Educators' Social and Emotional Learning: A Landscape Analysis of Strategies and Outcomes for Thriving Schools

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CASEL

This report is for educators, program providers, and researchers looking to continue to move the conversation forward, advance the work on adult SEL, integrate new strategies into their programs or practices, and expand their research agendas.

This report is not intended to provide a comprehensive or exhaustive review of all existing adult social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches or programs. It does not reflect a formal evaluative process, nor does the inclusion of any specific approach imply endorsement or validation.

We are honored to dedicate this report to

Dr. Roger P. Weissberg,

a CASEL visionary and founder,

in recognition of his outstanding contributions

to the advancement of evidence-based research of

social and emotional learning.

Dr. Weissberg's pioneering spirit and unwavering commitment

have established a vital foundation for

our understanding and appreciation to

advancing the science, practice and policy of SEL in education.

His profound impact on the field continues to inspire us all,

and we extend our deepest gratitude for his lasting legacy.

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Abstract

Educators—and all adults in the school—are critical for fostering students' self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Educators can teach and model SEL in lessons; for example, promoting critical thinking in a math lesson and encouraging students to engage with challenging content. And teachers, school leaders, and school staff set the tone of the learning environment through their interactions with students and with each other. For adults to most effectively deliver, model, and embed SEL in academic settings, they need support in developing their own social and emotional competencies as well as supportive school, district, and community-wide structures.

In this report, we delineate findings from a field scan of adult SEL approaches in education settings (e.g., schools, pre-service training). In doing so, we: (1) established a common definition of adult SEL in education with a logic model that illustrates pathways to influencing student outcomes, (2) reviewed literature on adult SEL approaches and outcomes, and (3) extracted patterns of commonality and differences across a sample of adult SEL approaches along a set of research and design characteristics. We conclude with a set of questions to advance research and practice in the field. We hope that this report catalyzes increased understanding of adult SEL and its relationship to student success.

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Introduction

In 2003, CASEL published the first-ever comprehensive resource to help schools and districts select social and emotional learning (SEL) programs for students. *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based SEL Programs* set the foundation for CASEL's Guide to Evidence-Based Programming (CASEL's Program Guide). The first iteration of the Program Guide primarily included programs with explicit SEL lessons, but has evolved over three iterations (2013, 2015, 2021) to keep up with the latest scientific findings in SEL programming and become more user-friendly with filter tools, including to search for programs with implementation support for teachers. The Program Guide now includes 99 programs that utilize four main approaches[1]:

- Explicit SEL lessons;
- Teaching practices that can be applied throughout the day to support SEL and engagement;
- Guidance for creating organizational structures, such as cohorts of students and teachers to promote relationships; and
- Practices that integrate academic learning and SEL within specific content areas.

Since publishing *Safe and Sound*, we have grown to more fully understand the many factors that contribute to students' academic, social, and emotional development. We now view SEL not as a separate program but as a systemic approach where each adult in the school is a critical component. Look no further than the Program Guide to see that each type of program or approach requires adult involvement. For example, educators deliver lessons, model through teaching, reinforce schoolwide climate through relationships, and embed SEL in academic content (e.g., fostering critical thinking skills during math lessons). For adults to most effectively deliver and model social and emotional competencies in academic settings, they need support in developing their own social and emotional competencies as well as supportive school, district, and community-wide structures.

Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have documented the importance of adults developing social and emotional competencies for (1) supporting teaching behaviors in the classroom, (2) improving educator occupational health and well-being, and (3) increasing educator sense of agency and professional purpose.

A wealth of evidence connects outcomes for adults to improved learning conditions and student outcomes, including academic outcomes (see Lopez-Martin et al., 2023 for a meta-analysis).

These patterns call for systematic evaluation of adult SEL approaches to identify the characteristics of evidenced-based, high-quality approaches to promote educator health and retention, effective instructional and pedagogical practices, modeling social and emotional skills for students, and schoolwide visions for student outcomes (Gimbert et al., 2023).

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1 Some programs use a combination of these approaches.

This report is organized into three sections:

First, we provide an overview of the state of the field of adult SEL as it relates to education (e.g., teaching practices, schoolwide climate) and student outcomes.

We provide a definition and logic model of adult SEL informed by theory and research. We focus on recent literature reviews and meta-analyses that comprehensively synthesize research on approaches to, and outcomes associated with, adult SEL in education.

Second, we introduce characteristics of adult SEL design and evaluation that are important for understanding an approach and its evidence of effectiveness in the educational context.

We discuss characteristics of adult SEL evaluations and unique challenges in these evaluations. For design, we explore characteristics that align with CASEL's "Learn, Connect, & Collaborate, Model" framework from our *Guide to Schoolwide SEL*. Each characteristic is accompanied by a rationale that provides background and justification for why it is important to understand when considering adult SEL approaches. We expect that these characteristics will evolve alongside the still-developing field. We intentionally use the term "approach" to be inclusive of the wide variety of ways to develop adult SEL, including those that are not formal "programs" or curricula.

Third, we include a sample of adult SEL approaches to illustrate variations among these characteristics (e.g., program duration, demographics of students included in evaluation reports, etc.) (See **Tables 2-4**).

Please note that this report is not intended to present an exhaustive list of adult SEL approaches, nor does it signify a formal review process or offer a "stamp of approval" to the approaches included. Instead, we include a sample of approaches that span the landscape of adult SEL across a number of dimensions to allow schools and districts to identify the adult SEL approaches that best align with the goals and priorities of their context. The tables may also be useful for program developers and researchers to identify gaps in current offerings.

Finally, we surface critical questions and gaps in knowledge to further understanding of adult SEL in education and the relationships between adult SEL and student SEL and outcomes.

Background and Literature Review

Figure 1

DEFINING ADULT SEL IN EDUCATION

Adult SEL refers to the process through which all adults in the educational context develop and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to foster healthy identities, manage emotions, build relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020). This definition is aligned with CASEL's systemic framework for SEL, which identifies core social and emotional competencies (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) 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 (**Figure 1**). The definition is also is informed by the various ways the field of education has conceptualized adult SEL, including focusing on specific competencies (e.g., self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills; Blewitt et al., 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021b; Patti et al., 2015; Sleilaty, 2022) and educator behaviors (e.g., classroom management, building supportive relationships; Lancu et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Adult social and emotional competence is an outcome of SEL, shaped by an individual's personal development, professional training, and the structural conditions of their school or district. Distinct from well-being and positive affect, competencies are applied contextually in an appropriate manner and can be drawn on to support specific skills and outcomes. Importantly, researchers distinguish between knowing and doing—having knowledge of or positive attitudes toward SEL versus applying competencies in practice (Nielsen et al., 2019). An educator's ability to apply these competencies is influenced by their sense of agency, psychological safety, belonging, and the cultural and societal norms within their environment. As such, fostering adult SEL requires not only individual skill development but also school, district, and community conditions (including partnerships with families and caregivers) that enable educators to integrate these skills into their daily work.

MODELS OF ADULT SEL

A number of frameworks have been developed to explain who could engage in adult SEL approaches or how adult SEL relates to different outcomes in education. For example, there are models that focus on educator-specific practices (e.g., planning and preparation as described in the Danielson Framework: The Danielson Group, 2022), the role of school leaders (Mahfouz et al., 2019), classroom environment and interactions (e.g., Classroom Assessment Scoring System [CLASS] framework: Pianta & Hamre, 2009), and factors related to educator well-being (Maslach et al., 2001; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Some of these models focus more on individual skills, while others emphasize systemic factors, reinforcing the importance of supporting adult SEL at both the personal and institutional levels.

In **Figure 2**, we introduce the logic model that guides this report. This model was informed by Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) Prosocial Classroom Model, which emphasizes two-way relationships as well as the ways that schools, communities, and policies influence the use of SEL. We suggest that adult SEL approaches operate through two primary mechanisms:

1. **Educator social and emotional competencies.** Educator social and emotional competencies will also be influenced by one's personal background, education, and training.

2. **The educational context (school, district, community climate, and context).** We note a two-way relationship between educator social and emotional competencies and the broader educational context.

