



Research Report

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Social and Emotional Learning in U.S. Schools

Findings from CASEL's Nationwide Policy Scan and the American Teacher Panel and American School Leader Panel Surveys



A large body of evidence indicates that well-implemented social and emotional learning (SEL) programs improve academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students and educators. Universal SEL programming for students can promote mental wellness, healthy relationships, and academic achievement (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan, 2010). The role of SEL in education is particularly important in the wake of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. There is considerable evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on students' social and emotional health and well-being (Hamilton and Gross, 2021), and SEL has been a leading evidence-based strategy for schools during the post-pandemic recovery period. In fact, in a spring 2024 survey of K–12 public school district leaders, SEL was the most frequently selected of 13 strategies to help students recover academically from COVID-19 setbacks in the 2023–2024 school year (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024).

Education policy has the potential to influence the high-quality implementation of SEL from the school district to the school to the classroom. Before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, states enacted supportive policies and conditions to promote SEL in schools. Prior to the pandemic, 18 states had adopted standards, guidelines, or benchmarks that

set out expected social and emotional competencies that students should demonstrate at different grade bands (Dusenbury et al., 2020). During the pandemic, another nine states adopted similar policies (Dermody and Dusenbury, 2022). Additionally, states and districts leveraged funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which delivered a historic investment of \$122 billion in COVID-19 pandemic relief funds to help K–12 schools safely reopen and respond to students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs.

At the same time, SEL became swept up in broader education culture wars (e.g., Anderson, 2022). Curricula fostering the development of social and emotional competencies have been one of many controversies about the instructional content and instructional practices schools should use to teach students. Thus, legislators in nine states have proposed bills to prohibit or inhibit SEL instruction in K–12 schools, none of which have passed as of this writing.

In this report, we investigate whether states' SEL policies (for and against) are associated with the implementation of SEL by K–12 schools, as reported by teachers and principals. As a second step, we study whether SEL implementation is, in turn, correlated with two teacher-reported indicators of positive student experience: supportive climate and student interest in learning.¹ To conduct these analyses, we

KEY FINDINGS

- More schools across the United States are incorporating social and emotional learning (SEL) into students' educational experiences, and nearly all U.S. states have policies that support SEL in schools.
- A greater proportion of K–12 schools are delivering instruction to children about social and emotional competencies. By the 2023–2024 school year, 83 percent of school principals reported that their schools used a SEL curriculum, up from 76 percent in the 2021–2022 school year.
- Forty-nine U.S. states (and the District of Columbia) have at least one supportive policy or condition that actively promotes SEL in schools.
- Principals and teachers working in states with more supportive SEL policies and conditions are more likely to report SEL implementation in their schools.
- Principal-reported spending on SEL programs, practices, and professional learning is associated with a wide array of high-quality implementation efforts.
- Teachers who instruct their students in SEL are more likely to report that their schools have positive climates and that students are interested in learning.

created two state-level indicators using publicly available data: (1) supportive policies and conditions for SEL and (2) limiting conditions for SEL.² We view these state-level indicators and correlational analyses as initial efforts to lay the foundation for future inquiry, including causal research.

Although previous literature has focused on formal SEL programming and curricula as the primary measure of implementation, we examine additional conditions and factors, such as supportive school and classroom climates and student interest in learning, that can indicate how deeply SEL is embedded across all aspects of students' educational experiences. We refer to these conditions and factors as indicators of systemic SEL implementation throughout a school. These indicators give us a broader, more robust picture of SEL implementation across classrooms and schools nationwide.

Although we cannot establish causality, this report makes three new contributions that we believe will prove useful for SEL researchers and policymakers:

1. We update our existing prevalence estimates of SEL implementation, inclusive of components of implementation beyond formal programming, in K–12 public schools nationally for the 2023–2024 school year.

2. We identify state-level policies and conditions that are supportive of or limit SEL implementation using publicly available data. Our indicators can serve as a starting point for subsequent research to gauge how federal policy and state policy drive SEL implementation.
3. We examine the relationships between state-level SEL policies and conditions, school implementation efforts, and indicators of school climate and student experience.

From this report, researchers can connect state-level indicators to a variety of SEL practices at the school and classroom level. These relationships help identify fruitful areas for future inquiry. For policymakers, we show whether their SEL-related policies (including legislation and guidance) connect to schools' on-the-ground decisions and implementation, according to principals and teachers. In this report, we first explain what we mean by systemic SEL implementation, what the research has shown about it, and why we might expect state policy to influence it.

To set the stage for our analysis, we describe how many public schools nationwide are engaged in myriad SEL implementation efforts in the 2023–2024 school year and whether the implementation of SEL

About Our Analyses

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) developed a way to categorize each state's and the District of Columbia's (DC's) SEL-relevant policies and conditions using publicly available documents. We merged these state-level categories with survey data RAND collected from educators. CASEL wrote two surveys—one for K–12 principals and one for K–12 teachers—that RAND administered to nationally representative samples of each group in the 2023–2024 school year via RAND's American School Leader Panel (ASLP) and the American Teacher Panel (ATP), respectively. These surveys were highly similar to ones this same research team fielded to educators in the 2021–2022 school year.

RAND statisticians recruited principals and teachers into the ASLP and ATP, respectively, using probabilistic sampling methods. ASLP and ATP members were subsequently randomly sampled to participate in these SEL surveys. For the ASLP, RAND researchers targeted 1,000 complete responses. RAND invited 3,333 principals to take the survey, of which 1,030 did between November 15, 2023, and December 6, 2023 (a 31.8 percent survey completion rate). Meanwhile, RAND researchers invited 7,790 public school teachers to take the teacher survey; 3,897 teachers completed surveys between March 19, 2024, and April 5, 2024 (a 50.3 percent completion rate). This survey includes oversamples of teachers in seven states, selected to ensure coverage of a broad spectrum of political control and be used in analyses that are beyond the scope of this report.

In the text, we only call out differences in that are statistically significant at the 5 percent level, at minimum. Additional details about our methods are included in this report's Appendix.

programming, specifically, has changed over time. Next, we present states' supportive SEL policies and conditions and limiting SEL conditions based on our extensive scan of publicly available state documents and data. Then, we examine whether and how our categorizations of state-level indicators correlate with school principals' and teachers' reports about SEL implementation efforts. Finally, we explore the associations between teachers' reports of their SEL implementation and their reports of school climate and student experience.

Overview of SEL Implementation

CASEL defines *SEL* as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, undated-c). When implemented,

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities. (CASEL, undated-c)

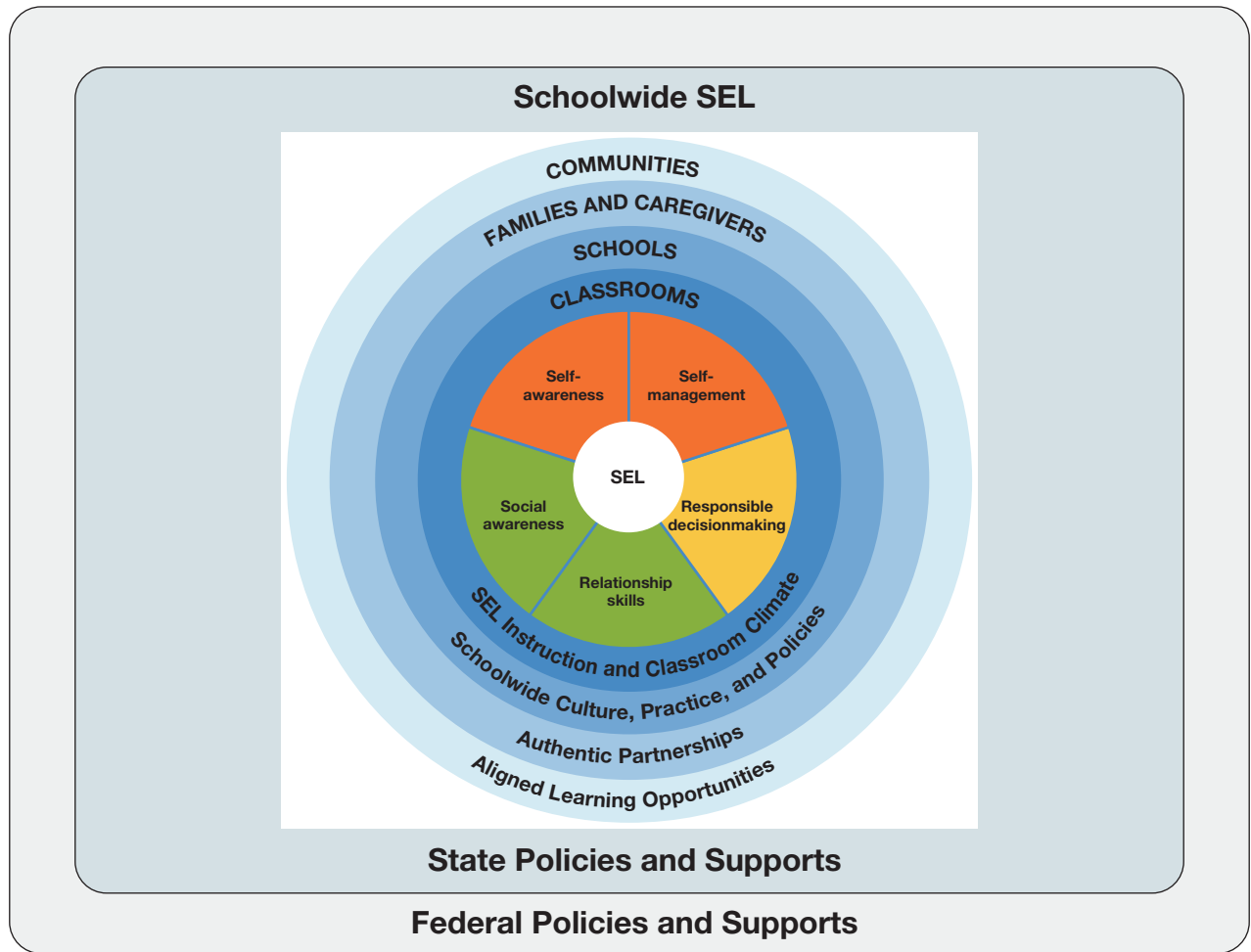
Figure 1 shows a conceptual framework for systemic SEL implementation (Jagers et al., 2021). When implemented systemically, SEL practices and policies are integrated and coordinated throughout all parts of a student's educational experience, from their classroom instruction and school culture to learning opportunities at home and in their community. Often, SEL is equated with explicit SEL programming (e.g., lesson-based curricula), implemented as a stand-alone program separate from academic content and not integrated throughout the day. Although evidence-based SEL programming is a central aspect

of school implementation, systemic approaches also integrate SEL practices into academic content areas and incorporate inclusive cultural elements, such as strong teacher-student relationships, family partnerships, positive school culture and climate, and spaces for youth voices and agency (Schwartz et al., 2023). Our analysis in this report looks at all of these factors as part of SEL implementation.

The conceptual framework for systemic SEL implementation in Figure 1 is undergirded by various theories in the fields of psychology and education, including social-cognitive learning, information processing, behavior change, and systems-thinking theories (Brackett, Elbertson, and Rivers, 2015). Furthermore, this model reflects the importance of relationship-centered learning environments.

