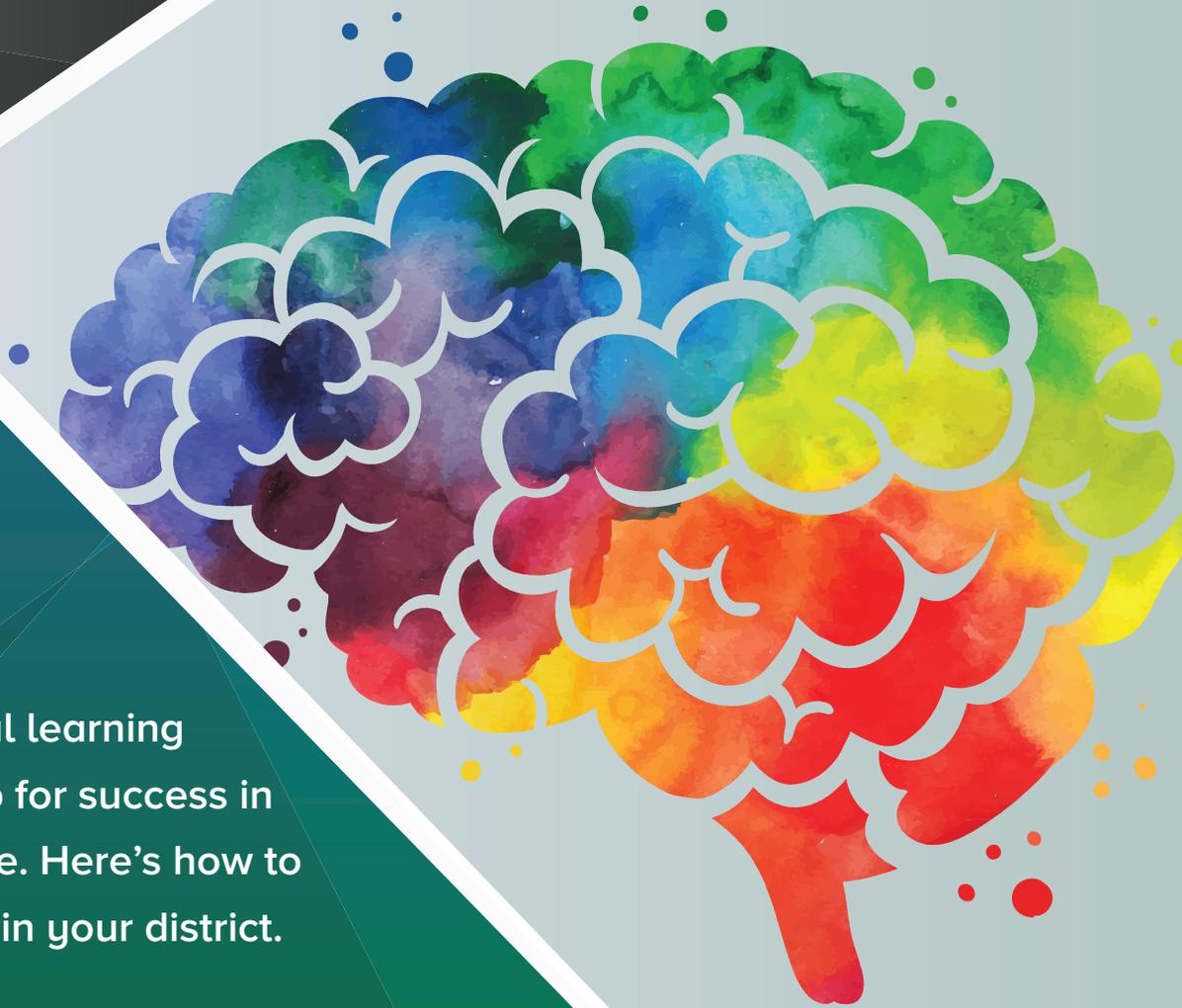


# All You Need to Know About SEL

**SPECIAL  
REPORT**

Social-emotional learning sets students up for success in school and in life. Here's how to make it happen in your district.



Social-emotional learning (SEL) helps students learn valuable lessons that they'll carry with them long after graduation. When students learn empathy and how to handle their emotions, they're learning important skills they can apply to both in-school and real-world situations. In fact, research shows the skills students take away from social-emotional learning contribute to increased academic achievement and improved school culture. And the best way to enforce these concepts? In classrooms.

The following stories can help you as you develop a social-emotional learning strategy for your district.