With both mechanisms, the goal is to enhance educator outcomes (including educator practices in the classroom, occupational health and well-being, and educator agency and purpose) and/or student experience and outcomes (including student-educator relationships, classroom climate, and academic outcomes).
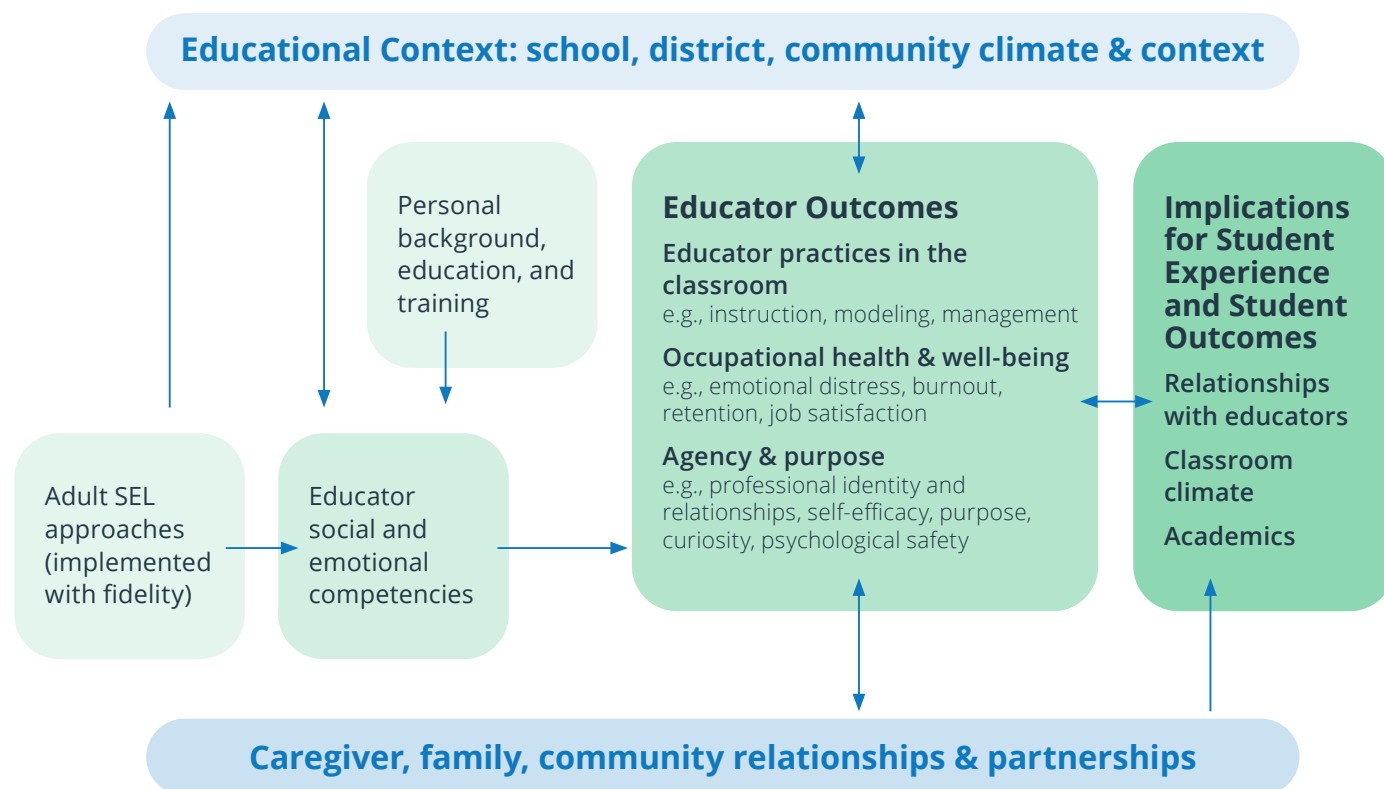
Educational Context: school, district, community climate & context

Personal background, education, and training

Educator Outcomes

Educator practices in the classroom
e.g., instruction, modeling, management

Occupational health & well-being
e.g., emotional distress, burnout, retention, job satisfaction

Agency & purpose
e.g., professional identity and relationships, self-efficacy, purpose, curiosity, psychological safety

Implications for Student Experience and Student Outcomes

Relationships with educators

Classroom climate

Academics

Adult SEL approaches (implemented with fidelity)

Educator social and emotional competencies

Caregiver, family, community relationships & partnerships

Figure 2. Guiding logic model. Note that outcomes listed are not exhaustive.

Additionally, while not a primary focus of this report, we acknowledge that caregiver/family/community partnerships can influence educators (see Casto, 2016; Coleman et al., 2022). Finally, student experience and outcomes can also affect educators. For example, student-facing SEL programs and approaches can influence educators through their role in implementation and facilitation.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND APPROACH ANALYSIS

To situate this report in the context of current research on adult SEL, we conducted a targeted literature scan focused on meta-analyses, reviews, and syntheses of the literature. Initial search terms included combinations of adult/educator/teacher with SEL/social emotional/social-emotional and review/meta-analysis/synthesis. We also searched for reviews with narrower terms such as adult/teacher/educator with social and emotional competencies, social and emotional skills, mindfulness, stress, burnout, and/or well-being. This search yielded a total of 37 meta-analyses or reviews published between 2009 and 2023. After reading the initial reviews, we identified eight additional reviews for inclusion. Finally, we retrieved 14 individual studies that were exemplary illustrations of themes, methods, or processes reported in the full reviews.

We provide a summary of findings on approaches and outcomes associated with adult SEL. However, we acknowledge that there may be relevant research not captured in this relatively limited review, particularly given the plurality of terms and concepts that may subsume what we refer to as adult SEL.

Additionally, we scanned adult SEL approaches to better understand their evaluation outcomes and the approach's design characteristics. We engaged internal and external partners to generate an initial list, and then narrowed that list based on whether the approaches were specifically designed for implementation within the educational context. In our outreach to adult SEL providers, we asked about evaluation outcomes, design characteristics, and characteristics related to approach delivery, including connections to student-facing programming, delivery scope (e.g., for individuals, for implementation schoolwide), dosage, technology integration, and mechanisms for sustaining effects. It is important to note that the information provided regarding design and implementation is based on self-report from providers. (For a full list of prompts that providers responded to, please see **Appendix B**.)

APPROACHES TO ADULT SEL

There are varied approaches to adult SEL in educational settings. These approaches may differ in terms of whom the adult SEL approach targets (e.g., teachers, school leaders), what content is covered in the approach, and how the approach is delivered to the target population.

"The Who"—Whom Is Adult SEL For?

Adult SEL could be beneficial for any adult who works with students, but much of the research and programming has been geared toward teachers who typically spend the most time with students throughout the school day, creating opportunities for modeling and relationship-building. Teachers also often deliver SEL lessons and embed SEL in academic content areas, making them a logical target for adult SEL approaches.

There has also been a strong focus on pre-service and teacher preparation. For instance, an analysis of 3,916 required courses in 304 United States colleges of education found that many programs address some aspects of teachers' SEL (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Equipping educators with knowledge, skills, and practice before entering full-time teaching positions is essential for setting the foundation for sustainability and takes the lens of "prevention" versus "intervention."

The role of school leaders in promoting SEL within schools is under increasing focus. Not only are social and emotional competencies essential for effective leadership, but SEL-focused professional learning for school leaders has the potential to support high-quality SEL implementation schoolwide (Miao et al., 2018; Patti et al., 2015).

For example, the Prosocial Leader Model (Mahfouz et al., 2019) emphasizes the importance of school leaders' own social and emotional competencies and their ability to model caring and culturally competent behaviors to serve as a foundation for SEL program implementation, school climate, teacher well-being, and student outcomes. Given the role of systemic conditions (as indicated in the logic model), it is likely that aligning multiple roles will garner the most robust schoolwide changes benefiting students.

"The What"—What Content Is Covered?

Most adult SEL approaches aim to affect educators' social and emotional competencies. We focus on two more specific approaches that have been well-studied: mindfulness-based interventions and emotional intelligence approaches.

Mindfulness-based interventions—including mindful breathing, body scanning, and meditation—have emerged as a promising approach to enhancing SEL and well-being in educators. These interventions typically aim to reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and boost self-efficacy through mindfulness, meditation, and self-compassion (Emerson et al., 2017). These approaches are primarily intended to produce changes in an individual's skills (e.g., regulation) or mental and emotional health. While these skills and overall health are critical to educator's roles (DeMauro et al., 2019), mindfulness-based interventions do not necessarily include direct instruction or support for enacting changes to teaching behaviors or classroom environments (Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018; Krame, 2021).

