



## **The CASEL/NoVo Collaborating Districts Initiative: Three-Year Planning Goals and Expectations**

To promote student success in school and in life, CASEL aims to establish SEL programming as an essential part of education for all students. Based on the notion that school districts must play a fundamental role in shaping, supporting, and sustaining SEL programming in schools and classrooms, CASEL has launched a multi-year Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) funded and supported by NoVo Foundation.

### **Goals of the Initiative**

The CASEL Theory of Action states: “Through collaboration, CASEL, the NoVo Foundation, and district leaders can create systemic changes that will impact schools and classrooms in ways that influence students’ social-emotional development and academic performance. Documenting these processes will generate knowledge that can inform future efforts to build systemic support for social and emotional learning in school districts throughout the country.”

The focus of CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative is to help each participating district achieve the following:

- High levels of expertise in SEL among district leaders.
- Implementation of high-quality SEL programming at all schools from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12.
- High-quality, ongoing SEL professional development for school leaders and staff.
- Integration of SEL into the academic curriculum and instruction practices.
- Coordination of SEL with other district initiatives.
- Commitment to SEL among all stakeholders.
- Continuous, data-informed improvement of SEL programming.
- A respectful, collaborative, student-focused culture throughout the district.
- Leadership roles and responsibilities dedicated specifically to systemic SEL implementation.
- Allocation of sustainable resources to support SEL programming.

In partnership with the collaborating districts, CASEL hopes to:

- Build a knowledge base and shared learning about district-level change processes that support high-quality implementation of SEL programming.

- Document the short- and long-term impact of these efforts.
- Create demonstration sites for systemic SEL.

## **CASEL's Role in the Initiative**

***District systems development consultation.*** Each collaborating district will work closely with a senior CASEL district advisor and a SEL specialist. These consultants have extensive experience in facilitating systemic change in large school districts, and they are well-versed in current research and policy relevant to district reform.

***Staff development consultation.*** Because systemic implementation of SEL depends upon the understanding and involvement of individuals at all levels of the district, CASEL will also provide support for professional development. This will include introductory workshops that provide district leaders and staff with an initial orientation to SEL theory, research, and practice as well as assistance in developing coherent, sustainable staff development plans for school leaders and personnel. To begin, CASEL consultants may play a prominent role in delivering training and other professional development services, but these activities will be carried out in close collaboration with district staff who will ultimately take full responsibility.

***Action research approach.*** CASEL's action research approach to supporting school districts is an essential component of the Collaborating Districts Initiative. In all of the work with school districts, CASEL consultants and staff are committed to working alongside district leaders and staff to pursue the goals of the initiative in ways that promote continual inquiry and reflection. Rather than imposing a prescribed set of practices, CASEL intend to engage districts in the process of continually gathering relevant information; reflecting on the impact of current policies, programs, and practices; and making decisions based on available data. Similarly, CASEL will continually refine its own practices based on internal and external feedback.

***Connections to external partners.*** A major strength in CASEL's approach to supporting school districts is our emphasis on linking districts with other external partners who can meet identified needs. CASEL staff and consultants will connect districts with evidence-based program providers, professional organizations, and funders to support the development of SEL programming. CASEL will also broker relationships among the collaborating districts, facilitating a professional learning community and organizing diverse opportunities for collaboration among staff from each district.

***Development of tools for planning and implementation.*** CASEL will develop and refine a variety of tools to support planning, implementation, and monitoring of SEL-related activities in the collaborating districts. These tools will be resources that help district leaders and staff organize their thinking about SEL, gather relevant information, communicate clearly, and monitor progress. They include conceptual frameworks, research and practice briefs, assessments, training materials, planning and monitoring templates, and instructional guides.

***Design and lead the collaboration and learning agenda.*** CASEL will facilitate cross-district learning by convening semi-annual meetings for leaders and periodic opportunities for collaboration among role-alike staff from each collaborative district. The agenda and processes for this work will be continually refined based on experience and feedback from district personnel, CASEL staff, and SEL program providers.

***Facilitate site visits to collaborating districts.*** In addition to providing support to the collaborating districts, CASEL will provide limited support to a number of other affiliated districts. CASEL will assist the collaborating districts in hosting study tours by representatives from the affiliated districts and other interested parties to observe high-quality SEL implementation in action and learn directly from the collaborating districts' experiences.

### **General Expectations for Collaborating Districts**

The invitation to participate in this Initiative comes with both general and specific expectations.

Foremost among the general expectations, each collaborating district is expected to make SEL a high priority for its students and staff. Because CASEL recognizes that it may take some years to make evidence-based, well-implemented SEL a reality for all students in all schools, the expectation is that each district will make a steady, focused, long-term effort to achieve that goal. CASEL also expects that the district's SEL efforts will involve a personal commitment among its top leaders and will be incorporated within district resources and fully integrated with the district's overall vision, strategic plan, support structures, and other school improvement activities.

Second, each collaborating district is expected to join with CASEL and the other participating districts to form a powerful learning community in which the districts learn with and from each other. Since this work must be shaped by its members, its success will require that each district's top leaders invest their time and effort.

A third general expectation is that each district will enter into a genuine partnership with CASEL that involves open and candid communication, collaboration, and mutual learning, including collaborative development of tools and procedures to maximize the potential of the CDI. CASEL also recognizes that the cross-district evaluation that AIR will conduct will succeed only to the extent that it is a collaborative effort to help continuously improve practice as well as document impact. Activities associated with these expectations include:

- Co-planning and facilitation by top district leaders with the on-site work of CASEL's senior consultants and other CASEL personnel.
- Implementation and monitoring of the three-year plan outlined in the implementation proposal submitted to NoVo Foundation.
- Commitment of the superintendent to engage in regular meetings with CASEL staff and consultants.
- Attendance of the superintendent and other top district leaders at CASEL's biannual Forum and at annual cross-district meetings and other opportunities such as a cross-district learning community meeting. Also, participation in periodic cross-district conference calls.
- Co-planning and logistical support for the cross-district evaluation, including cooperation with its data gathering activities, assistance with interpretation of findings, and in-district utilization of those findings to shape subsequent SEL endeavors.
- Preparation of an annual district progress report to NoVo Foundation.

## **NoVo Foundation's Role in the Initiative**

Beginning with the 2011-12 school year, NoVo Foundation has committed to providing each collaborating district with an initial grant of \$125,000 to be used for developing a multi-year SEL implementation plan. Once plans are approved, a grant of \$250,000 per year for three years (\$750,000) will be awarded, contingent on the district continuing to make significant progress toward systemic implementation of high-quality SEL. NoVo Foundation may also host a gathering of local funders to educate them about SEL and the Collaborating District Initiative, with the aim of catalyzing additional financial support beyond the district and NoVo commitment.

### **Sample SEL Programs:**

<http://www.cfchildren.org/programs/ssp/overview/>

<http://www.devstu.org/>

<http://www.morningsidecenter.org/index.html>

<http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>

<http://www.therulerapproach.org>