pair to discuss the topic. When the time is up, the students must shuffle around and sit down with a new partner. Repeat with new questions each round until you'd like the game to end.	K-8
Class Goal Scorecard Throughout the year, track and display how often students meet the weekly class goals described in "Weekly Class Behavioral Goals" above. Establish long-term goals that comprise the accumulation of the weekly short-term goals, at the beginning of the year (or adjust early in the year if you think goals are unrealistic or too easy).	K-8
Student Photo Gallery Invite students (or their parents/ guardians) to send in photos of themselves with descriptions. Use the photos and descriptions to create a gallery.	K-8
Student-Designed Class Norms (+ Signage) Assign students to small groups, each of which works to establish one classroom value or norm that will be displayed in your classroom.	4-8
Student Perspective Gallery Ask students to write about what community means to them (e.g., who is in their community, what makes a community) or how your classroom's community feels. Display their answers on a gallery in your classroom, anonymously or named.	6-8
Four Corner Debate Create four posters/signs, with one label per sign: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Post each sign in a different corner of the room. Read aloud a statement to students that takes a stand on an issue, adjusted for grade level, classroom dynamics, and subject matter. After giving students five minutes to consider their stance, ask them to move to the corner of the classroom assigned to their level of agreement. In each corner, one student is appointed notetaker. The group then discusses their reasons for their stance, which is then presented to the class. After all groups have presented, give students the opportunity to move to a different corner, if another group has made a convincing case. Repeat this for 1-2 more rounds. After the first round, every student takes notes for themselves. Turn these notes into a paragraph articulating their view on the issue in question.	K-12

Guide to Direct SEL Instruction

Use this section to help school leaders prioritize direct instruction of relationship-building skills using a socio-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum.

Communicating SEL Curriculum Importance to Staff

School administrators should use this page to help them develop talking points on why SEL skills are important for students to generate teacher and support staff buy-in.

Importance of SEL Curricula

Research shows that well-implemented, evidence-based SEL programs are the most effective way to support students' success and well-being in school and beyond.

SEL Skills Improve Academic Outcomes

11

Percentile-point gain in academic achievement for students who participated in evidence-based SEL programs

Skills Essential for Post High School Success

88%

Of business leaders say there will be an increasing need for socio-emotional skills among future employees

Administrator Tasks for Increasing Buy-In

❑ Introduce district SEL priorities to school community and why it will help your students.

❑ Communicate all staff members' role in achieving school SEL goals

❑ Provide professional development sessions related to social emotional well being and behavior.

❑ Solicit feedback from students, teachers, and staff on schoolwide SEL plans.

❑ Require continuous professional development sessions on supporting social emotional learning.

Why Each Task Is Critical for Increasing SEL Buy-In

◀ Teachers and staff want to know the why behind any new program or initiative. Framing how and why SEL can help student success will generate further buy in.

◀ Clear role definition ensures all stakeholders know what is expected of them ahead of implementation so there are no surprises in their responsibilities.

◀ Teachers and staff will support SEL programming if they feel confident in their ability to enact it. PD sessions that reemphasize this will help grow confidence in their ability to support SEL.

◀ Incorporating all stakeholders point of view in program implementation will ensure al who are impacted by a new program voices are heard.

◀ Dedicating ongoing PD time to behavior and SEL help reemphasize importance throughout the school year.

▶ Check out EAB's Building a Sustainable Social-Emotional Learning Strategy Toolkit to help implement SEL initiatives across your district

Source: Brain Futures, "Brain Fitness and Executive Function", (2019); CASEL, (2023); EAB Interviews and Analysis

Choosing a Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum

Share this document with district and school leaders to guide them in selecting an effective SEL curriculum that considers district and school SEL goals and students' grade level.

Choosing a SEL Curriculum

1 **Review Existing District Initiatives and Programs**

Auditing existing district initiatives will help uncover SEL goals already in progress and identify which practices are working well across schools.

2 **Determine School SEL Priorities and Metrics**

Establishing clear priorities and metrics will help guarantee existing programs align with district priorities. The right SEL program for your district should align with current school and districtwide programs and priorities.

3 **Identify and Compare SEL Programs**

Reviewing which evidence-based SEL programs are most-aligned with your district priorities will help with selecting a curriculum. It is important to select a curriculum that is well-matched for your district in format (i.e., lessons, teaching practices) and in metrics.