Emotional intelligence approaches often aim to increase educators' capacity for recognizing, expressing, and regulating emotions in the classroom (e.g., Brackett & Katulak, 2006) along with a deep understanding of why it matters. These approaches are thought to help teachers manage stress and increase efficacy and coping (Vesely-Maillefer & Saklofske., 2018). Through skill development, emotional intelligence has the potential to reduce occupational stress more broadly with better well-being for educators as a result (Vesely et al., 2013).

"The How"—How Are Adult SEL Approaches Deployed?

It is worth noting that there is great variety in how adult SEL opportunities are structured and implemented. For example, they may range from short workshops to more intensive, sustained programs. As a reminder, we use the term "approach" to cover this range. Below we highlight two ways in which adult SEL approaches are deployed.

Many approaches aim to strengthen adult SEL in the context of student-facing SEL implementation. That is, they provide educators with the SEL knowledge and skills to support students and, in doing so, also provide adults with exposure to key ideas and practices they can connect to their own lives and teaching. For example, when educators learn a process for teaching students how to stop, take a breath, and notice feelings before making an important choice, the process asks them to apply and potentially deepen their own self-management. This approach often occurs through professional learning but may also include content embedded in teaching manuals, such as a callout to remind educators to model social awareness before a lesson where students will be sharing varied perspectives on an issue.

In many cases, providers will begin professional learning by creating a common language through an overview of SEL, often including the CASEL competencies, and the goals of their specific offering. Then, providers move to deepening adult SEL facilitation capacity with students, including both instructional and relationship-building strategies. Many approaches include opportunities for participants to experience lessons and strategies as learners, practice strategies themselves and receive feedback, and collaborate with peers to think through what the program will look like in their context and troubleshoot potential obstacles. This honors an important tenet of learning—that learners draw upon their own context-embedded experiences—by acknowledging and leveraging the expertise that educators bring to professional learning. Approaches may also provide guidance for facilitating activities with students in ways that help educators understand student experiences more deeply and adjust instruction accordingly.

Student-facing SEL is also delivered through integration with academics, which further requires adult knowledge around SEL (e.g., the competencies, purpose of SEL, developmental approaches), along with the capacity for skillful facilitation and modeling. Within CASEL's systemic model, the integration of SEL and academics falls into three categories:

- **Taking a student-centered approach.** In a student-centered classroom, educators spend time getting to know their students and thoughtfully plan instruction to support them with challenging, meaningful work.

- **Aligning SEL and academic standards,** which supports academic attainment by providing students opportunities to learn about and practice the skills to meet classroom expectations, such as working independently towards goals and challenging the ideas of others in a way that is thoughtful and informed.
- **Using interactive pedagogy to foster collaboration and reflection** to help ensure all students are speaking and listening every day as they engage in meaning-making as valued members of the classroom community.

Implementing an SEL curriculum can positively affect educators by enhancing their own emotional well-being, self-efficacy, and classroom management skills (Jennings et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Educators often report increased job satisfaction and stronger relationships with students when they feel supported and equipped to deliver SEL effectively (Collie et al., 2012). CASEL's model for adult SEL provides opportunities and support for all staff to learn about SEL and themselves; connect/collaborate with colleagues, students and families; and model SEL throughout all their interactions. This approach prepares all staff for systemic implementation throughout the school.

OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH ADULT SEL

Research on adult SEL has yielded valuable insights into a number of potential positive outcomes for educators, students, and the school community as a whole. As depicted in our model (**Figure 2**), we acknowledge that these outcome areas are: (1) broad and subsume many different sub-outcomes, (2) not mutually exclusive, and (3) highly interactive, with two-way relationships, multiple pathways, and many potential mechanisms of influence, including those not explicitly specified in our logic model.

Central Mechanism of Change: Social and Emotional Competencies

A key area of focus has been the social and emotional competence of educators. Oliveira and colleagues (2021a) conducted a meta-analysis of 29 SEL interventions, involving 3,004 PreK-12 teachers and found that SEL interventions positively impacted teachers' social and emotional competence with a moderate effect size. Similarly, a five-week program designed to develop emotional intelligence in pre-service teachers showed an increase in emotional intelligence (Vesely et al., 2014; Vesely-Maillefer & Saklofske, 2018). These effects on social and emotional competence lay the groundwork for other outcomes of interest, including educator practices in the classroom, occupational health and well-being, and agency and purpose.

Outcomes for Educators

Educator Practices in the Classroom

The educator's classroom practices speak to the direct experiences that students will encounter in their day-to-day learning environments via instruction, relationship-building, and discipline. As such, student-facing SEL programs often include adult SEL characteristics that target teaching practices and show positive results including developing responsive interactions to students and promoting effective classroom management (Blewitt et al., 2020).

Additionally, even though mindfulness-based adult SEL approaches do not always include a direct focus on behavior in the classroom (versus improving mindfulness for the individual across all settings), researchers have observed positive effects of mindfulness approaches on classroom practices, including instruction quality and teacher supportiveness of students (Jennings et al., 2017). Similarly, Hwang and colleagues (2017) reviewed 16 studies of mindfulness-based interventions for in-service teachers and found that these programs led to improvements in classroom organization and greater use of positive, affective language by teachers. Therefore, through professional learning characteristics and pre-service programs, adult SEL approaches have the potential to meaningfully shape students' classroom experiences.

Occupational Health and Well-Being

Numerous studies have demonstrated that adult SEL interventions can alleviate educator stress and improve well-being. Beames et al. (2023), for instance, conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of approaches aimed at reducing teacher burnout and improving mental health. Their findings showed significant positive effects on stress reduction and moderate effects on anxiety, depression, and overall well-being. The benefits were consistent across randomized controlled trials and non-randomized trials. These results are consistent with other reviews and meta-analyses that show positive outcomes of improved mindfulness reduced stress, emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and burnout (Dreer & Gouache, 2021; Zarate et al., 2019). Positive outcomes may be catalyzed through effects on emotion regulation, blood pressure, cortisol levels, sleep quality, or other physiological mechanisms (Harris et al., 2015; Hwang et al., 2017; Jennings et al., 2013; Krame, 2021).

Additionally, well-being can be understood as a multidimensional construct, extending beyond the absence of negative emotions to include aspects like job satisfaction, autonomy, and the quality of workplace relationships (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Thinking about the construct of well-being more broadly, adult SEL approaches have been shown to reduce emotional exhaustion and increase sense of personal accomplishment (Oliveira et al., 2021b). Additionally, educators who develop self-efficacy and emotional intelligence may experience higher levels of personal accomplishment, commitment, and job satisfaction (Braun et al., 2020; Miao et al., 2017; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Together, the outcome area of "well-being" is not solely focused on an individual's physical and mental health but addresses the conditions for stability in an individual's educational career and therefore stability in students' educational experiences.

Agency and Purpose

An emerging domain of interest includes educator's agency, self-efficacy, and purpose. For example, a recent meta-analysis by Zhou et al. (2023) examined the impact of SEL-focused professional development on STEM teachers' self-efficacy. Analyzing 21 studies involving 1,412 teachers, the authors found a moderate overall effect size, with longer-duration professional development associated with greater improvements in teachers' self-efficacy. Additionally, a review of 14 studies examining mindfulness-based interventions for teachers, including a randomized controlled trial involving pre-service educators who participated in a mindfulness-based well-being education course, found improvements in mindfulness, life satisfaction, and teaching self-efficacy (Krame, 2021).

Further, an updated version of an emotional intelligence program for pre-service teachers demonstrated lasting benefits: Participants showed improvements in emotional intelligence, increased teaching self-efficacy, and greater use of task-focused coping strategies, with effects sustained for at least six months after the program ended (Vesely & Saklofske, 2018). Other related outcome areas are less well-studied, including connections to colleague relationships (though see Matsuba & Williams, 2020, for positive effects on relationships), educator sense of purpose, and creativity. This outcome area for adult SEL is important for ensuring resilience and innovation in educational systems.

Student Experience and Outcomes

While adult SEL approaches often yield positive outcomes for educators, many were originally developed with students in mind. A critical question in the development of our understanding of adult SEL is whether (and how) adult SEL affects the daily lives of students and outcomes for students. In this report, we synthesize two well-established connections between adult SEL approaches and student experience—educator-student relationships and classroom climate—and highlight one emerging student outcome area: academic outcomes.

