

GUIDE

The Comprehensive
Guide to Supporting

Social Emotional Learning in K-12

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The Comprehensive Guide to Supporting Social Emotional Learning in K-12

Between the stress and significant change associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, K-12 children and their caretakers are experiencing drastically rising levels of anxiety and depression. Families with young children have reported a 67% increase in feeling anxious or depressed all day. And according to another national survey of 3,300 adolescents, since the closing of school buildings, nearly 33% had feelings of depression and anxiety, with more than 25% reporting a lack of connection to peers, teachers, and school communities.¹

All of this shines a light on a need that existed even before the pandemic: easy access to mental health resources for K-12 students and their families.

What is Social Emotional Learning?

That's where social-emotional learning comes into play. Social-emotional learning, or SEL, is:

“an integral part of education and human development. . . [and] the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”²

Through the framework of SEL, students can develop skills in self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal relationships to better prepare themselves for school, work, and life success. SEL provides a foundation in areas ranging from impulse control and emotion management to problem-solving and self-discipline.

These types of key skills are critical for improving mental health and well-being. Given the mental health crisis now faced by communities across the country, schools are turning to SEL for a solution. In fact, at the national level, **an overwhelming 83.8% of states have reported that SEL has increased in priority** since the pandemic began.¹

This guide aims to shed some light on how exactly to implement an SEL program that effectively teaches critical skills to your students, educators, and families in order to provide the support they need for better mental health.





1. Easily Measure Program Impact

An effective SEL program requires coordination between the entire learning community: students, educators, administrators, and families. Given the high importance of collaboration and transparency between stakeholders, the first step of implementing a successful program is to choose a platform that can foster this kind of transparency.

Look for a tool that focuses on connection. Throughout your SEL program, you'll need to integrate student information, academic curriculum, family information, educator development, and community partner program engagement.

By selecting a platform that acts as a central hub to integrate all the different stakeholders and school apps that play a role in SEL skill development, you'll streamline the process and be able to pull actionable insights to make data-driven decisions to enhance your program.

Here are some key features and capabilities you'll want to make sure you have in the platform or tool you use for SEL:

-  Streamlined communication abilities between schools, families, and community partners
-  Integration of learning activities and assessments with student information
-  Ability to pull reports from which you can gain data-driven insights on the performance of your program
-  Integration of educator development and training content

Abre, an education platform used to better manage and support schools, students, and families, is one example of a platform that works well for SEL. By connecting all stakeholders in one place and integrating information from different programs, it helps streamline program management and enhance decisions with data-driven insights.

2. Providing Explicit SEL Instruction for Students

With an effective platform in place, you can easily provide explicit SEL instruction to students through the dissemination of lessons and assessments.

Just as you would with standard academic curriculum, for an SEL program you would create presentation material, assignments, and assessments focused on learning objectives that support SEL skills.

This may look like a lesson on self-control, in which students watch a video on digital impulses and how social media pushes and pulls them in different direction (for example, Netflix's "The Social Dilemma"). Students may then complete an assignment that asks them to journal their actions during the day. The goal of the lesson is for them to identify moments when their attention and actions are controlled by outside sources.



To see what this might look like in practice, here are a few ways explicit SEL instruction might be built out in a platform like Abre:



Student Assignments

Schools can build and import an SEL curriculum into the platform's Curriculum app, which provides structure, links to standards, and pacing guides for instruction.



Curriculum Plans

Assignments are added to the platform's Class app. Students access the app to complete & upload their assignments, which are then graded by the instructor.



Asynchronous Lessons

The Learn app can be used for autonomous, asynchronous learning experiences that teach students about SEL skills at their own pace.



Summative & Formative Assessments

The Assessments app captures data on the efficacy of instruction. Since this data is captured in the platform, it can be used to inform the bigger picture on how the SEL program is performing as a whole.

3. Integrating SEL Objectives into Current Curriculum

SEL instruction doesn't have to be a stand-alone activity. You can strengthen your SEL initiative by integrating it into ongoing curriculum and coursework as well.

