

## WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

*“Diane Staehr Fenner and Mindi Teich’s new book, Social Emotional Learning for Multilingual Learners: Essential Actions for Success, is a masterful addition to their robust body of work in support of multilingual learners. It is a call to action for all educators to address the SEL competencies that support all students, with a focus on the unique needs of multilingual learners, the complexity of their experiences, and the long-standing systematic issues impacting this population. The book is designed for all educators as it provides clear strategies and recommendations for the inclusion of SEL competencies in all our daily work with our students, as it also encourages professionals to become more self-reflective and empathic in our interactions with students and one another.”*

**Diane Howitt**, Executive Director  
New York City Regional Bilingual Education Network (NYC RBERN),  
Fordham University

*“Immense thanks to Diane Staehr Fenner and Mindi Teich for writing this book because the topic is so prevalent, yet few books address the specific social emotional needs of our ML kids and provide professional learning tools for practitioners. Long-term school success is not just about academics, and it’s not just about dealing with ‘learning loss’ or the pandemic effect. This book gives educators, administrators, and school support instructional personnel like school counselors the most comprehensive information, real examples, and actual tools and guidance to best work with our ML students to shape and ensure their well-being.”*

**Giselle Lundy-Ponce**, Director, Educational Rights and  
Social Justice Initiatives and Policy  
American Federation of Teachers

*“This urgently needed book guides educators through a framework of practical ways to integrate equitable SEL instruction for multilingual learners throughout the school day. The real-life scenarios, note-taking tools, checklists, and reflection questions will support educators as they collaborate to thoughtfully and systematically implement the recommendations at a classroom and schoolwide level. All educators and the multilingual learners they serve will benefit from the affirming practices in this book.”*

**Beth Skelton**, Education Consultant  
Educational Consultants, LLC

*“Staehr Fenner and Teich bravely approach the naturally sensitive topic of SEL with simple rationale and actionable techniques that should enable all educators and administrators to provide multilingual learners with the environment to thrive.”*

**Daniel Ward**, Editor  
Language Magazine

*“While social emotional learning has become a hot topic across educational circles, not enough attention has focused on the needs of multilingual learners. Teachers are an essential element in addressing their social emotional needs, but only 30 percent of the professional development related to SEL addresses MLs specifically. Ideally, teachers and administrators will become well-versed in the concepts and processes put forward in this new book. Immigration can offer hope and new opportunities to families seeking a better life, but the process is too often filled with challenges and uncertainties. Diane Staehr Fenner and Mindi Teich’s work helps all educators empower immigrants and their children to truly make the most of those opportunities.”*

**Eleni Pappamihiel**, Professor  
Watson College of Education, University of North Carolina Wilmington

*“A critical extension of the CASEL framework, this book offers educators the most essential understandings of the social and emotional inner lives of multilingual learners, as well as tangible actions they can take to support students in building their SEL competencies. Staehr Fenner and Teich shine a timely light on the need for nuanced and culturally sensitive SEL programs. Whatever your role in a school community, you will find information and ideas that will transform your practice permanently.”*

**April Perkins**, Director of Multilingual Programs  
South Portland School Department

*“Staehr Fenner and Teich have provided a valuable and especially timely resource that centers on the socio-emotional needs of linguistically diverse learners. By engaging in self-reflection and application, individually or as part of a learning community, readers will increase their understanding of terms, definitions, SEL competencies, and essential practices. The practices described are necessary for all educators to recognize, further develop, and support the well-being of their students. Academically robust, healthy, socio-emotionally empowered learning communities are what all students deserve.”*

**Ayanna Cooper**, Author/Consultant  
ACooper Consulting

*“Every time Diane and her colleagues write a book, my practice transforms and levels up. While reading this book, I immediately started revising my lesson and unit plans to integrate SEL. I love frameworks, and this book offers a central framework that guides SEL integration. Each chapter shows us how to delicately design instruction so that life-skill development is not an ‘extra’ responsibility but actually foundational to working with MLs.”*

**Tan Huynh**, Secondary ELD Teacher

*“One of the areas that has received less attention regarding the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students is social emotional learning. Staehr Fenner and Teich’s work, grounded on an advocacy stand, not only provides clear directions to implement SEL competencies for the benefit of MLs but also describes the principles and rationale behind each of these competencies.”*

**David Nieto**, Associate Professor  
Northern Illinois University

*“Diane Staehr Fenner and Mindi Teich combined their decades of field experiences and produced a much needed new resource. They not only make an indisputable claim that social emotional learning for multilingual learners is an essential component of these students’ education, but they also offer a well-constructed framework and concrete, actionable recommendations. A must-have for today’s complex classrooms!”*

**Andrea Honigsfeld**, Author/Consultant, Professor of TESOL Teacher Education  
Molloy University

*“Dr. Staehr Fenner and Ms. Teich’s book amplifies the urgency of understanding how social-emotional learning approaches address the emotional needs of diverse, multilingual learners in our classrooms, schools, and districts. They share practical educator actions to support MLs’ access to each of the five SEL competencies and create space for educators to reflect on their own experiences with SEL as they navigate their unique learning journey. I highly recommend this timely book to all educators looking to elevate their mindset to implement critical considerations, strategies, and tools to intentionally integrate SEL for MLs into their daily instructional practices, accelerate learning opportunities, and foster MLs’ well-being and academic success.”*

**Luis-Gustavo Martinez**, Senior Policy Analyst/Program Specialist  
National Education Association

*“This book provides a much needed comprehensive and holistic ‘deep dive’ into the multilayered topic of social and emotional learning with multilingual learners at the forefront. The authors provide numerous hands-on tools and reflection questions to help schools ensure that their SEL efforts and priorities are equitable, inclusive, culturally and linguistically responsive, trauma-informed, and focused on the well-being of all students within the school community.”*

**Lydia Breiseth**, Director  
Colorín Colorado

*“Social Emotional Learning for Multilingual Learners: Essential Actions for Success could not come at a better time as more and more migrants and asylum seekers are entering our schools. Our emergent multilingual learners face unique challenges when acquiring a new language in a culturally different environment. The strategies in this book will provide them with the necessary tools and skills to effectively navigate those challenges and thrive.”*

**Ron Woo**, Executive Director  
NYS Statewide Language RBERN (Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network)

*“Over the years, when creating professional learning for teachers, I have often referred to books by Diane Staehr Fenner. Her ability to take research and make it useful for practitioners is impressive. In Social Emotional Learning for Multilingual Learners: Essential Actions for Success by Staehr Fenner and Mindi Teich, she does it again. Both authors bring current understanding of issues around social emotional learning to the forefront. How can we teach a student who isn’t in a state of mind to learn? This book helps you go beyond just understanding and empathy. It helps teachers and school staff thoroughly understand how to help multilingual learners reach their fullest potential.”*

**Sam Klein**, Supervisor  
Office of English Learners, Arlington Public Schools

Do not copy, post, or distribute

# Social Emotional Learning for Multilingual Learners

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Do not copy, post, or distribute

*We dedicate this book to the more than 12 million multilingual learners who bring their incredible assets to our classrooms every day. This book is because of and for you.*

# Social Emotional Learning for Multilingual Learners

Essential Actions for Success

Diane Staehr Fenner

Mindi Teich

Foreword by Margarita Calderón

CORWIN

Copyright ©2024 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.



FOR INFORMATION:

Corwin  
A SAGE Company  
2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks, California 91320  
(800) 233-9936  
www.corwin.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.  
1 Oliver's Yard  
55 City Road  
London EC1Y 1SP  
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.  
Unit No 323-333, Third Floor, F-Block  
International Trade Tower Nehru Place  
New Delhi 110 019  
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.  
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12  
China Square Central  
Singapore 048423

---

Vice President and  
Editorial Director: Monica Eckman  
Program Director and Publisher: Dan Alpert  
Acquisitions Editor: Megan Bedell  
Content Development Editor: Mia Rodriguez  
Content Development Manager: Lucas Schleicher  
Senior Editorial Assistant: Natalie Delpino  
Project Editor: Amy Schroller  
Copy Editor: Amy Hanquist Harris  
Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.  
Proofreaders: Heather Kerrigan and  
Lawrence Baker  
Indexer: Integra  
Cover Designer: Scott Van Atta  
Marketing Manager: Melissa Duclos

Copyright © 2024 by Diane Staehr Fenner and Mindi Teich

All rights reserved. Except as permitted by U.S. copyright law, no part of this work may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

When forms and sample documents appearing in this work are intended for reproduction, they will be marked as such. Reproduction of their use is authorized for educational use by educators, local school sites, and/or noncommercial or nonprofit entities that have purchased the book.