▶ Check out CASEL's Program Guide to help select an evidence-based SEL program that best meets your students' needs
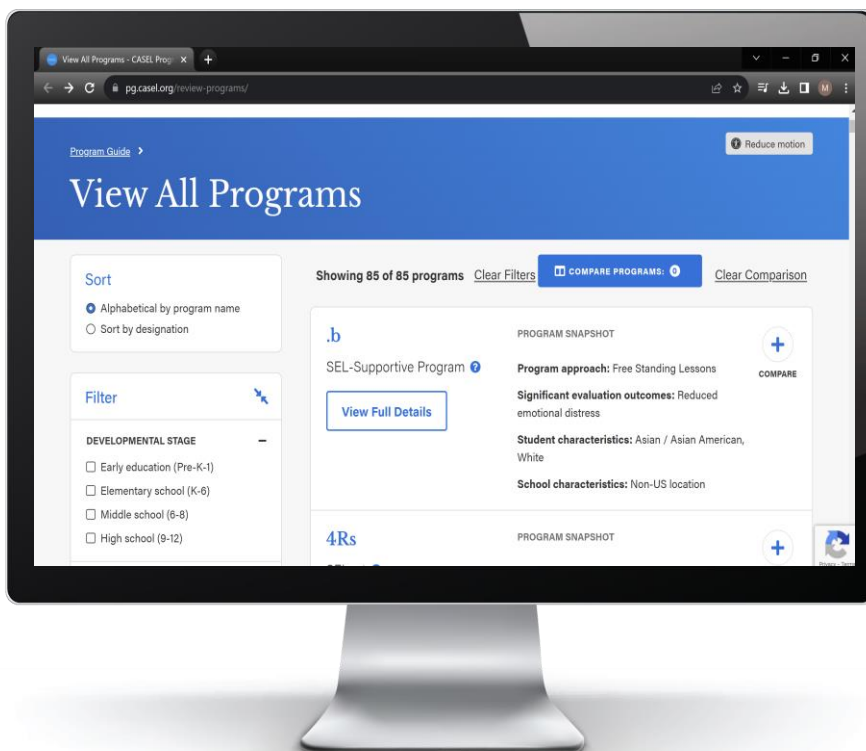
▶ **Filter based on student developmental stage** to determine SEL programs appropriate for each grade level.

▶ **Compare programs of interest** to further understand differences between programs with similar goals/content.

▶ **View implementation support options** offered by each program to find a program that can meet your schools' needs.

Considerations for Choosing Secondary SEL Curricula

Share this document with school leaders experiencing challenges successfully implementing a schoolwide SEL approach in grades 7-12.

Common Concerns with SEL in Secondary Grades

Insufficient Research-Backed Programs

The number of research-backed SEL programs in secondary grades is significantly less than elementary. Elementary was found to have 40 research backed programs while middle school has 21 and high school only 8. Of those that are research-backed, very few are measured across multiple grade levels.

SEL Curricula Ignore Adolescent Development

Research shows that most SEL curriculum do not consider the adolescent development of middle adolescents. Older students need curricula that considers their psychological needs, hormonal changes, skills, and climate.

Older Students Desire Relationships Alongside SEL Instruction

Older students also seek connection in their SEL development. Curricula should aim to make them feel respected by adults and peers while also allowing students to connect with the adult(s) delivering content.

Administrator Tasks to Help Select Appropriate Secondary SEL

☐ Solicit feedback from students and teachers through surveys or focus groups.

☐ Assess possible curriculum content with student feedback in mind.

☐ Consider teacher readiness to deliver SEL content by evaluating existing professional development calendar with SEL content.

☐ Choose desired frequency of SEL lessons and how to implement that into the existing school day schedule.

Why Each Task Is Critical in Selecting Curriculum

◀ Students and teachers are impacted the most by SEL instruction, understanding their point of view will help select curriculum that aligns with student interest and teacher feasibility.

◀ Comparing focus areas and metrics of possible SEL programs is easier when there is understanding on what skills students want to learn.

◀ Aligning curriculum selection with what teachers are prepared to deliver or what you are capable of training will ensure quality delivery of important topics.

◀ Understanding how much time the school wants to dedicate to SEL to meet district goals will help select a curriculum since many vary in lesson time and frequency.

Source: Grant, et. Al, "Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Students Succeeds Act," 2017, Yeager, "Social-Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents," 2017; EAB Interview and Analysis.

Incorporate Student Voice for Viable Secondary SEL Approach

Greenville County Schools in South Carolina adjusted their district-created SEL curriculum in the secondary grades due to difficulty in finding any secondary SEL curricula from which students received value.

1 Gather Student Feedback

First, Greenville County Schools collected input from students at their high school through focus groups and student surveys. Students shared that they felt the current SEL curriculum was immature and not meeting their social-emotional needs.