There are many ways to support your current coursework with SEL practices. For instance, CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) promotes three signature practices to support systemic SEL: welcoming/inclusion activities, engaging strategies, and optimistic closures.³

In practice, this might look like using a group discussion format to encourage students to help each other understand the ideas and issues presented in a text. Or, presenting a "brain break" activity that focuses on doing something calming to promote focus and readiness to learn before diving into material.

These types of activities can be added into the platform you use to present instruction, just as you would any other lesson or activity. By weaving practices like this into "normal" curriculum, you can embed SEL into your students' routine and further solidify their mastery of the skills.

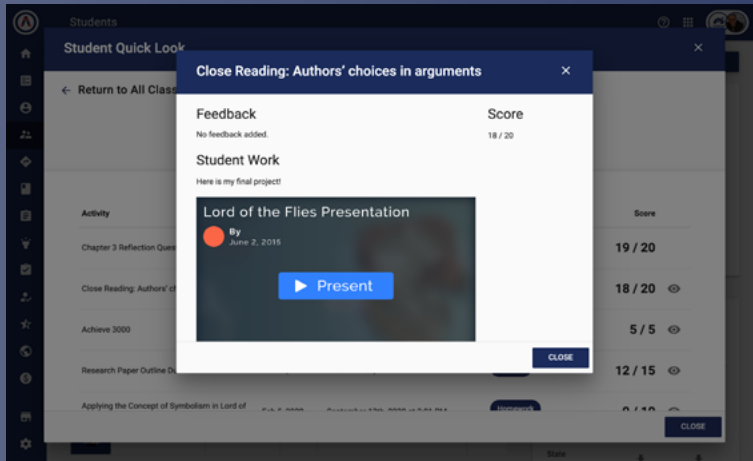
4. Capturing Youth Voice and Increasing Student Engagement

Self-awareness and self-management are core components of social-emotional learning. This means that in your SEL program, you'll want to make sure you're encouraging students to speak up about how they feel about the program and reflect on their experiences.

Not only does this promote additional building of SEL skills, but it also gives you key insight into whether or not your program is achieving the desired outcomes. In order to effectively use these insights to drive program decisions, it's important to have a tool in place that can collect data from surveys and reflections in a way that makes it easy to analyze.



It's also important to make sure these surveys or activities actually get completed by the recipients. By being strategic about where and when you disseminate surveys, you can increase your participation rate and ensure that you're getting the data you need to have a positive impact on your program.



To see an example, here's how all of those components would work in Abre.



Student Surveys

Abre's Forms app allows schools to customize surveys that capture student feedback and aggregate data over time.



Reflection Activities

Reflection activities (called Portfolio Objects in Abre) can be saved to a student's Portfolio to demonstrate how they are achieving SEL objectives.



Announcements & Notices

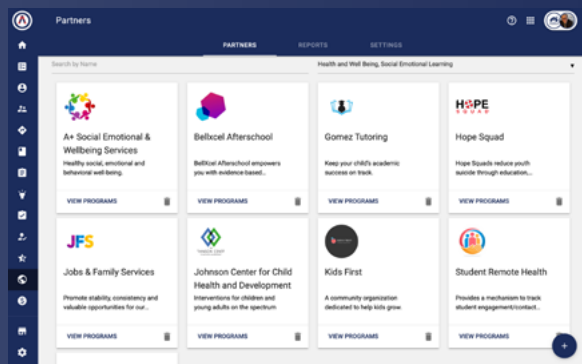
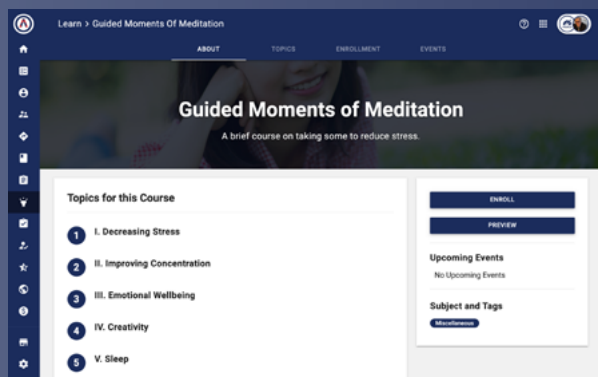
The Headline feature in Abre allows schools to display a survey or other important content immediately upon the user logging in, increasing the likelihood of completion.