All third-party trademarks referenced or depicted herein are included solely for the purpose of illustration and are the property of their respective owners. Reference to these trademarks in no way indicates any relationship with, or endorsement by, the trademark owner.

Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Fenner, Diane Staehr, author. | Teich, Mindi, author.

Title: Social emotional learning for multilingual learners : essential actions for success / Diane Staehr Fenner, Mindi Teich.

Description: Thousand Oaks, California : Corwin, [2024] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023057318 | ISBN 9781071895672 (paperback) | ISBN 9781071895689 (epub) | ISBN 9781071895702 (epub) | ISBN 9781071895696 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Affective education—United States. | Multilingual education—United States. | Multilingualism in children—United States. | Social learning—United States. | English language—Study and teaching—Foreign speakers—United States.

Classification: LCC LB1072 .F47 2024 |  
DDC 371.102/4—dc23/eng/20240131  
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023057318>

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

24 25 26 27 28 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DISCLAIMER: This book may direct you to access third-party content via Web links, QR codes, or other scannable technologies, which are provided for your reference by the author(s). Corwin makes no guarantee that such third-party content will be available for your use and encourages you to review the terms and conditions of such third-party content. Corwin takes no responsibility and assumes no liability for your use of any third-party content, nor does Corwin approve, sponsor, endorse, verify, or certify such third-party content.



# Contents

---

Foreword	xi
<i>Margarita Calderón</i>	
Acknowledgments	xiii
About the Authors	xv
Who Should Read This Book	xvii
Chapter Overview	xxi
<b>1</b> WHY SEL FOR MLs MATTERS	1
<b>2</b> THE SEL FRAMEWORK FOR MLs	27
<b>3</b> FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO SELF-AWARENESS	59
<b>4</b> FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO SELF-MANAGEMENT	91
<b>5</b> FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO SOCIAL AWARENESS	125
<b>6</b> FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	157
<b>7</b> FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	187



TAKING THE NEXT STEPS TO IMPLEMENT  
SEL WITH MLs

213

References

247

Index

255



For downloadable resources  
please visit the companion website.  
[resources.corwin.com/SELforMLs](https://resources.corwin.com/SELforMLs)

Do not copy, post, or distribute

# Foreword

---

by Margarita Calderón

Student well-being and mental health are two ever-growing preoccupations for teachers and administrators. Many educators also realize that social emotional learning (SEL) is a positive way to help students become more in tune with themselves and their surroundings. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has found that 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.

As a growing student group, multilingual learners (MLs) need social emotional support as they strive to fit in with peers, learn every subject in a new language, and maneuver within the context of a different schooling environment. When SEL is not addressed, identity, safety, and students' sense of belonging suffer, and their learning and academic achievement are negatively impacted.

Mental health issues are plaguing students in general, but the hardships experienced by multilingual learners compound the impact on their mental health. Newcomers or immigrant children might be experiencing homelessness, recent traumatic experiences, and scarce resources such as food, clothing, and housing. Yet they tend to be reluctant to share their challenges, and sometimes educators are reluctant to ask. Fortunately, Dr. Diane Staehr Fenner and Ms. Mindi Teich's book takes a deep dive into the way SEL approaches can help address the emotional needs of diverse multilingual learners.

One group of students, long-term English learners (LTELs), are students who have been in our schools for six years or more and are still unable to achieve the academic language and language proficiency scores needed to be reclassified and exit from English language development (ELD) services.

Each year they are in school, LTELs' self-esteem diminishes if they are unable to exit their ELD status. Self-awareness of this persistent hurdle may damage their willingness and tenacity to keep on trying to do better in school. This is perhaps the reason why so many LTELs drop out of high school instead of graduating. The lack of quality evidence-based instruction infused with social emotional learning has most likely been the barrier (Calderón & Montenegro, 2021). In the studies reported in the Calderón and

Montenegro book, we identified multiple dimensions in which SEL competencies aligned with teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension. We emphasized the importance of SEL as the catalyst for creating a learning community that is inclusive, engaging, and values the wealth of experiences and abilities inherent among these diverse learners. We emphasized the need to explicitly teach SEL skills daily so that students work effectively in pairs, triads, or teams to practice and hone their language, literacy, and social and emotional skills in a safe learning environment.

A whole-school approach that is designed for and embraces diversity highlights MLs' assets and helps all educators in the school see how these talented students have been historically underserved and historically unrecognized (Calderón et al., 2023). The whole-school approach centers on MLs' development of skills that enable them to thrive in a learning context, to regulate emotions, to navigate across cultures, and to form healthy relationships.

What is impressive about Dr. Staehr Fenner and Ms. Teich's book is how they make connections between mental health issues and well-being of MLs—a topic that has not been addressed as thoroughly up to now. Although mental health is not the focus of this book, teachers want to know what to do to help MLs and newcomers. This book offers teachers, counselors, psychologists, and administrators practical strategies and tools to integrate SEL into their instructional practice to foster MLs' well-being and academic success.

Their book also addresses CASEL's core SEL competencies and shares ideas on how to help MLs learn skills to manage their emotions, set and achieve goals, develop healthy identities, feel and show empathy, and maintain positive relationships. The authors share nuanced considerations that are unique for MLs in each competency. Then, they share practical educator actions to support MLs' access to each of the five competencies. The chapters offer opportunities for educators to reflect on their own experiences with SEL and model specific strategies for supporting SEL in their work with multilingual learners and their families.

In essence, this book is a must-read because it complements and expands on a small number of books about SEL for MLs by adding educator actions that all stakeholders in a school can leverage to create a climate in which MLs are valued.

# Acknowledgments

---

This book was years in the making. From an initial idea Mindi had to explore SEL more in depth for MLs to Diane saying, “Hey, this topic would make a great book!” a multitude of people lent their expertise to make the dream of this book a reality. Here, we acknowledge a few and recognize there are also others who inspired us or contributed in some way.

We have partnered with Corwin as our publisher since 2014 and treasure the many professionals we have had the pleasure to work with. Dan Alpert, publisher and program director, was enthusiastically on board with the content of this book from the very beginning. We will forever appreciate his quiet guidance and gently probing questions that enabled this book to be the best version of itself. We will miss Dan after his retirement from Corwin and wish him the very best as he continues to impact lives and inspire others. We are so glad that Megan Bedell, acquisitions editor, came home to Corwin and back into our lives just as we were brainstorming ideas for this book. From our lunch in New York City as the world began opening up again to multiple conversations about the book’s topic, we are immensely grateful to have collaborated with her on this title and look forward to what’s to come. We would like to acknowledge Lucas Schleicher, senior content development editor, for his tireless expertise and keen eye that brought the look and feel of the book to life while also keeping us on track with the not-so-exciting minutiae involved with publishing a book. Thank you to Melissa Duclos, senior marketing manager, who first schooled us in the local beverages in Louisville and always brings a creative lens that captures the essence of this book. Thank you for your guidance in sharing this book with the world. We would also like to express our gratitude to longtime Corwin collaborator and friend Dr. Margarita Calderón for writing a foreword that captures the sense of urgency around SEL for MLs that undergirds the entire book. We appreciate your expertise in this area in addition to the wealth of knowledge you bring in the field of ML education.

We witnessed so many exemplary approaches to integrating SEL out in schools, and we would like to heartily thank several staff in Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland for their ongoing collaboration, partnership, and support of our work to highlight the amazing SEL for MLs practices we see every day in MCPS classrooms. We first recognize Nicole Sosik, director of the Office of School Support and Well-Being; Tamara Hewlett, director, Department of English Learners & Multilingual Education; and Sonja Bloetner, English language development supervisor, Department of

English Learners & Multilingual Education. In addition, we give a big shout-out to Cary Dimmick, Gaithersburg High School principal, and Michael Green, staff development teacher. From Briggs Chaney Middle School, we extend a heartfelt thank you to Dr. Shawaan Robinson, principal, Abby Hendrix, staff development teacher, and Angela Norwood, wellness teacher. We would also like to recognize Galway Elementary School and Page Elementary School for their integration of SEL with MLs that sparked some ideas for this book. We extend our thanks to Karla Velez for sharing her students' work at Gaithersburg High School and Irene Julian for allowing us to share an SEL practice she embeds at Galway Elementary School. In addition to these MCPS educators, you will see the work of other teachers cited within this book's pages. Thank you to Lauren Binkley, Karlana Mayfield, and Madison Lindgren from Metro Nashville Public Schools and Renee Wilson from Jefferson County Public Schools for the wonderful examples of the SEL work they are undertaking with MLs.