2 Create SEL Committee to Implement Changes

Following this feedback, the high school formed a committee of 10-12 students and 8-10 teachers to begin redesigning the SEL curriculum. This committee's goal was to create a curriculum that resonated well with students and amplified the students' point of view while also meeting district SEL goals and priorities.

3 Initiate SEL Curriculum Redesign

Teachers initiated this process by aligning new curriculum topics with the CASEL framework and the Profile of South Carolina graduate. While the goal was to amplify student voice throughout this process, this step ensured the outcome was beneficial to student progress and met their state standards required for graduation.

4 Develop New Lessons with Small Groups

After teachers presented the new curriculum topics the SEL committee gathered for a summer workday to workshop new lessons under each topic. The topics included skills like empathy, conflict resolution, and building relationships. See below the outline of their summer workday and key details to consider when replicating.

Summer Workday Schedule	
9:00am	Arrivals, announcements
9:15am	Group discussion on goals
10:00am	*Small Groups Work on Lesson Content*
12:00pm	Lunch
1:00pm	*Small Group Lessons Presented to Larger Group*
2:30pm	Lesson Feedback Provided
3:30pm	Lesson Adjustments Implemented

Students believed these lessons should be taught by a teacher they knew, so staff changed schedule to have students be taught by a teacher they already had.

Students decided which committee teacher they wanted to work with to encourage comfortable conversation.

Coming out of small groups, the whole committee was able to decide which lesson aspects would work and suggest adjustments.

5 Launch New Curriculum

Finally, teachers began using the new student-developed SEL lessons with students about 2-3 weeks into the new school year. SEL progress will be monitored at the end of each quarterly through additional student surveys.

Profiled Institution: GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS Inspire | Support | Prepare
Greenville County Schools, SC

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Sample Daily SEL Schedule, Elementary Grades

Direct SEL instruction should not be time consuming, but it must be consistent. Dedicating this time can be done by incorporating time into your preexisting academic schedule. While different SEL curricula require different frequencies (i.e., lessons per week/day) creating a schedule that works best for your teachers and their students is most important.

#		Activity	Time
1		**SEL Lesson/Morning Meeting**	**9:00**
2		**Math**	**9:30**
3		**Physical Education**	**10:30**
4		**Lunch and Recess**	**11:30**
5		**Science**	**1:00**
6		**Language Arts**	**2:00**
7		**Pack Up and Dismissal**	**3:00**

> 15-30minute SEL lessons can be delivered during a classroom's daily morning meeting.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

eab.com
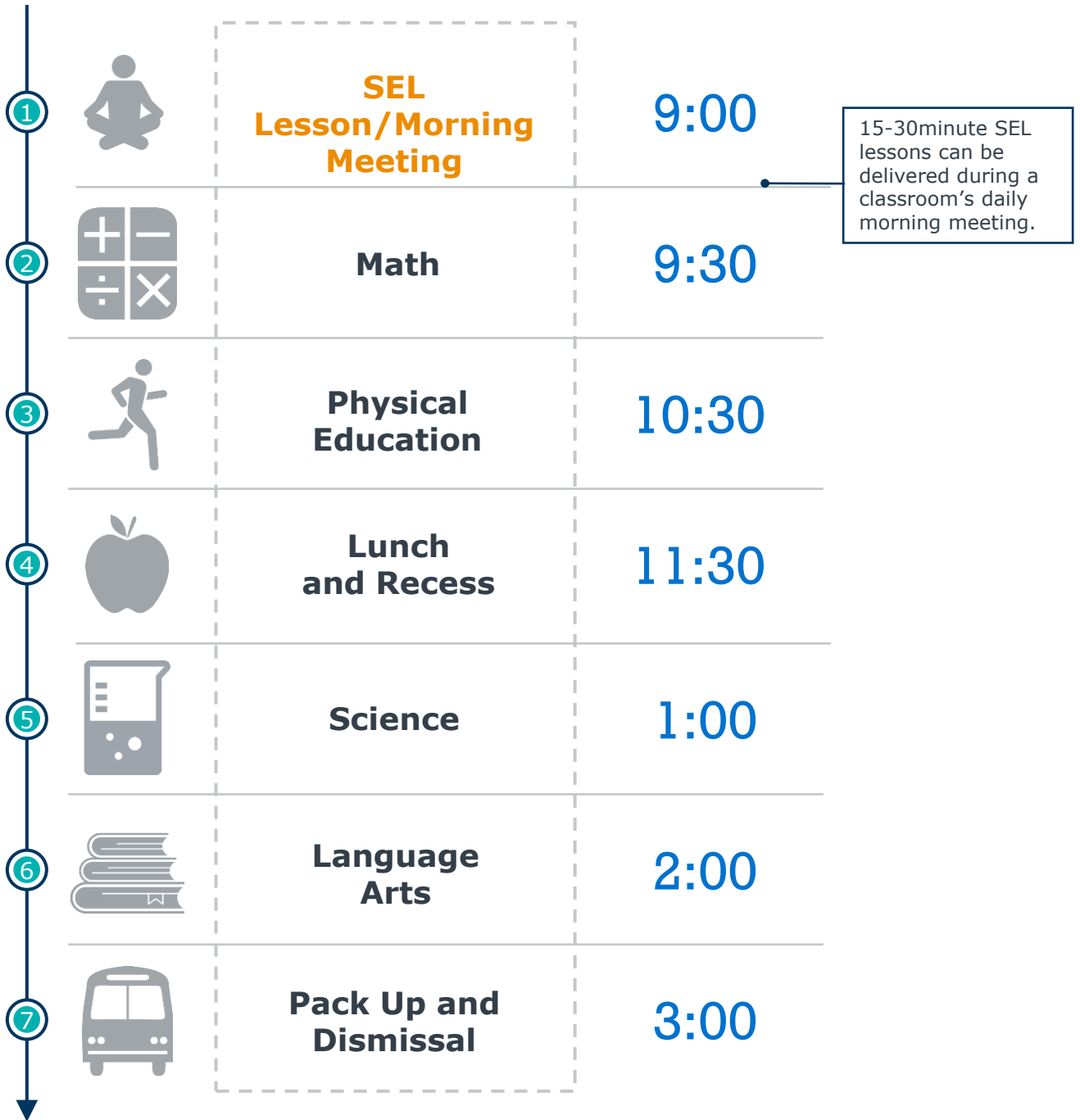
Sample Weekly SEL Schedule, Elementary Grades

