K12 School Leader Guide

5 ways K-12 SEL is broken
And How to Fix it

mooZoom

It's hardly a secret: When students feel better — mentally, physically, social-emotionally — they learn better.

They also lead more fulfilling and purposeful lives.

Despite evidence and good intentions, most K-12 schools struggle to integrate SEL into teaching and learning. Educators and administrators, overworked and worn-thin by a years-long pandemic, have thrown their hands up at the prospect of yet "one more thing to do."

While a majority of teachers collectively believe in the power of SEL — **one survey** found that **93%** of classroom educators believe it contributes to academic achievement and positive attitudes toward school — a dizzying array of standards, professional development hours and academic research makes it difficult, if not impossible, to actually teach the stuff.

WHY SEL?

SEL can help all young people and adults thrive personally and academically, develop and maintain positive relationships, become lifelong learners, and contribute to a more caring, just world.

In fact, **one survey** found that less than **26%** of educators feel prepared to implement their school's SEL curriculum — this, despite the fact that more than half of them received training from their district on what to do.

The good news? It doesn't have to be this way. The team at moozoom created this blueprint, featuring five ideas to help simplify your current SEL approach, so that teachers can spend less time playing the part of amateur researcher or psychologist and more time doing what they were meant to do: help students reach and exceed their potential.
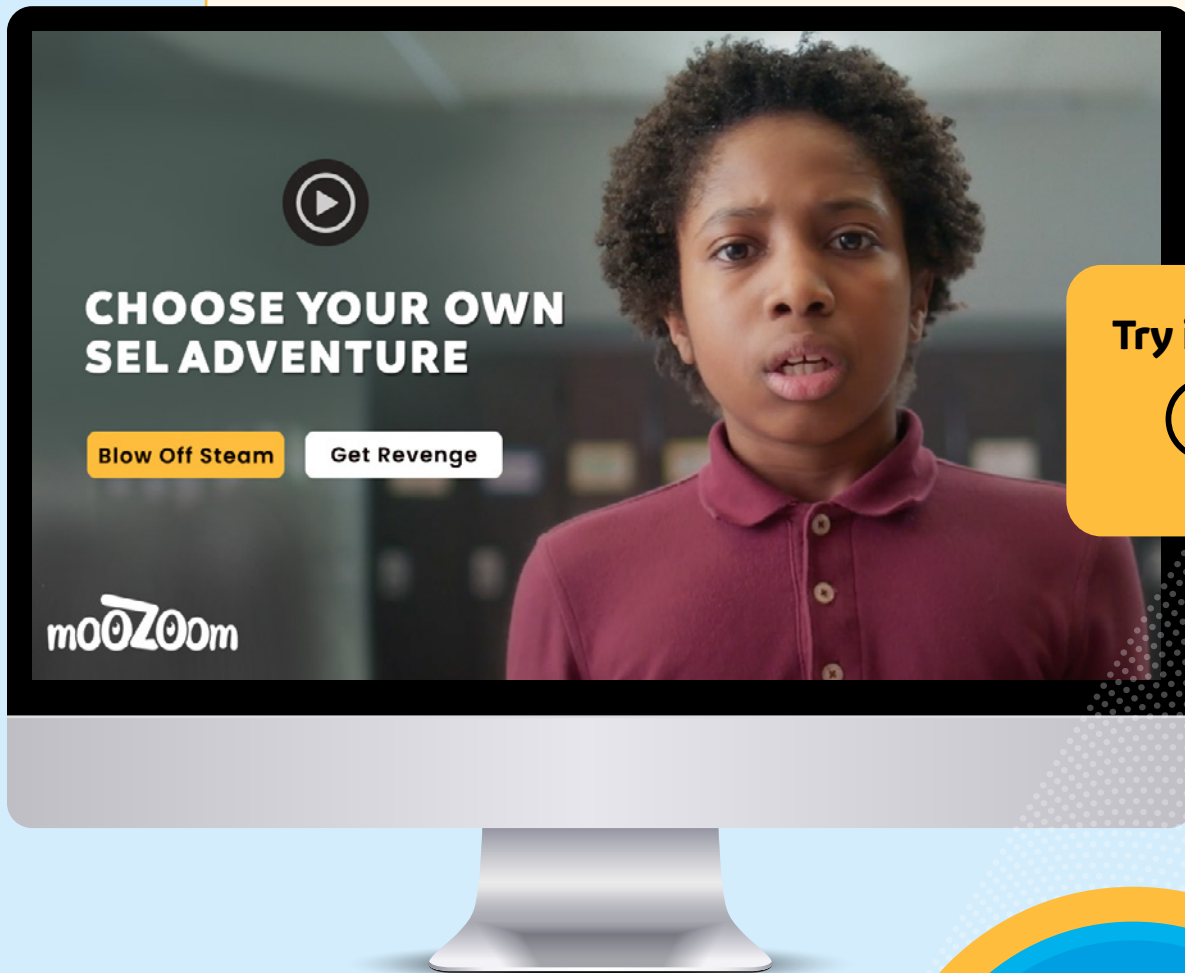
The stats hardly need repeating:

- Compared to students with low social-emotional learning (SEL), students with high SEL are "twice as likely" to achieve above-average grades

- Students with high SEL are **60%** less likely to demonstrate one of more behavior issues during the school year; and

- Students with high SEL are half as likely to be chronically absent.

Source: Panorama Education

If you have questions, or want to learn how other school systems like yours are doing this, drop us a note or check out our free classroom module on helping students deal with rejection. Our video-based approach was designed to make SEL engaging for students and easy for teachers.

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> It can be difficult to integrate SEL into the curriculum, especially since these skills haven't typically been taught or assessed. Schools are unsure who should be responsible for teaching these topics, and which instructional methods should be used. "

- Source: Digital Promise, 2020

Why it's broken:
It's hard to integrate SEL into the curriculum

How to fix it:
Keep it simple: focus on 'teachable moments'

SEL is easier to talk about, than it is to do in schools. Most K-12 curriculum is built over years with **100%** focus on pedagogy and academic rigor and little space for intangibles such as feelings and compassion.

Try to cram all that emotion into a 45-minute class session, jam-packed with learning standards and other requirements and it's no wonder so many teachers ask, "How do I fit it all in?"

In fact, **one study** reported by Education Week found that, as of 2020, just a third of U.S. K-12 schools (**31%**), set aside specific time to teach SEL skills. These teachers also said that SEL was not integrated into academic learning.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Somewhere in our attempts to validate and legitimize SEL, we've managed to complicate its purpose, making life insanely hard for teachers in the process.

When it comes to SEL, the goal is simple: give students the skills they need to confidently navigate challenging situations and emotions. That's it.

What if, instead of trying to retrofit SEL into a 20-year-old language arts or social studies curriculum, we asked our teachers to recognize teachable moments at the beginning or at the end of class, then gave them access to ready-to-use tools and resources to plug & play into existing lesson plans?

Organizations like CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, have spent years advocating for the integration of SEL, suggesting exercises like "welcome rituals," in-class engagements, and "optimistic closures."

However well-intentioned, even these activities tend to miss the point. Teachers are already stretched for time. In most places, the school day isn't getting longer. These things take serious planning. Even worse, they run the risk of alienating students for whom the chosen content or scenario doesn't resonate.

What if, instead of a predetermined scenario mapped out by teachers through hours of planning with little context, the student had the ability to choose? Imagine a student is being bullied, or feeling rejected by their peers; maybe they're struggling with self-esteem, or trying to adapt to a new school, in a new community.

No teacher could possibly be expected to plan a welcome ritual or in-class engagement that includes real-life scenarios that account for each situation. Even if they could, there'd be no way to anticipate students' reactions to those situations. What makes one student sad might make another angry or scared.

There are too many variables.