We could not have written this book without the unwavering support and skills our team at SupportEd bring. Thank you to Shannon Smith for reviewing chapter drafts, providing guidance on the structure of the book, checking references, and lending a hand with the neuroplasticity lesson in Chapter 8. Sydney Snyder, we really appreciate your reading of our initial chapters and giving us your input on what worked and what needed to be revised. We are so grateful that we were able to bounce our ideas off Shannon and Sydney. Even with solid content, it takes so much more to truly bring a book to life. To that end, we would like to give Michele Iris a huge thank-you for making our book so much more visually appealing through her graphics and collaborating closely with us and Corwin to lend her expertise and vision on the design of the book while also juggling many more marketing responsibilities. Jasmine Singh, we have never seen a computer with so many tabs open! We appreciate all the detailed work you did on graphics, images, and preliminary copyediting of our manuscript. We are amazed at how you remember every last detail. Thank you also to Jasmine's talented daughter Rasna for her moving identity portrait. We also deeply appreciate our consultant Jessica Fundalinski's support with the literature reviews that laid the solid groundwork for our book's chapters. In addition to these individuals, we would like to recognize our entire team at SupportEd for their tireless flexibility, patience, and grace in helping us bring this book from conception to fruition. Thank you to Diane Choi, Tamara Echols, Meghan Gregoire-Smith, and Galen Murray for being an amazing, talented team. We could not be more fortunate to collaborate with you each day.

Next, we would like to acknowledge the role our families played in supporting our work on this book. Diane thanks her husband David and children Zoe, Maya, and Carson and honors her deceased parents August and Jean Staehr's memory. Mindi thanks her parents, Reba and Herb Kushner, her husband Rob, and children Maxwell, Hayley, and Zachary. As we witness our children hone their SEL skills and head off into the world, we are forever grateful for all they have taught us.

# About the Authors

---



**Diane Staehr Fenner**, PhD, is the president of SupportEd (SupportEd.com), a woman-owned small business located in the Washington, DC, metro area that she founded in 2011. Dr. Staehr Fenner and SupportEd are dedicated to empowering multilingual learners and their educators. Dr. Staehr Fenner leads her team to provide ML professional development, coaching, technical assistance, and curriculum and assessment support to school districts, states, organizations, and the U.S. Department of

Education. Prior to forming SupportEd, Dr. Staehr Fenner was an English language development (ELD) teacher, dual-language assessment teacher, and ELD assessment specialist in Fairfax County Public Schools, VA. She speaks German and Spanish and has taught in Berlin, Germany, and Veracruz, Mexico. Dr. Staehr Fenner grew up on a dairy farm in central New York State and is a proud first-generation college graduate. This is the eighth book she has written on ML education (and counting), with other titles that include *Unlocking Multilingual Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible*, *Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners: Tools for Equity*, and *Advocating for English Learners: A Guide for Educators*. She is a frequent keynote speaker on ML education at conferences across North America. She earned her PhD in multilingual/multicultural education at George Mason University and her MAT in TESOL at the School for International Training. You can connect with her by email at [Diane@SupportEd.com](mailto:Diane@SupportEd.com) or on Twitter/X and LinkedIn at [@DStaehrFenner](https://www.linkedin.com/company/dstaehrfenner).

Learn more about bringing Diane Staehr Fenner to your school or district at [SupportEd.com](https://SupportEd.com).



**Mindi Teich**, MEd, is a multilingual learner coach with SupportEd. Ms. Teich has been an advocate for multilingual learners and their teachers for over 20 years. She began her career as an ELD teacher in DC Public Schools (DCPS), where she worked with students in pull-out, push-in, and co-teaching environments. While still teaching, she worked with district staff to develop and implement training on collaborative practices for classroom and ELD teachers.

Later, as part of the DCPS Language Acquisition Division, Ms. Teich spent 10 years providing professional development and on-site coaching to DCPS teachers who worked with MLs. She focused primarily on supporting literacy development for MLs and helped develop district guidance for working with MLs during the literacy block. Just prior to joining SupportEd, she worked as a coach and coordinator of a pilot project, Together Is Better, supporting co-teaching in the School District of Philadelphia. Upon joining SupportEd, Ms. Teich has continued to provide coaching and professional development to school districts in Pennsylvania. As a coach, she models lessons, co-teaches alongside teachers, and encourages reflective conversations with teachers and administrators. In addition to her work in schools, Ms. Teich presents often at conferences on topics related to ML education. She earned her master's in education at Marymount University. You can connect with her by email at [Mindi@SupportEd.com](mailto:Mindi@SupportEd.com) or on Twitter/X at [@MindiTeich](https://twitter.com/MindiTeich).

Learn more about bringing Mindi Teich to your school or district at [SupportEd.com](https://SupportEd.com).



# Who Should Read This Book

We wrote this book not only with multilingual learners in mind but also the adults who work every day to ensure students have a safe, inclusive, and engaging learning environment. Regardless of your role in your school building or district, you can use the research, reflection opportunities, and activities in this book to enrich MLs' social emotional learning, either by working with students directly or by supporting teachers and other professionals in the building who work with them. Figure I.1 outlines some examples of the expertise of readers who work in different roles and offers suggestions about how each might engage with this book. While some of you may choose to read the book independently, you may also want to think about how your perspective, unique skills and expertise, and newly acquired knowledge could enhance the planning and instruction your colleagues are doing in support of MLs. As you read through the table in Figure I.1, also consider with whom you might collaborate in order to bring in additional expertise that will further enhance the social emotional learning opportunities for MLs.

**FIGURE I.1** ● Professional Role, Expertise, and How This Book Can Support Your Work

READER'S PROFESSIONAL ROLE	KEY EXAMPLES OF EXPERTISE	HOW THIS BOOK CAN SUPPORT YOUR WORK
Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional leadership</li> <li>• Schoolwide strategic planning to achieve goals</li> <li>• Building and supporting positive school culture</li> </ul>	As you work through the reflection questions and activities in each of the chapters, think about how you can share key ideas with your school leadership team and teachers in PLCs or school-based professional learning sessions and/or book studies.
Content teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content knowledge</li> <li>• Pedagogy and instructional strategies aligned with your content area</li> <li>• Designing and implementing assessments appropriate for grade level and content area</li> </ul>	We provide several opportunities for you to think about and reflect specifically on the MLs in your classroom. The tools and strategies in each chapter are practical and are designed so you can implement them immediately to support MLs with skills in each SEL competency in your content area.

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

READER'S PROFESSIONAL ROLE	KEY EXAMPLES OF EXPERTISE	HOW THIS BOOK CAN SUPPORT YOUR WORK
ELD teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge of process of language acquisition and development</li><li>• Pedagogy and instructional strategies that promote language development</li><li>• Cultural competency</li></ul>	The tools and strategies we share are adaptable and will be applicable to your work integrating content and language development for MLs, whether you pull out, co-teach, or work with small groups or an entire class. The reflection questions will guide you to think intentionally about how the SEL competencies relate to MLs in your context.
Instructional coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches that align with educational standards and goals</li><li>• Data analysis and interpretation</li><li>• Adult learning methodology</li></ul>	As you read through the research, activities, and tools, think about which will connect with the educators you support. You may find some parts of the book apply to your entire school, while others will resonate with specific educators and classrooms.
School counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Counseling techniques to support a wide range of student academic, social, and emotional needs</li><li>• Academic guidance and postsecondary planning</li><li>• Crisis intervention and support</li></ul>	The discussions, activities, and tools in the book can be used to support one-on-one, small-group, or whole-class lessons that address a range of academic and social emotional needs across grade levels. Many of the tools and activities suggest language supports and scaffolds that can enhance your lessons with MLs, while at the same time benefitting non-MLs.
Special education teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Laws, regulations, and rights of students in relation to special education services</li><li>• Differentiated and adapted instruction</li><li>• Assessments and evaluations to identify and support learning needs</li></ul>	You can use and adapt the tools and strategies to meet the specific needs of the students you work with and the learning environment in which you teach. As you respond to reflection questions and complete the activities, focus in on the MLs on your caseload and consider ways to apply your new learning so you can be intentional with instruction for MLs.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We know that there is a lot of information to read through and process in this book. And we also know that you are busy, both in and outside of school. To help guide you through the book, we provide reflection questions to encourage you to periodically stop and reflect on your learning. We hope that you will take advantage of the spaces provided to respond in writing to prompts and activities, but we also encourage you to highlight, annotate, take notes, add stickies, draw, and do whatever you need so your experience reading this book is truly your own.