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## Here's how teachers think SEL can truly help students

*A new survey analyzes how social and emotional learning contributes to a positive school culture*

BY LAURA ASCIONE, MANAGING EDITOR, CONTENT SERVICES

A resounding majority of administrators, teachers, and parents say they believe social and emotional learning (SEL) is just as important as academic learning.

SEL is the process that helps students understand and regulate their emotions, understand different points of view and show empathy toward others, and develop intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. Many believe these skills contribute to safer and more positive schools and communities.

Of the more than 1,000 people surveyed in McGraw-Hill Education's 2018 Social and Emotional Learning Report, 96 percent of administrators, 93 percent of teachers, and 81 percent of parents overwhelmingly say SEL is as necessary as core academic subjects.

Seventy-nine percent of teachers believe SEL should be explicitly included as a part of state academic standards, and 65 percent of teachers want even more class time to devote to teaching these skills.

Most administrators (88 percent) and teachers (74 percent) say SEL skills are being taught at their school, but only 32 percent of parents say they are aware of these skills being taught at their children's schools.

In addition to wanting more time to teach SEL, educators want more support, too, with just 22 percent saying they feel "very prepared" to teach it. Fifty-one percent say the level of SEL professional development offered at their school is not sufficient.

Teachers are most interested in receiving professional development training on SEL instruction via in-school training at their school (with 85 percent indicating they are at least "somewhat interested"), followed by in-person training at professional conferences, workshops or seminars (77 percent).

Many teachers (46 percent) say parental engagement is one of the top three things that would help them teach SEL more effectively.

Most educators and parents say SEL has a positive impact on school culture—83 percent of teachers and 76 percent of administrators feel such instruction is “very important” in helping improve negative student behaviors like bullying.

Teachers and administrators also cite school safety (76 percent and 66 percent), lack of student motivation and engagement (75 percent and 66 percent), and a negative school climate (71 percent and 69 percent) as areas where SEL could help.

Most teachers think SEL is very important in contributing to a variety of positive and short-term benefits for students, including:

- Positive attitudes about self and others (85 percent)
- Positive social behaviors in and out of school (83 percent)
- Ability to regulate emotions (83 percent)
- Reduced behavioral problems (82 percent)
- Responsible decision-making (81 percent)
- Less emotional distress (81 percent)



When it comes to long-term benefits, teachers pointed to:

- Improved overall mental health (86 percent)
- Improved likelihood of positive relationships (84 percent)
- Increased likelihood of graduating from high school (77 percent)
- Lower likelihood of negative involvement with the justice system (77 percent)

Administrators and teachers are in virtual agreement about many of the skills they rank as “very important” for students:

- Self-management (95 percent and 93 percent)
- Relationship skills (93 percent for both groups)
- Responsible decision-making (92 percent for both groups)
- Self-awareness (90 percent for both groups)
- Social awareness (88 percent and 89 percent)

## 6 key principles for a successful SEL program

*These are the common practices that lead to creating a successful and sustainable social-emotional-learning environment*

BY JULIA OTTESEN

A social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum adds valuable lessons to a student's normal school day that will help propel them beyond academic success and onto success in life. No matter the program, there are common practices that lead to creating a successful and sustainable SEL environment. The presenters of "7 Must-Haves for Successful and Sustainable Social-Emotional Learning" reviewed these common practices and shared how they work in their district and school.

### **1. Leadership must be committed to the program.**

Leadership does not have to be the school leaders; it can be the students themselves. In District Lead School Counselor Dr. O'Tasha Morgan's district, students started to take on leadership roles and achieve more after the district implemented a mentoring program. The mentoring program gives students a chance to participate in community activities, engage in conversation with students in different grades, and demonstrate their SEL learning overall.

### **2. Professional development (PD) is mandatory.**

Faculty and staff need to have PD on what SEL is all about and why it's important. If they can identify with the PD in a way that impacts their personal lives, that's a win-win situation. "Any time we can do the PD—it's one of the only things that changes the teachers, as opposed to just kind of helping them strengthen their curriculum knowledge," said Dr. Morgan. Derrick Hershey, principal at Shiloh Point Elementary School in Georgia, added that you can't just provide teachers with a resource; you have to offer training to really dig into the subject.

### **3. Having a flexible SEL curriculum is important for both students and teachers.**

Rather than always following a strict curriculum of assignments, give students the opportunity to work on passion projects. Allow teachers to teach lessons on subjects they're passionate about. Flexibility in switching from the academic curriculum to the SEL curriculum is also necessary to turn classroom issues into teachable moments.