CASEL's systemic framework for SEL identifies core social and emotional competencies that young people develop through their interactions and experiences across key settings (e.g., classrooms, schools, with families and caregivers, communities) where they live and learn. A systemic approach fosters coordination across these settings to consistently promote social and emotional competence and establish supportive learning environments (CASEL, undated-c; Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan, 2010). For example, teachers and school staff may partner with families and out-of-school time leaders to develop shared goals and aligned approaches for strengthening students' SEL in classrooms, during transition periods, in lunchrooms, on bus rides, in afterschool programs, and in their homes. Meanwhile, school leaders cultivate a community of adults who engage in their own SEL, collaborate on strategies for promoting SEL, and model SEL through their daily professional interactions. State education agencies (SEAs) support their school districts and community members by providing frameworks for SEL competencies and standards, providing guidance to integrate and align SEL with academics, and supporting the high-quality implementation of evidence-based SEL policies and programs that foster family and community partnerships (Mahoney et al., 2021). In coordinating across these settings, the systemic SEL approach is supportive of various outcomes that are often aimed at school improvement—including attendance, student

FIGURE 1
A Framework for Conceptualizing Systemic SEL in Educational Settings



SOURCE: Image adapted from Weissberg et al., 2016, p. 7.

engagement, and academic achievement—setting the foundation for workforce development (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2024; Steponavičius, Gress-Wright, and Linzarini, 2023).

Current Research and Understanding of SEL Implementation

When reviewing the research on SEL programming specifically, there is a large body of independent and rigorous empirical research studies that has established the academic and other short-term and longer-term benefits of SEL programming for children (see

Cipriano et al., 2023, for a meta-analysis, and Jones and Kahn, 2017, for a review). SEL programming promotes the development of competencies—goal-setting, problem-solving, self-management, responsible decisionmaking, and self-motivation—that positively affect students’ academic achievement and their attitudes and behaviors toward peers, educators, and the broader school community. The positive impact on academic achievement and related attitudes and behaviors are consistent across studies on SEL (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak, Mahoney, and Boyle, 2022). These impacts are also long-lasting. According to a 2017 meta-analysis of 82 research studies involving 100,000 students worldwide, follow-up studies conducted years after students partici-

pated in SEL found that their positive outcomes continued to be higher than among students who did not participate (Taylor et al., 2017).

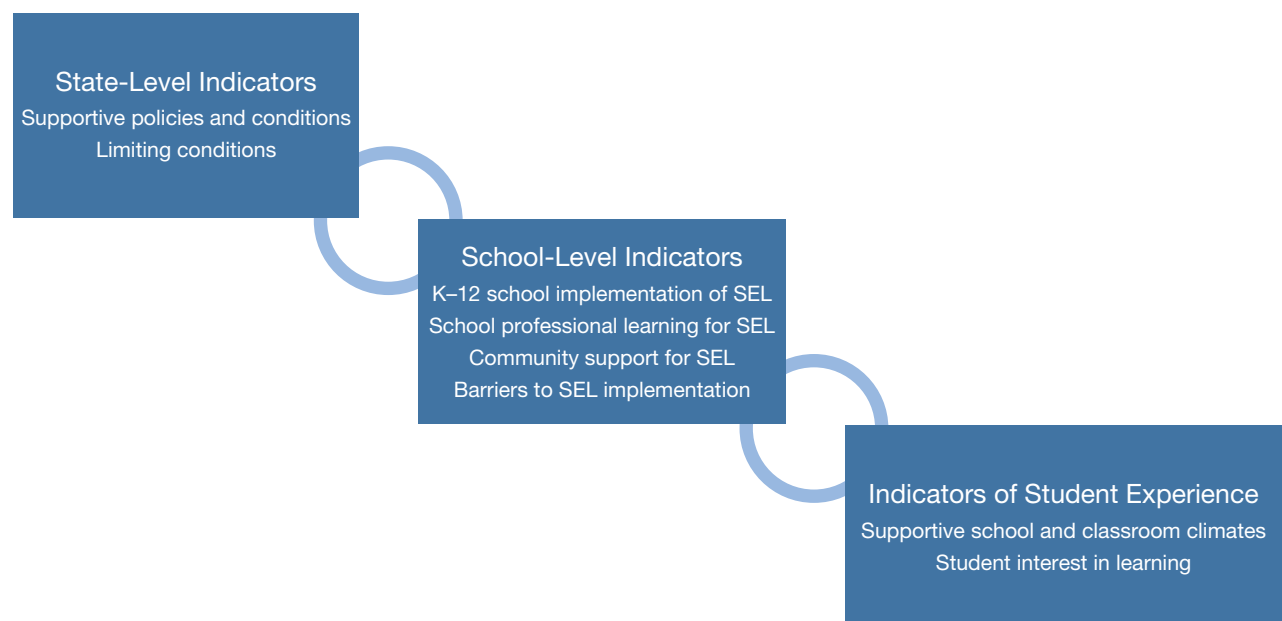
Additionally, experts in the field of SEL suggest that the strongest benefits of school-based SEL programming are achieved when programs are conducted in the context of a systemic district and schoolwide approach (Elias et al. 2016; Mart, Weissberg, and Kendziora, 2016; Oberle et al. 2016; Wanless and Domitrovich, 2015). The systemic implementation of SEL has been shown to have a positive impact on building strong school environments and student experiences. Past research assessing the impact of systemic SEL implementation in eight large urban districts nationwide found that SEL (1) improved academic performance, including improved reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress, higher grade point averages, and greater improvements in standardized test scores in English language arts (ELA) and math achievement; (2) improved behavioral outcomes, including an increase in attendance and students’ social-emotional competence, along with a decrease in suspensions; and (3) improved school

environments, as measured by district surveys (Osher, Friedman, and Kendziora, 2015).

The SEL field has only recently begun to investigate the influences of district, state, and federal policies on school SEL implementation, so empirical evidence is limited on how SEL policies and practices influence local implementation. Yoder and Dang (2023) found that the state SEL policies that drive implementation in schools include (1) stakeholder engagement (e.g., educators, families, and communities), (2) statutory and regulatory policies, and (3) nonregulatory policy and practice efforts (e.g., embedded and explicit instruction, adult SEL, and systemic SEL).

We aim to advance the literature by examining relationships between states’ supportive and limiting policies and conditions for SEL, school-level reports of SEL implementation efforts, and indicators of student experiences, specifically supportive climate and student interest in learning. Figure 2 portrays the hypothesized relationships we examine. This figure is derived from CASEL’s theory of action and conceptual framework about schoolwide SEL adoption (CASEL, undated-d). In the next section, we report on SEL implementation efforts in public

FIGURE 2
Hypothesized Relationships Between State-Level Indicators, School-Level Indicators, and Indicators of Student Experience



schools nationwide during the 2023–2024 school year. We use our previous research (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2022) as a reference point to track changes in reported implementation rates over time.

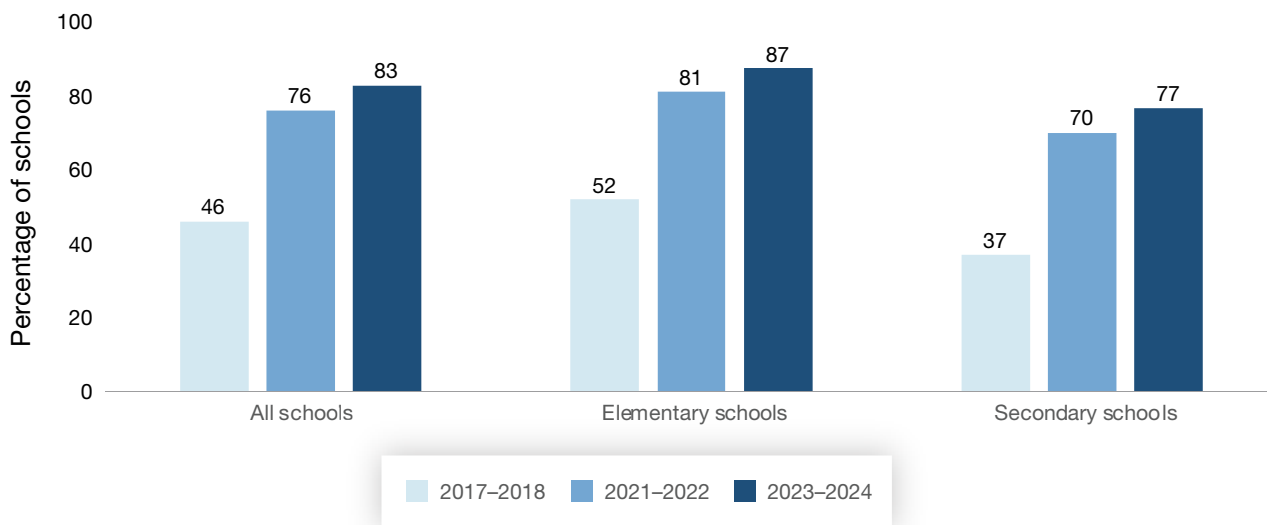
A National Look at Schools’ SEL Implementation Efforts Over Time

We start by examining schools’ use of SEL curricula or programs, which is one element of systemic SEL implementation. As of fall 2023, 83 percent of public school principals reported that their schools used either a commercial SEL curriculum or program and/or a district-created or school-created curriculum or program. Figure 3 shows that this percentage had increased from the 76 percent of school principals

who responded similarly in fall of the 2021–2022 school year (Schwartz et al., 2022). And this percentage, in turn, had increased from the 46 percent of school principals who responded similarly in spring of the 2017–2018 school year (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019).³

To gather more information about the extent of schools’ SEL implementation, we asked principals in fall 2023 about not only their school’s SEL curriculum use (whether commercial or locally created) but also about their school’s use of eight additional approaches that are core to systemic SEL. We developed a ten-item set of SEL implementation indicators based on “The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning” (CASEL, undated-a; Mahoney et al., 2021). Our assumption is that schools engaging in more of these implementation efforts (e.g., direct SEL instruction from a curriculum *and*

FIGURE 3
Percentage of Schools Using an SEL Curriculum or Program, According to School Principals



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from several similar, but slightly different, survey questions. In fall 2023, principals were asked, “To what extent has your school used, or plans to use, the following approaches to promote students’ social and emotional learning this school year (2023–2024)?” The figure depicts the percentage of principals who selected “To a moderate extent” or “To a great extent” for either “Commercially available social and emotional learning program or curricula (e.g., Second Step, Facing History and Ourselves, etc.)” and/or “District- or school-created social and emotional learning program or curricula.” In fall 2021, principals were asked, “To what extent have teachers at this school used or plan on using the following approaches to promote SEL this school year (2021–2022)?” The figure depicts the percentage of principals who selected, “Implement a commercially available social and emotional learning program or curricula (such as Second Step, Facing History and Ourselves, etc.)” and/or “Implement a district- or school-created social and emotional learning program or curricula.” See Figures 2 and 3 in Schwartz et al., 2022 (pp. 7–8). In spring 2018, principals were asked, “Please select the practices, programs, or strategies you personally used during the current school year (2017–2018) to improve your students’ social and emotional learning.” The figure depicts the percentage of principals who selected, “Implement SEL programs.” See Table 3 in Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019 (p. 13), and Figure 3 in Schwartz et al., 2022 (p. 8).

the integration of SEL into core courses) represents more-intensive and more-systemic SEL implementation. To create a metric for systemic SEL implementation, we averaged principals' responses on these indicators into a composite. Each of the ten items was measured on a four-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "a great extent" (for more details, see Table A.2). On average, schools scored a mean of 2.7 on our systemic SEL implementation composite, which ranged from one to four. This corresponds to somewhere between a "small" and "moderate" extent.