We are also strong advocates of talking about learning and engaging with colleagues. We know that discussions help us clarify our own thinking, hear new perspectives, honor others' expertise, and raise new questions. To take your learning a step further, we encourage you to use this book, maybe choosing just a section or a chapter, in PLC meetings or as a grade-level, department, or schoolwide book study. Perhaps you will choose to collaborate with just one colleague to get started. With the differentiated tasks and examples spanning grade levels and content areas, you will be able to read, apply your learning with students or colleagues, and then come back together to discuss, compare experiences, and plan next steps. We also hope you draw from and adapt the materials in this book to create your own turn-around professional learning for colleagues. Finally, we encourage you to connect with others who are interested in this topic on social media using the hashtag #SELforMLs.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Do not copy, post, or distribute

# Chapter Overview

---

## CHAPTER 1: WHY SEL FOR MLs MATTERS

---



Chapter 1 highlights our own sense of the urgent need for intentional social emotional learning (SEL) for multilingual learners (MLs). We explain what we have been noticing in classrooms, schools, and our own lives that compelled us to write this book. We share information about who we mean by the term “MLs” and where they fit in to the data and trends in student mental health in the United States. We also define SEL in this chapter, explore what it is and what it isn’t, and underscore its high level of priority alongside some common misunderstandings. We begin to unpack the role of culture, which we will continue to explore further in later chapters, especially as it impacts MLs’ academic performance, well-being, and social emotional outcomes. We conclude the chapter with some tools designed to help you begin to think about integrating SEL for MLs in your context.

## CHAPTER 2: THE SEL FRAMEWORK FOR MLs

---



In this chapter, we introduce you to our SEL for MLs framework and our thinking that led to its development. We share a definition and description of each of the five SEL competencies in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) SEL framework: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. Following this, for each of CASEL’s SEL competencies, we describe considerations unique to MLs and practical actions you can take to foster MLs’ access to the skills associated with the competency. You will have ample opportunities to reflect on the new information provided in the chapter, as well as SEL strengths, needs, and priorities you have noticed in your own context. We close out the chapter by discussing the essential role ML families will play as you plan and implement SEL in your context.

## CHAPTER 3: FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO SELF-AWARENESS

---



Chapter 3 is the first of five chapters dedicated to deeper discussion of a single SEL competency; the chapter establishes the structure that each of the next four chapters will follow. This chapter focuses on the first CASEL social emotional learning competency, Self-Awareness, and includes a deeper explanation of ML Considerations for this competency, including MLs' connections to collectivist cultures and their potential discomfort in speaking about their individual strengths or using the language of self-awareness that might be expected in U.S. schools. We also examine some systemic and programmatic considerations as they relate to MLs' access to self-awareness. We then explore research that highlights unique factors for MLs that may impact their understanding of and expression of their self-awareness, including the significant role of culture. You will read about how culture shapes a sense of identity, influences the language used to describe self-awareness, and impacts the acceptance of a growth mindset. We identify four Educator Actions: validate MLs' cultures and linguistic assets, support MLs with the language of self-awareness, model positive self-talk and a growth mindset, and create scaffolded lessons that include opportunities for MLs to demonstrate their strengths. We provide practical tools or strategies for each of these actions and ample space for your application and self-reflection.

## CHAPTER 4: FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO SELF-MANAGEMENT

---



In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the CASEL SEL competency of Self-Management. In discussing the ML Considerations for this competency, we highlight the significance of social norms and MLs' potential lack of familiarity with the dominant culture's expectations. In addition, we discuss MLs' possible impacts from trauma and the disconnects MLs may experience between home and school around expectations and goal setting. We also share some insights into school- or district-level system and program features within the context of self-management. You will have much to explore and reflect on throughout our research section of this chapter, including how stress and trauma affect the brain and ultimately self-management and the various ways culture intersects with self-management. We discuss four Educator Actions that will support MLs in this competency: directly teach social norms, teach students to name and identify emotions, teach a range of strategies for MLs to manage their emotions, and collaborate with MLs and their families to set and monitor goals. For each educator action, we share a tool or strategy that you can immediately implement in your context.

## CHAPTER 5: FOSTERING MLs’ ACCESS TO SOCIAL AWARENESS

---



Chapter 5 will unpack the third CASEL SEL competency, Social Awareness. In this chapter, you will read about MLs’ potential for understanding and empathizing with others as well as their unique capacity to navigate between cultures. We will consider how systems and programs at the school or district level may impact MLs’ access to skills in this competency.

You will explore the concept of empathy in depth and consider the factors that make this concept so complex for MLs. In addition, you will consider the significance of the dominant culture in understanding social awareness, as well as the role of multicultural texts. Once again, we will describe four actions educators can take to enhance MLs’ capacity to build on their strengths in social awareness: create a welcoming environment; make use of diverse texts and materials; discuss and model empathy, including what it might look like in other cultures; and teach and model expectations for academic conversations so MLs have the opportunity to share their perspectives. After discussing each Educator Action, we share tools and strategies that you will be able to use to support MLs to build and strengthen their skills in social awareness.

## CHAPTER 6: FOSTERING MLs’ ACCESS TO RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

---



In Chapter 6, we focus on Relationship Skills, the fourth CASEL SEL competency. Throughout this chapter, you will see how both teacher–student and student–student relationships are essential for MLs’ academic outcomes and general well-being. We will discuss considerations that acknowledge challenges that may arise when MLs with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds communicate and attempt to develop relationships with English-speaking teachers and non-MLs. In addition, we explore how programmatic structures may impact MLs’ ability to build relationships. Throughout the chapter, you will reflect on your own relationships with MLs in your context and think about how to apply your new learning to effectively strengthen these relationships. To further support relationship skills for MLs, we recommend four Educator Actions that we will discuss in more depth in the chapter: identify one staff member for each ML who will actively build a relationship; support, encourage, and affirm students’ ways of communicating; teach about nonverbal communication; and model, practice, and scaffold self-advocacy for MLs. Each Educator Action is accompanied by a tool or strategy you can use to support your work with MLs in this competency.

## CHAPTER 7: FOSTERING MLs' ACCESS TO RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

---



In Chapter 7, we discuss the final CASEL SEL competency, Responsible Decision-Making. We examine several ML Considerations for this competency that may impact MLs' perception of caring and constructive choices, including potential uncertainty about social norms and possible experiences with inequity, trauma, and the stress of acculturation. We also explore how MLs' sense of agency impacts how they make decisions, as well as how systemic and programmatic structures may be impacting MLs' ability to engage in responsible decision-making. You will reflect on research and respond to scenarios and examples that will help you think about your own work with MLs. To foster MLs' access to responsible decision-making skills, we suggest four Educator Actions: elicit and validate MLs' views of constructive and caring choices, use intentional student grouping to foster interactions that support decision-making, teach the language for explaining their rationale, and model and practice making informed decisions. We provide examples and tools that will equip you to move forward with MLs' decision-making skills.

## CHAPTER 8: TAKING THE NEXT STEPS TO IMPLEMENT SEL WITH MLs

---



In this final chapter, we want to prepare you to take the next steps in integrating SEL for MLs and keep you moving forward. We include several tools and examples that will help you reflect, prioritize, and problem solve. We share tools and templates to support lesson and unit planning and overall goal setting for SEL implementation. In addition, we provide a case study as an example for how you can use talking points and a five-step advocacy framework to advocate for your MLs' SEL. We also make recommendations for implementing professional learning that ensures all staff in your school or district are aware of considerations around the work of SEL for MLs. Finally, we advocate for including MLs themselves in decisions that involve SEL through the use of student advisory groups. We conclude the chapter by sharing our complete SEL for MLs framework and our final thoughts.