Your selected SEL program should align with your schools overall SEL goals. Therefore, lessons across programs may vary in frequency and length. If your SEL program/goals are more fitting for a weekly direct SEL lesson schedule, consider dedicating SEL time through incorporating it into your usual special's rotations for ease of scheduling.

#		Activity	Time
1		**Morning Meeting**	9:00
2		**Math**	9:30
3		**SEL Lesson**	10:30
4		**Lunch and Recess**	11:30
5		**Science**	1:00
6		**Language Arts**	2:00
7		**Pack Up and Dismissal**	3:00

SEL lessons added to the existing special's rotation can be taught by school counselors, interventionists, or classroom teachers.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
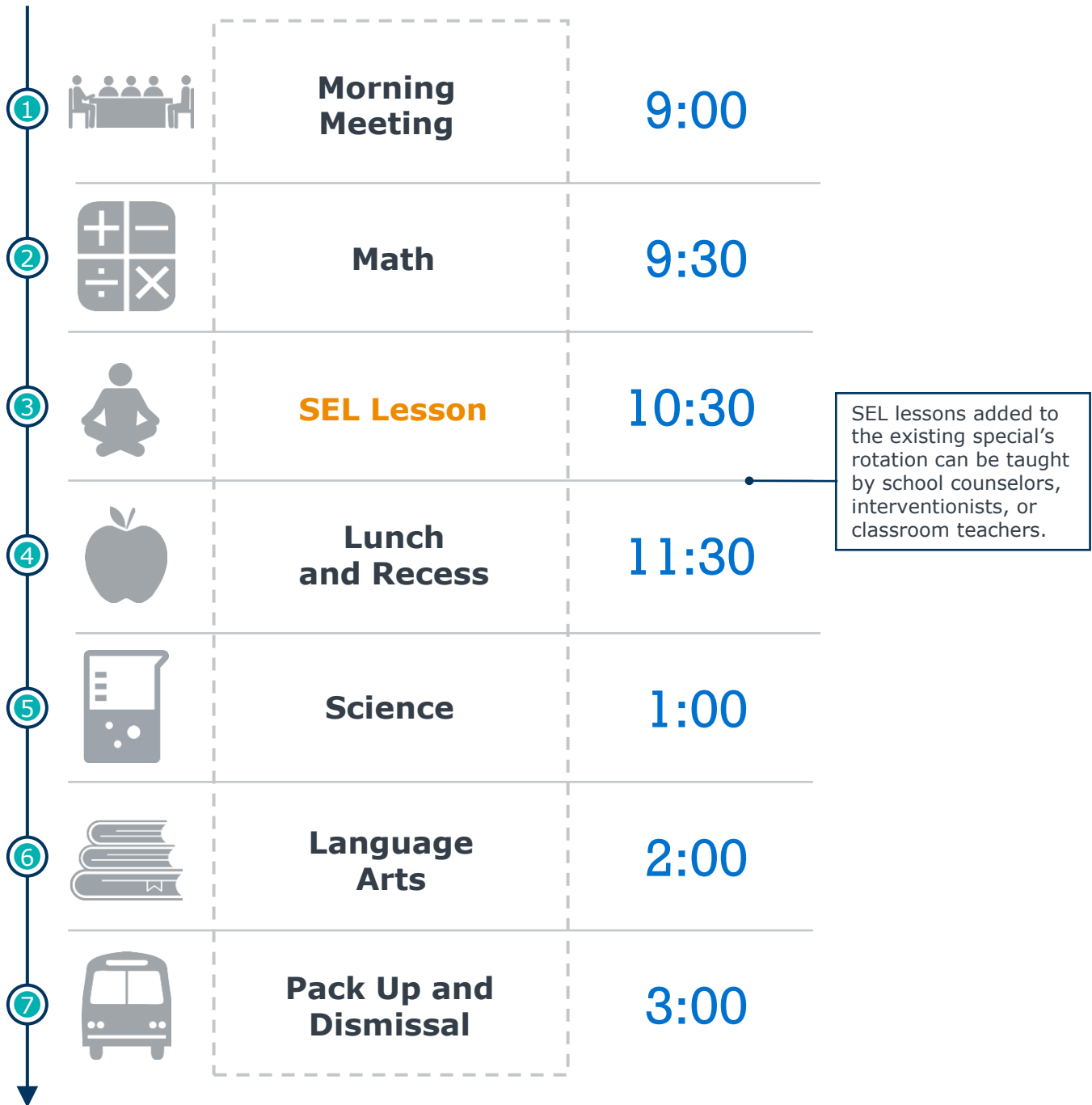
Sample SEL Schedules, Secondary Grades