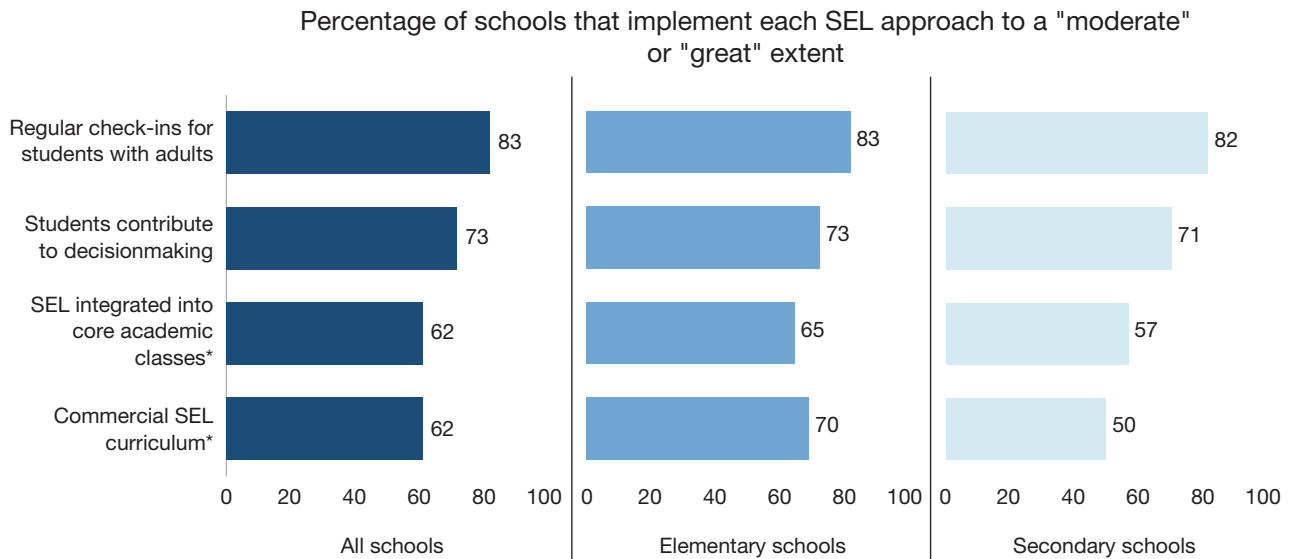
In Figure 4, we display the results for four of ten survey items in the composite. We highlight these specific items to provide a sampling that captures the breadth of SEL. Additionally, we highlight these items because we examine these four survey items in subsequent analyses.

To show which of the four approaches are the most and least common, we display in rank order the percentage of principals who indicated that their schools used the approach either to a "moderate" or "great" extent. Of these four, the most common

approach, which 83 percent of principals reported doing to a moderate or great extent during the 2023–2024 school year, was offering regular opportunities for students to check in with their teachers or other adults (such as via an advisory period or home period). The second most common SEL approach was offering opportunities for students to meaningfully contribute to classroom decisionmaking (73 percent of principals reported that their schools did this to a moderate or great extent).

The majority of schools also integrated SEL approaches into core content area classes to support students' academic success and used commercially available SEL programs or curricula (both 62 percent). Elementary schools were more likely to use commercially available SEL programs or curricula in 2023–2024 (70 percent versus 50 percent, respectively). Elementary schools were also more likely to report integrating SEL approaches in core content area classes to support students' academic success (65 percent versus 57 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 4
Schools' SEL Implementation Efforts in the 2023–2024 School Year, According to School Principals



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "To what extent has your school used, or plans to use, the following approaches to promote students' social and emotional learning this school year (2023–2024)?" ($n = 1,025$). For each of ten approaches, respondents were asked to select among the following responses: "Not at all," "To a small extent," "To a moderate extent," or "To a great extent." The figure depicts the percentage of respondents who selected a "moderate" or "great" extent. The survey responses have been truncated for readability purposes. The asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of elementary principals who indicated that their schools use a specific SEL approach is statistically significantly different than the percentage of secondary principals who responded similarly.

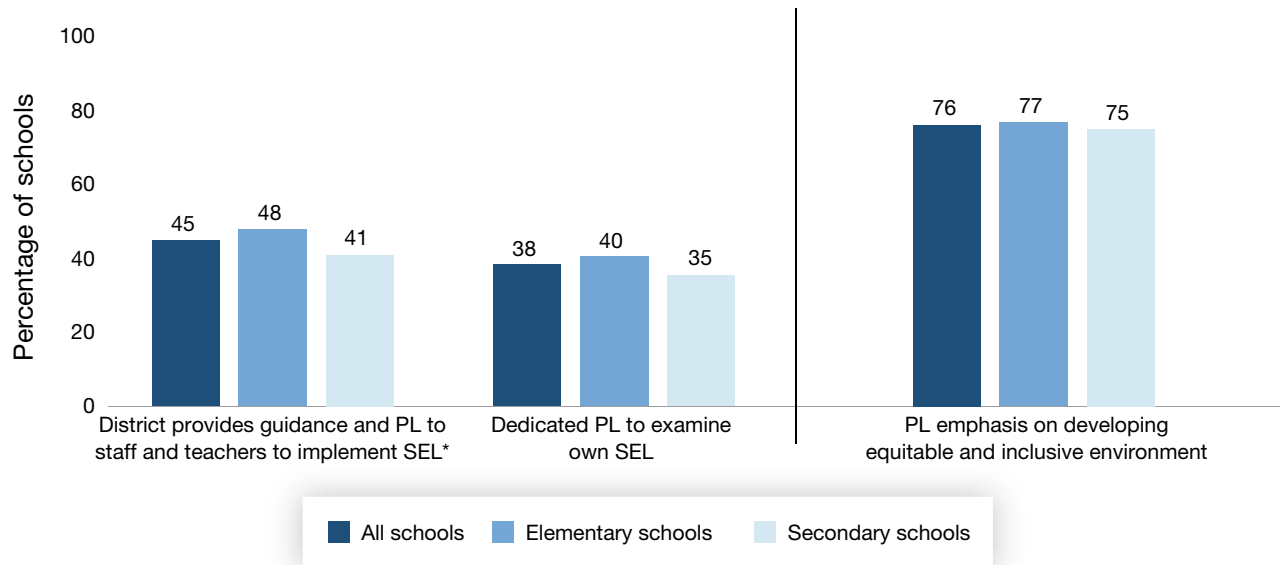
We next examine three additional areas that CASEL hypothesizes influence systemic SEL implementation: professional learning (PL) for educators, school community support, and barriers to implementation. Research has shown that PL is important for SEL implementation to ensure that educators and staff understand what systemic SEL is, what social and emotional competence looks like, how building adult and student SEL competence supports critical long-term outcomes for students, and what implementation fidelity looks like in classrooms and schools (Oberle et al., 2016).

As shown in Figure 5, a slight minority of principals (45 percent) said that the provision of district guidance and PL for staff and teachers to implement SEL describes their schools “fairly well” or “very

well” in the 2023–2024 school year. Elementary principals were slightly more likely than their counterparts in secondary schools to indicate that their school districts provide guidance and PL to implement SEL (48 percent versus 41 percent, respectively). Meanwhile, 38 percent of principals overall said that their schools provide dedicated PL to examine and work on their own SEL (e.g., development of their own SEL competence). Three-quarters of schools (76 percent) have PL that places a moderate or a lot of emphasis on developing equitable and inclusive learning environments (which support the conditions for SEL to be implemented) during the 2023–2024 school year.

We also asked principals for their perceptions of support from their school community for

FIGURE 5
Schools’ Professional Learning Focus on SEL in the 2023–2024 School Year, According to Principals



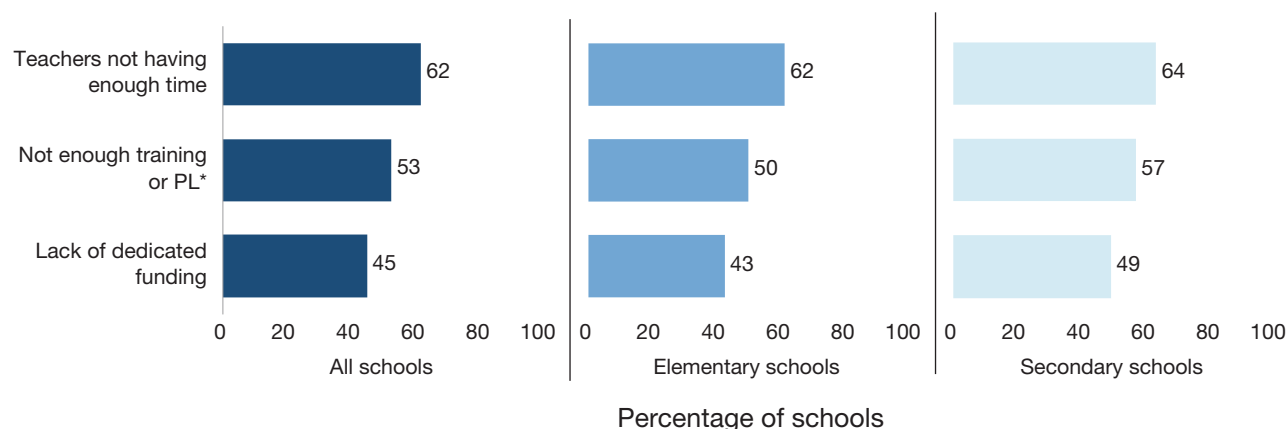
NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions: “Please indicate the extent to which the statements below describe your school/district: My district’s central office leaders provide guidance and professional learning to staff and teachers to implement social and emotional learning” (n = 1,022) and “Staff at this school have dedicated professional learning to examine and work on their own social and emotional learning (e.g., development of their own social and emotional learning skills, staff wellness initiatives, etc.)” (n = 1,022). Respondents were asked to select from the following responses: “Does not describe at all,” “Does not describe that well,” “Describes somewhat well,” “Describes fairly well,” and “Describes very well.” The figure depicts the percentage of respondents who selected “Describes fairly well” or “Describes very well.” The figure also uses data from the survey question, “Thinking of your school’s professional learning activities this school year (2023–2024), how much emphasis has been placed on the following topics? Developing an equitable and inclusive school environment” (n = 1,020). Respondents were asked to select from the following responses: “None,” “A little,” “A moderate amount,” and “A lot.” The figure depicts the percentage of respondents who selected “A moderate amount” or “A lot.” The survey responses have been truncated for readability purposes. An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of elementary principals who indicated that their schools’ PL included an SEL focus is statistically significantly different than the percentage of secondary principals who said similarly.

SEL. Support for SEL is important for coordinating schoolwide SEL. A comprehensive approach to PL and SEL implementation involves all school staff in order to establish consistent practices, messages, and a common language that is shared throughout the school community. This coordination is hypothesized to positively contribute to schools' SEL implementation (Oberle, 2016; Ransford et al., 2009). We asked principals to what extent they perceive that teachers, parents, their districts, and state leaders believe it is important for schools to promote SEL as a part of students' in-school experience. We averaged principals' responses across these four survey items into a single composite that we refer to as "school community support for SEL." (See Table A.2 for more details about how we constructed this composite.) This composite ranged from one (not important at all) to five (very important).

The average score on this composite was four, meaning that principals generally perceived that their school community believes the promotion of SEL is fairly important. Additionally, one-half of principals perceived that their school communities believe promoting SEL is more than just fairly important, including about one-third who perceived that it is very important.