## CHAPTER 1

---

# Why SEL for MLs Matters



*iStock.com/mikedabell*



At a large suburban high school, students were feeling stressed out in the spring with state content assessments, Advanced Placement (AP) tests, and final exams looming large. Some support staff arranged to bring in two adorable alpacas for students to pet during their lunch period to reduce students' stress and anxiety as well as promote the importance of mental health. The school year had been marked by many challenges, including an uptick in student absenteeism, students being distracted by their electronic devices during classroom instruction, and a decreased sense of in-person social connection among peers. At the event, students formed large crowds in order to take selfies with the animals that they could share on social media. All the

while, many students who did not feel a sense of belonging at school, including many multilingual learners (MLs), chose not to participate.



What is your reaction to this story? What does it illustrate about social emotional learning (SEL) for MLs?

---

---

---

---

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter will convey a sense of urgency for the need for SEL for multilingual learners. It will include relevant research on SEL for all students as well as SEL specifically for MLs, the changing demographics in our schools, and the important role that SEL plays in teaching and learning. The chapter will examine what SEL is, what SEL is not, and will lay the groundwork for why SEL is essential right now for MLs. It will discuss the heightened need for SEL to meet MLs' unique needs due to trends in student well-being, a shift in priorities in K–12 schools, and an awareness of why SEL is crucial for MLs' success and sense of belonging in schools.



What do you hope to learn from this chapter? Set your intention here.

My intention in reading this chapter is to \_\_\_\_\_




---

---

---

Since we recognize we will be presenting a good amount of material in this chapter, including research, we've developed an SEL for MLs note-taking tool (Figure 1.1) for you to jot down key ideas you've learned, your reaction to these ideas, and implications for your context.

**FIGURE 1.1** • Chapter Idea Note-Taking Tool

KEY IDEA 	MY REACTION 	IMPLICATIONS FOR MY CONTEXT 

## WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

We decided to write this book to ensure that MLs are thoughtfully included in SEL instruction. Here, we'll share three perspectives that contributed to our desire to write this book. Over the past few years as ML coaches, we have witnessed teachers who have done a magnificent job engaging their MLs, making them feel welcome, and taking the extra care to ensure their learners were an integral part of the school community. It has been inspiring to watch these teachers in action, and we have seen MLs grow by leaps and bounds in learning content and language, strengthening relationships, and increasing in confidence and self-esteem. It is so exciting to see when MLs

feel comfortable enough to take risks with grade-level content, are empowered to set goals, are in tune with their emotions, and speak up for themselves as self-advocates—especially if they are also developing their English skills. At the same time, we have also seen MLs who appear to be withdrawn, disengaged, and checked out in the classroom. As educators, we take it personally when we see a student not living up to their immense potential.

Zooming out to look at the wider context for this work on a national level, we are keenly aware that, after their families, school may likely be the community second in line in terms of importance to students. In addition, as community involvement lessens as a whole across the United States, it seems schools are being asked to do more and more to fill in gaps and create a sense of belonging that places of worship and civic engagement once held for some individuals. Beyond the outsized role that schools are asked to play to foster students' well-being, students are facing more stress than ever. The constant drip of social media, comparisons to others, pressure to achieve academically, experiences with racial injustice, and uncertainty about the future all add up to sources of unease in many students' lives. Couple our more granular classroom observations with our awareness of what has been happening with student development and our social fabric as a whole, and we felt compelled to contribute to the conversation.

Finally, possibly our most important reason for writing this book is that we are moms—each of us has three adolescent children. Prior to the pandemic, we would swap stories about challenges our children faced in school systems that felt increasingly more academically competitive and less focused on our kids' well-being. We recognized that we had privileges that included being white, fluency in English, knowledge of how school systems work through our previous roles as teachers and administrators, and the resources to allow us to advocate for our kids as well as help support them at home. We would often discuss how challenging it is when MLs face these same pressures and then some—possibly dealing with trauma, relocation, financial instability, cultural dissonance between home and school, and of course the immense challenge of learning content in an additional language. We knew that even though our plates were already beyond full collaborating with educators of MLs and with our own family lives, we felt we needed to offer our insights on how our enhanced vision for SEL can help put MLs on a path for academic success and an improved sense of well-being. We were ready to take essential actions.

## **SEL FOR MLs AND OUR CORE BELIEFS**

---

In addition to what we have seen when collaborating with teachers, we have observed as well as read about many school districts implementing SEL practices in a one-size-fits-all approach, not taking into account MLs' unique strengths and needs. With the numbers of MLs increasing as the fastest-growing group in U.S. schools, it is imperative to ensure educators are intentional about including MLs in their SEL practices. Beyond the sheer and

increasing number of MLs, including newcomers, it is crucial to know what is unique about MLs on a personal level and how SEL practices must be inclusive of them. To that end, SEL is woven into our newly updated core beliefs about ML education, which follow in Figure 1.2 (Staehr Fenner et al., 2024).

**FIGURE 1.2** ● Our Core Beliefs



We have updated our core beliefs, originally written in 2017, to reflect our learning about MLs and their educators over the past few years. With the revised beliefs, we highlighted the importance of integrating peer learning and authentic conversations into instruction and stressed that student well-being was just as important as academic achievement. All of these updates have direct ties to SEL for MLs, and these core beliefs also underscore the role SEL plays in the educational lives of MLs. Despite all the losses we have suffered, the past few years have given us an unexpected opportunity to reflect on the current state of education to do better by our students.

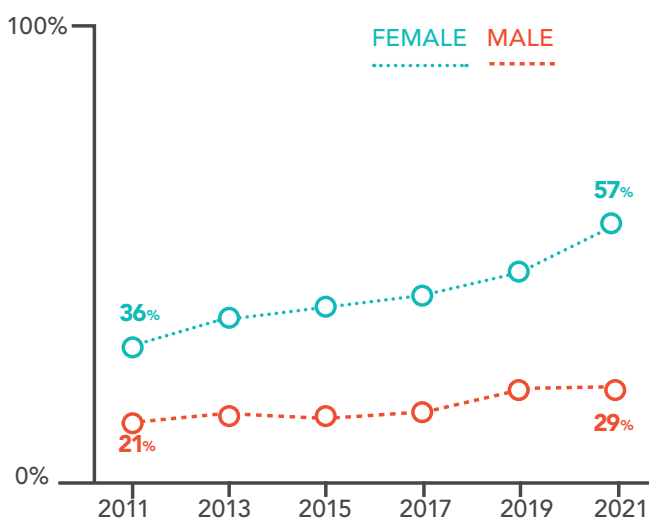
## URGENCY FOR THIS BOOK

We are mindful of the extra initial lift educators must engage in to implement SEL for MLs. Through our collaboration with educators in districts across the country, we know that nearly everyone seems to have one thing in common: Teachers are experiencing unprecedented amounts of stress and pressure to bring their students out of “learning loss.” We are also well aware that MLs faced many additional challenges prior to the pandemic when compared to their monolingual peers. We also know that more teachers than ever before have given serious thought to leaving the profession. In addition, while MLs bring many strengths to their schools, they also can most effectively engage with content when teachers implement scaffolds and supports, which require extra time, collaboration, and planning (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017; Staehr Fenner et al., 2024). We recognize that the extra effort teachers will need to make to integrate SEL for MLs, in addition to scaffolding instruction for MLs, will result in students who feel more at ease in their classrooms, who enjoy closer relationships with their teachers and peers, and who are better positioned to learn. In terms of the urgency of SEL for ML students, just like our alpaca story, our good intentions are not enough. We will examine research findings which speak to the need for SEL for MLs framed through the many benefits well-planned SEL can bring to students.