Key Factors to Help Ensure Students Receive Recommended SEL Time

Bi-weekly or weekly lessons | 30-to-60-minute lesson blocks | Fit SEL into your existing schedule

Protecting Time with Block Schedules Example

Replace a rotating elective course with SEL lessons to ensure each student receives SEL content.

Block 1	Spanish
Block 2	English
Block 3	SEL
Block 4	Lunch
Block 5	Science

or

Block 1	Spanish
Block 2	English
Block 3	Elective
Block 4	Lunch
Block 5	Science
	Advisory/SEL

Use existing advisory schedules to easily incorporate SEL lessons into schedules
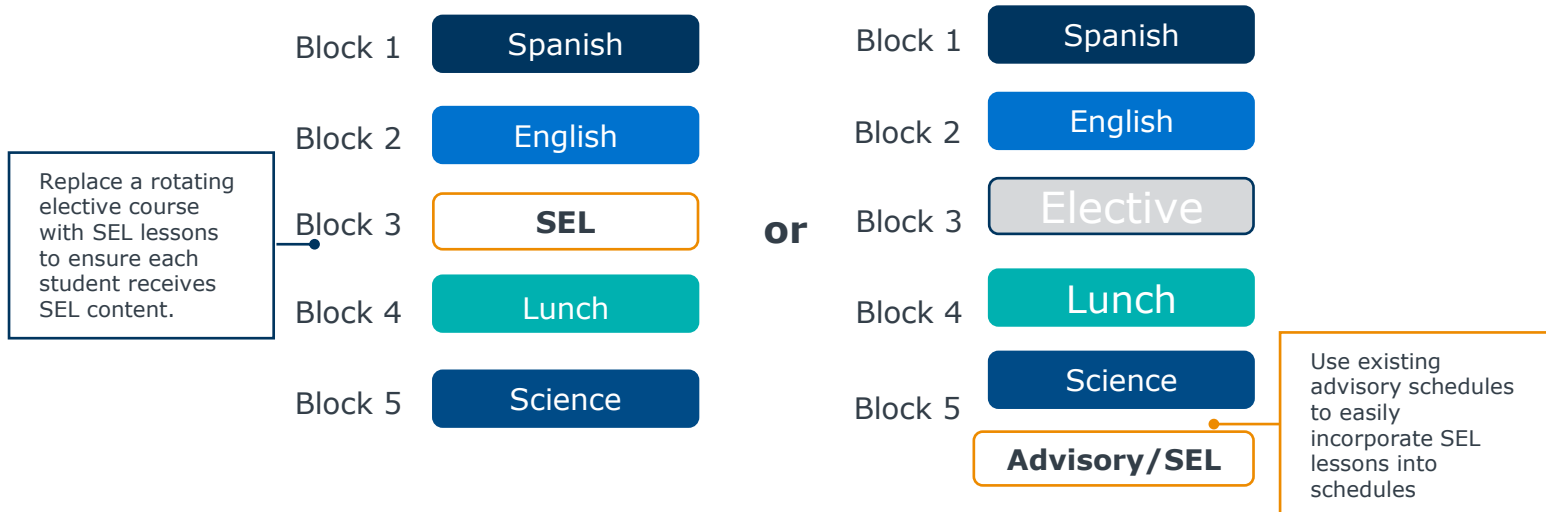
Protecting Time with Class Periods Schedule Example

SEL period does not have to be as long as academic periods. Consider dedicating 30–40-minutes if your program aligns.