**4. Be intentional about engaging students and parents in as many different ways as possible.**

Host workshops for students to better understand the concepts of SEL. Those students can go on to become SEL ambassadors. Host events for parents so they can stay involved in what their children are learning and celebrate their accomplishments.

**5. Find ways to engage the entire community in the SEL program.**

Give students the opportunity to demonstrate their newly learned SEL skills and how it has impacted their lives. Invite community members to different events to engage in conversation and share their stories; show students that they are part of a community that truly cares about their success.

**6. Finally, perhaps the most important factor to having a successful SEL program is having a common language.**

A common language among teachers, students, and parents is key to developing conversations, making sure everyone is exhibiting positive character traits, and having a smooth-running SEL program. Hershey commented on Shiloh Point's SEL curriculum: "It just gives us, again, that common language to use with our students to really make sure that they're going above and beyond the academic skills but also [building] all of [the] character traits that we're looking for them to build."

*"It just gives us, again, that common language to use with our students to really make sure that they're going above and beyond the academic skills but also [building] all of [the] character traits that we're looking for them to build."*

*—Dr. Morgan. Derrick Hershey, principal at Shiloh Point Elementary School in Georgia*

**About the Presenters**

O'Tasha Morgan, Ph.D., currently serves as the district lead school counselor for Richland (SC) School District Two, the fifth-largest district in South Carolina with over 27,000 students. She has been a school counselor for 20 years and works as an adjunct professor at Webster University. Dr. Morgan supervises the school counseling programs of 42 schools for grades K-12 and oversees the implementation of the ASCA National Model for school counseling. Her leadership has created a culture in which mentoring is not only expected but celebrated. Dr. Morgan credits this growth to her district's holistic focus on the whole child and support of SEL. Various means of teaching and learning SEL have been utilized, not only with staff members, but also with students and parents.

Derrick Hershey has served students, parents, and staff as the principal of Shiloh Point Elementary in Forsyth County, Georgia, for three years and has been an educator (teacher, coach, and administrator) for 16 years. Hershey also serves as this year's co-chair of the Beyond Propel Governance and Leadership Committee for the district. One of his favorite quotes is, "When you serve in small ways, you get more opportunities to serve in bigger ways," by Jon Gordon.

### **About the Host**

Lupita Knittel, president of 7 Mindsets, has more than 17 years' experience of pioneering leadership in the K-12 education marketplace. Most recently she worked with PlanetHS and Promethean, where she was a core member of the leadership team that built Promethean. Prior to working at Promethean, she led strategic initiatives for Apple and Electronic Data Systems. Knittel began as a teacher in her native Mexico, where she also founded and operated her own marketing research company.

### **Join the Community**

Mindsets for Social-Emotional Learning is a free professional learning community where educators can collaborate and share ideas, examples, and resources for igniting positive change through social-emotional learning.

This broadcast was hosted by edWeb.net and sponsored by 7 Mindsets.

The recording of the edWebinar can be viewed by anyone [here](#).

[**Editor's note:** This piece is original content produced by edWeb.net. View more edWeb.net events [here](#).]

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*Julia Ottesen is the community & public relations coordinator for edWeb.net. She coaches edWeb members, partners, and sponsors on using online networking for collaboration, and helps to spread the word about how this collaboration helps teaching and learning. Contact her on Twitter @edwebnet.*

## How SEL inspired a transformation in my school

*Don't miss this inspirational story of a schoolwide culture shift*

BY VANESSA DRUMM-CANEPA

When I accepted the position as principal at Langley Elementary in Washington, D.C., I had two objectives in mind: one, to empower teachers who truly care about supporting the whole child, and two, to inspire a schoolwide culture shift.

Langley Elementary has historically struggled with dropping student enrollment numbers, a rise in suspension rates, and an unimpressive student satisfaction rate—all factors linked to an incohesive school culture. A rise in charter schools in the area has resulted in a competition between public and private education, and the



gentrification of area neighborhoods has tension at an all-time high. With behavioral challenges and no defined philosophy of how to interact with students, Langley Elementary didn't feel safe.

There was a disconnect between teachers, students, and parents that was impeding on the learning process. My answer to this was to ingrain social-emotional learning (SEL) in every aspect of the curriculum.

### Getting started

The main appeal of SEL is that it gets at the core of considering how we can instill the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students need to understand and manage emotions, and how to use these skills to achieve positive goals.

Our school chose Conscious Discipline as our SEL program. Conscious Discipline is a research-backed, brain-based method of managing classrooms and building skills through SEL.