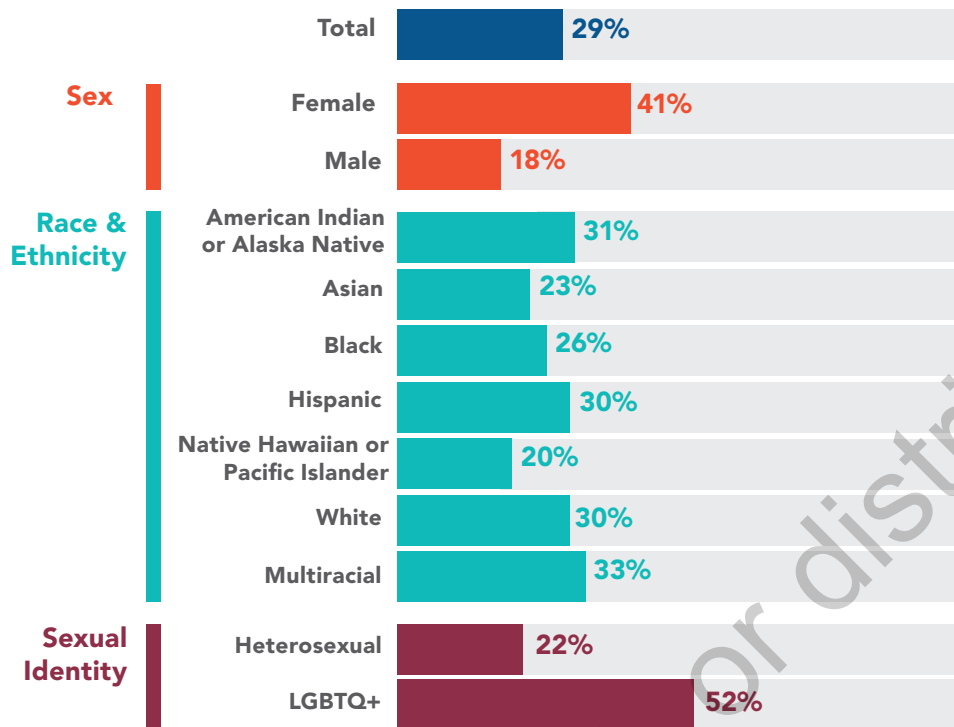
## SNAPSHOT OF U.S. HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ MENTAL HEALTH

Before we examine research about SEL for MLs in K-12, let’s first let the following three pieces of data sink in to provide a context for how adolescent students in general are feeling in U.S. schools. In the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey report (2021), there were several trends and findings that we found to be extremely worrisome. In Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5, we provide you with three data sets to reflect on related to sadness, poor mental health, and suicidal ideation.

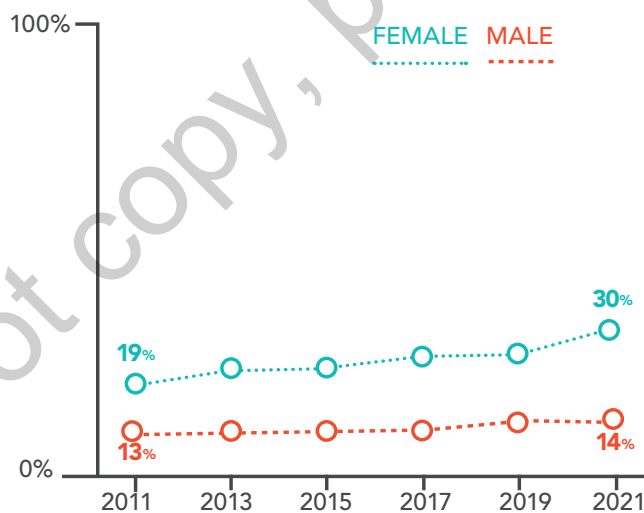
**FIGURE 1.3** ● Percentage of School Students Who Experienced Persistent Feelings of Sadness or Hopelessness



**FIGURE 1.4** ● Percentage of School Students Who Experienced Poor Mental Health During the Past 30 Days



**FIGURE 1.5** ● Percentage of School Students Who Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide



The CDC report states, “These data make it clear that young people in the U.S. are collectively experiencing a level of distress that calls on us to act” (2021, p. 4). One action the CDC recommends is to increase school connectedness across all grades for all students, pointing out that students who are from racial and ethnic minority groups, who experience racism, and who identify as LGBTQ+ often feel less connected at school than their peers. We recognize the dire need to make changes in students’ educational lives so

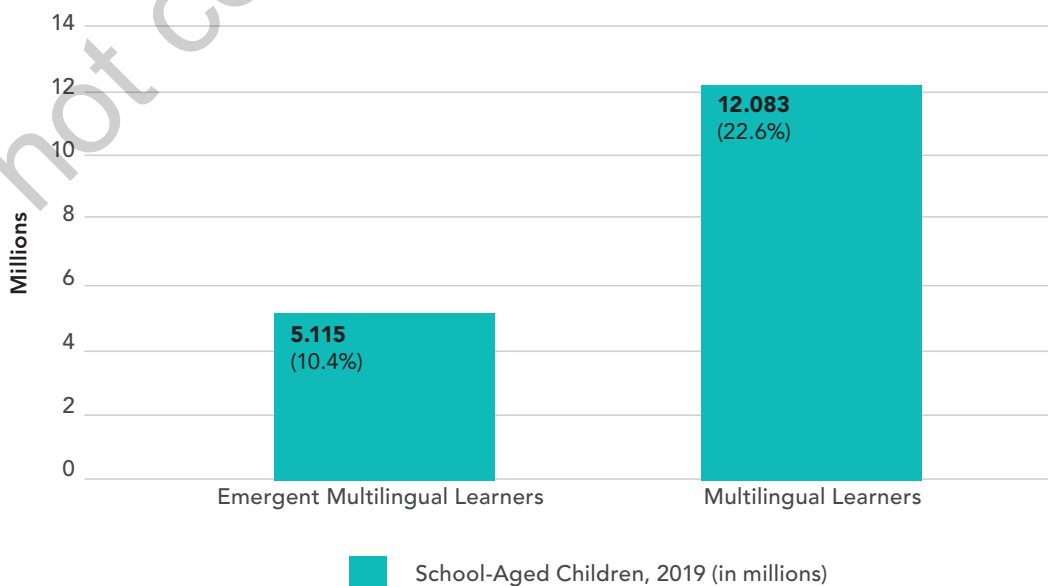
that they don't reach a level of hopelessness displayed in the data. While SEL in and of itself is not a panacea that will solve all students' problems, examining what we can do to better foster students' sense of belonging and well-being is a solid step in the right direction.

## WHO MLs ARE

In order to focus on SEL for MLs, we first need to carefully define who we mean by MLs. There are many terms used to describe students who speak a language in addition to English (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021; Snyder et al., 2023; Sugarman, 2020). Multilingual learners, English learners (ELs), and emergent bilinguals are a variety of names for students whose parent or guardian reports their child speaking one or more languages other than or in addition to English in the home. While EL is the term still officially used by the federal government to describe these students, some argue that the term "English learner" focuses more on students' deficits of learning a language while ignoring the strength of their home language (García, 2009; Zacarian & Staehr Fenner, 2020). **We define multilingual learners as students whose parent or guardian reports speaking one or more languages other than English at home. MLs may or may not qualify for English language support, depending on their level of English proficiency** (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021; Snyder et al., 2023). In order to distinguish between MLs as a whole and MLs who qualify for ELD services, particularly in the discussion of data on a nationwide level, we use the term "emergent ML." **Emergent MLs are MLs who qualify for ELD services.**

In the United States in fall 2019, school-age MLs who qualified for language support services (emergent MLs) numbered approximately 5.1 million, making up 10.4 percent of the school-age population (National Center on Education Statistics [NCES], 2022; see Figure 1.6). In contrast, the entire group

**FIGURE 1.6** ● Population of Emergent MLs and ML School-Aged Children in the United States





of MLs—those who qualify for language services and those who do not—encompass markedly more students. In the 2019–2020 school year, more than 12 million (or nearly 23 percent of children ages 5–17) came from a home in which a language other than or in addition to English was spoken, according to U.S. census figures. In this book, we focus on the more inclusive ML population.

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND MLs**

---

As we learn more about mental health issues that are plaguing students in general, it is important to elevate the unique mental health challenges that have emerged for non-white students. The Child Mind Institute found in 2021 that non-white teens reported more concern than their white peers about nearly every issue related to returning to school in person, including the negative impact of the pandemic on their focus and academic progress, coping with loss and grief, economic struggles or food insecurity, and mental health challenges.

Research has shown that culturally and linguistically diverse populations present higher prevalence of mental health problems and access to care when compared to the white population (Alegría et al., 2008). Individuals with lower levels of English language proficiency have been found to struggle more with mental health problems, as they are less likely to seek services (Bauer et al., 2010). These disparities suggest that culturally and linguistically diverse populations are not only at higher risk for developing problems due to the many systemic challenges they face (i.e., lower socioeconomic status, language barriers, discrimination), but they also have fewer opportunities to access the care they need to address their challenges.