Period 1	Spanish
Period 2	English
Period 3	SEL
Period 4	Social Studies
Period 5	Science
Period 6	Math

or

Period 1	Spanish
Period 2	English
Period 3	Elective
Period 4	Social Studies
Period 5	Science
Period 6	Math
	Advisory/SEL

Extend an academic block so students complete SEL work with teachers they already know.

Facilitating Peer Relationships and Social Skills

Use this section to help school leaders and teachers provide opportunities for students to develop relationships with peers and social skills.

Adult Nudges to Subvert Common Friendship Barriers

Share with teachers these subtle, relatively low-effort ways they can help facilitate stronger student-student relationships within their classrooms.

Barrier to Friendship	*Adult Action to Overcome Barrier*

Lack of Contact
Physical distance prevents relationships from forming

Use Seat Proximity

- Proximity in seating can help students who dislike each other find common interests and improve relations
- However, keep in mind that for paired learning, existing positive relationships more positively impact learning

---

Competition
Environments that suggest a scarcity of a desired outcome, like top grades or teacher approval

Foster Interdependence

- *Goal interdependence*: Teachers may require a single finished product from a group
- *Reward interdependence*: Teachers may offer a reward to the group if everyone achieves above a certain threshold

---

Unequal Status
Students non-conforming to school/social norms (e.g., behavior, ability, body size) at risk for being excluded.

Act as Social 'Influencer'

- Studies have show when teachers voice positive opinions or interact warmly with students, it can increase that students' social integration, despite social, economical, or physical status
- Ensure teachers take inventory of the students with high peer status; it may not always align with teacher's initial perception

---

Surface-Level Homophily
Bias towards gravitating towards relationships with those who appear similar

Surface Deeper Similarities

- Friendships that bridge common divides based on ethnicity, socio-economic status, and/or gender have bene associated with higher academic outcomes
- Teachers can most straightforwardly encourage by drawing attention to similarities less readily apparent than gender or skin tone such as shared interests

Source: Cornwall, Gail, What the Research Says About the Academic Power of Friendship, Mindshift, November 2020; Faur S and Laursen B (2022) Classroom Seat Proximity Predicts Friendship Formation. Front. Psychol. 13:796002. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.796002; Kagan, S. The Two Dimensions of Positive Interdependence. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing. Kagan Online Magazine, Fall 2007

Speaking & Listening Weekly Opportunity Inventory

Use this activity with teachers during faculty or PLC meetings at least twice a year. For teachers with a priority to increase number of these opportunities, encourage them to complete this activity more regularly (e.g., monthly, weekly).

✅ Activity

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
I have incorporated ____ minutes[1] for full group discussion (e.g., Socratic seminars) into my academic lesson planning.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I have incorporated ____ minutes for small group activities into my academic lesson planning.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I have incorporated ____ minutes for 1:1 activities (e.g., pair and share) into my academic lesson planning.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I have incorporated ____ minutes for formal speaking opportunities (e.g., student presentations) into my academic lesson planning.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I have incorporated ____ minutes of encouraging students to intentionally reflect on their active listening approach during partner and group activities. See this guide for an example.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I have incorporated ____ minutes of other opportunities for students to practice interpersonal communication skills during academic lessons.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Total Number of Minutes per Week _____

There is no magic number for the number of minutes to spend on these activities. Instead, encourage teachers to think about the ratio of minutes spent practicing student-student speaking and listening compared to other activities (e.g., independent work, teacher listening) and encourage them to get that ratio closer to even. Use this as a reflection exercise for teachers to create goals to incorporate these types of activities more often or have teachers who already do this well, share.

1) This should be an estimation of time. Reassure teachers that they should not feel pressured to get this number overly precise.