Now, imagine the teacher had a bank of ready-made (district-approved) content from which they could pull at the outset of class or in a particular moment. Imagine in accessing that content that the student could choose their own path, based on their lived experience. The phrase "real-life" suddenly starts to take on real meaning.
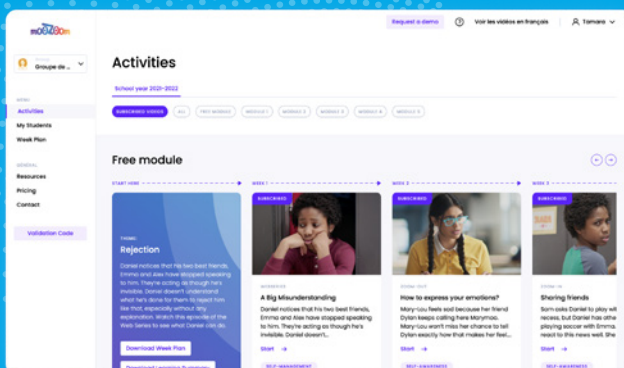
#1 **As you plan your SEL curriculum, look for ready-made tools and resources that your teachers can easily plug & play in the classroom. Be sure those resources account for the many ways that students are likely to feel and react in those situations.**

> " The skills that students need to learn are the very skills that SEL provides — things like reflection, perseverance, and focus. The question isn't whether we can or should teach these skills, but how to do it, especially when we're already swamped trying to meet our academic goals. "
>
> - **Meena Srinivasan**, executive director, Transformative Educational Leadership
>
> Source: **Greater Good magazine**, 2019

Why it's broken:
Most teachers aren't trained psychologists

How to fix it:
Give them tools that are practical & research-based

English teachers aren't trained child psychologists. Science teachers didn't graduate with a degree in SEL.

It's important to remember that, while teachers and staff recognize the importance of SEL in classrooms, most of them have no specialized training. Perhaps even more concerning, coming out of COVID, many of these educators are likely dealing with emotional stresses and challenges themselves.

Despite the best efforts of school counselors and SEL coordinators, it's unfair to expect every member of your frontline team to become an SEL expert overnight. In the throes of a global pandemic, it's also unrealistic to expect them to work through all of their own social-emotional challenges before helping students confront their own issues.

Recall the stat we shared at the outset of this report — while 93% of classroom educators believe SEL is integral to student achievement, just 26% feel prepared to implement their school's SEL curriculum.

The chances of you closing that gap with professional development hours are slim to none.

For your SEL implementation to be effective, your teachers need access to research-backed resources that give them confidence when working with students to address complex feelings and emotions. As **one educator put it**, "SEL is more than just random acts of kindness."

Instead of hours of additional training, what if your school or district did the legwork for them? While teachers are great implementers, they can't be experts in everything. Rather than put the onus on the individual educator to plan standard-based lessons, wouldn't

it be easier, and less risky, if they had a fully vetted, research-based curriculum from which to operate?

There's a lot of talk in schools about setting students up for success. To be sure, the same is true for your teachers and staff.

Rather than challenge your team to develop lesson plans and activities for which they aren't qualified and have no time, look for a curriculum that gives teachers access to what they need. We're not talking about a bundle of activities or personal journals here. That's just more stuff. A full curriculum should include a full slate of research and standards-based activities for different scenarios.
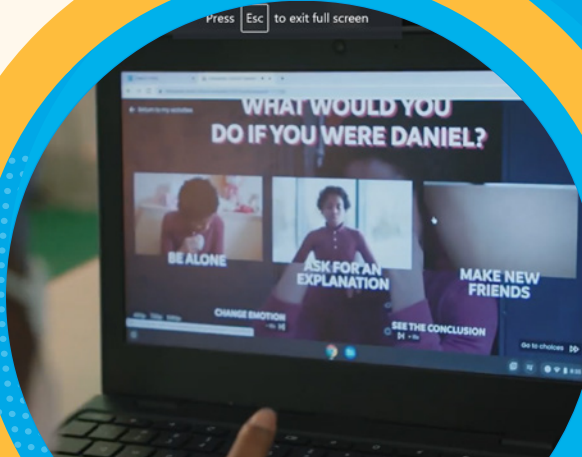
In addition to being easy for teachers to implement and use, your next SEL curriculum should include, at minimum, these five core elements:

1. Pre-built lessons plans — for each week, if necessary

2. Detailed resources for teachers, including guides and discussion points

3. Some form of standards-based assessment to track competencies

4. A dashboard to measure and easily report individual and group progress

5. Resources to communicate with parents and other stake holders

Don't get it wrong: This isn't to suggest that teachers shouldn't be expected to use their professional judgement. Rather the point is that when teachers have a strong set of tools and resources on which to rely, they will feel more confident using that judgement to help students.