As you react to this research about mental health and MLs, we must stress that we cannot and must not ask teachers to take on the role of school psychologist, therapist, and/or counselor in addition to their already heavy workload during trying times. Teachers are already asked to wear several hats; while we recognize the importance of integrating SEL into teachers' instructional repertoire, we must be cognizant of knowing how and when to leverage mental health experts' expertise and not rely on teachers to make a mental health diagnosis or provide treatment. That said, it is important for teachers to recognize signs of students in distress to be able to refer them to the appropriate professional.

## **WHY SEL IS ESSENTIAL RIGHT NOW FOR MLs**

---

Despite all the strengths that MLs bring to the classroom, we are well aware of the many challenges MLs already face, including lower graduation rates, lower academic achievement for emergent MLs, and disproportionate representation in programs such as advanced placement as well as gifted and talented programs. As it did for many other students, COVID-19 exacerbated such prepandemic disparities for MLs that had already existed prior to March 2020 and also created new gaps. For example, according to

the Office of Civil Rights (2021), virtual school reduced opportunities for social and academic English language conversations and reduced access to English language development instruction. In fact, MLs have been among the group of students that was the most negatively affected by COVID's disruptions to in-person learning. In many cases, virtual learning greatly reduced opportunities for MLs to engage in English language conversations with adults and with peers and engage in intensive language instruction at frequent intervals. In addition, strains on ML family resources have made it difficult for many ML families to help their children thrive academically during the pandemic.

Beyond looking at why SEL is needed specifically as a result of the pandemic, SEL has always been essential in that it is often seen as a way to support students' well-being as a pathway to improved academic outcomes. However, when we narrow our focus to examine SEL for MLs, many SEL programs focus on skill development at the expense of exploring students' cultural assets (Jagers, 2016; Simmons, 2017). One way to elevate students' cultures is to approach SEL in the context of culturally sustaining pedagogies, which means relying more heavily on student, family, and community cultural assets to inform SEL curricula as well as instructional strategies. **Culturally sustaining pedagogies extend beyond merely tolerating students' cultural practices and shift the focus toward explicitly supporting aspects of their languages, literacies, and cultural traditions** (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Applying the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogies to the field of SEL, this translates into fostering cultural well-being, racial and ethnic identity development, and safe and inclusive learning environments (Cantor et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). While culturally sustaining pedagogies are the gold standard for SEL for MLs, we have found that the majority of the SEL frameworks and programs we have encountered do not focus on the unique strengths and attributes that MLs bring to school.



What takeaways do you have about the sense of urgency for SEL to be inclusive of MLs?

---

---

---

---

## DEFINITION OF SEL

---

We have used the term “SEL” many times already in this chapter. To begin to make sense of research we present in this chapter on SEL and MLs, let’s first pause and ensure we are using a common definition of SEL in general. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as **“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.”** We provide CASEL’s definition first since it is used widely in the United States and is likely familiar to many. CASEL has also coined the term “transformative SEL” to focus on specific implementation to transform inequitable settings and systems while promoting justice-oriented civic engagement (CASEL, 2020).

While the CASEL definition and model tend to be well known in the United States, there are other models and along with them definitions of SEL that we would also like to acknowledge. The Harvard University EASEL Lab<sup>1</sup> compares six domains of 40 different SEL frameworks used around the world. These are cognitive, emotion, social, values, perspectives, and identity. It is important to note that there are many international SEL frameworks, including those from Lebanon, Kenya, Singapore, and India. We encourage you to take a look at them. In addition, there are many aspects of SEL beyond the CASEL definition that are important to acknowledge and reflect on, especially as they relate to students who are not white. Dena Simmons (2021) provides much to consider when conceptualizing SEL with students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). She discusses the implications of implementing SEL without consideration of racism and notes that “SEL faces the risk of becoming *white supremacy with a hug* if we do not apply an anti-oppressive, antiracist lens.” She states that in school districts that are mostly BIPOC, the focus of SEL is often about compliance and control when compared to SEL for white, privileged students, in which case it tends to be used to support these students’ college and career readiness. Simmons asks us to consider the connections between SEL and what educators deem as employable and professional, being sure to send students the message that their unique identities should not be diminished and that being successful can take multiple paths. Finally, she urges educators to go beyond good intentions and being empathetic to also “interrogate how such a kind field could perpetuate white supremacy culture.”

---

<sup>1</sup><http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/compare-domains/>

## WHAT SEL IS NOT, PART 1: A FIX FOR STUDENTS, A SEPARATE CURRICULUM, OR A DIVISIVE SUBJECT

Now that we have explored what SEL is and looked at some definitions, let's focus on what SEL is not. According to Simmons (2021), SEL is not intended to identify student deficits, fix problems, ensure compliance, or control students. We find that SEL often gets mistakenly conflated with classroom management and controlling unwanted student behaviors. Further, SEL is not a curriculum in and of itself; it should be regarded as forming the underpinning of skills that help students share, contribute to, and enhance their learning, their confidence, and their appreciation of people (Centre for Education & Youth and STiR Education, n.d.).

We cannot begin this book without acknowledging what is happening currently in some areas in the United States regarding SEL. A study by the Fordham Institute (2021) found that, in general, families—regardless of where they stand politically—want their children to learn social and emotional skills. However, the term “SEL” in and of itself can sometimes be polarizing, suggesting there is confusion about what SEL actually is and involves. As educators, it is important to be aware of what the political climate is in your context. We encourage you to follow what is happening with your district's school board as well as at the state level and also share your input on SEL for MLs if you feel comfortable doing so. Please see our final chapter for some guidance on encouraging your school or district to integrate SEL for MLs in different types of circumstances.

## WHAT SEL IS NOT, PART 2: MENTAL HEALTH AND SEL

While there are commonalities between SEL and mental health, the two constructs are not synonymous. We start with a definition of mental health from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023): “**Being mentally healthy during childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems. Mentally healthy children have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and in their communities.**” Mental health is a continuum, and children who do not have a diagnosed mental health disorder can still differ in how well they are doing and coping.<sup>2</sup> Signs of mental health include successful engagement in productive activities, such as school and friendships, as well as healthy relationships. Hallmarks of mental health include the ability to maintain stable relationships and cope with adversity, which share elements of SEL (Sherman, 2022). In addition, psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour would like to rewrite the definition of mental health. In an interview with the *New York Times*, she states, “Too often, ‘mental health’ is equated with feeling good, happy, calm or relaxed.”



iStock.com/art-skvortsova

<sup>2</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/basics.html>

But, she continued, it's "about having feelings that fit the moment—even if those feelings are unwanted or painful—and managing them in effective ways" (Damour, para. 5, as cited in Moyer, 2023).

However, mental disorders are distinct from mental health. According to the CDC,<sup>3</sup> **mental disorders in children are “serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, which cause distress and problems getting through the day.”** The most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children are attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, behavior problems, and depression.<sup>4</sup> Like many challenges, mental health challenges were exacerbated during the pandemic. While there was a decrease in emergency room visits for all ages during COVID lockdowns in 2020, CDC data tell us that visits for mental health in 2020 increased by 24 percent for children ages 5 to 11 and 31 percent for children ages 12 to 17 when compared to 2019 data (Leeb et al., 2020).

While the number of children and adolescents with mental health challenges has increased, there is a stark disparity between numbers of students who need help and resources available to support them. The Institute of Education Science (2022) shared that 69 percent of public schools reported the percentage of students who have sought mental health services increased since the start of the pandemic. In addition, the Institute of Education Sciences report that only 56 percent of public schools reported they moderately or strongly agree that their school was able to effectively provide mental health services to all students in need. For instance, the Child Mind Institute (Whitney & Peterson, 2019) reports that about half of the estimated 7.7 million children in the United States who had a treatable mental health disorder in 2016 did not receive adequate treatment. In every state, there is a serious lack of accredited professionals, including child psychiatrists, therapists, and social workers (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, n.d.). While SEL can provide tools for students to develop relationships with peers and adults as well as understand themselves and their emotions better, it is important to note that SEL is not designed to diagnose or treat mental illness.



