



Excellence Through Social Emotional Learning Network

Request for District Applications

Submit by July 31, 2017

Excellence Through Social Emotional Learning Network

The Excellence through Social-Emotional Learning (exSEL) Network is currently seeking districts across Massachusetts for a yearlong partnership to focus on the design and implementation of policies and practices that promote social-emotional learning (SEL) in order to better prepare all students for college and career. Success in school and life depends on more than academic ability alone. Research shows that social-emotional skills such as self-management, growth mindset,¹ and social competence have a significant impact on students' academic performance and persistence in school, as well as their lifelong health, wealth, and well-being.²

With the support of the ExSEL Network and its partners The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, Teachers21, and Transforming Education—districts will work together to provide educators with the necessary training and tools to help students develop their social-emotional skills. The structure of the network, anticipated to be made up of four to six districts, will provide a community of support where educational leaders can learn from one another, work together toward common goals, and support each other's systemic and practice shifts. By taking a systems approach, small teams of district leaders comprised of key central office personnel (e.g., superintendent) and school level participants (e.g., teachers, principals) will work with the exSEL Network to:

- Establish a solid foundation of knowledge among participants in current research on social emotional learning practice, policy, and research
- Identify specific areas of need in relation to growth mindset and other SEL competencies among students and adult staff and faculty
- Develop skills, structures, and policies that can sustain effective SEL practices over time.
- Guide participating districts in developing change management systems to effectively support and sustain improved SEL practice.

What will it look like?

Districts chosen to participate in the exSEL Network will have access to expert facilitators and trainers, a peer network focused on SEL, and the latest research on a variety of tools, practices, and interventions that support students' social-emotional development. Districts will first conduct a self-assessment and survey key stakeholders to identify and prioritize a specific set of SEL needs and goals. ExSEL will then support district teams in identifying and developing strategies to support students in advancing toward these new goals. Districts will commit to actively participating in a learning community network focused on mutual accountability, resource and knowledge sharing, and continuous improvement efforts.

Rigorous longitudinal research has demonstrated that SEL competencies have a significant impact on students' academic performance as well as their broader life success, as measured by a variety of health, wealth, and well-being indicators in adulthood.

Examples include:

- Growth Mindset
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Self-Efficacy
- Student Agency

The district network will focus on growth mindset as an entry point. Growth mindset is the belief that ability can change as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice. A broad body of research has shown

¹ Students with a **growth mindset** believe that ability can change as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice. By contrast, students with a **fixed mindset** believe that their intelligence and talent are innate traits that don't change.

² For more information on the longitudinal research base showing the impact of social-emotional competencies on students' outcomes, see Chris Gabrieli, Dana Ansel, and Sara Bartolino Krachman, "Ready to Be Counted: The Research Case for Education Policy Action on Non-Cognitive Skills," December 2015, http://www.transformingeducation.org/s/ReadytoBe-Counted_Release.pdf

that what students and adults believe about their own intelligence can affect their effort, engagement, motivation, and achievement as measured by test scores, school grades, passing rate in post-secondary education, and other metrics.³ Focusing on growth mindset as an entry point into the collective work of the network will provide an opportunity for adult participants to foster the mindset that change is possible and also to begin exploring how encouraging a growth mindset amongst students can help improve a wide range of outcomes (both academic and social-emotional).

The exSEL Network is envisioned as a minimum one-year engagement with potential opportunities for districts to extend their work beyond this time frame. Participants will focus on developing growth mindset to create a foundation upon which other social emotional skills, such as self-management, can emerge. Experts in the field will work with participating districts to identify and develop locally-determined goals, and incorporate new strategies into school level practices to better support educators and students in confronting and overcoming both academic and social-emotional challenges.

What are the benefits?

The exSEL network anticipates several short-term and long-term benefits to participating districts. In the short term, participants will discover ways to build capacity to use actionable data to assess further development of students' growth mindset at all grade levels. Assessing these skills and measuring progress over time will enable districts to provide more effective and more targeted SEL supports for students. These efforts will be complemented by a variety of facilitated trainings and leadership coaching sessions to build deep knowledge and skills related to growth mindset and other social-emotional competencies as well as the conditions within schools that foster innovation and best practice around SEL. While specific short-term benefits are dependent on the direction chosen by participants, we know from extensive, longitudinal literature that better developed SEL skills will position children for a healthier and more professionally rewarding life.