5. Supporting Social-Emotional Health & Learning of Employees

SEL isn't only for students. With high numbers of educators facing burnout and struggling to support increasingly stressed out kids, it's critical to support the social-emotional health of school employees as well. In order to fully support students in developing SEL skills, educators and other school employees need to be able to demonstrate these skills themselves too.

This support can be provided the same way it is for students — through lessons and activities embedded in your school and learning management platform. Additionally, you may want to partner with community partners like mental health providers in your area to provide additional resources.

Abre supports both of these delivery methods by bringing together resources in one easy-to-access



Employee Courses

Explicit SEL instruction can be added to the platform, such as this course on meditation, and accessed by educators and other school employees.

Community Partnerships

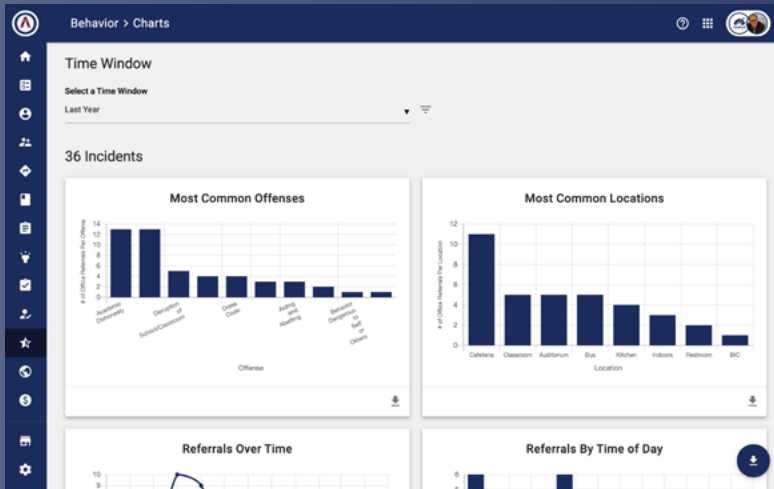
Seamless integration with external partners like mental health providers is provided through Abre's Partner Catalog.

6. Practicing Supportive Discipline

A school's discipline procedures can have an effect on student SEL skills as well. There's a growing awareness that when traditional discipline measures like detention and suspension are used, issues like bullying, violence, and poor academic performance are only made worse.⁴

Instead, more educators are turning to restorative practices to prevent these problems and create a healthier school community. These types of practices promote inclusiveness, relationship-building, and problem-solving, bringing together victims, offenders, and their supporters to address wrongdoing. Students are encouraged to reflect on their actions and devise plans to repair harm rather than simply endure punitive action.

This type of shift involves the collaboration and action of many different school stakeholders. Staff will need to complete training that teaches them how to implement the new procedures. School administrators will need to develop a code of conduct and practices that are aligned with best practices for social and emotional health and share this information with students and families. Additionally, the school needs a streamlined way to track discipline incidents and analyze them along with other student factors to uncover any influencing factors and make effective decisions.



This is where having a platform like Abre will really save you some headaches. Here's a look at how the management of all those different pieces and stakeholders would be streamlined in Abre.



Employee Training

School employees take a training course on restorative practices through Abre's Learn app



In Platform Communication

The school code of conduct is shared with students and families through Abre's communication features. Parents can be prompted to acknowledge and sign upon logging into the system.



Behavior Incident Log

Educators log discipline incidents into Abre through the Behavior app, collecting data all in one place.



