Using Data to Support and Communicate Effectively about Social-Emotional Learning

Help Students Develop the Skills They Need to Succeed

Families, educators, and policymakers have long relied on academic data like grades, test scores, and graduation rates to understand and support student learning. But education leaders and communities are starting to see the interconnected nature of academic skills and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills like managing emotions, setting goals, showing empathy, maintaining positive relationships, and making responsible decisions. Families are looking to schools to help grow and support SEL skills: 82 percent of Americans say it is highly important for schools to help students develop interpersonal skills. As schools invest their time and resources in this work, they will have questions about how to measure and understand SEL skills, how to ensure that student data is kept private and secure, and how to determine whether their investments have made a difference. State policymakers have an important role in ensuring that educators and leaders have the data and supports they need.

State and local leaders need to answer important questions:

❓ How can schools measure and understand their students' social-emotional learning, and how can schools use SEL data to best support students' growth?

❓ How can we talk with educators, families, and the public about what SEL data is, why it matters, and how it is being used and protected?

❓ How can schools use data to understand whether their investments in social-emotional learning are leading to better outcomes for their students?

Districts Are Leading the Way

Ninety-one percent of families are interested in knowing about their child's social-emotional learning. While some states are beginning to explore their role in measuring and supporting these skills, districts have been leading the way in using SEL data to support learning. One example is California's CORE Districts, whose School Quality Improvement Index includes both academic indicators (i.e., proficiency, growth, and graduation rate) and SEL measures collected via surveys to look at school performance.

Talk about What Matters

Before you can help people understand SEL data, they need to understand why you are investing in social-emotional learning at school. Focus groups conducted with parents around the country have helped identify strategies to effectively communicate about social-emotional learning:

✅ **Emphasize how interrelated social-emotional and academic learning are.** Social-emotional learning is not separate from academic learning: both skill sets are critical to student success. More than any other framing, parents responded to the idea that social-emotional learning benefits all students and helps them succeed in school.

✅ **Share how social-emotional development sets up students for success in school and beyond.** The research found that "making social and emotional skills part of the learning equation will help children succeed in school and life. . . . When adults focus on helping children develop these skills and are supported by good policies and training, children are better prepared for the world and able to fulfill their potential."

✅ **Acknowledge the many trusted adults** who help support social-emotional learning. Families and caregivers, educators, and community partners like afterschool tutors and mentors all have a role to play in supporting students' growth and social-emotional development.

Take Action

When considering how to measure and support social-emotional learning, state policymakers should build trust by communicating clearly, ensuring that those closest to students are empowered with the information they need, and understanding the connections between social-emotional and academic learning.

- **Communicate why social-emotional learning matters.** See the "Talk about What Matters" box on the previous page for strategies.

- **Communicate the value of SEL data for learning.** Explain how school leaders and educators are using SEL data to support learning in the classroom, and be clear about how valuable measuring and supporting social-emotional learning are to improving academic learning.

- **Be clear and transparent about the data you collect and how you use and safeguard it.** Communicate proactively about what SEL data is collected, how it is used, how educators are trained to use the information appropriately, and how the data is safeguarded.

- **Ensure that educators are trained to use SEL data appropriately.** Support data literacy among educators so they have the knowledge and skills to access, interpret, act on, and communicate multiple types of data to support student learning. If educators are expected to use SEL data to inform their practice, they must be given the training, time, and supports to do so effectively and ethically while safeguarding privacy.

- **Empower those closest to students with the right information to support success.** Build trust in the value of SEL data by ensuring that parents and teachers have meaningful, actionable data about their students. Data in the hands of those closest to students can help shine a light on each student's needs. When parents and teachers have academic data side by side with SEL data to provide context, they can work together to provide the right supports.

- **Use social-emotional data to better support academic learning.** Support students' growth in both academic and social-emotional learning to help your state or district meet its education goals. When educators, school leaders, and families have access to SEL and academic information, they can fully support their students' learning. Ensure that SEL data is being used ethically and appropriately to open doors for students and not to punish them or educators and families.

Learn More

- Time to Act: Making Data Work for Students. DQC's Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students include recommendations for state policymakers to ensure that data—including SEL data—is accessible, useful, and secure.

- Using Social-Emotional Learning Data in the CORE Districts: Lessons Learned. This profile highlights the California CORE Districts' work to measure, report, and effectively use SEL data to support student and school success.

- What Is Student Data? This infographic and video show the types of data that can come together—guided by requirements like privacy and security—to form a full picture of student learning.