Prior to implementing, it was important to connect with teachers and introduce the concept and reasoning behind the idea. We had a trainer come in to work through strategies with teachers, and invested in a professional development program so that teachers felt both supported and familiar with Conscious Discipline before using it with students. The immediate feedback was positive, with many of our teachers bringing the things that they were learning home to use with their own children.

One of the key elements to a nurturing, successful classroom is having teachers who enjoy being there and feel that they are being supported. Since implementing the SEL program, educators at Langley Elementary have noted that the classroom environment has become nurturing, allowing optimal learning to happen.

**Working through the process**

Students immediately grasped the new concepts and strategies. Every morning, I wait for students to arrive and we do a greeting ritual, where each student gets to choose how they'd like to be greeted, with options such as a handshake or fist bump. This small interaction gives a positive start to the school day and is crucial to building relationships with each and every student.

Prior to implementing SEL, students were discouraged from talking in the cafeteria. Now we encourage students to have meaningful and positive discussions and invite staff to engage with students whenever possible.

Each student participates in a “brain start smart” at the beginning of the school day, where they are able to connect, prepare for the day, and get rid of any stress that they may have entered with. In addition, we hold “brain breaks” throughout the day—purposeful, activity-based lessons—to refresh and reengage the mind.

Recess has also seen a shift since incorporating SEL. We've enlisted an organization called Playworks to ensure that recess activities are positive, safe, and valuable to students. Part of our culture shift was to have a student-centered, safe environment and this strategy delivers on that promise.

A notable example of seeing SEL in action was observing a student who was struggling with a math exam. In the past, this student may have gotten upset and acted out physically; instead, he used a breathing exercise to calm himself and work through the rest of the exam.

**Proof in the numbers**

Today, one of DC Public Schools' (DCPS) strategic priorities outlined in its five-year strategic plan, A Capital Commitment, is educating the whole child. That includes providing SEL to ensure all students are college and career ready. I know this system-wide focus on embedding SEL into DCPS' culture and classrooms will pay off, because the changes seen after implementing SEL at Langley were drastic. Since implementation, our suspension rate has decreased from 65 percent to 23 percent, and our student satisfaction rate has skyrocketed from 70 percent to 86 percent.

Our kids enjoy that they are learning how to navigate difficult situations with peers, how to use their voice, and how to deal with conflict in a healthy way. Equally as important, teachers are enjoying how they are now being supported with new, positive strategies to interact with students. As a testament to the success of SEL, we're currently over-enrolled by 110 percent, a positive signal that we've made the right decision.

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*Vanessa Drumm-Canepa is principal at Langley Elementary in Washington, D.C. She graduated from Duke University in 2004 with a major in history and minor in English, and during her senior year took an education class and volunteered at a local community center where she fell in love with teaching and found her calling. She works closely with teachers to identify best practices for the classroom and teaching the whole child, always considering emotional development as much as academics.*

## 10 ways we made our school happier

*A principal takes a closer look at what it takes for students and staff to be happy at school, and how to build a stronger community*

BY TRACEY SMITH

After the recession hit in 2013, it was evident that something was off at Mashburn Elementary School (part of Forsyth County Schools in Georgia). I watched teachers being laid off, and it was draining to witness. We had bigger class numbers than ever before, and our school culture and employee morale were at an all-time low. For us to pull our way out of this difficult time, we first had to take a closer look at building strong relationships between staff and students. We started by asking what it means to be happy in the classroom.



### Happy schools start with happy teachers

As educators, one of the biggest challenges we face is learning how to put our health and happiness first. My first thought was that I needed to put the students' well-being first, but I discovered that I needed to start with my staff instead. If we didn't find out what educators are passionate about and connect them back into this building, we knew they would quickly burn out.

Inspired by the house system in the Harry Potter books and the Ron Clark model, we held house meetings once a month that focused on one of the 7 Mindsets. These mindsets come from Scott Shickler and Jeff Waller's book *The 7 Mindsets to Live Your Ultimate Life*, and include affirmations such as "everything is possible" and "the time is now."

The mindsets helped us develop a mental health strategy. We created a Positive Learning Environment (PLE) committee consisting of one person from each grade level to focus on one mindset a month and decide how we were going to roll that out to the whole school. For example, during spring break this year, every teacher wrote inspirational messages for the students. We posted their messages on the walls so that when the kids came back from spring break, they all saw a special note to them on the wall of the school, written by their teacher. It was really cool.

### Happiness is a conversation

We talk a lot about what happiness looks like and how to get there. I ask teachers questions like, “What do you want the school to look like?” or, “If you could change something—anything—about where you work, what would it be?”