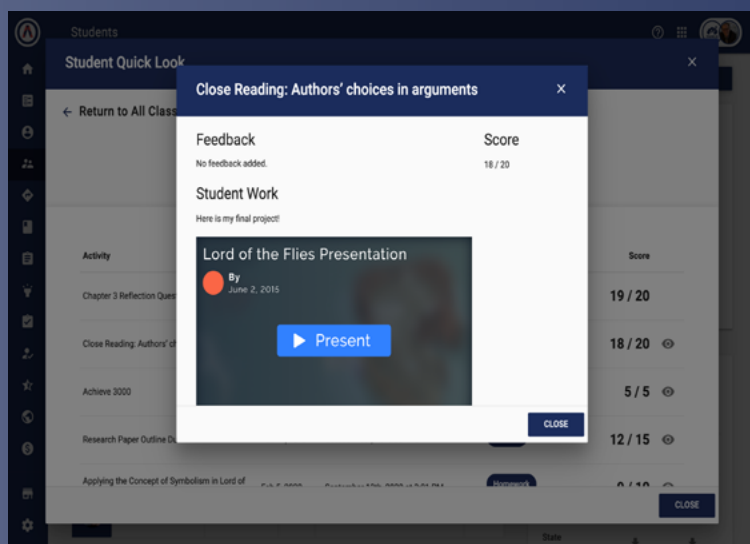
Discipline Reports

Administrators can pull reports from Abre on discipline incidents correlated with any influencing factors to determine the most effective ways to make improvements.

7. Implementing a Suite of Supports that Account for Timing of Student Needs

Many schools use the MTSS framework for supporting their students. MTSS stands for multi-tiered systems of supports and, when used properly, promotes student success in both academic and social-emotional skills.

MTSS is also a process that includes feedback loops that account for changes over time. For example, some of the more popular programs used with the MTSS framework are Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI).



Abre excels at supporting the MTSS framework. Here's how might look:



Collecting Student Information

Screening and identification is collected in Abre's Student App.



Intervention Plans

Interventions are designed and customized in Abre's Plans App.



Student Instruction

Evidence-based instruction is delivered in Abre Class and Abre Learn.



Family Communication

Through in-platform communication tools, families are involved with the learning process from beginning to end.

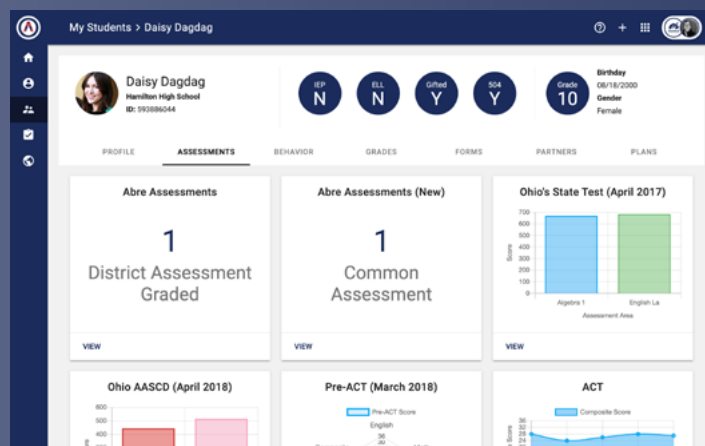
8. Authentically Partnering with Families

Family participation plays an important role in helping develop and support a child's social and emotional health. For an effective SEL program, it's important to provide families with resources and support to help them develop an awareness of SEL skills and the role they play in their children's well-being.

This might be done through things like micro-courses, short videos, or connection to community programs that help families learn about aspects of mental health.

In addition to educational resources, it's also important to provide transparency into the full picture of how their child is doing. With a clearer idea of where their child might be struggling, families can provide the additional support and encouragement needed to improve kids' health and overcome obstacles to student success.

With this in mind, you need to have a simple way to grant families access to the platform where you consolidate all of your student information and important communications. This way, families can easily find out the most critical information they need to know about their children's performance and behavior, as well as reach the just-in-time support most relevant to their situation.



Here's a look at how this type of family partnership can work in Abre:



In Platform Communication

Family members are instantly presented with the most important communication when they log into Abre.



