

4 Steps to Combat Politicization And Win Buy-In for SEL

Social-emotional learning has faced strong pushback recently as the term has been swept up in the divisive politics of the times. But some polling has found that parents—both liberal and conservative—are broadly supportive of students learning in school many of the skills that social-emotional learning teaches.

Providing students with the non-academic skills they need to be successful in school, careers, and life while being mindful of how touchy this once benign topic has become can be a difficult needle for schools to thread.

Steps to follow to help temper—or avoid altogether—politicized pushback to SEL

1

DEFINE | SEL in terms people can understand

Define what SEL is for your community, making sure every single staff member knows what that definition is, and don't use education jargon—such as “multi-tiered systems of support” or “culturally sustaining practices”—when discussing SEL outside of faculty meetings.



2

SEEK | Community input before adopting a program

Seek community input through surveys or townhalls about SEL programming both before and during implementation of a program. Don't wait until SEL is a contentious issue to talk about it, and remember that one-on-one conversations are a powerful means of defusing people's concerns.

3

TAILOR | Your SEL message to local culture and values

Share the community-specific goals of your SEL programming—focusing on the specific skills that SEL teaches students—and tailor your message to the local culture and values. Bring in local leaders from the business community, industry, or military to explain why these skills are important.

4

INCLUDE | Parents as meaningful partners

Acknowledge that parents are kids' first teachers, and that is especially true when it comes to social-emotional learning. Solicit their feedback through surveys and share what's being taught in the classroom through newsletters.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [What Does SEL Mean Anyway? 7 Experts Break It Down](#)
- [5 Mistakes Schools Make When Building SEL Programs](#)
- [Addressing SEL Skepticism: Tips From Education Leaders for Getting Parents on Board](#)