Finally, we asked principals about potential barriers their schools may have experienced implementing SEL. On the basis of past literature within the implementation science field, we focus on three barriers for this report: lack of time, lack of funding, and lack of training given the direct demands on teachers (Domitrovich et al., 2008; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). In Figure 6, we show the percentage of principals who indicated that these barriers were a fairly big or very big challenge during the 2023–2024 school year. Principals most often identified teachers not having enough time to deliver explicit lessons about SEL as a barrier, with 62 percent of principals indicating that this was a barrier to SEL implementation in their schools during the 2023–2024 school year.⁴ Meanwhile, 53 percent of principals said that teachers not having enough training or PL to support students' SEL was a fairly big or very big challenge to SEL implementation, and 45 percent of principals responded similarly about a lack of funding dedicated to support SEL. Secondary school principals were especially likely to note a lack of training or PL as a barrier. Together, these data provide a coherent snapshot of broad SEL implementation efforts that occurred in the 2023–2024 school year. Next, we complement this schoolwide viewpoint with the SEL-

FIGURE 6
Schools' Barriers to SEL Implementation Efforts in the 2023–2024 School Year, According to Principals



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey prompts: "Below are some potential challenges schools might face when trying to implement social and emotional learning. Please indicate how much of a challenge, if at all, each one of these is at your school" (n = 1,017). Respondents were asked to select among the following response options: "Not a challenge at all," "Not much of a challenge," "Somewhat of a challenge," "A fairly big challenge," "A very big challenge," and "N/A [not applicable]; Our school is not trying to implement social and emotional learning." The figure depicts the percentage of respondents who selected "A fairly big challenge" or "A very big challenge."

relevant state policies and conditions that were in place at the start of the 2023–2024 school year.

States’ Supportive and Limiting Policies and Conditions for SEL

CASEL conducted an extensive scan of publicly available policies and data related to SEL for all 50 states and DC to capture states’ SEL-relevant policies, guidance on SEL policies to support SEL implementation, conditions that may limit SEL implementation, and state-reported data that reflect SEL-relevant practices.⁵ We developed two indicators, as shown in Table 1.⁶ We then calculated a value for each indicator for each state that equally weights each metric we list in Table 1. That is, the value is the ratio of the number of state metrics satisfied out of all possible metrics within that indicator. For example, if a state’s limiting conditions indicator equals 0.5, it indicates that the state had two of four metrics we identified. For more details about each metric, see the “State Policy Scan” section of the Appendix.

It is important to note that our scan does not include an exhaustive list of all potential policies or conditions in support of or in opposition to SEL. Rather, the metrics included in Table 1 were what was

publicly available and to which CASEL could assign a numeric value to serve as a proxy for various aspects of statewide SEL implementation.

How States Scored on Supportive and Limiting Indicators

Supportive Policies and Conditions Indicator

The supportive policies and conditions indicator includes metrics that we hypothesize signal the state’s prioritization of SEL and actions to support strong statewide SEL implementation. *Statewide SEL implementation*, as used in this report, refers to a state government’s ability and willingness to support the planning and execution of systemic SEL through policies and various conditions. For example, when a state adopts comprehensive state SEL standards, it messages the importance of the inclusion of SEL in a student’s K–12 education, provides a guide for how districts and/or schools can help students acquire social and emotional competency, and—in some cases—outlines instructional approaches to satisfy that expectation. Similarly, if a state has a profile of a graduate that includes SEL skills, it is sending a message about the necessity for high school graduates to

TABLE 1
The Metrics Within Our Two Indicators of State Support for and Limitations on SEL

Indicator	Metrics
Supportive policies and conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State has stand-alone K–12 SEL standards, competencies, or benchmarks • State indicates integration of SEL into math and/or ELA via math or ELA standards and/or SEL-academic crosswalks • State profile of a graduate includes SEL • State strategic plan includes SEL • Statewide student-counselor ratio is less than the national average • State reports on more than one SEL-related school quality or student success (SQSS) indicator • State Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan includes SEL • State leverages Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections grant funds to support students’ SEL and well-being
Limiting conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State has introduced anti-SEL legislation • Percentage of students statewide referred to law enforcement is higher than the national average • Percentage of students statewide who received one or more out-of-school suspensions and/or in-school suspensions is higher than the national average • State leverages BSCA Stronger Connections grant funds for school hardening

demonstrate certain social and emotional skills by the time they exit the state’s public education system.⁷

As depicted in Figure A.1, at least 20 percent of states possess each of the eight metrics we identified in supportive indicators. For example, 84 percent of states (or 43 states) leveraged BSCA Stronger Connections Grant funding to create safe, healthy, and supportive schools that support students’ social and emotional needs and well-being, and 63 percent of states (32 states) have included SEL in their ESSA state plans. Only one state does not have any supportive policies or conditions for SEL, and the majority of states have one-half or more of the supportive policies or conditions listed in Table 1.

Limiting Conditions Indicator

The limiting conditions indicator, on the other hand, includes metrics that we hypothesize are either barriers to strong statewide SEL implementation or an indication of poor SEL implementation. For example, given that suspensions are central to punitive and zero-tolerance practices and policies, we use states with higher percentages of students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions and/or in-school suspensions as a stand-in for discipline policies that

Policies that can support strong SEL implementation are present in states across the political spectrum. All but one of 50 states (plus DC) have at least one supportive policy or condition to support SEL implementation.

rely on punitive measures rather than practices that promote SEL. This indicator also considers the possibility that the mere introduction of anti-SEL bills might have a chilling effect on implementation.

Eighteen states have zero limiting conditions and an additional 13 states have only one limiting condition (see Figure A.2). The most common indicator (41 percent) is having a suspension rate above the national average, and the least common indicator is the introduction of an explicitly anti-SEL bill (18 percent).

It is important to note that a single state may (and often does) have both supporting and limiting conditions for SEL (e.g., a state could both have standards for SEL and its legislature could have introduced legislation to ban SEL).⁸ Therefore, these indicators are not inverses of each other but instead represent state-level actions that uniquely affect specific aspects of SEL implementation or SEL implementation globally.

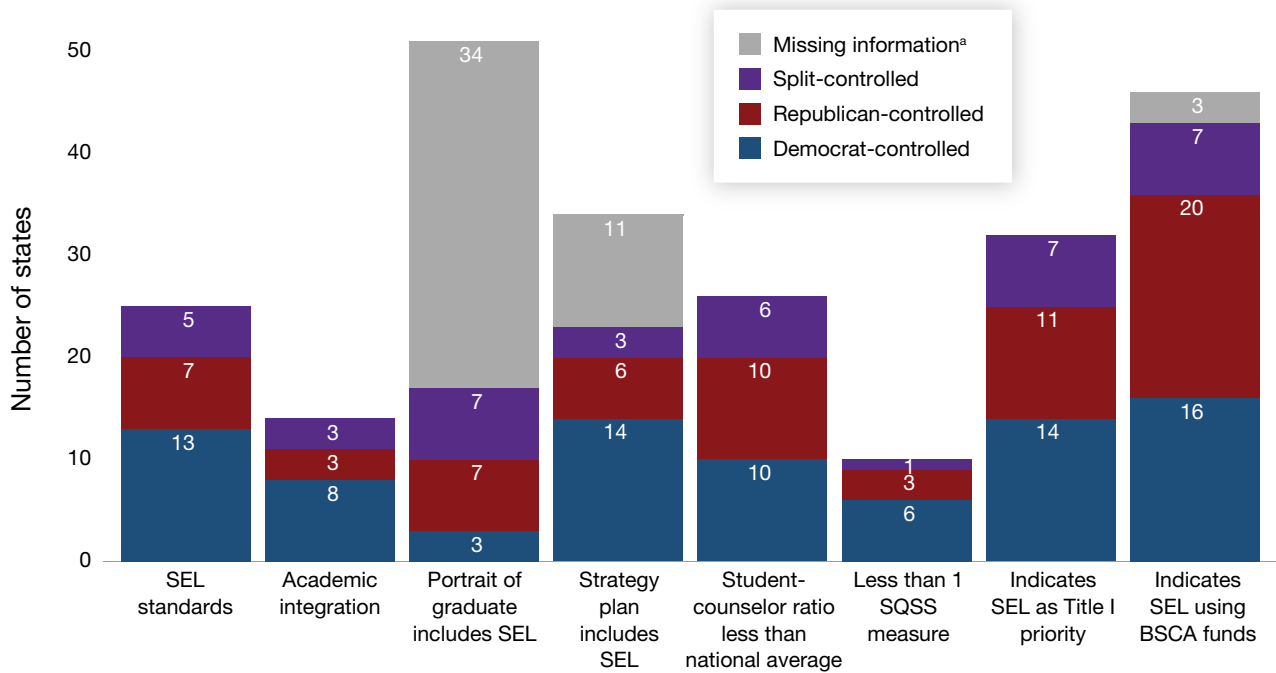
Political Party Representation Across Policies and Conditions

States’ SEL policies and conditions do not cleanly map to political party control of a state.⁹ Specifically, policies that can support strong SEL implementation are present in states across the political spectrum. All but one of 50 states (plus DC) have at least one supportive policy or condition to support SEL implementation (see Figure 7). For several of the individual metrics within the supportive policies and conditions indicator, the number of states that are Democrat-controlled compared with those that are Republican-controlled and split-controlled combined are nearly equivalent. Such is the case for states with stand-alone K–12 SEL standards and for states integrating SEL into math and/or ELA via standards or crosswalks. Most other metrics within this indicator are relatively evenly distributed, regardless of political party control.

For the limiting conditions indicator, Republican-controlled and split-controlled states had a higher frequency of limiting conditions compared with Democrat-controlled states, in some cases by a wide margin (e.g., all the states with suspen-

FIGURE 7

Number of States with Supportive Policies and Conditions for SEL, by Political Party Control



NOTE: Eighteen states are Democrat-controlled, 23 states are Republican-controlled, and ten states are split-controlled.

^a Information was not available for all states at the time of the scan. Thirty-four states did not have portraits of graduates and 11 states did not have strategic plans at the time the scan was conducted.

sion rates and law enforcement referrals above the national average). This finding suggests that some Republican-controlled states tend to have the highest number of barriers to SEL implementation (see Figure 8). Although Republican-controlled states are overrepresented in the limiting conditions indicator, the majority of states—regardless of political party control—have one or zero limiting conditions. Specifically, of the 31 states with one or zero limiting factors, 17 are Democrat-controlled and 14 are Republican-controlled or split-controlled.