Family Access to Student Profiles

Families have access to see the full profile of their student through Abre's Student app, which includes things like Student Surveys, Education Plans, Behavior, Grades & Assessments, and Portfolio Objects.



Student Instruction

Families can access Abre's Partner Catalog for additional resources and community partners that help support mental wellness.



Family Access to Courses

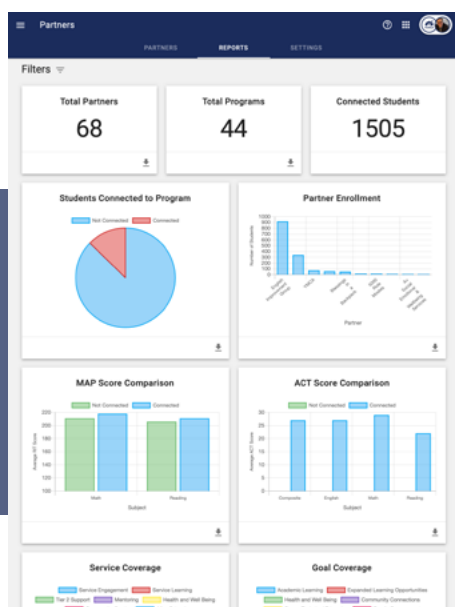
Family members can take a micro-course to learn about specific topics in mental health like teen depression, without leaving the Abre platform.

9. Aligning Your School with Community Partnerships

Instructors these days are being asked to take on several different roles, from teacher to counselor to social worker, and more. While teachers play a vital role in the development of children, we can't place all of these responsibilities on them. By establishing partnerships with organizations in the community, you can get your kids access to the mental health resources they need, while simultaneously lifting the burden off of teachers and allowing them to focus on what they love most — teaching.

Community partners may include counselors or therapists, wellness groups, and other providers focused on supporting mental health. The first key to success in community partner programs is to get the programs in front of more students and families. Your students and families need a reliable way to find the right program for their needs and an easy way to sign up and contact the provider.

Additionally, in order to truly see the impact of these partners on your students, staff, and families, their programs also need to be integrated into the platform you're using to manage your SEL program. You'll want to be able to pull reports that show participation and engagement levels, see the distribution of program types to make sure they align with your goals, and be able to easily see the big picture of how the programs are making an impact on your students.



Here's how all of that would work in Abre.



Community Partner Catalog

Abre's Partner Catalog collects all your community partner programs in one place for easy access by students and families.



Program Integration with Student Data

Abre can integrate partner programs with student information to provide a 360 view of each student's performance and the impact programs are having.



Partner Program Data






Abre allows you to pull reports on partner program data, driving insights in seconds that can inform your choices and help you align goals or district priorities.

10. Continuous Improvement

As with any program, you'll want to track data in order to see what works and what doesn't over the course of time. The first step is to define what your goals are, or what success of your SEL program looks like for your school. This might be increasing mastery of specific SEL skills among your students, getting a particular response on mental wellness surveys administered to your student and staff population, or simply tracking if your school is matching and offering substantial resources to your entire learning community.

With success defined, it's time to put in place the instruments that will collect and aggregate data for you to make sure you have what you need to make insight-driven decisions for your program. This is where having one platform that captures data across all different stakeholders and programs can make a big difference. When data is siloed in different apps or different people's computers, it makes it much harder to see the whole picture and make informed decisions.

As an example, here's some of that data that Abre can compile that would help when evaluating SEL program efficacy:

-  Demand for third-party partners, including which partners are popular
-  Enrollment in partner programs
-  Aggregated behavior changes within a school over time
-  Survey responses and changes over time
-  Enrollment and completion of Learn Courses by family members, staff members, and students

The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning is vital for the health and well-being of our students, educators, staff, and families, but a truly effective SEL program requires careful thought and planning. There are several things to consider when implementing your SEL program to ensure that you're maximizing your efforts and having a positive impact on your school community. By using the right tools and strategies, you can support quality social-emotional learning in your district and provide students with the tools they need to succeed.

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