Educator-Student Relationships

Several studies have examined the ways in which adult SEL influences relationships between educators and students. Understanding how adult SEL could improve educator-student relationships is critical because positive relationships influence a number of student outcomes, including critical thinking, self-esteem, and reductions in disruptive behavior (Cornelius-White, 2007). There is strong evidence that adult SEL approaches are associated with improvements in educator-student relationships (Baroody et al., 2014; Berger et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2019), even if the approach did not have direct effects on educator well-being. Educator empathy has also been identified as a crucial element in fostering supportive relationships, although findings have been less consistent (Aldrup et al., 2022; Zee & Koomen, 2016), indicating that there may be complex pathways between adult SEL approaches and relationship-building.

Classroom Climate

For adult SEL approaches to have broad, and equitable, impacts, it is important to observe effects on classroom climate. Zee and Koomen (2016) reviewed 165 articles over 40 years on the link between educator self-efficacy and various classroom-level outcomes. They found that educator self-efficacy positively predicted classroom emotional climate in fifth-grade classrooms, specifically in terms of creating a supportive environment characterized by warmth, responsiveness, enthusiasm, teacher support, and effective use of instructional time. However, this relationship was not observed in preschool classrooms, suggesting that the impact of teacher self-efficacy on classroom climate may be age- or grade-specific, and that additional factors might influence its effectiveness in younger age groups. Others have found no (Oliveira et al., 2021a) or only weak (Maricuțoiu et al., 2023) effects on climate. This suggests that adult SEL impact on broader classroom dynamics may require more specific or targeted approaches.

Academic Outcomes

While not as commonly measured, there is emerging evidence that adult SEL approaches can benefit student academic outcomes. Students of K-5 teachers who received professional development using the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program scored higher on measures of reading and math proficiency (relative to students of teachers in a control condition; Brown et al., 2023). Teachers who participated in the CARE program also rated their students higher on academic enablers including motivation and classroom engagement. There is also evidence of associations between teacher burnout and lower achievement in reading, math, and literacy. The relationship between adult SEL and academic success is particularly critical as districts race to make up for learning losses suffered during COVID-19 pandemic school closures (Irwin et al., 2022).

Evidence-Based Characteristics

We introduce a number of evidence-based evaluation and design characteristics that have been observed across adult SEL approaches. Below we provide more information about why we selected these characteristics and how they contribute to our understanding of adult SEL.

EVIDENCE-BASED EVALUATION CHARACTERISTICS

We modeled the evidence-based evaluation characteristics after CASEL's Guide to Evidence-Based Programs evaluation criteria. These criteria were updated in 2020 to reflect best practices in evaluation design and analyses. In particular, we indicate whether approaches were evaluated with a *randomized controlled trial* or *quasi-experimental* design, which are the gold-standard approaches to generate evidence of effectiveness, and whether the approach garnered *significant effects* when accounting for any potential differences between tested groups at baseline. We also include characteristics to indicate sample size, consideration of *covariates*, and presentation of *disaggregated data*. To provide additional context to the evaluation—in order to inform *generalizability*—we indicate the sample characteristics (e.g., teachers vs. pre-service, grades taught), location of evaluation, and indicators of implementation fidelity (Gage et al., 2020). Finally, we provide the outcomes reported on in the evaluations to offer insight into areas of impact. Together, these characteristics provide a comprehensive indication of research rigor (**Figure 3**; Kauh et al., 2021; Kraft et al., 2018; Lakens, 2022; Serdar et al., 2021).

Randomized Control Trial: Experimental design in which patients are randomly assigned to an experimental group (in these cases, the group that engages in the adult SEL approach) or to a comparison group (e.g., a group that engages in a different adult SEL approach or does not engage with an adult SEL approach).	**Covariates:** A variable that exhibits covariation with a measured outcome. It is often included in an analysis so that its effect may be taken into account when interpreting outcomes or effects.
Quasi-Experimental: Experimental design in which assignment of participants to an experimental group (e.g., adult SEL approach) or to a comparison group cannot be made at random for either practical or ethical reasons.	**Disaggregated Data:** The process of breaking down data into smaller units or sets of observations to better understand experiences for subgroups.
Significant Effect [Significance Testing]: A set of procedures used to determine whether the differences between two groups or models are statistically significant (i.e., unlikely to arise solely from chance)	**Generalizability:** The extent to which results or findings obtained from a sample are applicable to a broader population.

These definitions were adapted from the APA Dictionary of Psychology https://dictionary.apa.org/

Evidence-Based Evaluation Components

Implementation Features
- Target population (e.g., teachers, pre-service)
- Grades included
- Location where program was tested
- Implementation fidelity

Evaluation Design
- Evaluation design
- Sample size
- Attrition rates

Main Effects and Controls

ESSA Tiers 1 & 2
- Main effects between intervention & comparison
- Baseline tested; differences accounted for
- Includes necessary covariates
- Describes disaggregated sample

ESSA Tiers 3 & 4
- Evidence-based logic model
- Identifies potential confounds
- Provides disaggregated sample description

Positive Outcomes

Educator includes but not limited to
- Educator Practices
- Occupational Health and Well-Being
- Agency & Purpose

Student includes but not limited to
- Student-Educator Relationships
- Classroom Climate
- Academic Achievement

School includes but not limited to
- School/District/ Community Climate
- Family/Community Partnerships

Figure 3. As adult SEL research continues to grow and evolve, we raise a number of characteristics that will be important to monitor with the objective to generate recommendations for best practices to ensure quality research to support educator and student outcomes.

EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

Strengthening adult SEL is a foundational component of CASEL's theory of action for systemic SEL implementation. In our Guide to Schoolwide SEL, we organize adult SEL in a "Learn, Connect & Collaborate, Model" framework based on research showing that:

- **It is important for adults to both learn about and experience SEL** to become stronger and more effective practitioners, advocates, and models (CASEL, 2021).

- **Trust, belonging, and collective efficacy** are strong predictors of how well schools can take on a new initiative and impact student achievement (Donohoo et al., 2018; Schneider, 2003).

- **Teachers who demonstrate positive social and emotional competence** have stronger relationships with their students (Baroody et al., 2014; Berger et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2019), which leads to improved student connection to school and academic performance (Allen et al., 2013; Farmer, 2018; Kincade et al., 2020; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; McHugh et al., 2012).

For this report, we synthesized the diverse approaches to adult SEL by crosswalking the Learning Policy Institute's brief on Effective Teacher Professional Development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) with our model of adult SEL. The Learning Policy Institute identified features of 35 adult SEL studies that produced evidence of effectiveness, which we organized according to the "Learn, Connect & Collaborate, Model" framework (**Table 1**). Although we hope that this organization provides an entry point for exploration, it is worth noting that there is fluidity among the connections. For example, while "opportunities for reflection" connects most directly to learning, it can be integrated throughout the entire "Learn, Connect & Collaborate, Model" approach to adult SEL.

	Includes	Connects to

Learn	• **Deepening understanding of schoolwide SEL**
	  - Foundational learning about SEL
	  - Professional learning about SEL
	  - Build on strengths and experience
	• **Learning about yourself, your context, and your school community**
	  - Reflect on personal social and emotional skills
	  - Examine cultural competence
		• Content-focused
		• Incorporates active learning using adult learning theory
		• Provides coaching and expert support
		• Offers opportunities for feedback and reflection

Connect & Collaborate	• Connect and collaborate among staff • Connect and collaborate with students • Connect and collaborate with families	• Supports collaboration (typically in job-embedded contexts) • Is of sustained duration
Model	• Model SEL among staff • Model SEL in interactions with students and families • Practices for school leaders	• Uses models and modeling of effective practice

Table 1. Learning Policy Institute's features across 35 adult SEL studies organized according to the "Learn, Connect & Collaborate, Model" framework.

Patterns and Variations Across Approaches

In **Tables 2-4**, we display a sample of adult SEL approaches that vary along the evidence-based evaluation and design characteristics. This sample was generated through nominations from our team and collaborators, followed by a relevance review for inclusion in this report. Selected programs (as well as others not shown) were invited to share information about their design, implementation strategies, and evaluation evidence (**Appendix B** includes the information asked from providers.)[2] All approaches that provided that information are included. Please note that our synthesis is based on the information provided and may not reflect the full offerings of the approaches. As such, this table is not intended to be used as a decision-making tool about specific approaches directly, but to guide schools and districts in the characteristics that may be most relevant to their individual objectives.