The Relationships Between Supportive and Limiting State SEL Indicators and Schools’ SEL Implementation Efforts

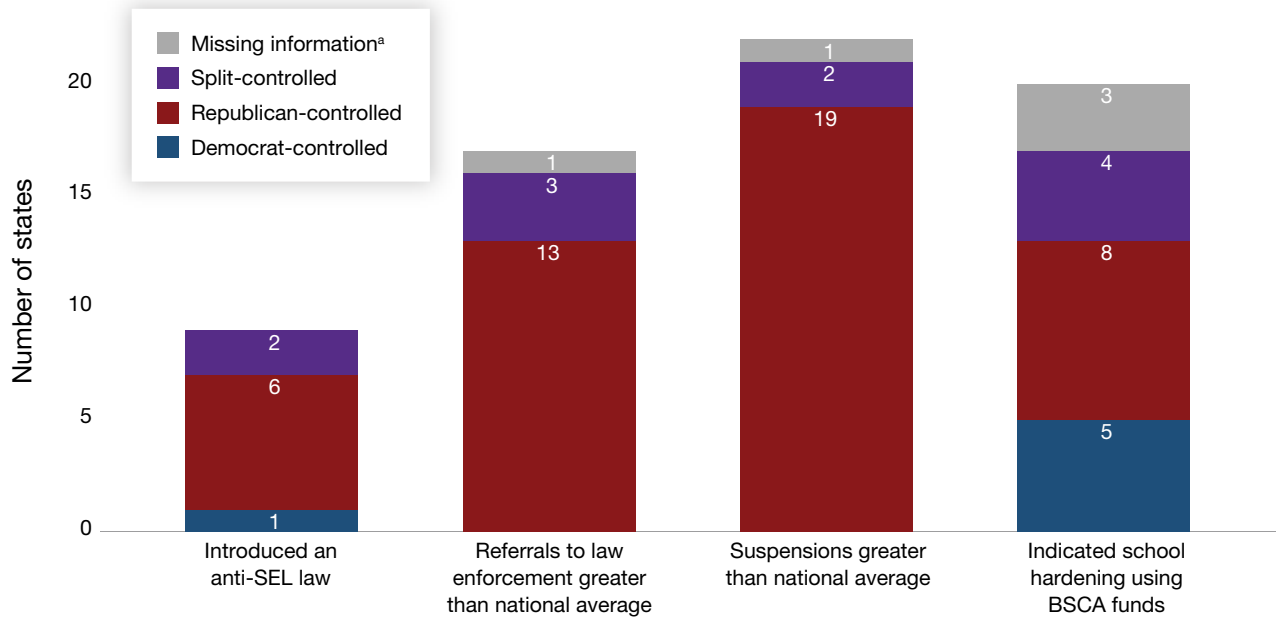
We now turn to the relationships between our two state indicators and schools’ SEL implementation

efforts. In Figure 9, we illustrate the associations between our two state-level indicators (shown in the two leftmost columns) and school-level SEL implementation efforts (shown in the rows). For this analysis, we also rely on school principals’ reports about their schools’ SEL implementation because principals tend to have a more comprehensive view of their schools.¹⁰

We see several significant relationships between states’ supportive policies and conditions for SEL and school-level SEL implementation efforts. These relationships are in the expected positive direction (i.e., more state-level supportive policies and conditions are associated with higher levels of school-level SEL implementation efforts). For example, supportive

FIGURE 8

Number of States with Limiting Conditions for SEL, by Political Party Control



NOTE: Eighteen states are Democrat-controlled, 23 states are Republican-controlled, and ten states are split-controlled.

^a Information was not available for all states at the time of the scan.

policies and conditions are related to schools’ implementation of a commercial SEL program and the reduction of barriers related to teachers’ time, opportunities for training, and available funding. Supportive policies and conditions also relate to aspects of adult SEL, including dedicated PL for teachers’ SEL and opportunities to strengthen teacher-student relationships via regular check-ins.

The relationship between limiting conditions for SEL at the state level and school-level SEL implementation was also in the expected direction (i.e., states with more limiting conditions were associated with lower levels of school-level SEL implementation efforts). This association was significant for only certain aspects of schools’ SEL implementation efforts, although it is particularly notable that limiting conditions are associated with lower school community support and principal reports of less dedicated funding to support SEL.

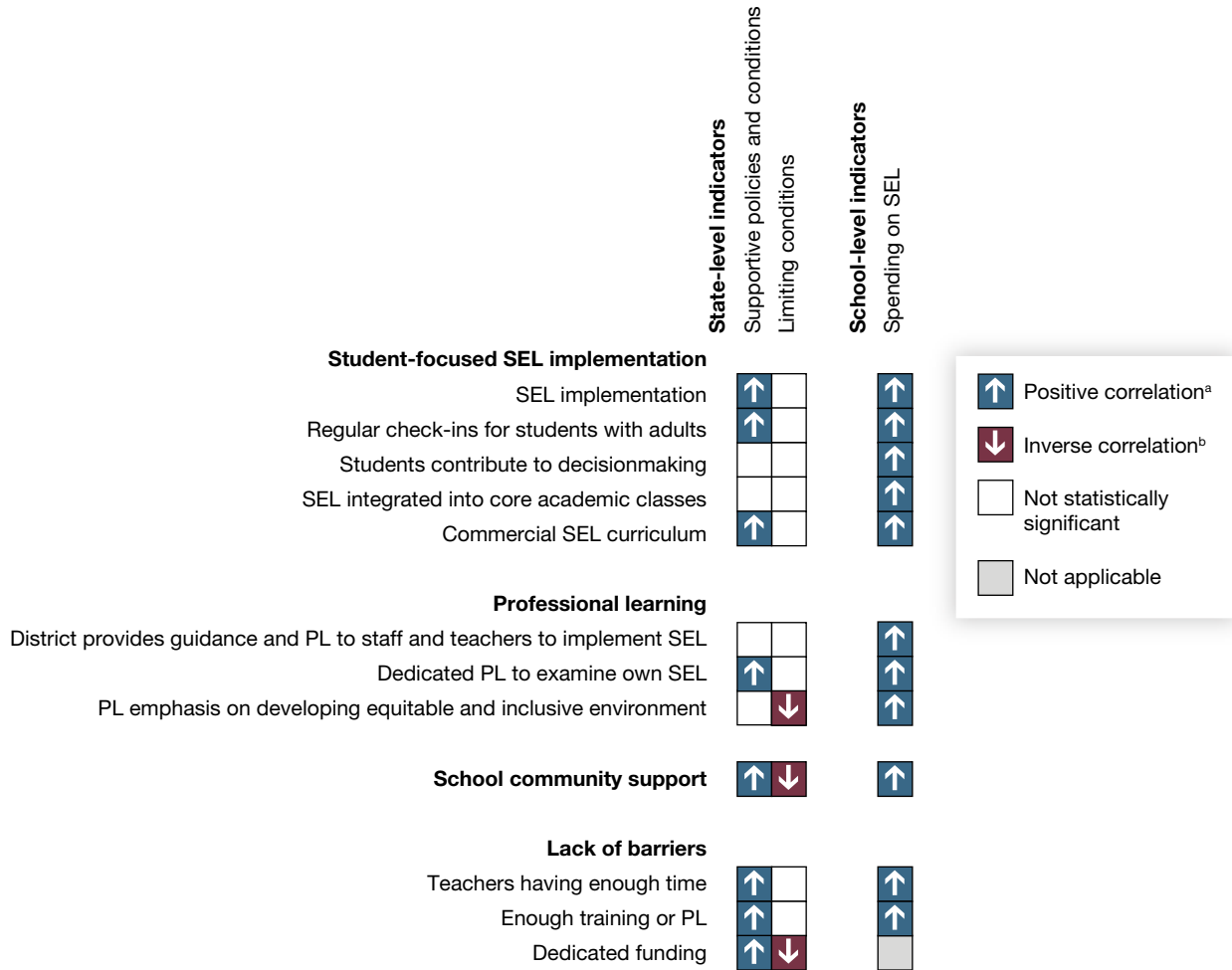
Although our study was not designed to determine causal relationships, they do suggest that policies and conditions at the state level accord with implementation efforts at the school level, illustrat-

ing some of the systemic conditions that support students’ SEL.

Given that many of these implementation efforts require financial support, we used principal reports of spending on SEL to better understand relationships between spending and specific elements of SEL implementation. Principal reports of schools’ spending on SEL had consistent, positive associations with all of the schools’ SEL implementation efforts (see the far right column in Figure 9). This demonstrates correlations between principal-reported spending on SEL and a host of implementation efforts, including integrating SEL into core academic classes, PL, and school community support for SEL, all of which are critical to systemic SEL.

FIGURE 9

Associations Between State-Level and School-Level Indicators and Principals' Reports of Their Schools' SEL Implementation Efforts



NOTE: Figure 9 plots the associations from linear regression models regressing our 12 measures of schools' SEL activities on our three state-level and school-level enabling policies and conditions. We do not report on the relationship between spending on SEL and dedicated funding (denoted as "not applicable" in the figure) given the high degree of conceptual overlap between those two measures. Regression models include controls for school level, share of free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL)-eligible students, and share of students in racial and ethnic groups (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian).

^a Higher values of state-level and school-level indicators are associated with higher values on indicators of SEL implementation efforts.

^b Lower values of state-level and school-level indicators are associated with lower values on indicators of SEL implementation efforts.

The Relationships Between State SEL Policies and Conditions and Two Indicators of Student Experience

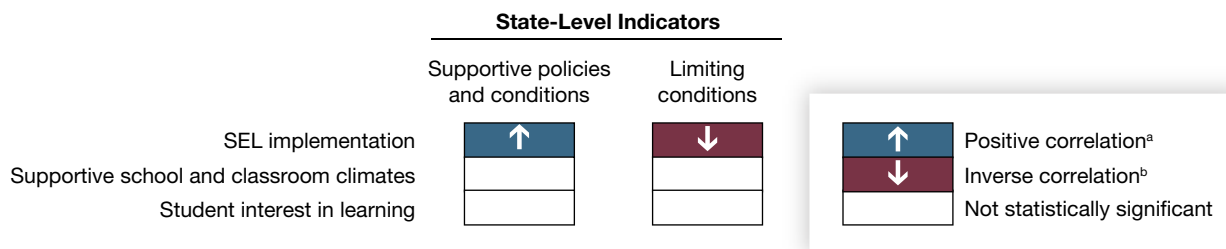
Next, we examine whether the two state-level indicators are correlated with teachers' reports of SEL implementation in their own classrooms, as well as the two indicators of student experience identified in Figure 2:

- (1) supportive school and classroom climates and
- (2) student interest in learning (see Table A.2 for how we constructed the SEL implementation composite and the two indicators of student experience).

The top row in Figure 10 shows the positive and negative associations that we hypothesized would occur: The more a state prioritizes policies to support SEL implementation, the more likely teachers are to report implementing systemic SEL practices in their

FIGURE 10

Associations Between State-Level Indicators and Teachers' Reports of SEL Implementation, Supportive School Climate, and Student Interest in Learning



NOTE: Figure 10 plots the associations from linear regression models regressing our three teacher-reported measures of SEL implementation on our two state-level policies and conditions. Regression models include controls for school level, share of FRPL-eligible students, and share of students in racial and ethnic groups (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian).

^a Higher values of state-level indicators are associated with higher values on indicators of SEL implementation and student experience.

^b Lower values of state-level indicators are associated with lower values on indicators of SEL implementation and student experience.

classrooms. Similarly, if a state has fewer limiting conditions (e.g., lower than average law enforcement or suspension referrals), teachers are more likely to implement SEL programs and approaches. These findings suggest that policies and conditions at the state level have the potential to cascade down to SEL in schools, and future investigations could map the causality and directionality of these pathways.

We did not see a relationship between state-level supportive or limiting policies and conditions and teachers' perceptions of climate and student interest in learning. We speculate that this may be because the state-level conditions are just one of many influences, potentially too distal from teachers' perceptions of school climate and student interest in learning. It may also be that the two teacher survey questions were too crude of measures to detect this hypothesized relationship.