Recess Promotes Peer Connections, Improves Behavior

Academic Pressure Pushing Out Play Time for Kids

60

Average recess time has **declined by nearly 60 minutes per week** *(2001-2015)*

25

Elementary students get an average of 25 **minutes of recess per day** *(2018)*

22%

Only 22% of **districts require daily recess** for elementary students *(2014)*

Profiled Institutions:
The LiiNK Project, TX
Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD, TX

> "Developmentally appropriate play is **a singular opportunity to promote the social, emotional, cognitive, language, and self-regulation skills** that build executive function and a prosocial brain. [...]
>
> **Play is not frivolous:** it enhances brain structure and promotes executive function which allows us to pursue goals and ignore distractions."
>
> *The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children*

Liink Program Decreases Disruption and Promotes Positive Classroom Behavior
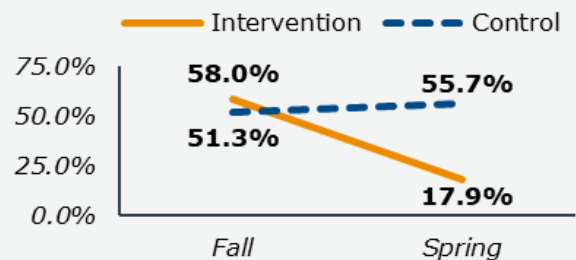
> "Before LiiNK, **recess really depended on the classroom you were in and the campus you were at**. On one hand it could be a building quick to take 5 minutes because students were 'acting out'. On the other hand, some schools had a culture where they'd say, 'it's a beautiful day we just can't bear to go back inside yet.'
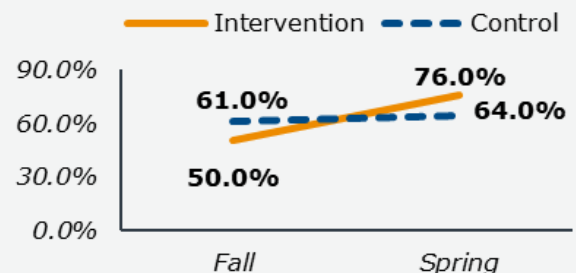>
> But districtwide, when we brought LiiNK in, we realized that **one short recess a day wasn't enough for our students**."
>
> *LiiNK Program Specialist*
> *Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD*

Off-Task Behavior[1], First Grade

— Intervention   - - - Control

75.0%
50.0%   58.0%   55.7%
        51.3%
25.0%   17.9%
0.0%
     Fall   Spring

Appropriate Behaviors[2]

— Intervention   - - - Control

90.0%   76.0%
60.0%   61.0%   64.0%
30.0%
     50.0%
0.0%
     Fall   Spring

1) Off-task behavior captures: full movements (e.g., sitting standing walking); stationary behaviors (e.g., bouncing, fidgeting); vocal behaviors (e.g., talking to self or others); and aggressive behavior.
2) Appropriate behaviors include: following directions, working quietly at seat, being respectful of classmates and teacher.

Sources: LiiNK Project, "Results," "Recess in Schools," Children at Risk, 2015; "Data Uncovered the Positive Impacts of Recess on Student Development, Behavior and Social Interactions," IPEMA and Voice of Play, 2018; "Strategies for Supporting Recess in Elementary Schools," Center for Disease Control, 2014; Yogman, M. et al., "The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children," 2018; Deruy, E., "Learning Through Play: Education Does Not Stop When Recess Begins," The Atlantic, 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

How to Build More Play Into the Schedule

Daily Unstructured Play Breaks

- **Four 15-minute** unstructured play breaks per day
  - 2 before lunch, 2 after lunch
  - Outdoor whenever possible
- **Does not replace** any existing breaks for lunch, specials
- Focus on **reducing transition time** to minimize disruption to the day
  - Transitions consistently <1 minute each way by end of first year of implementation

Steps to Include More Play Into School Schedule

Sample Daily Schedule[1]	
8:15am	Arrivals, announcements
8:25am	Instructional content
9:10am	*Outdoor play break*
9:25am	Instructional content
10:15am	*Outdoor play break*
10:30am	Instructional content
11:15am	Lunch
11:45am	Co-curricular (e.g., gym, music, art)
12:35am	*Outdoor play break*
12:50pm	Instructional content
1:45pm	*Outdoor play break*
2:00pm	Instructional content

STEP 1 **Calculate** total time allotted for the school day

STEP 2 **Subtract** time for play breaks and character education to build in as non-negotiable

STEP 3 **Find opportunities** to increase efficiency in the day *(e.g., planning time, transitions)*

STEP 4 **Slightly decrease** instructional periods as needed, with adjustments varying by grade and building

Sources: Jones, S. Brush, K. Bailey, R. Brion-Meisels, G. McIntyre, J. Kahn, J. Nelson, B. Stickle, L., "Navigating SEL From the Inside Out," Harvard Graduate School of Education and The Wallace Foundation, 2017; EAB interviews and analysis.