In synthesizing the materials from providers of the approaches, several patterns emerged. First, there is vast variability along a number of dimensions, including the "who," "what," and "how." Given that diversity across these approaches, it is difficult to characterize across all approaches. The diversity, though, provides an opportunity for schools and districts to employ approaches that best align with their needs and context. We provide further commentary on the approaches, zooming in on evaluation and design characteristics.

EVIDENCE-BASED EVALUATION PATTERNS

There are several strong evaluations that show evidence of effectiveness in generating positive outcomes for teachers and students aligned with the outcomes reviewed above. **Table 2** includes evaluations that demonstrate positive outcomes through randomized control trial or quasi-experimental designs. For example, EL Education and Empathic Instruction (in addition to other citations from CARE) showed positive effects for students, including academic outcomes. All of the randomized control trial or quasi-experimental evaluations reported disaggregated sample data and nearly all included covariates and/or moderators to examine potential confounds or differential patterns for subgroups. Understanding effectiveness for subgroups of students is essential for addressing pernicious gaps in our educational systems. While most of the outcomes were based on educator self-report, the student-facing outcomes are performance- or behavioral-based, which provides a more holistic idea of approach efficacy. However, one area of improvement, even for those programs that provide the most stringent tests of efficacy, is more comprehensive measurement and/or reporting of implementation fidelity (with the exception of CARE, which serves as a model for reporting implementation fidelity).

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2 We were only able to report on one evaluation report per approach. However, many approaches conducted more than one evaluation. Information in the table is based on the single evaluation provided to CASEL by the approach

Provider	Citation	Population, Grades	Design	Number of Participants	Significant Outcomes	Additional Evidence or Citations Available
CARE	Jennings et al., 2017	Teachers, K-5	RCT	224	• Increased adaptive emotion regulation • Reduced psychological distres • Reduced time urgency • Increased emotional support • Increased positive climate • Increased teacher sensitivity • Increased productivity	Y
CBCT for Educators	Frazier et al., 2025	Educators, K-12	RCT	27	• Decreased anhedonia (lack of feeling pleasure or interest • Reduced burnout	Y
EL Education Staff Crew	Nichols-Barrer & Haimson (2013)	Students, 6-8	QE	3016	Improved test scores (math and reading)	N
Empathic Instruction	Okonofua et al., 2022	Teachers, 7-8	RCT	173	Reduced suspensions	Y
RULER	Castillo et al., 2013	Teachers, K-12	QE	47	• Increased engagement • Increased teacher-student interaction • Reduced burnout	Y

Table 2. Information for approaches that have quasi-experimental (QE) or randomized control trial (RCT) evidence of effectiveness. All studies accounted for the outcome measure's baseline scores in their statistical models, which is important because we want to be confident that the approach would produce positive effects, even if the intervention and comparison groups started at the same place. All provide sample information broken out by demographic category to better understand trends. All except CBCT included covariates and/or moderators to examine potential confounds or differential patterns for subgroups. CARE is the only program that comprehensively tracked and reported implementation fidelity. EL Education, CARE, and Empathic Instruction evaluations were conducted in the United States. RULER's evaluation was conducted in Spain (location was not specified in Frazier et al., 2025). Please note that our synthesis is based on the information provided and may not reflect the full offerings of the approaches. As such, this table is not intended to be used as a decision-making tool about specific approaches directly, but to guide schools and districts in the characteristics that may be most relevant to their individual objectives.

Programs Without Randomized Control Trial or Quasi-Experimental Evidence. Given the methodological complexities of adult SEL research, we want to include a sample of approaches that have a strong evidence-based logic model and theoretical framework but do not yet have primary research on effectiveness in comparison to a control group. In **Table 3**, we include approaches that have some evidence of program effectiveness in terms of outcomes or implementation. While in an earlier stage of acquiring research evidence, a number of patterns emerged:

- These approaches tended to have smaller samples and (given the diverse formats of the reports) less information specified, particularly in comparison to published studies.

- The outcomes primarily focused on self-report. In many cases, they focused on participant experiences instead of adult or student outcomes.

- Many of the programs reference other reports that provide research findings related to the approach or indicate there is additional research underway. Nearly all of the programs shared ongoing measurement of participant experiences to guide the refinement of approaches to best meet the users' needs as part of continuous improvement.

Finally, in **Table 4**, we share approaches that have not yet reported outcomes or conducted research evaluations. All of these approaches have logic models that are grounded in evidence, and we indicate those that have research in progress.

Provider	Citation	Population, Grades	Number of Participants	Significant Outcomes	Additional Evidence or Citations Available
Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools	Elias, et al., 2021 (Internal Evaluation Report)	Instructors and leaders, unspecified	31 in focus groups; 120 for surveys	N/A did not conduct significance testing	Y
Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley's Education Program (GGSC Ed Program)	Shapiro & Hwang, 2021	Any educator and general population, unspecified	761	Increased familiarity with content areas of SEL and character education	Y
Growing Your HEART Skills	Martínez, 2025	Teachers, unspecified	Approximately 100	N/A did not conduct significance testing	N
Resilience in Schools and Educators (RISE) from the Center for Resilience + Well-Being (CRW)	Fitzgerald et al., 2022	Teachers, K-12	53	• Increased emotional awareness; • Increased emotional clarity; • Increased nonreactivity • Increased nonjudging • Increased well-being • Reduced conflict • Increased self-care satisfaction	Y
Second Step for Adults	Choi & Delger, 2023	Educators, unspecified	84	Educators who completed short version completed more lessons and found it relevant to their work	N
Social Emotional Learning for Teachers (SELF-T)	Lang et al., 2020	Teachers, early childhood	63	• Increased understanding of stress and stress reduction techniques • Increased use of stress reduction strategies • Increased perceived stress (counter to hypothesis) • Increased expressive encouragement to children's negative emotions • Decreased negative social guidance • Increased reactions to children's negative emotions (counter to hypothesis)	Y
Teacher Educator Institute (TEI)	Lotus Consulting Group, 2019	Pre-service, K-12	22-31	Increased self-report knowledge/ application of SEC competencies	Y
Transformative Educational Leadership	Harnett & Boyer, 2023 (Internal Evaluation Report)	Educational leaders, unspecified	145	Increased "Inner Shifts," increased "Outer Shifts"	N

Table 3. Information for approaches that have descriptive or exploratory evidence (without a comparison group). Second Step and SELF-T are the only programs that indicated inclusion of covariates in their models, but Second Step's study was focused primarily on implementation. All studies were conducted in the United States (with the exception that location was not specified for Second Step or TEL). Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools's approach and Growing in Your HEART skills did not conduct significance testing. SELF-T and GGSC Ed Program were the only approaches that provided sufficient information on attrition. Please note that our synthesis is based on the information provided and may not reflect the full offerings of the approaches. As such, this table is not intended to be used as a decision-making tool about specific approaches directly, but to guide schools and districts in the characteristics that may be most relevant to their individual objectives.

Provider Name	Research-Based Logic Mode	Evaluations in Progress
Alongside for Educators	Y	Student-facing evaluations available and in progress
Education on Purpose	Y	Evaluations available for student-facing programming
The Flourish Lab	Y	Y
FuelED	Y	Conducts internal evaluations
Lead by Learning	Y	Conducts routine evaluations on conditions for adult learning, the impact on student learning experiences and outcomes, and progress monitoring
MindUP for Educators	Y	Y

Table 4. Information for approaches that have not yet conducted or published an evaluation. Please note that our synthesis is based on the information provided and may not reflect the full offerings of the approaches. As such, this table is not intended to be used as a decision-making tool about specific approaches directly, but to guide schools and districts in the characteristics that may be most relevant to their individual objectives.

Challenges in Adult SEL Research. It should be noted that there are unique research challenges to evaluating the effectiveness of adult SEL approaches. For instance, whereas evaluating a student-facing SEL program may involve enlisting a small number of classrooms to reach a strong sample size of students (e.g., 4 classrooms of 25 students would provide a sample size of 100 students to evaluate), evaluating teacher outcomes would require vastly more classrooms (e.g., 100 classrooms to have a sample size of 100 teachers). The need to enlist more classrooms to achieve the power to detect effects introduces additional variables (e.g., grade, school/district) that may be otherwise controlled for in studies that focus on student samples. Therefore, the research on adult SEL includes methodological and potentially analytic complexity that may slow the process of knowledge generation. These issues may affect other aspects of the research as well. As was observed in both the literature review and in the approaches included in **Tables 2-3**, the overwhelming majority of outcomes are

measured via self-report. Reliance on self-report makes sense when it may be feasible for an evaluator to visit four classrooms to code student behavior or interactions but much less feasible to visit 100 classrooms.