The Relationships Between Teachers' SEL Implementation and Indicators of Student Experience

As a final step in our analyses, we examine the association between teachers' reports of SEL implementation efforts in their classrooms, school climate, and student interest in learning. We rely on reports from teachers rather than principals because teachers can report on more-granular, in-depth implementation

efforts that can vary across classrooms (Domitrovich and Greenberg, 2000; Ransford, 2007; Ransford et al., 2006) and that we might expect are more directly associated with students' experience. For example, prior research shows that educators' own SEL competence facilitates SEL implementation (Jones and Bouffard, 2012), youth SEL competency development, and positive school climate (Denham, Bassett, and Wyatt, 2007; Zinsser, Denham, and Curby, 2018).

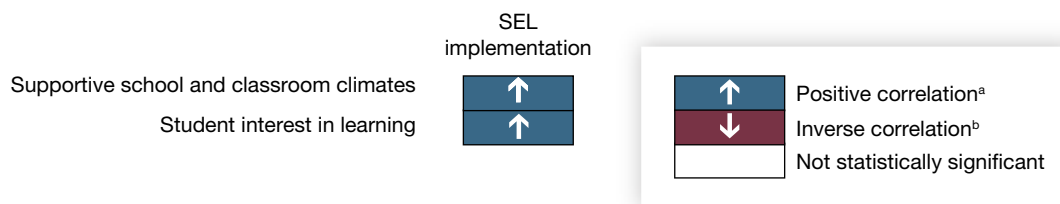
Figure 11 shows the expected positive relationship between teacher-reported implementation and supportive school and classroom climates and student interest in learning. That is, teachers who reported higher levels of SEL implementation in their classrooms also reported higher levels of both indicators. This correlation does not prove that SEL implementation created the climate or student interest (or vice versa). However, we deem this correlation—in combination with the SEL research we described previously—as an initial validation of CASEL's hypotheses shown in Figure 2 of a positive correlation between SEL implementation and indicators of student experience.

Summary of Findings and Limitations

This report seeks to advance the SEL field's understanding of the connections among SEL-relevant policies and conditions, school-level SEL implement-

FIGURE 11

Associations Between Teachers' Reports of SEL Implementation, School Climate, and Student Interest in Learning



NOTE: Figure 11 plots the associations from linear regression models regressing two teacher-reported indicators of schoolwide systemic SEL (supportive climate and student interest in learning) on our teacher-reported measure of SEL implementation. Regression models include controls for school level, share of FRPL-eligible students, and share of students in racial and ethnic groups (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian).

^a Higher values of state-level indicators are associated with higher values on indicators of SEL implementation and student experience.

^b Lower values of state-level indicators are associated with lower values on indicators of SEL implementation and student

tation, and student experience. To do this, we used publicly available data on state policies to explore possible relationships with the reports from principals and teachers regarding local school-level decisions and conditions.

We found that the implementation of SEL programming has become more prevalent in U.S. schools, with greater adoption during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. We suspect this growth is because more educators and school leaders view SEL as particularly helpful to students academically, socially, and emotionally to help them recover from the pandemic—a perspective that is supported by the research (Zieher et al., 2021).

We also found that state policies and conditions that support SEL are widespread and generally do not fall along political party lines. Forty-nine states (plus DC) had at least one condition of SEL support, whereas 20 states had more than one limiting condition.

Favorable state SEL conditions were positively correlated with both teachers' and principals' reports of SEL implementation efforts in their classrooms and schools. Additionally, principals reported fewer barriers to SEL and more support for SEL from the school community in states with favorable SEL policies. They also reported increased time devoted to PL for educators to focus on their own SEL and to support SEL implementation.

We also found positive associations between teachers implementing SEL in their classrooms and

their perceptions of positive school climate and stronger student interest in learning. Although our analysis cannot prove that teachers' implementation of SEL improved school climate or student interest, our findings comport with the assertion that, "Teachers are the engine that drives SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms" (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, p. 138). Our findings also align with the notion of systemic SEL that we have outlined, which illustrates that schools that prioritize relationship-centered learning environments also demonstrate two indicators of systemic SEL: (1) a supportive school culture in which students are known, respected, and feel safe to learn and (2) student interest in learning, from which students have a voice in their learning and development.

Conversely, principals who worked in states that had more limiting conditions placed on SEL reported less state-level funding, less PL for equitable and inclusive learning environments, and lower support from the school community for SEL. The broader education culture wars have included political opposition to SEL, including attempts to limit SEL implementation through legislation and the removal of SEL resources from public websites. At the time of this writing, no anti-SEL legislation has passed in any state, and the introduction of such legislation does not appear to be correlated with statistically significant reductions in most of the SEL implementation efforts we examined in this report. However, there

of SEL resources from public websites. At the time of this writing, no anti-SEL legislation has passed in any state, and the introduction of such legislation does not appear to be correlated with statistically significant reductions in most of the SEL implementation efforts we examined in this report. However, there may be multiple ways in which political opposition could have a chilling effect on SEL implementation efforts that lie outside the scope of this report and about which future research would be valuable.

Readers should note several limitations to our analysis. First, given that our data and methods cannot establish whether states' SEL policies or conditions determine whether schools implement SEL, none of our claims are causal. Instead, our research takes up an earlier stage of investigation by exploring whether our indexes indicate associations between SEL-supportive policies and school-level implementation of SEL and student experience. Second, we rely on principals' and teachers' self-reports about their own or their schools' actions. Educators may overreport or underreport the actual amount of SEL activity depending on their recall, their own attitudes toward SEL, and their sense of which answers are socially desirable. Third, the relatively low rate of responses to the principal survey may limit their representativeness of school principals nationally, although we weight their responses to minimize this concern. Fourth, the state policy scan relies only on what information is publicly reported, and our composite indicators are an initial effort to codify a combination of policies that support (or limit) SEL implementation. As composites, the state-level indicators cannot speak to the relationships between any one single policy or condition, preventing clear insights into the nature or degree of the putative connections between specific policies or conditions with SEL implementation efforts. Further study may uncover different correlations between an individual policy or condition and SEL implementation. In future work, we will look more closely at the individual indicator variables with more specified hypothesis-driven analytic strategies to better understand the relationships between policies and conditions and their direct and indirect relationships to school-level SEL implementation efforts.

Considerations for Future Research and Implications for Policymakers

Future research should examine the pathways by which SEL policies help or hinder school SEL implementation efforts and how those efforts influence downstream intermediate and longer-term school and student outcomes, particularly for student academic outcomes given the deep learning and attendance impacts following COVID-19. As we indicated previously, the research field would benefit from breaking down composite metrics to better understand the unique relationships between specific policies and conditions and implementation efforts. We also recommend analyses and research on funding streams that allow for federal, state, and local spending on SEL and the influence of that spending on implementation. We hope to spur research and advance knowledge of potential causal relationships among state policy and school actions that affect the social and emotional well-being of students.

The results of this report are clear. In states that have more policies and conditions that are supportive of SEL implementation, school principals report that adults tend to check in more consistently with students and that adults have greater access to PL on SEL. In those states, principals also reported that their schools have more community support for SEL, and they reported fewer barriers to implementation. Finally, this report reveals that supportive state policies are positively associated with teacher reports of stronger SEL implementation, more supportive school and classroom climates, and higher student interest in learning. States with more limiting conditions on SEL are associated with a decrease in SEL implementation in schools.

This report aligns with other studies documenting increased SEL implementation and the evidence-based benefits of SEL for students, educators, schools, and communities. The combination of our findings and prior research establishing the positive effects of SEL should direct policymakers at the state and local levels away from advancing policies aimed at limiting SEL implementation in schools and toward the following actions:

1. Encourage SEL implementation in schools, such as through the adoption of SEL standards, competencies, or benchmarks, and the inclusion of SEL in an SEA's strategic plan.
2. Provide dedicated funding for school leader and educator PL to support the implementation of high-quality SEL in schools.
3. Ensure that high-quality SEL implementation is an integral part of bolstering a positive school climate.
4. Leverage federal policies and resources to strengthen students' academic, social, and emotional well-being and educators' social and emotional competence and capacity.

Although we continue to investigate the associations across policies, classroom activities, and student outcomes, policy and education leaders can help students recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and thrive in the future by continuing to advance SEL.

APPENDIX Sources, Methods, and Approach

In this appendix, we provide a description of our data sources, survey methods, and analytic approach.

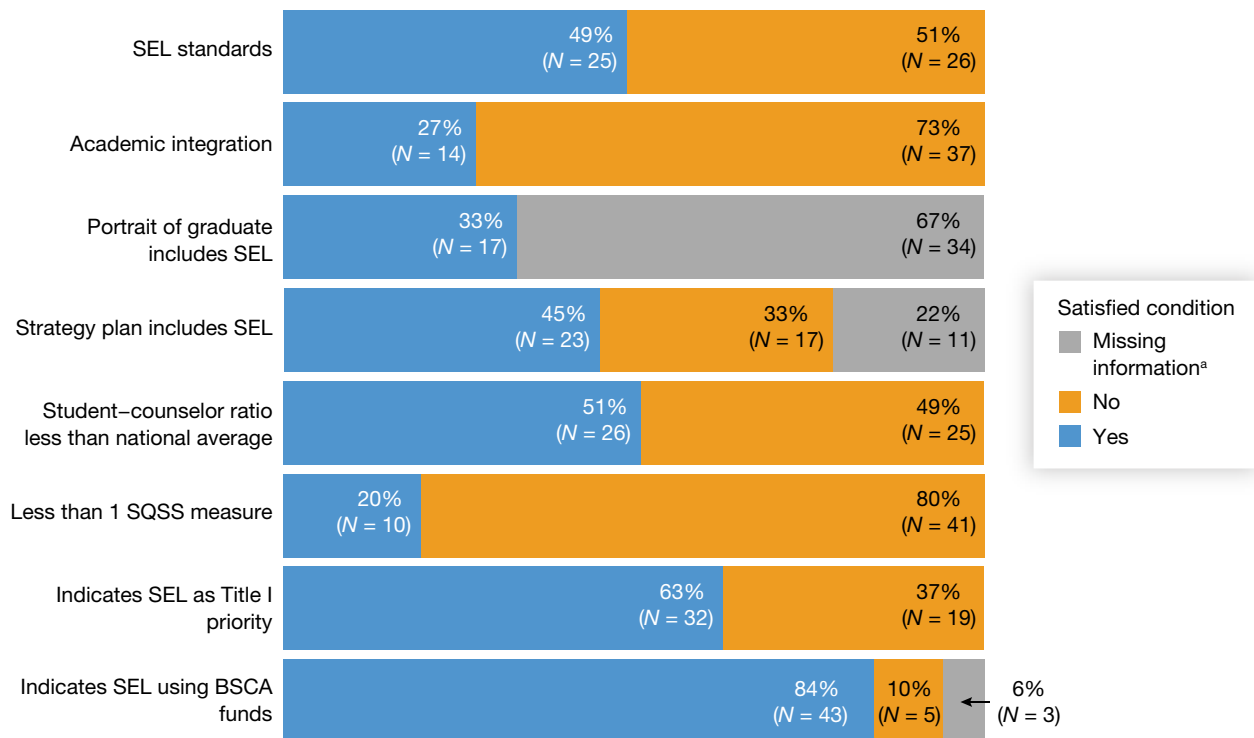
Appendix Figures

Figure A.1 presents the percentage of states with supportive policies and conditions for SEL.

Figure A.2 presents the percentage of states with limiting conditions for SEL.

The coding for the metrics in Figures A.1 and A.2 is provided in Table A.1.