We have one faculty meeting a month, and they’re all about team-building. The nuts and bolts of scheduling go in a newsletter that I send out every week. Even there, I’ll include inspirational videos or something that touched my heart and I think will touch theirs. I keep the conversation going by asking, “If you do this with your kids, let me know their responses.”

Every faculty meeting is organized around our mindset of the month. The PLE team comes up with a team-building activity that does three things:

1. Connects with their hearts
2. Connects them to the mindset
3. Is simple to take back into their classroom with pretty much no thought.

When they’re having an issue in the classroom, we want them to remember and say, “This is the perfect moment for us to do what we did in the faculty meeting, where we took a fear, wrote it on a piece of paper, then wadded it up and threw it in the trashcan.”



### If you connect with their hearts...

Around the school, we do everything from painting hallways and offices crazy colors to having staff surprises. (You can see what I mean in this [video](#).) If there’s a heaviness in the air, we’ll get chicken biscuits or Krispy Kreme donuts and surprise the staff. During flu season, we pass out Bath and Body Works hand sanitizers. The key to that isn’t sending out a staff email saying there’s hand sanitizer in the work room; we hand-deliver these little treats as much as possible. That way, our teachers can say to themselves, “It’s important enough to my administration that they put this in my hand.” Those are all deposits in the heart that help them feel appreciated, valued, and cared about.

To us, happiness is about taking the time to understand what each educator is passionate about and how they can become a positive influence on others. For example, one of my special ed teachers has a passion for art. She and I were talking one day, and I suggested that she create a segment in her day where she could pull kids in and do art projects. So she did an art therapy class where students got to choose from sculpting, water colors, or just coloring, and it was a huge success.

**...Their minds will follow**

According to a recent Harvard study, happiness positively affects students' GPAs, and John Hattie's research says that a successful social-emotional learning program can add as much as a year's growth per year.

We've seen a direct correlation between talking about growth mindset and higher test scores, but to me, the clearest sign that the mindsets lessons are reaching our students is that we've seen a big decrease in Monday tardies. Our tardy bell rings at 7:40, and now kids want to be here, because our mindset lessons start at 7:40. They don't want to miss them, because they love them.

Our schoolwide theme for next year is "We Are Connected." Our PLE committee is considering ideas like adopting another school, but they're not making the final decision—and I'm not making the final decision, either. They'll take ideas to their grade levels and we'll figure it out as a school, because we're all happiest when we're working together.

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*Tracey Smith is currently the principal at Brookwood Elementary School in Forsyth County, Georgia. Smith was the principal at Mashburn Elementary for eight years. Follow her on Twitter @tbsmith01.*

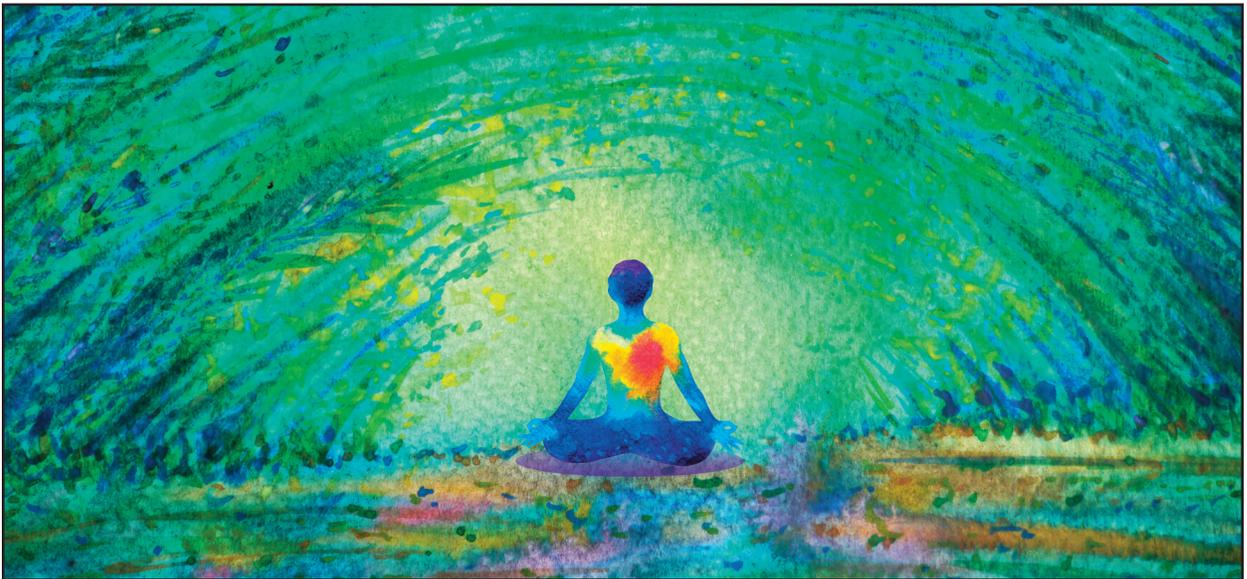
## 8 ways I practiced mindfulness this year