#2 As you plan your SEL strategy, ask yourself whether you're asking too much of your teachers and staff. Have you identified research-based curriculum materials that set them up for success?

Press [Esc] to exit full screen

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE DANIEL?

BE ALONE
ASK FOR AN EXPLANATION
MAKE NEW FRIENDS

CHANGE EMOTION

SEE THE CONCLUSION

Why it's broken:
Student engagement is harder than ever

How to fix it:
Make your instructional practices 'student-driven'

When students feel engaged in school, nearly every indicator of student improvement — creativity and expression, academic engagement, critical thinking, social-emotional learning, etc. — goes up.

But research shows student engagement has been heading in the wrong direction for a while. And the pandemic hasn't helped.

In **one study** from EdWeek Research Center, **87%** of teachers reported that students appeared less motivated this year. When they asked students the same questions, **50%** reported feeling less motivated.

As you look for ways to re-engage students this year, it's important to think about what motivates them. While teacher-driven engagement practices are effective, research shows that student-driven engagement practices — where teachers encourage students to take control of their own learning in close collaboration with their peers — is even more impactful.

When you vet SEL activities for your schools and classrooms, make sure you evaluate options that put your students at the center of their own learning, get them talking to each other, and challenge them to make their own choices.

There are many ways to deliver this kind of instruction. One way is through the integration of high-quality cinematic video that engages students in different scenarios, facilitates discussion, and enables them to "choose their own path."

In **one survey**, **92%** of teachers said the strategic use of video increased student satisfaction with classroom lessons; **84%** said they thought it contributed to higher levels of student achievement.

On her **blog N2Y**, general education teacher and college instructor Jennifer Schmidt explains how she uses video-based lessons to illustrate critical concepts.

"When I am teaching a social skill such as anger management, I use movie clips to demonstrate how to implement coping strategies before rising to an anger level where you may not make choices you are proud of later," she writes. "This can be especially helpful for our visual learners who remember the video clip and how sad the character was after throwing a fit and getting into trouble or hurting someone."