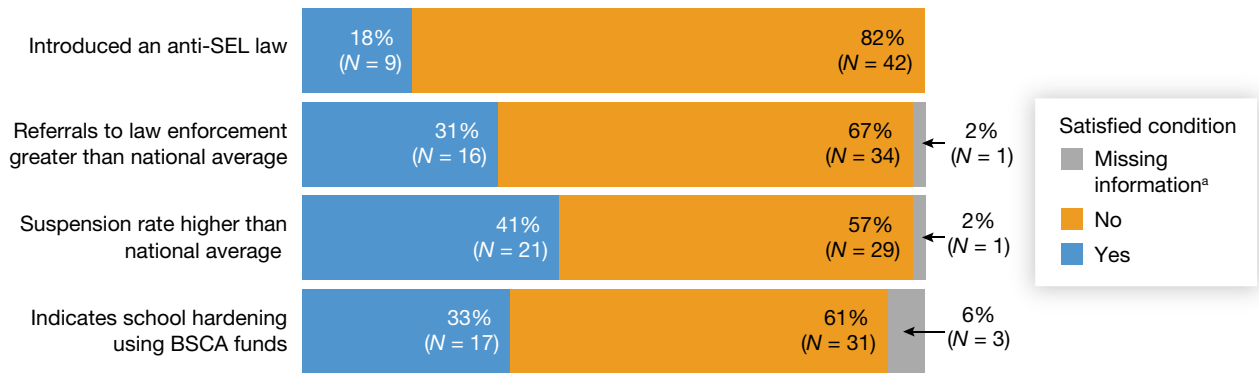
FIGURE A.1
Percentage of States with Supportive Policies and Conditions for SEL



NOTE: The coding for each metric is available in the codebook presented in Table A.1.

^aInformation was not available for all states at the time of the scan. Thirty-four states did not have portraits of graduates and 11 states did not have strategic plans at the time the scan was conducted.

FIGURE A.2
Percentage of States with Limiting Conditions for SEL



NOTE: The coding for each metric is available in the codebook presented in Table A.1.
^a Information for all states was not available at the time of the scan.

Data Sources

CASEL wrote two surveys—one for K–12 principals and one for K–12 teachers—that RAND administered to nationally representative samples of each group via the ASLP and the ATP, respectively. The surveys are available on request and will be posted to the RAND American Educator Panels data portal at www.rand.org/aepdata for free download, along with de-identified survey data files, in spring 2025.

To facilitate the analyses we present in this report, we merged data from several sources. Panel records contain identifying information on the schools that these educators lead and in which these teachers work. Therefore, we were able to connect survey results to the state policies to which these educators were subject, which allowed us to examine the associations between state policies and conditions and educators’ reports of SEL implementation efforts.

In the following sections, we briefly describe each of these data sources and how we used them for the analyses.

Principal Survey

RAND researchers fielded a survey to a nationally representative sample of K–12 public school principals who are members of the ASLP between November 15, 2023, and December 6, 2023. The ASLP contains roughly 8,000 public school principals who were recruited into the panel using probabilistic sam-

pling methods. RAND statisticians randomly sampled a subset of ASLP members to take this survey. To achieve a target number of 1,000 responses, RAND invited 3,333 principals to take the survey, of which 1,030 did (a 31.8 percent survey completion rate using the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s [2023] Response Rate 6 definition).

On completion, we weighted principals’ responses to our survey to make them representative of the national population of K–12 public school principals. RAND statisticians created survey weights that account for (1) the individual-level and school-level characteristics of each respondent (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity, school locale, school level), calibrated so that these characteristics closely matched the characteristics of the national population of public school principals based on the National Center for Education Statistics’ National Teacher and Principal Survey; (2) the probability of selection into the survey sample using the full ASLP as a frame; and (3) the probability of a principal completing the survey.

To facilitate some comparisons over time, CASEL included many of the same survey items on these surveys as those administered in similar surveys during the 2021–2022 and 2017–2018 school years. However, we note that because we lack longitudinal weights that correct for the partial overlap in respondents over time, we are not able to conduct significance testing across survey waves.

Teacher Survey

To learn more about SEL implementation at the classroom level, we also conducted an analogous teacher survey. RAND researchers fielded a survey to a nationally representative sample of K–12 public school teachers who are members of the ATP between March 19, 2024, and April 5, 2024. The ATP contains roughly 25,000 public school teachers who were recruited into the panel using probabilistic sampling methods. RAND statisticians randomly sampled a subset of ATP members to take this survey. We also oversampled teachers in seven states. RAND invited 7,790 teachers to take the survey, of which 3,897 did (a 50.3 percent survey completion rate using the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s Response Rate 6 definition [2023]). Teachers’ responses were also weighted to be representative of the national population of K–12 public school teachers using the same weighting methods described previously for the principal survey.

Common Core of Data

Because we hypothesized that educators’ responses to our survey items would vary by school context, we linked survey data files to the 2022–2023 Common Core of Data published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2023) to obtain data on school demographics (e.g., school level, student racial and ethnic composition). However, preliminary analyses conducted with the merged data file suggested that educators’ reports of SEL implementation did not vary as much as anticipated by school demographics. Therefore (and also to maintain as much align-

ment as possible between the demographics included in school-level and student-level regressions), we restricted our analyses to focus on school level (elementary, middle, and high).

State Policy Scan

CASEL conducted a scan of publicly available policies and data related to SEL for all 50 states and DC to capture states’ SEL-relevant policies, guidance on SEL policies that is relevant to supporting SEL implementation, policies that may limit SEL implementation, and state-reported data that reflect SEL-relevant practices (for a list of metrics included in this report, see Table A.1). Systematically collecting this information for each state required diverse methods and data sources, including locating, reading, and coding state documents; obtaining information from SEA websites (e.g., SEL standards, academic content area standards, and American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief plans); and using publicly available databases (e.g., to identify explicitly anti-SEL legislation). In other cases, CASEL pulled quantitative data from publicly available government sources, such as U.S. Department of Education grant reports and its Civil Rights Data Collection state profile dashboards (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2024). In each case, every attempt was made to include data as close as possible to, and no more recent than, the beginning of the 2023–2024 school year. The specific sources used, including specific coding information, are indicated in the codebook in Table A.1.

TABLE A.1

Codebook for Scan of State-Level Metrics

Item	Coding	Definition
Political party control	Republican, Democrat, or split control	The party in control of the executive and legislative branches as of the beginning of the 2023–2024 school year, as defined by a party holding a majority of the seats (legislative branch) or the party of the leader of the executive branch. If one party controls all chambers of the legislative branch and the executive branch, the state is designated as controlled by that party. If one party controls the legislative branch and the other party controls the executive branch, the state is designated as split controlled. If the legislative branch is split by party, the state is designated as split controlled.
Supportive policies and conditions		
Standards	Yes or no	Whether or not the state has adopted freestanding K–12 SEL standards (also sometimes referred to as <i>competencies</i> or <i>benchmarks</i>). <i>Freestanding K–12 SEL standards</i> refer to a document or webpage(s) that articulate expectations about what students should know and be able to do with regard to SEL. This document or webpage(s) are specific to SEL (although they sometimes use other language) rather than being embedded in an academic content area. To be considered a “1,” the standards must be accessible via the SEA’s website at the beginning of the 2023–2024 academic year. Note that three states (Arizona, Indiana, and Iowa) have removed their freestanding K–12 SEL standards from their SEA websites.
Grade levels for which standards are incorporated into academic content areas (math and ELA)	Grade level and content area (e.g., kindergarten through grade 3: ELA; grades 9–12: math)	If a state’s math and/or ELA academic content area competencies or standards incorporate SEL, this variable describes the grade level and content area within which those competencies or standards are embedded. This includes specific references to SEL, as well as by another name, and the description should include at least three of the CASEL 5 core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decisionmaking, relationship skills, and social awareness) (CASEL, undated-d). Included among the academic standards’ referenced competencies must be at least one intrapersonal competency (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, responsible decisionmaking) and one interpersonal competency (i.e. relationship skills, social awareness). Note that if a state’s academic content area (math and/or ELA) standards include at least three terms from the definition or sub-bullets defining the CASEL 5 core competencies, as established by the Ecological Approaches to Social and Emotional Learning Lab’s “Thesaurus” tool (undated)—including at least one intrapersonal competency and one interpersonal competency—the variable is also coded as “1.”
SEL crosswalk with ELA and/or math standards	Content area	Whether a state has resource(s) that depict the connections between SEL and a state’s math and/or ELA standards.
Profile of a graduate that includes SEL	Yes or no	Whether a state’s existing profile of a graduate, portrait of a graduate, vision of a graduate, or stated expectations of a graduate (if any profile exists) features SEL. This includes specific references to SEL, as well as by another name, and the description should include at least three of the CASEL 5 core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness) (CASEL, undated-d). Included among the profile’s referenced competencies must be at least one intrapersonal competency (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, responsible decisionmaking) and one interpersonal competency (i.e., relationship skills, social awareness). Note that if a state’s current profile or portrait of a graduate includes at least three related terms, as established by the Ecological Approaches to Social and Emotional Learning Lab’s “Thesaurus” tool (undated), to CASEL’s 5 core competencies—including at least one intrapersonal competency and one interpersonal competency—the variable is also coded as “1.”

Table A.1—Continued

Item	Coding	Definition
Profile of a graduate that includes SEL competencies	List of competencies	Specific SEL competencies and/or related terms named in profile (if the profile does not specifically refer to SEL), verbatim as stated in the profile.
State strategic plan includes SEL	Yes or no	Whether a state’s strategic plan (if it has one) features SEL. This includes specific references to SEL, as well as by another name, and the description should include at least three of the CASEL 5 core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decisionmaking, relationship skills, and social awareness) (CASEL, undated-d). Included among the strategic plan’s referenced competencies must be at least one intrapersonal competency (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, responsible decisionmaking) and one interpersonal competency (i.e., relationship skills, social awareness). Note that if a state’s strategic plan includes at least three related terms, as established by the Ecological Approaches to Social and Emotional Learning Lab’s “Thesaurus” tool (undated), to CASEL’s 5 core competencies—including at least one intrapersonal competency and one interpersonal competency—the variable is also coded as “1.”
State strategic plan includes SEL competencies	List of competencies	Specific SEL competencies and/or related terms named in a state’s strategic plan (if the plan does not specifically refer to SEL), verbatim as stated in plan.
Student-counselor ratio	Ratio of students compared with counselors statewide	The ratio of students compared with one counselor statewide, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection state profile dashboard (2024).
SQSS measures	List of indicators	A list of the SQSS indicators that a state is measuring based on reporting by the Education Commission of the States (Erwin et al., 2021) that are relevant to SEL (i.e., climate survey, chronic absenteeism—for which SEL can be a mitigating strategy—and school discipline).
ESSA plan	Yes or no	Whether SEL (or development, needs, or readiness) is included in a state’s Title I-A funding, per its ESSA plans.
Leveraging BSCA SEL	Yes or no	Whether in their distribution of BSCA Stronger Connections Grant funds—as evidenced by their application process and/or grant website—a state is investing in SEL and student well-being. Examples of evidence include references to the allowable use of funds, descriptions of the overall purpose of the grant, and grant guidance.
Limiting conditions		
Introduction of anti-SEL legislation	Yes or no	Whether a state legislature has ever introduced a bill (or bills) with an explicit barrier to the implementation of SEL. A specific reference in a bill to “social (and) emotional learning” is required for inclusion in this variable.
Introduction of anti-SEL legislation subcategories	List of categories	If a state legislature has introduced anti-SEL legislation, any relevant subcategories of the bill(s) (e.g., barriers to implementation, critical race theory, parental rights).
Referrals to law enforcement	Percentage of total student enrollment	The percentage of all students (with and without disabilities) statewide who were referred to law enforcement in the 2020–2021 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection state profile dashboard (2024).