*Here's how a middle school teacher decreased her and her students' anxiety and began to think more positively*

BY KOREY BARKLEY

Mindfulness has become a buzzword in schools over the past few years. Many schools have hired mindfulness professionals to work with their students and faculty. According to scientist and meditation teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."

As the daughter of two developmental psychologists, I was introduced early to the concept of being mindful, though I am not proficient at being mindful in my own life. After 19 years of teaching adolescents and then having children of my own, I have become more aware of the importance of mindfulness. I decided to spend time throughout the year improving my mindful skills. My goal was to decrease anxiety in myself, my students, and my children. I also hoped to create a space where I was thinking more positively.



### 1. I dropped all social media for the summer

With my mindfulness mission in mind, I decided to try out life without social media for the summer. This meant getting at least an hour or two back every day (100+ hours total for the months of July and August).

To be honest, the first week was a little more difficult than I expected. I tried to meditate during the time that I had been wasting scrolling through random pictures, but I found it difficult to concentrate. I started reading instead and was able to burn through a few books in just two weeks.

Being free of social media proved to be just that: freeing. While I did return to some social media this month, I decided to not add the apps back on my phone. Having to go onto my laptop to check social media will most definitely decrease the amount of time I spend scrolling, which I hope will leave more time for my mindfulness practice.

## **2. I did some mindfulness training at work**

Last year, I obtained a grant and brought a mindfulness consultant to our district. The training, from MindWise, was a huge hit with the 20 teachers who participated, and it helped to start a mindfulness movement in the Burlington (MA) Public Schools! The presentations were so dynamic and truly got me thinking about mindfulness as an important movement to improve the lives of everyone in my community.

## **3. I went to Kripalu**

I have never been into yoga or meditation, but when I turned 40 I wanted to go somewhere to learn how to relax. A friend recommended Kripalu, an all-inclusive retreat center in western Mass. You stay in a modest room (shared or single), hike around the beautiful grounds, and attend as many yoga and meditation classes as you want. I took the “I’m on vacation” approach, sleeping in and attending an afternoon yoga class and an evening meditation each day.

Never in my life have I felt at chill as I felt after three days at Kripalu. That feeling vanished immediately upon returning home, so I knew I’d have to do more to hold onto that incredible feeling.

## **4. I began taking yoga**

I bought a yoga mat and looked online for yoga videos. After weeks of staring at my beautiful mat (still rolled up in the corner), I decided to check out a local yoga studio. My goal was to go at least once a week. After the first class, I could barely walk. I took a few beginners classes after that to ease my way in. I am not flexible (which had always been my excuse to avoid yoga), but I quickly caught on to the breathing and blissing out parts of yoga. Also, I found it very helpful to have a teacher to help me, offer suggestions, and be there practicing with me.

## **5. I used mindfulness apps**

After months of practicing mindfulness with others, I wanted to try on my own. I found a quiet space and tried to relax and concentrate on my breathing. After about three seconds, my mind was racing. All I could think about were the hundreds of items on my to-do list.

I decided to download a mindfulness app. With Headspace, Calm, and Buddhify, I could practice mindfulness in my home and have the assistance I needed for free. The best thing about these apps is that you can choose the duration. Some days I opt for four minutes; other days I try for 20. Whatever the time commitment, I always feel better after a mindful moment.

#### **6. I took an online course on mindfulness**

I am fortunate to have a supportive school administration who buys in to the importance of bringing mindfulness into the schools. I was able to take part in an online course through Mindful Schools this summer. The course, which was six weeks long, included a wide variety of ways to include mindfulness into each day—for yourself and for others.

For me, the most important week focused on compassion and gratitude. We kept a daily list of things we are grateful. Making this list was a reminder to me of how fortunate I am. This feeling of gratitude was a very simple way to practice mindfulness. I look forward to taking more classes and become certified as a mindfulness teacher.

#### **7. I practiced with my students before quizzes**

I teach middle school Spanish. Most of my students have anxiety. This anxiety may not always be obvious, but it's there. The most common cause of school-related anxiety is testing. This year, I taught my students a short breathing exercise that I encouraged them to do before each quiz and test.