Maurice Elias, a Rutgers psychology professor and a co-author of The Educator's Guide to Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement: Social-Emotional Learning in the Classroom, wrote in Edutopia that videos are an efficient way for students and educators to first "see" SEL in context *before* modeling concepts in the classroom.
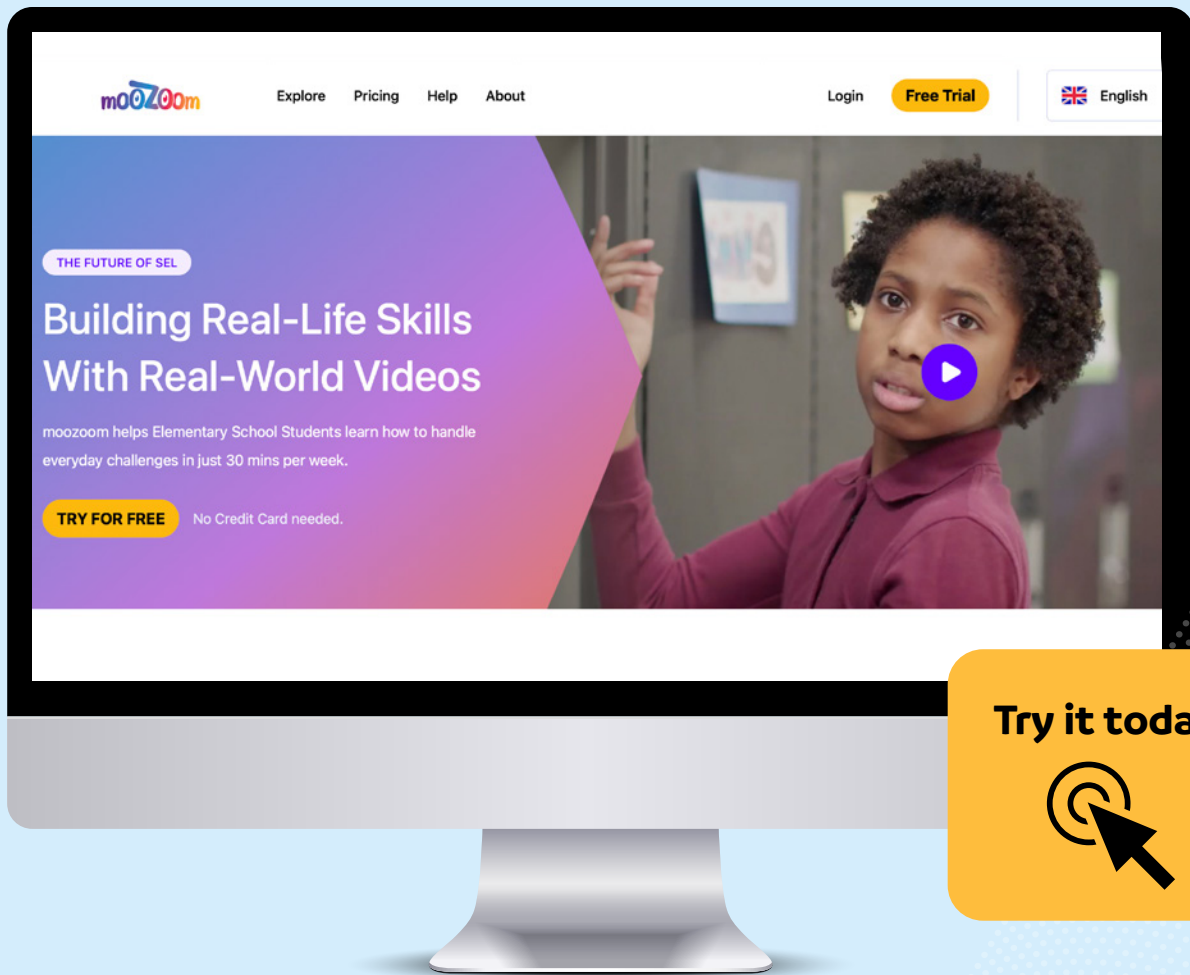
"In my work with SEL in schools for nearly four decades, I have always said that I never have to 'sell' SEL; I only have to 'show' it," he writes. "Once educators see it in action, and especially once they experience kids' reactions to SEL, they almost always understand its value and begin down the road to transforming their classrooms and/or schools."
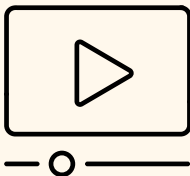

#3 As you develop SEL content for your schools, have you considered the use of ready-made video content that encourages students to take ownership of their own learning?

STUDENT-CENTERED SEL VIDEOS

moozoom offers educators instant access to six ready-made video modules built specifically for the K-6 classroom. Topics include: "Adapting to change," "Bullying," "Accepting 'no,'" "Self-esteem" and "Fear of being judged." **The sixth module, "Rejection," is free.**

WHY CINEMATIC VIDEO?

Recent educational research suggests video is effective for students because:

• It's a medium students are comfortable with outside of school
• It can be replayed to underscore important concepts
• It can be accessed on-demand in classrooms when needed
• It works for students, in class or at home, in different locations (assuming connectivity)

Why it's broken:
Teachers & staff see SEL "as one more thing"

How to fix it:
Invest in resources that save teachers time

Teachers and staff are overstressed and overworked — COVID has only made matters worse.