I. Network Activities and Commitments:

District-level planning and implementation, including:

- Initiate planning and team-building process involving 4-6 total participants from both central office and in-district schools, resulting in the formation of the ExSEL network. Superintendents, teachers, guidance counselors, and building leaders are highly recommended.
- Conduct a needs assessment to develop locally-determined district-level goals linked to growth mindset, and SEL resources and activities already in place;
- Craft a three-year, cross-district plan with a common, shared aim, based on identified district needs, for chosen school- and classroom-level change ideas and strategies that aim to foster growth mindset and other areas of SEL;
- Engage in professional development opportunities for educators that support implementation of new strategies to address locally-determined SEL needs in district and in schools;
- Learn about a variety of tools available for assessing growth mindset and other SEL competencies;
- Participate in five, half day cross-district meetings, including a beginning kickoff meeting, through the course of the school year, with virtual touchpoints to support team leads.

³ Aronson, J., Fried, C. B., & Good, C. (2002). Reducing the effects of stereotype threat on African American college students by shaping theories of intelligence. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(2), 113-125; Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child development*, 78(1), 246-263; Dweck, C. S., Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. (2011). Academic tenacity. White paper prepared for the Gates Foundation. Seattle, WA.; Yeager, D. S., Walton, G., & Cohen, G. L. (2013). Addressing achievement gaps with psychological interventions. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 94, 62-65.

II. Selection Criteria

There are no restrictions on size, location, or demographics for participating districts; however, exSEL seeks to select a diverse range of schools with respect to each of these factors.

In applying to be a part of the exSEL network, districts must make a full-year commitment, focused on improving social-emotional skills among ALL students in their district (e.g., not a single subgroup or distinct tier of students).

Instructions

Interested districts are invited to submit a proposal in PDF format, and include a short response to the items listed in section III. Interested districts should provide a notice of intent by June 30th via email to info@renniecenter.org. A full application must be submitted by July 31, 2017. Applicants will receive quick notification of their status by August 4, 2017 to help enable planning for the 2017-18 school year.

III. Applications should include:

a. Submittal Letter

Include at least one district contact person—name, phone, and email address—for all follow-up questions and communications related to the application.

b. Background

This section should provide a short description of the district, such as its size, demographics, number of schools, academic performance, etc., and any additional context that might be helpful.

c. List of Proposed SEL District Team Members

This section should provide a proposed list of 4-6 staff members (including name, title/role) to represent the district in the ExSEL network. This team should include, at minimum, the assistant superintendent, as well other central office leadership instrumental in moving forward with implementation efforts, and at least 1-2 members from in-district schools, such as principals, teachers, and guidance counselors.

d. Brief Description of Current Efforts to Improve SEL in District

This section should describe briefly 1) what the district hopes to achieve by improving growth mindset and other social emotional competencies, and 2) a general overview of current efforts to improve SEL in the district (e.g., the use of an SEL curriculum or program and the schools or students included in this program, professional development and training efforts around related areas, such as trauma or self-regulation, coaching from counselors). Districts with minimal (or no) efforts underway to improve SEL will also be considered.

IV. Cost

ExSEL will provide the network with necessary funding, which will include the cost of all services; however, districts are expected to contribute \$5,000 per year to help offset the total cost of these services.

V. Timeline to Start Work

Districts will be notified of their selection decision by August 4, 2017. The network will be notified shortly thereafter with a scope of work and timeline for 2017-2018, beginning with a network kickoff event on September 22, 2017.

Summary of Key Deliverables and/or Dates for Applicants

| | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| District Notice of Intent | June 30, 2017 | Deliver via email to info@renniecenter.org |
| District Application | July 31, 2017 | Deliver via email to info@renniecenter.org |
| Notification of Application Status | Aug. 4, 2017 | |
| District Team Onboarding Meeting | Aug. 7 – Sept. 14 | Date/Time TBD |
| exSEL Network Kickoff Event | Sept. 22, 2017 | Location TBD |