ADULT LEARNING DESIGN PATTERNS

As mentioned earlier, this scan of adult SEL is guided by the research on effective professional learning, which highlights the importance of an active and collaborative approach, with adult development supported through coaching, modeling, and opportunities for feedback and reflection (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This aligns with CASEL's "Learn, Connect & Collaborate, Model" approach to adult SEL, discussed previously.

In analyzing the adult SEL approaches included in this report, we found a variety of research-aligned strategies. We discuss patterns below. It is important to note that these strategies are self-reported by providers themselves. Where applicable, we've included quotes to help provide texture and nuance to the approaches. These quotes were shared by the staff member responsible for filling out CASEL's survey questionnaire and are not attributed to any specific person.

There is a wide range of delivery models among the approaches we surveyed, including online, in-person, and hybrid (e.g., approaches that begin with in-person retreats and supplement with online learning). One program that provides personalized wellness coaching for educators required no training but encouraged consistent engagement. For other programs, training ranged from two 45-minute interactive online exercises to training that extended over two years. There is also a range in the extent to which approaches promote coordination across schools and the mechanisms by which they do so. While only four of the approaches are explicitly designed to be implemented schoolwide, others offer tools and support for systemic SEL. This includes monthly newsletters to principals for supporting whole-school action, optional leadership training for all staff, and awareness-building around systemic approaches to SEL. Some suggest that all staff in the building, including office, custodial, and other support staff receive training.

The approaches to adult SEL we reviewed supported collaboration among adults, often in job-embedded contexts. Some build this collaboration into training and sustain it through cohort-based learning, including monthly communities of practice. For others, the emphasis on collaborative learning is intrinsic to their approach. For example, Lead By Learning is structured around an ethos of public learning. As they describe, "public learning helps educators focus on student outcomes by encouraging them to share questions and data about their students' learning with colleagues." One way that approaches support collaboration and public learning is by having educators share problems of practice with colleagues.

As with student SEL,[3] effective adult SEL approaches provide active, experiential learning. Multiple approaches use explicit processes to ensure that there are opportunities not only to learn but to practice and generalize social and emotional competencies. For example, Social and Emotional Learning for Teachers (SELF-T) utilizes a L.E.A.D. Framework: Learn, Explore, Apply, Demonstrate. Each module in the program Heart in Mind follows a "learn-practice-reflect" sequence. Resilience in Schools and Educators (RISE) includes classroom scenarios so educators and staff can immediately apply the knowledge and skills within their own roles. Adult learning theory also demonstrates the importance of learning not only "what" we can do, but "why" it matters. Each Greater Good in Education (GGIE) practice includes a "Research Behind It" and a "Why This is Important" section, which help shift educators' "beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives." RULER programming aligns with adult learning theory by articulating clearly the value of emotions and emotional skills in student development and success.

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3 CASEL has found that effective student-facing SEL approaches often incorporate four elements represented by the acronym SAFE: (1) SEQUENCED: Connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development; (2) ACTIVE: Employing active forms of learning to help students strengthen new skills; (3) FOCUSED: Dedicated time and attention to developing personal and social skills; (4) EXPLICIT: Targeting specific social and emotional skills.

In terms of connection to student programming, most approaches in this report are entirely separate from student programming. Of these with student-facing SEL programming, most indicated that their adult offering was independent but supportive of their student-facing content. Second Step, for example, referred to an "ever-expanding skill progression," with modules moving from individual-focused skills to skills with colleagues, then with students, and finally, to creating a positive school climate. For some of these approaches, student-facing programming was developed first, but as the need for adult learning became clear to the field, they expanded their resources. Explaining how they came to build out SEL for adults, RULER indicated that "in its early years, RULER curricula was created and educators were trained to deliver the curricula to students. Findings indicated that the educators themselves were not prepared to deliver content in a meaningful way, and the program was adapted to begin with adult learning first, focusing on leaders, educators, and non-teaching staff." Many providers of student facing SEL programming understand the importance of adult competencies in this work, as evidenced by the number of programs in the current CASEL Program Guide that include adult SEL components (53/99) even though their programs are focused on student outcomes.

Within the adult SEL programs we analyzed, almost all approaches indicated that they provide expert modeling during training. Additionally, coaching, modeling, and expert support often occur through a train-the-trainer model that enables staff to lead as an "in-house" expert within their context. Some approaches support teams of teachers to build out implementation plans as part of an "embedded" approach to adult SEL. These approaches seem aligned with the Learning Policy Institute's focus on the role of sustained duration to ensure "adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Most approaches responded to questions around cultural competence by pointing to the responsive nature of adult SEL training, since the learning builds on participants' own experiences. Some programs provided specific strategies used to tailor learning. Examples include customization based on interviews, focus groups, surveys, or stakeholder meetings; integrating culturally relevant stories and examples; and including an International Cross-Cultural Review Committee that tailors examples, prompts, and reflection questions to be meaningful across diverse cultural settings.

Future Directions

One of the primary objectives of this report is to surface critical questions and gaps in knowledge to further understanding of adult SEL and the relationship of adult SEL to student experience and outcomes. We now turn our attention to these questions before concluding with specific recommendations for researchers and practitioners.

Question 1: What are the most critical short- and long-term outcomes to target through adult SEL approaches?

The answer to this question may vary depending on who is asked. In alignment with our mission, we emphasize the role of adult SEL in promoting positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students. But different stakeholders may prioritize different outcomes. For example, perhaps district leaders might prioritize teacher retention. Educators, in contrast, may prioritize well-being and agency. It is clear that the potential landscape of outcomes for adults and students is vast, varied, and highly interconnected. It is okay if we do not all agree on the same target outcomes. However, it is critical that each researcher, practice group, and provider is clear about the outcome(s) they seek and situate that outcome in an evidence-based framework.

At times, it may appear that outcomes are in conflict with each other. For example, could increasing an educator's sense of agency lead to leaving a toxic work setting, and therefore lower educator retention and increased instability for students? When outcomes appear in potential conflict, it is necessary to examine the role of systems. In this example, perhaps addressing schoolwide climate and culture could support both the educator's sense of agency and retention. As a metaphor, when training for a marathon, strengthening only the legs is not enough. The whole body (e.g., arm muscles, foot mobility), mind (e.g., mindset, goals), and context (e.g., weather, hills) must work in concert. Similarly, targeting a single outcome or single individual may not be sufficient to affect the health of the system. Comprehensive and sustained change requires a comprehensive and sustained approach. Therefore, considering the "why"—why a school or district is implementing an adult SEL approach—is just as critical as considering the "who," "what," and "how."

Question 2: What works for whom?

Despite the burgeoning research on adult SEL, we know very little about moderators, processes of change, and why some studies found bigger effects than others (Oliveira et al., 2021a; 2021b). Without this level of detail, it is difficult to ascertain what approaches will be most effective for which adults (or student groups that they work with). Because there are often costs to these approaches (e.g., costs for professional learning sessions or costs to educator time), it is important to be able to make choices that have a high likelihood of success. However, it is difficult to make those informed choices without a level of detail that considers the many interacting contextual components of school settings (e.g., urbanicity, student and school staff demographics, family/community involvement and support). There is also little research on equity in outcomes or how equity was planned for in approach development. Teachers of color in the United States face unique challenges in schools, often attributed to organization factors and associated with lower retention (e.g., Benson et al., 2021; Frank et al., 2021). But adult SEL has the potential to mitigate negative outcomes based on individual differences in educator well-being (Sandilos et al., 2023). Therefore, equity needs to be a key consideration to reduce (not maintain or widen) inequities. Given that many approaches sampled in this report (particularly in **Tables 3 and 4**) are at early stages or are continuing evaluation, there is an important opportunity to include student, educator, and community voice in decisions about loci for disaggregation and moderators of change.

Question 3: What is the role of technology in adult SEL?

Online delivery of adult SEL approaches. Another significant gap in the literature is the scalability and real-world applicability of educator SEL programs. Many approaches require significant time, effort, and resources to implement, which may not be feasible in typical school settings where school funding may be limited and educators are often time-poor (Beames et al., 2023). Increasingly, approaches are delivered online or in blended formats, though there is little research on how these approaches may compare to traditional, in-person adult SEL approaches. We know even less about AI-assisted components in adult SEL approaches. Understanding the effectiveness and feasibility of online (including AI-assisted) or blended interventions for teachers is critical to ensuring that adult SEL can reach a larger number of educators.