#### **8. I practiced with my children at home**

I decided to teach my children (ages eight and 11) about mindfulness and meditation so that they would have plenty of time to practice and add relaxation techniques to their toolbox of coping strategies for life.

As a parent, it's sometimes tough to teach your kids something that's new or foreign. I found it difficult to lead my own children through a breathing exercise, so I tried some yoga classes and apps with them. While they were resistant at first, they both noticed that taking a few minutes to breathe and focus helped them. My daughter has been able to manage her stomach aches with a 15-minute meditation, and my son will often choose to do a 5- to 10-minute meditation when he is feeling frustrated about something. They both use mindfulness apps when they are having trouble falling asleep.

Whether you'd like to increase your attention span, decrease your anxiety, or just chill out a bit, I recommend trying some of these steps. They worked for me, and I hope they work for you too. Namaste!

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*Korey Barkley teaches Spanish at Marshall Simonds Middle School in Burlington, Mass. You can find her on Twitter at @KoreyBarkley.*

## Finding the money for SEL

*Great advice about grants and other sources from a funding expert*

BY STACEY PUSEY

Effective social emotional learning (SEL) requires a thorough understanding of the student population's needs, training to integrate SEL into everyday lessons, and the instructional resources. Although educators and education advocates acknowledge the importance of SEL, the funding has lagged behind. In the edWebinar, "Funding Social Emotional Learning: Where's the Money?," Dr. Rita Oates, president of Oates Associates, explained that money can be found for SEL, but teachers need to be ready to tackle the world of grants. While employing a professional grant writer can be advantageous, Oates offered advice for those who will be overseeing the process or who plan to go after the funding themselves.

First, she said that grant writing is like writing a piece of fiction—teachers are being asked to talk about their vision of the future. They should familiarize themselves with the different tenets of SEL and projects that have already worked. One potential resource is Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which features definitions of SEL, research, and best practices. Research on SEL is especially helpful as grant applicants will need to prove the efficacy of their approach. In addition, educators should assess the social-emotional needs of their target kids. Having an assessment will validate requests to potential funders.

After educators have assembled the background information, they need to look at the variety of funding options. There are several opportunities available from the federal government, such as IDEA (special education); Title I, Part A (the largest single grant through the federal government to school districts); and Title II, Part A (supporting effective instruction). Most of the federal funds are awarded to local education agencies and require a concentrated effort from constituents across the school district.

For school or even class-level grants, educators can look to local sources. For example, service clubs like the Lions, Rotary International, and the Jaycees may have compatible funding programs. Local businesses and foundations, chambers of commerce, and the arm of a professional society within the school's zip code are also worth contacting. Similarly, educators should look into community foundations where money from different donors is pooled to make an impact on the local population. With a well-written ask, schools may be surprised how eager these groups are to support area students.

Finally, educators should investigate crowd-funding sites like DonorsChoose.org. The key for this option is to line up a few donors, even at small amounts, before posting the project. Oates commented that success breeds success on these sites; donors are more likely to contribute if they see others have supported it.



Before pursuing any option, talk to your principal and the district development office to make sure you are not in conflict with other grant requests. More important, do not limit yourself to a single funding source.

“Don’t think that you have to get all the money from one source. People love to back a winner,” said Oates. “So, if you’ve already gotten some money from somebody, if you want to do a school-wide social emotional learning program, the first place that you might look is to go to the PTA. If the PTA can give \$100, other people will give money for this as well. Think about all of the places that people care about this and how the community comes together.”

### About the Presenter

Dr. Rita Oates, president of Oates Associates, has helped schools win grants from \$500 to \$1.9 million. As edtech director of Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida, the nation’s fourth largest district, Oates initiated innovative uses of technology, partly funded with more than \$10 million in grants. She has also been the external evaluator on several collaborative federal grants. She has presented grant-writing workshops at conferences such as FETC and TCEA, for university faculty, and is presenting at METIS 2018 (in Mississippi). Oates has presented several other webinars for edWeb’s Education Funding community and has written more than a dozen books on edtech. Follow her on Twitter @ritaoates.

### About the Community

Education Funding is a free professional learning community created to help educators and institutions uncover the funds they need to supplement shoestring budgets, expand innovative programs, prepare students for the increasingly complex skills they’ll need to participate in tomorrow’s workforce, and help close the equity gap in educating students from all backgrounds and circumstances.

This broadcast was hosted by edWeb.net.

The recording of the edWebinar can be viewed by anyone [here](#).