One **study of more than 7,000 teachers** found that teachers worked an average of 13 hours a week more during the first semester of 2021. **Another study** found that **75%** of teachers reported experiencing job-related stress this year compared to **40%** of workers across other industries.

With everything going on, inside and outside of school, the last thing teachers need right now is "one more thing" on their plates.

The right SEL strategy doesn't just help teachers support students, it saves teachers time. While the jury is still out on the impact of educational technology on student achievement, researchers suggest that innovations that help teachers make better use of their time can have a tremendous impact on staff and student engagement.

A recent **McKinsey & Co. report** estimated that the right technology-based tools could cut in half the amount of time teachers spend lesson planning.

#4 When you look for SEL resources for your classrooms, consider solutions that promise to both engage students and save teachers time. Encourage teachers to reallocate that time savings to other activities that support student learning.

FROM THE REPORT:

Our current research suggests that 20 to 40 percent of current teacher hours are spent on activities that could be automated using existing technology. That translates into approximately 13 hours per week that teachers could redirect toward activities that lead to higher student outcomes and higher teacher satisfaction. In short, our research suggests that existing technology can help teachers reallocate 20 to 40 percent of their time to activities that support student learning.

Source: **McKinsey & Co., 2020**

Why it's broken:
Measuring SEL's impact is hard to do

How to fix it:
Evaluate students individually, case-by-case

"What gets assessed, gets addressed."

It's hard to escape this cliche in K-12 education — and for good reason.

When taxpayers pony up funds for use in schools, school boards and other influencers want to see evidence of impact. Plain and simple. SEL is no exception.

But measuring the impact of SEL on student performance isn't as straight-forward as scores on a standardized test.

When it comes to SEL, students often have very nuanced and specific needs. The best way to assess your program's effectiveness is to have a system whereby you can evaluate students individually, then aggregate that data to highlight broader performance trends at the school or district level.

There are five core competencies that schools look to when evaluating SEL. You know what they are:

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1. Self-awareness
2. Self-management
3. Social awareness
4. Relationship skills
5. Responsible decision-making

While these core competencies are well-known, there are different schools of thought about how to assess SEL. Though CASEL and other organizations offer different frameworks and guides to support these efforts, it's easy to get overwhelmed.

When developing your SEL assessment plan, keep it simple.

The team at **Panorama Education** recommends taking these 5 steps:

1 **Choose the topics you want to measure.** There are close to two-dozen SEL skills and behaviors to choose from. Don't boil the ocean. Identify the ones your school or district wants to measure and put your focus there.

2 **Find out where your students are with a baseline assessment.** There are any number of tools for this. SEL quizzes and/or surveys can be completed by students in minutes.

3 **Analyze the data for trends.** Take a hard look at the information you collect to identify trends and make decisions about how you want to serve students.

4 **Develop your action plan.** Design a plan for improvement based on the data you collect. Then implement that plan across your district.

5 **Evaluate and adjust.** Whatever you system, make sure you have a way to check back in with students and teachers, so that you can make continuous improvements during the year.

#5 **What steps are you taking to help teachers and staff assess students' SEL skills and competencies? Have you considered using a dashboard to help track and measure individual and group SEL goals?**

Sound like a lot? At moozoom, we built a dashboard where teachers and administrators can go to monitor and track individual student progress, while identifying and addressing broader SEL trends.

At the end of the day, for schools, it's all about staying on track and moving forward to help students thrive.

SUPPORT STUDENT

Mental Health

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How to make SEL stick

However you choose to implement SEL in your school or district this year, while there are tools and resources that can help, experts say it's important to note that an effective implementation takes time — and commitment.

At first, many teachers "think of SEL as just gushy, feeling stuff, and it's not just that," Julie Carter, SEL behavior coach in the North East Independent School District in San Antonio, told **Education Week**. For Carter and her team, SEL represents a non-negotiable long-term investment for the district, families and its community at large. "This is the way we're getting it from the bottom up — it's going to take more time for it to get to everyone, but it's going to be so deeply embedded. It's going to stay around longer because it will be part of the process, not just one more initiative."

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