Adult SEL in student's technology knowledge and use. We also need to consider the role adult SEL has in equipping educators to help students navigate technology use and develop digital citizenship. As student-facing programming increases in the education technology space, including use of artificial intelligence and app-based, student-accessible interfaces, educators' role may shift from teaching an SEL curriculum to shepherding the use of these technologies. In other words, educators may no longer be teaching SEL curricula directly themselves; instead educators may supervise use of digital SEL curricula and use data dashboards that the digital programs produce to inform their knowledge about students' SEL competencies and direct further intervention. Educators may also be tasked with new roles in helping students develop and use SEL competencies (e.g., responsible decision-making and relationship skills) with a specific focus on supporting their navigation through a digital world. Without research and theory in this area, educators may not be well-equipped to translate and transfer their SEL skills to the deeply integrated digital world that their students inhabit.

Question 4: How can systems change to facilitate adult and student outcomes?

While educator SEL is theorized to involve individual, relational, and contextual influences (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), current interventions tend to focus primarily on individual factors, often neglecting broader systemic determinants such as relationships with colleagues, organizational policies, and workplace conditions (Berger et al., 2022). Hascher and Waber (2021) emphasize that educator well-being is strongly influenced by the support provided through relationships and a supportive work environment, including shared values, school culture, and organizational justice (see also Zinsser et al., 2016). These factors are crucial for fostering long-term educator well-being and positive classroom outcomes (Sandilos et al., 2015) but have received less attention in intervention research.

Additionally, there is a need for research on the impact of SEL interventions at the leadership level. As school leaders play a crucial role in shaping the culture of their schools, exploring how SEL competencies in principals and other school leaders affect school climate and teacher outcomes would provide valuable insights into how to create schools that prioritize the well-being of both educators and students (Mahfouz et al., 2019).

Finally, there is the critical missing piece of how adult SEL approaches might engage families and caregivers and also foster family-school partnerships, which are known to support academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students (Bierman & Sheridan, 2022). Related to this idea, there is a need for research on preparing educators with SEL skills needed to collaborate with caregivers and families, particularly in instances in which families or communities are culturally different than educators themselves. Fostering effective family-school-community partnerships requires thoughtful intervention across all levels. Without addressing systems and context, individual-level skill-building may not be effective to produce the degree and sustainability of change for students. The responsibility to engender the desired student outcomes should not rest on educators' shoulders alone.

Question 5: How do adult SEL approaches connect to other models of workforce well-being?

Although the school context is unique to educators, many of the concerns they experience in the workplace are common in other professions, including reduced well-being, burnout, low perceived agency, and lack of systemic support. Learnings from adult SEL can be used to inform broader understanding of workplace well-being and vice versa. For example, our logic model incorporates several principles from the Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being. Cross-talk between frameworks and researchers can help us understand similarities in underlying mechanisms.

Recommendations for Field Advancement

RESEARCH

Many limitations of the research reported on here are not new to the education field—including disproportionate reliance on self-report measures, limited follow-up, small sample sizes, and unspecified mechanisms. Despite the fact that many of these limitations are not unique to the adult SEL evaluation (though some of the unique considerations for adult SEL evaluation are discussed earlier), they nevertheless require attention and targeting in order to advance our knowledge. There is a need to incorporate complementary measures such as classroom observations (Pianta & Hamre, 2009), biological measures like cortisol and blood pressure (e.g., Greenberg, 2025; Harris et al., 2015; Krame, 2021; Hwang et al., 2017; Sleilaty, 2022), and student perceptions of change (Nielsen et al., 2022) to provide a more holistic understanding of how SEL impacts teachers and students. These additional measures would help provide a more objective and multi-dimensional view of the effects of SEL on teachers.

We additionally need clear logic models that present ideas that can be directly tested by research, in particular to test for potential moderating factors. There has not been a clear pattern of findings for moderators of educator SEL program impacts (Oliveira et al., 2021a; 2021b). Therefore, we do not know why some studies found bigger effects than others. Consequently, there is much to learn about mediating variables, processes of change, or follow-up effects. Qualitative (e.g., DeMauro et al., 2019) and quantitative (e.g., Roeser et al., 2013) studies of change mechanisms are needed that identify and test putative mediators.

These research efforts require partnerships with practitioners and providers, braiding efforts to develop knowledge and products that will most effectively support adults and students schoolwide. Additionally, these research efforts also require funding, including support from federal grants and state agencies. Policymakers across levels have power to support efforts, policies, and funding streams that have the potential to influence adult SEL and implementation. For example, we show that state-level supportive policies and conditions are associated with more implementation of professional learning for adult SEL (Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2024).

PRACTICE

Two areas stand out for additional focus from practitioners. First, there is a significant gap in understanding about effective implementation (Harachi et al., 1999). Qualitative and quantitative insights from adult SEL participants are essential to better understand feasibility of approaches, including what effective integration with other professional learning and/or student-facing SEL programming could look like, and which approaches to adult SEL support educator retention and impact, including principal buy-in (Wanless et al., 2013) and educator engagement (Wanless et al., 2015). Educator perspectives will be invaluable for advancing the field and finding sustainable, impactful strategies that help them thrive in their jobs. As part of a systemic approach, instead of thinking of adult SEL as an add-on, we must consistently ask, "What are the conditions that best support adult development so they can be their best for students?" and work to organize our schools and districts accordingly.

Second, there is room for growth in the implementation of adult SEL approaches in pre-service and teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation and continuing education programs are critical to fostering social, emotional, and cultural competencies within educators (Hon et al., 2024; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). These competencies, in turn, help equip educators develop the skills, strategies, and mindsets to create supportive and engaging learning environments. Instead of adding SEL as one-more-thing later on, integrating adult SEL into pre-service programs recognizes the essential roles adult self- and social awareness (among the other competencies) play in teaching and learning.

Taken together, these two areas underscore the need for systemic implementation, which includes integrating adult SEL early in teacher training and throughout their career. Within schools and districts, adult SEL can be woven intentionally into professional learning and guidance around teaching and learning, building a positive schoolwide culture and climate, and partnerships with families and communities. Adult SEL should also be collaborative in nature, involving all adults in the educational context as stakeholders and uplifting voices. Drawing from the perspectives of educators themselves could lead to increases in self-efficacy, sense of purpose, and innovation, benefiting adults and students alike.

Conclusion

As our understanding of the factors that support young people's academic, social, and emotional development continues to grow, the role of adult SEL remains central. In this report, we presented a landscape scan of adult SEL approaches and research to highlight how adult SEL supports: (1) effective teaching practices in the classroom, (2) educators' occupational health and well-being, and (3) a strengthened sense of professional agency and purpose. We uncovered patterns, and in many cases, variability that indicate the need for more research and deeper understanding. In doing so, we surface characteristics of evidenced-based, high-quality approaches and raise areas of need in this essential, developing field. As the field continues to mature, we can use these characteristics to develop guidance and decision-making tools to support the use of high-quality and rigorously tested approaches for thriving schools.

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Appendix A

Adult SEL design characteristics. The chart below is for broad learning purposes; it is based on information received from providers, but may not reflect the entirety of their offerings. For those looking to select an adult SEL approach, we remind readers that this table is not intended as a decision-making tool nor does it include all adult SEL approaches. Inclusion in the chart is not an endorsement of the approaches. Like student-facing SEL programs, adult SEL includes a wide range of approaches, goals, and outcomes. For example, some providers seek to offer understanding around adult SEL strategies that can be immediately applied to the classroom while others also prioritize building deep relationships among participants over time. Additionally, while information in the chart may indicate the recommended implementation time investment, many programs provide flexibility to meet the goals of schools and districts.