[Editor’s note: This piece is original content produced by edWeb.net. View more edWeb.net events [here](#).]

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*Stacey Pusey is an education communications consultant and writer. She assists education organizations with content strategy and teaches writing at the college level. Pusey has worked in the preK-12 education world for 20 years, spending time on school management and working for education associations including the AAP PreK-12 Learning Group. She is working with edWeb.net as a marketing communications advisor and writer.*

## 8 apps and tools for classroom SEL

*School leaders say SEL is a priority, but they report varying levels of classroom implementation*

LAURA ASCIONE, MANAGING EDITOR, CONTENT SERVICES

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has quickly become a cornerstone of K-12 education, because it helps students regulate their own emotions and teaches them to respond kindly to their peers.

SEL helps students build intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. When students cultivate important social and emotional skills, such as self-management and social awareness, they can improve their success along with the school climate.

SEL focuses on five core competencies: self-awareness to help students recognize emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; self-management to help students successfully regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; social awareness to help students take the perspective of others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures; relationship skills to help students establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse people and groups; and responsible decision-making to help students make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.

Research shows that school leaders believe SEL is a huge benefit to students. In fact, 98 percent of principals in a recent survey said they believe students from all backgrounds would benefit from learning social and emotional skills in schools.

Those principals said SEL can help improve school culture (99 percent), help students grow to become good citizens as adults (98 percent), improve student-teacher relationships (98 percent), and decrease bullying (96 percent).

Schools are developing plans to incorporate SEL into classrooms, but progress is varied. Thirty-five percent of surveyed principals said they have a plan for taching SEL and are systematically implementing it school-wide, and while 70 percent said they expect all teachers in their school to teach students social and emotional skills, just 25 percent said that expectation is fully realized in their school.

Below is a list of apps and resources to help teachers and students build SEL. (Note: Editors have not reviewed the apps or resources.)

**1. Calm:** Because Calm allows for a ton of customization, teachers can engage students in a collaborative whole-group discussion on how to choose peaceful background noise and animated images for the day. Teachers could also set up a relaxation station in their classroom for students to use the app—with attached headphones—at their leisure after instruction. After recess or before a test, consider using this app in a whole-group session to help students relax or transition to a new activity.



**2. Pairin:** Teachers can use Pairin in their classrooms or in professional learning communities. Using an in-service meeting to collaborate with school counselors and other character-education professionals could help boost professional development. Logging into the teacher dashboard quickly shows the overall perceived climate of the teacher’s classroom based on student responses.

**3. Positive Penguins:** Positive Penguins is an award-winning, top ranked, fun educational app developed to help children understand why they feel the way they do and help them challenge their negative thinking. The app aims to help children understand that feelings come from their own thoughts—not the situations.

**4. Touch and Learn – Emotions:** Touch and Learn – Emotions can be an extremely useful tool for helping kids who are struggling to relate to and empathize with other kids, or who find it difficult to express their emotions using words. Be sure to use all of the settings to customize play, focus on certain emotions, and add your own lists. After kids practice identifying emotions on this app, act out some of the facial expressions and body language for various emotions to see if they’ve made the connection between the images and words that they’ve seen and heard with active expression.

**5. Peekapak:** Peekapak ties in most easily to existing ELA curricula. Though many lessons could potentially stand alone, they really work best as a full package. That means teachers should plan for two 20- to 25-minute lessons per week for four weeks for each of the 10 units. If there’s not enough time to do the full curriculum, teachers should be thoughtful in their choices of which lessons to skip so they don’t lose the advantages of exploring topics from multiple angles. Or, perhaps better yet, they could do full units but only some rather than all 10.

**6. Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame:** Children help a Sesame Street monster friend calm down and solve everyday challenges. Tap and touch to help the monster friend take deep breaths, think of plans, and try them out. Children are exposed to important emotional vocabulary, a calm breathing technique, personalized encouragements, and more.

**7. Mind Yeti:** Teachers can begin by letting students watch the instructional video that introduces the Mind Yeti and the group of Hububbles, which are thoughts that can cloud the mind. After whole-group instruction, teachers can introduce students to the expectations of where to sit or stand for these sessions. After a few practice sessions, assign a weekly Mind Yeti leader who can take the app with a small group to a corner of the room to practice leadership and communication skills.

**8. Middle School Confidential:** Middle School Confidential is a book and app series from anti-bullying activist Annie Fox, M.Ed. The series targets ages 11-14. The book series, a fiction/non-fiction hybrid, is part full-color graphic novel and part smart-talk life skills.