Table A.1—Continued

Item	Coding	Definition
One or more out-of-school suspensions or in-school suspensions	Percentage of total student enrollment	The percentage of all students (with and without disabilities) statewide who received one or more out-of-school suspensions and/or in-school suspensions in the 2020–2021 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection state profile dashboard (2024). The value was calculated by summing the number of out-of-school suspensions and in-school suspensions in the 2020–2021 school year at the state level, dividing by the number of students enrolled at the state level and multiplying by 100 to create a percentage.
Leveraging BSCA for school hardening	Yes or no	Whether in their distribution of BSCA Stronger Connections Grant funds—as evidenced by their application process and/or grant website—a state is investing in school hardening (including surveillance cameras, metal detectors, other physical or infrastructure-related security equipment, and/or school resource officers). Examples of evidence include references to the allowable use of funds, descriptions of the overall purpose of the grant, and grant guidance.

NOTE: All data are current as of the beginning of the 2023–2024 school year. Yes = 1; No = 0; Missing/unavailable = 999; Not applicable = The data are not expected (e.g., a prerequisite is not met).

Analytic Approach

Construction of Composite Survey Measures

We used data from our nationally representative surveys of educators and from our dataset on state policy conditions to construct indexes of SEL implementation efforts and indicators of systemic SEL. Before constructing these indexes, we performed exploratory factor analyses and reviewed correlations among survey items. We created a composite measure for each indicator by averaging educators' responses to the underlying survey items.

Regression Analyses

Relationship Between State-Level and School-Level Indicators

To look at the relationship between state-level and school-level indicators, we used data from our state policy scan and our nationally representative principal survey. We first estimated unconditional means models without survey weights to determine whether it was necessary to model these relationships using multilevel linear regression models. Intraclass correlations calculated from regression models ranged from 0 to 0.07, suggesting that use of multilevel regression models was not necessary. Therefore, we estimated simple linear regression models that take the following form:

$$schoolSEL_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 condition_i + X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

We iterate more than 12 school-level SEL implementation outcomes and three enabling policies, conditions, and funding implemented at either the state level or school level. We selected these measures for this analysis because they are key levers in CASEL's conceptual frameworks about schoolwide SEL adoption. Our SEL implementation outcomes of interest, all measured continuously and all taken from the principal survey data, include the following:

- SEL implementation composite measure (see Table A.2)

- Implementation of a commercial SEL curriculum
- Regular check-ins for students with adults
- SEL integrated into core academic classes
- Students contribute to decisionmaking
- School community supports composite measure (see Table A.2)
- Staff at this school have dedicated PL to examine and work on their own SEL (e.g., development of their own SEL competencies, staff wellness initiatives) (does not describe at all, does not describe that well, describes somewhat well, describes fairly well, describes very well)
- District central office leaders provide guidance and professional learning to staff and teachers to implement SEL (does not describe at all, does not describe that well, describes somewhat well, describes fairly well, describes very well)
- How much PL emphasis has been placed on developing an equitable and inclusive school environment in the 2023–2024 school year (none, a little, a moderate amount, a lot)
- Teachers not having enough time to teach SEL (not a challenge at all, not much of a challenge, somewhat of a challenge, a fairly big challenge, a very big challenge, not applicable) (reverse coded)
- Lack of funding dedicated to support SEL (not a challenge at all, not much of a challenge, somewhat of a challenge, a fairly big challenge, a very big challenge, not applicable) (reverse coded)
- Teachers not having enough training or PL to support students' SEL (not a challenge at all, not much of a challenge, somewhat of a challenge, a fairly big challenge, a very big challenge, not applicable) (reverse coded).

Our independent variables of interest capture aspects of state and school policies and conditions that we hypothesized were positively associated with principals' reports of their school's SEL implementation. In the report, we describe in Table 1 how we

created these composite measures. Our measures of states’ and schools’ enabling conditions include:

- Supportive policies and conditions
- Limiting conditions
- School spending on SEL

Meanwhile, X_i represents a vector of school-level controls, including the school level, share of students in the school who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), and share of students in the school of each race/ethnic category (White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian). In all models, we include survey weights.

Relationships Between State-Level Indicators and Teacher-Reported SEL Implementation and Indicators of Systemic SEL

We regressed the teacher-reported composites of SEL implementation, supportive climate, and student interest in learning on our two state-level indicators. In each regression model, we included school-level controls, including the school level, share of students in the school who are eligible for FRPL, and share of students in the school of each racial and ethnic category (White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian). In all models, we include survey weights.

TABLE A.2
Construction of Composite Measures from Survey Data

Indicator	Survey Items	Alpha	Respondent
SEL implementation (school level)	<p>To what extent has your school used, or plans to use, the following approaches to promote students’ social and emotional learning this school year (2023–2024)? Four-point scale: not at all, to a small extent, to a moderate extent, to a great extent</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commercially available social and emotional learning program or curricula (e.g., Second Step, Facing History and Ourselves) 2. District- or school-created social and emotional learning program or curricula 3. Technology-based games, a learning platform, or other software that support social and emotional learning 4. Measurement of students’ growth in social and emotional learning with assessments 5. Regular opportunities for students to check in with their teacher or other adults (such as advisory/home periods or morning meetings) 6. Opportunities for students to meaningfully contribute to classroom decisionmaking 7. Resources and/or recommendations to students’ families for supporting their social and emotional learning skills at home 8. Social and emotional learning approaches to support students with learning differences 9. Social and emotional learning approaches in core content area classes to support students’ academic success 10. Connection with out-of-school-time providers that implement social and emotional learning approaches to support students 	0.83	Principal
School spending on SEL	<p>Please indicate how much your school has spent on the following approaches for school year 2023–2024. Include spending from any source, whether federal, state, district, or school. Three-point scale: no spending, some spending, a lot of spending</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social and emotional learning programs and practices 2. Professional learning related to social and emotional learning 	0.67	Principal

Table A.2—Continued

Indicator	Survey Items	Alpha	Respondent
School community support	<p>Below is a description of social and emotional learning. [omitted for brevity] Please read it over carefully and then answer the questions underneath it. Five-point scale: not important at all, not too important, somewhat important, fairly important, very important</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In your opinion, how important do TEACHERS in your school think it is for schools to promote social and emotional learning as a part of students' in-school experience? 2. In your opinion, how important do PARENTS in your school community think it is for schools to promote their students' social and emotional learning as a part of students' in-school experience? 3. In your opinion, how important does YOUR DISTRICT think it is for schools to promote students' social and emotional learning as a part of students' in-school experience? 4. In your opinion, how important do YOUR STATE LEADERS think it is for schools to promote students' social and emotional learning as a part of students' in-school experience? 	0.67	Principal
SEL implementation (teacher level)	<p>To what extent do you use the following approaches to promote students' social and emotional learning in your classroom this school year (2023–2024)? Four-point scale: not at all, to a small extent, to a moderate extent, to a great extent</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement a commercially available social and emotional learning program or curriculum (such as Second Step, Facing History and Ourselves, etc.) 2. Implement a district- or school-created social and emotional learning program or curriculum 3. Offer regular opportunities for students to check in with you (such as advisory/home periods or morning meetings, etc.) 4. Implement social and emotional learning approaches in core content area classes to support students' academic success 	0.69	Teacher
Supportive school and classroom climate	<p>How much of a problem is each of the following in your classroom? Four-point scale: not a problem at all, somewhat of a problem, fairly big problem, very big problem [reverse coded]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negative school climate 2. Developing strong relationships between me and my students 	0.46	Teacher
Student interest in learning	<p>How much of a problem is each of the following in your classroom? Four-point scale: not a problem at all, somewhat of a problem, fairly big problem, very big problem [reverse coded]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students' lack of interest in learning 	—	Teacher

Notes

¹ “School climate is the ‘quality and character of school life’ based on how members of the school community experience school and the school’s ‘norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures’” (CASEL, undated-b). For student interest in learning, the survey item was “How much of a problem is each of the following in your classroom? Students’ lack of interest in learning” (not a problem at all, somewhat of a problem, fairly big problem, very big problem). For simplicity of interpretation, we reverse-scored the item and refer to it as “student interest in learning.”

² Few formal policies explicitly prohibit SEL implementation. Therefore, this indicator is titled “limiting conditions.”

³ We note that the item wording has changed slightly across all three survey administrations, so this comparison is imperfect.

⁴ Note that “Explicit SEL Instruction,” which requires time set aside, is one of three key aspects of classroom-level implementation, according to CASEL. The other two aspects—“a supportive classroom climate” and “integration of SEL into academic instruction”—do not necessarily require additional time (CASEL, undated-a).

⁵ Throughout this report, when we reference *states*, for simplicity, we are referring to the 50 U.S. states plus DC.

⁶ We also attempted to create a third indicator about funding for SEL, but ultimately excluded it because we were unable to isolate funding expressly for SEL, as opposed to funding streams in which SEL was one allowed activity among many.

⁷ All 17 states that had a profile of a graduate included SEL competencies in their profile.

⁸ CASEL measured this metric based on whether a state legislature has ever introduced a bill (or bills) with an explicit barrier to the implementation of SEL. A specific reference in a bill to “social (and) emotional learning” is required for inclusion in this variable.

⁹ CASEL defined Democrat-controlled, Republican-controlled, and split-controlled states based on the political party in control of the executive and legislative branches (the party of the leader of the executive or the party holding a majority of legislative seats, respectively) at the beginning of the 2023–2024 school year. If one party controlled all chambers of the legislative branch and the executive branch, the state was designated as controlled by that party. If one party controlled the legislative branch and the other party controlled the executive branch, the state was designated as split-controlled. If the legislative branch was split by party, the state was designated as split-controlled.

¹⁰ Note, however, that principals could have interpreted the survey items in different ways, depending on their involvement in instruction. Because our teacher survey often included only one teacher per school, we opted for principal reports as the more comprehensive view of school-wide SEL activity.

Abbreviations

ASLP	American School Leader Panel
ATP	American Teacher Panel
BSCA	Bipartisan Safer Communities
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DC	District of Columbia
ELA	English language arts
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FRPL	free or reduced-price lunch
PL	professional learning
SEA	state education agency
SEL	social and emotional learning
SQSS	school quality or student success

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About This Report

In this report, we explore states' supportive and limiting policies and conditions for social and emotional learning (SEL) and investigate whether and how those policies and conditions relate to the SEL implementation efforts educators say they engage in. To this end, we created two indicators: (1) supportive policies and conditions and (2) limiting conditions. We examine whether these two indicators correlate with kindergarten through grade 12 schools' implementation of SEL and whether SEL implementation is, in turn, correlated with two indicators of student experience: supportive climate and student interest in learning. To do this, we use data from nationally representative surveys of educators and a newly constructed database on state policies and conditions.

The American Educator Panels (AEP) are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders across the country. The panels are a proud member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative. If you are interested in using AEP data for your own surveys or analysis or in reading other publications related to the AEP, please email aep@rand.org or visit www.rand.org/aep. Through the AEP Data Portal available from that site, researchers can download survey data files to perform their own analyses.

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