Provider	Target Population/ grades taught	Countries where approach has been implemented	Technology components	Time investment
Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools	Teachers, teacher assistants, student support staff, before- and after-school program staff, school leaders in formal administration positions, and educators who are aspiring leaders	Albania, Bahamas, Belgium, Canada, Chile, China, England, India, Israel, Jordan, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Philippines, Romania, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden Switzerland, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, Virgin Islands	Online programs combining synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences; a supervised practicum; learning management system; discussion boards; virtual learning community	• School Leader Certificate Program: 7-week and 12-week courses and a 16-week practicum • SEL Instruction Certificate Program: 10-week courses and a 15-week practicum • Accelerated Track for those with 5+ years of SEL teaching
Alongside	Teachers, school staff, and administrators	United States	Fully digital program that uses AI for coaching support	Optional district orientation or educator professional development
Cognitively Based Compassion Training for Educators (CBCT for Educators)	Teachers, school leaders, pre-service	United States, Mexico, Brazil, Romania, Mongolia, Korea, Taiwan, Ecuador, and others (not specified)	A digital manual and guided meditation recordings; a full digital learning platform by 2025	Weekly 90-minute sessions over 8 to 9 weeks, with options for in-person or online formats, multi-day intensives, or bi-weekly sessions
Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)	Teachers; school leaders (separate version)	United States, Canada, Australia, Croatia, Germany, The Netherlands, China	Regular emails, including monthly newsletters to provide suggestions for whole-school implementation; online audio practices	18 hours over 3 days; currently testing hybrid option

Education on Purpose	Teachers, administrators	United States, Canada, Australia, Croatia, Germany, The Netherlands, China	Virtual offerings available	Five 60- to 90-minute sessions
EL Education Staff Crew	All adults in school building	United States	Asynchronous online courses and curriculum, surveys	Staff crew ideally meets weekly and at least 1 time per month for 45-60 minutes
Empathic Instruction	Teachers, school leaders	United States, United Kingdom	Interactive online exercises and modules, guidebook, surveys	Two to six 45-minute interactive online exercises/ modules
The Flourish Lab	Adults in districts, schools, and youth-facing organizations	United States	E-learning modules (live), online resources	Options: • Ignite workshop (75 minutes e-learning or 2-hours live) • Explore workshops (75 minutes e-learning or 2 hours live) • Deepen workshops 24 targeted sessions (15-30 minutes e-learning, 30-90 minutes live) • Train the Trainer
FuelED	Educators in district and school leadership positions as well as teaching and support roles (both instructional and non-instructional)	United States	Animated instructional videos used during training	Options: • The whole educator collective, 2-day immersive training • Growing Empathy, (train-the-trainer model, 1-day orientation and training) that prepares trainers to lead 8 hours of professional learning
Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley's Education Program (GGSC Ed Program)	Anyone who works in the field of PreK-higher education	United States and international (specific countries not indicated)	Many online resources and modules, including a free online magazine, monthly online community meetings, and multimedia modules	Multiple models ranging from low engagement (e.g., newsletters, online courses) to high engagement (4-day summer institute with additional online modules, and ongoing support)

Growing Your HEART Skills	Educators	United States, South Africa, Canada, Israel, Bolivia, Britain, and Morocco	All content is delivered online, includes modules with videos, practice tools, reflection tools, and pre- and post-assessments	7 modules, 14 practice tools, pre- and post-assessment; specific duration might depend on how individuals (or schools) choose to engage with the content
Lead by Learning	Teachers, coaches, leaders, other practitioners	United States (but resources have been accessed globally)	Sessions offered in person and virtually	Customized partnerships; participants engage in visioning retreats, monthly Communities of Practice, individualized coaching, and Design Team sessions
MindUP for Educators	Teachers, whole school staff, district leaders, administrators and educational support staff	United States, Canada	Program delivered online, asynchronously; library of guided audio practices	2-parts, 90 minutes each; a library of guided audio practices
Resilience in Schools and Educators (RISE) from the Center for Resilience + Well-Being (CRW)	K-12 educators	United States	Virtual training and support for facilitators	Train-the-trainer model (8 hours of asynchronous and 20 hours live training) preparing facilitators to lead whole school professional development, workshops for small groups, and individual coaching
RULER	Schoolwide	United States, Australia, China, England, Italy, Mexico, and Spain	Online training, digital resources and supports for implementation and sustaining	Options: • Train-the-trainer programming in person for groups of 3-5 per school over two full days (14 hours) • 6-week online course for groups of 3-10 per school • Coaching sessions, newsletters, and webinars available for the implementation team

Second Step for Adults	All staff; also has a track for leaders	United States	Online learning platform with modules that include videos	• 4 foundational modules with four units each. Units include approximately 60 minutes of individual online learning and one 30-minute small-group meeting • 45-minute whole-staff meeting at the end of the module for learning and reflection
Social Emotional Learning for Teachers (SELF-T)	Teachers	United States	Online course, including videos, web-based activities, and a reflection tool	3-5 hours self-paced (5 lessons)
Teacher Educator Institute (TEI)	Teachers, educators, and education leaders	United States	Online resources and sessions, monthly newsletter, resource guide, shared Google Drive folder with resources	A year-long cohort-based program that spans 10 months and includes two in-person retreats and 5-8 online professional learning sessions
Transformative Educational Leadership	Superintendents, district leaders, nonprofit leaders, principals, SEL coaches, mental health professionals, and teacher leaders	Fellows from United States, Canada, and India	Virtual retreats, digital coaching, and an online resource library	Year-long fellowship includes two in-person retreats (five days each), a mid-year virtual retreat (four days), and bi-monthly virtual gatherings

Appendix B

COMPLETE PROMPTS FOR ADULT SEL PROVIDERS

Program Basic Information (5-7 sentences)

- Provide a concise description of the program, the essential components of the program, and how the program incorporates content or examples that are grounded in day-to-day operations or experiences in a school (e.g., content related to classroom management, supportive discipline, instruction).
- Describe where the program is being implemented and the population that the program serves (e.g., whole school, teachers, pre-service trainees, school leaders, students; include grades where relevant).
- Specify if the program was adapted from a program intended for another age group (e.g., students). If the program was adapted, briefly describe how it was adapted.
- Specify if the program also incorporates student-facing programming (name the student program, if any).
- Indicate structures or routines needed for the program to be used in schools (e.g., 45 minutes of all adult educators together in a room once a week).

Program Implementation Features (5-7 sentences)

- Indicate the program duration (e.g., length of time per session) and frequency (e.g., number of sessions recommended); list any elements for sustaining effects (e.g., ongoing coaching, newsletters, booster training sessions).
- Detail the training available for implementing the program. Who provides the training? Is there a train-the-trainer model?
- Describe any digital elements or technology integration in the program.
- How is implementation quality-monitored to ensure fidelity and sustainability? What supports are available?
- If you have demographic information for schools or districts in which the program has been implemented, please provide them here (e.g., student race, free-reduced price lunch, urbanicity, English language learners).

Core Program/Approach Elements (3-5 sentences)

- Is the programming aligned to adult learning theory? How so?
- Are there practices to occur outside the session (e.g., out of school)? If so, what is recommended?
- Describe how the program has been adapted for different cultural or contextual settings and populations.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Modeling at School (2-4 sentences)

- Does your program support collaboration in job-embedded contexts
  (e.g., collaboration with other educators, school staff, or leaders at school)? If so, how?
- Are there opportunities to practice and reflect on the content with colleagues and students?
- Describe opportunities for coordinated approaches between the classroom and school if relevant.
- Are there ways in which the program facilitators provide modeling or coaching?

Example Flow and Content (3-5 sentences)

- Provide a summary of the flow and content of a single lesson/practice.
  Include an example of how a specific skill is taught.

Conceptual Model/Theory of Change (3-5 sentences + optional figure)

- Explain how the program works and its relevance to promoting positive outcomes for educators, students, and/or the whole school context. This should include the theoretical framework and research that informs the program/approach lessons, and the Conceptual Model/Theory of Change.
  We encourage providers to include figures/graphs.
- What are the key outcomes your program is focused on (e.g., bolster educator competency in providing SEL programming to students, bolster educator capacity to create a learning environment that promotes social and emotional development for students, enhance school climate for social and emotional support by training adults to make systemic changes, support educator well-being and SEL competences to increase educator retention, engagement, or performance)?

Program Evaluation (1-2 sentences + attachment)

- Provide via attachment ONE evaluation or research report (published or unpublished) of your program or indicate if you do not currently have a research report. We only have the capacity to view one report per program; if you provide us with more than one report, we will select one at random to consider.
- List citations for any additional evaluation reports. Please also include all countries in which your program has been evaluated.
- If you worked with an evaluator, please provide information about who you worked with and how they were involved?

Next Steps and Future Directions for the Program (1-2 sentences)

- Identify current work or future plans for program development and research, including any upcoming projects or areas of focus.