Formal Tracking of Student-Student Connections

Use this <5-minute Connections survey to track students' relationships with both peers and adults in the school building.
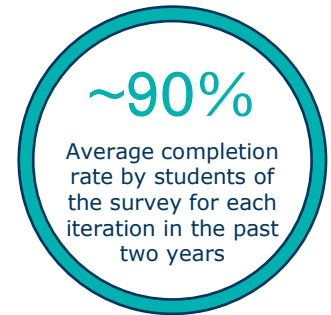
Connection Survey Helps to Track Student Relationships

Delsea Regional Middle School Uses Survey to Identify Students Lacking Connections

> " This survey has multiple benefits: it gives our counselors a window into the social dynamics into our school; the data across the year helps identify specific instances of social difficulties by helping to show shifts in friend groups; and it helps students who come to the school mid-year not fall through the cracks. Our counselors have been able to push in with students who are not able to identify any peer connections.
>
> *John Bertolino*
> Principal, Delsea Regional Middle School

~90%

Average completion rate by students of the survey for each iteration in the past two years

Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Connections Survey

STEP 1 Build the <5-minute survey in Google Forms or a similar platform. Use the survey template on page 24 for language to explain the type of relationships students should identify in their responses.

STEP 2 Communicate the rationale of the survey to parents and provide them with an opt out form (see pgs. 25-26). Distribute this opt-out form to parents/guardians each time the survey is distributed to students.

STEP 3 Distribute survey to students during an advisory period, homeroom, or similar time during the school day, three times per year—once in the fall, spring, and at the end of the year.

STEP 4 Delsea Regional Middle School tasks guidance counselors and school administrators to manage the data. Consider providing classroom teachers with the data for primary students. Some ways to use the data to better support students include:

- Identify students who did not list peer connections and encourage an adult they listed on the same survey to push in with that student.
- Encourage students with limited peer connections to enroll in an extracurricular activity.
- Observe trends in social dynamics and friend group changes across the school year to proactively identify potential conflicts.
- Ensure mid-year 'new' students successfully find connections with others.
- Delsea Regional Middle School uses the end of year data to help select 'team' placement in their middle school to avoid students from being isolated.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Delsea Regional Student Connections Survey Text

Use the survey below to design a Connections survey at your school.

Delsea Regional Middle School Connections Survey

1. *Email:* _____

   Name: _____

   Grade: _____

2. *Please list up to three classmates you feel most connected with at [school name]. This would be a classmate that you feel like you can talk to or that you consider a friend.*

   _____   _____   _____
   Student Name   *Student Name*   *Student Name*

   ☐ *I do not feel like I have a connection with any of my fellow classmates at [school name].*

3. *Please list up to three adults (teachers, coaches, principals, etc.) you feel connected within the building. This would be someone you can go to for academic help, support, or guidance.*

   _____   _____   _____
   Adult Name   *Adult Name*   *Adult Name*

   ☐ *I do not feel connected to any of the adults in the building.*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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Introducing Connections Survey to Parents/Guardians

Please customize the message below to fit the specific details and context of your school. Delsea Regional Middle School sends this message prior to each time they distribute the survey (three times per year).

To: All parents/guardians

From: Principal

SUBJECT: Connection Survey Notification and Opt-Out Form

EMAIL:

Dear Delsea Parent or Guardian,

This letter is to inform you of a student connection survey which will be available to students on [DATE].

What is the purpose of the survey?

The purpose of the survey is to gather information from students in relation to their experiences to continue to build a school of community and belonging.

What does the survey include?

The survey asks that they identify students they feel connected with (a classmate they can talk to or consider a friend) and adults in the school building they feel connected with (an adult they can go to for academic help; support; or guidance.)

What will happen if I do not give permission for my child to complete the survey?

Although your child will be invited to complete the survey, completion is not required. Participation is voluntary. You or your child's decision to participate in the survey will not, in any way, affect your standing within the district or affect your child's grades, status at, or their relationship with their school and the district.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

If you have any questions regarding any of the information provided above, please feel free to contact the principal, [PRINCIPAL NAME].

We hope you will allow your child to participate in the student connection survey. We encourage you to talk to your child about this process. This opt-out form will close [DATE AND TIME]

Best,

[PRINICIPAL NAME]

[Include link to opt-out form, see next page]

eab.com

Parent Opt-Out Form

Use the template below for an opt-out form for parents/guardians to fill out for a student connections survey.

Delsea Regional Middle School Connections Survey
Parents/Guardian Opt-Out Form

Only complete this form if you would like to opt-out your child.

1. *Student Name:* _____

   *Student Grade Level:*_____

   Parent Name: _____

2. *I understand that by completing this form, my child will not be allowed to take the [Spring] Connection Survey*

   ☐ *Yes*

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ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.