Please pause and reflect on what you have learned so far. What are your thoughts on the following:

- The definition of SEL

---

---

*(Continued)*

<sup>3</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/symptoms.html>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>

(Continued)

- What SEL is and is not

---

---

- Implications for MLs

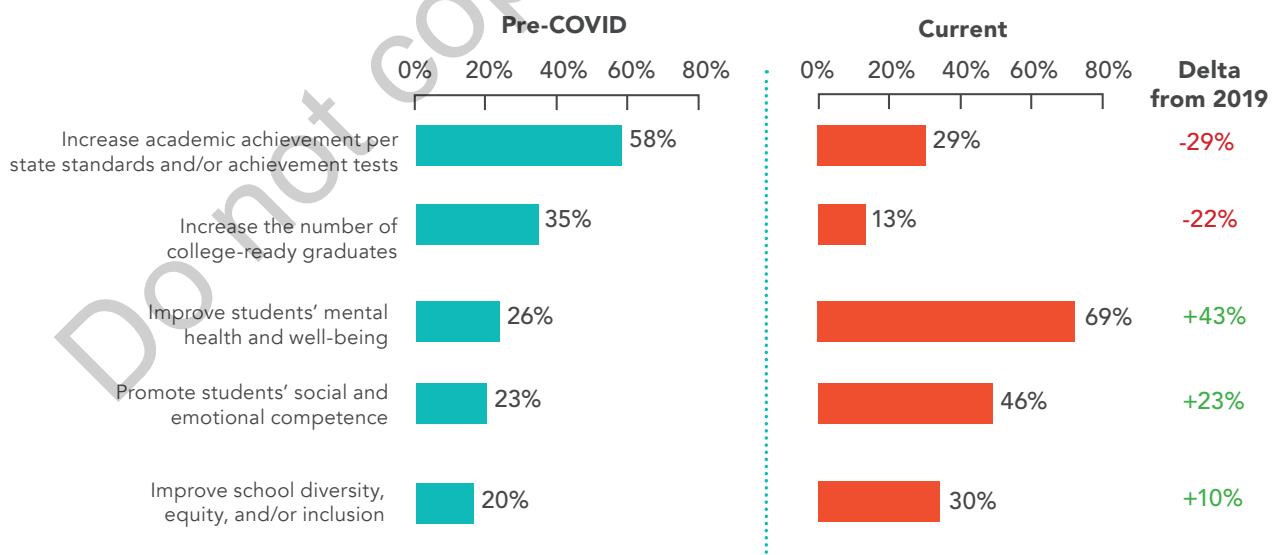
---

---

## TRENDS IN SEL FOR ALL STUDENTS

Social emotional learning's reach has expanded significantly over the past decade. The number of states that have adopted free-standing competencies or standards for SEL has grown from one in 2011 to 27 in 2022. It is noteworthy that this number increased 50 percent from 2020 to 2022. In addition, 44 states offered guidance for SEL implementation in 2022, a marked increase from 25 in 2020 (Dermody & Dusenbury, 2022). Narrowing the focus to the district level, according to market research (Tyton Partners, 2021), there has been a marked shift in school districts' priorities since the pandemic began. Sixty-nine percent of districts now prioritize improving students' mental health and well-being (an increase of 43 percent), and 46 percent of districts prioritize promoting students' social and emotional competence (an increase of 23 percent). Figure 1.7, Comparison of District Priorities, outlines

**FIGURE 1.7** • Comparison of District Priorities



Source: Tyton Partners (2021).

differences in the priorities districts have reported before the pandemic in 2019 and in 2021. The biggest increase was seen in improving students' mental health and well-being, while the largest decrease in priorities was the importance of academic achievement as measured by state standards and/or achievement tests.

## ROLE THAT SEL PLAYS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Now that we have a sense of the increased importance of SEL in the educational landscape, let's first take a look at the role SEL plays in teaching and learning for all students, including MLs. One large-scale meta-analysis was conducted on 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning programs involving more than 270,000 kindergarten through high school students. The study found that students who participated in SEL programs demonstrated the following: greater motivation to learn, improved metacognition, better problem-solving, deeper connection to school, greater sense of security at school, stronger sense of belonging, and fewer absences and suspensions. In addition to these nonacademic findings, these students who partook in SEL programs increased their academic achievement by 11 percentage points as compared with their peers who did not participate in SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007).



- What shifts have you noticed in terms of your school or district's priorities? What is your evidence?

---

---

- What is your reaction to the research on SEL and its impact on students?

---

---

## ML ASSETS VERSUS DEFICITS

Now that you are well-versed in information regarding what SEL is, how widespread the importance of SEL is in the United States, and have read a little research on the benefits of SEL, we will examine how this learning applies to MLs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, emergent MLs are one of the fastest-growing population of students in K–12 in

the United States.<sup>5</sup> We “firmly believe that all educators—no matter what their title or how many years of experience they have—are positioned to serve as agents of change to promote and champion MLs’ assets” (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021, p. 75). However, to be in a position to effectively serve as a champion of MLs when it comes to SEL and well-being, we first have to have a sense of what assets MLs bring to their education. We also all need to have a common definition of what we mean when we say MLs’ assets, noting that we intentionally use the word “assets” in its plural form to denote that students have multiple strengths and talents. **Educators operate from an assets-based perspective when they are knowledgeable about and actively value individual students’ home languages, cultures, and ways of being. They regard these gifts as foundations for future learning and well-being rather than obstacles to overcome** (adapted from Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021). This assets-based perspective extends to ML family engagement, recognizing that ML engagement may take place in ways that are not always recognized or visible (Staehr Fenner, 2014). For example, ML families may not be able to attend in-person back-to-school night or parent-teacher association meetings due to work or family obligations, but they are likely encouraging their children to do well in school and regularly voicing their support of their children’s education.



Conversely, a deficit-based approach focuses on students’ challenges and can result in educators as well as policymakers blaming students and families intrinsically for these challenges instead of looking outward to programmatic or systemic factors that may position ML students and families for failure instead of setting them up for success. We highlight the need to examine the importance of the programming and systems in which MLs are educated by devoting space to it in each chapter. **We define a deficit perspective as one in which educators focus primarily on MLs’ challenges and see these challenges as being intrinsic, personal obstacles to be overcome.** Over the years as we have supported educators of MLs, we have gotten into the habit of always using the term “strengths and challenges” or “strengths and needs” together when describing MLs rather than only focusing on challenges or needs alone. Whenever we speak of a challenge MLs may face, we are sure to lead with at least one strength (or more) that our MLs bring. We suggest you also begin to become more aware of the language you use when speaking of MLs and get in the practice of saying “strengths and challenges” or “strengths and needs” as well! Figure 1.8 provides examples of ML strengths and challenges. We encourage you to add your own examples as you see fit.

Figure 1.9 (adapted from Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021) contrasts an assets-based approach with a deficit-based approach in four areas.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/multilingualism-pathways#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20in,percent%20of%20the%20student%20population>



**FIGURE 1.8** ● Some ML Strengths and Challenges

ML STRENGTHS 	ML CHALLENGES 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With supports, MLs’ joy in learning language and content will be evident.</li> <li>• ML families tend to value education and respect teachers.</li> <li>• After MLs exit ELD services, they tend to outscore native English speakers on content area assessments.</li> <li>• MLs and their families may have developed resilience from facing challenges.</li> <li>• Other:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergent MLs tend to have lower graduation rates than native English speakers.</li> <li>• Emergent MLs tend to score lower than native English speakers on content assessments.</li> <li>• It is more likely that MLs’ experiences may not be reflected in curriculum and materials.</li> <li>• MLs may be more likely to have been exposed to untreated trauma and/or acculturation stress.</li> <li>• Other:</li> </ul>

Icons by iStock.com/Enis Aksoy

**FIGURE 1.9** ● Assets-Based Approach Versus Deficit-Based Approach

FACTOR/ASPECT	ASSETS-BASED APPROACH	DEFICIT-BASED APPROACH
Home language and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gifts to be recognized</li> <li>• Foundations for future learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hindrances to overcome</li> <li>• Distractions to learning English and content that should be minimized</li> </ul>
Families of MLs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaged in children’s education</li> <li>• Interact with children in their home language</li> <li>• Share their home cultural practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blamed for students’ perceived lack of academic skills, not learning English quickly enough</li> <li>• Not engaged in their children’s learning</li> </ul>
Connection with student learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct correlation between building instruction around students’ life experience and positive impact on learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnect between students’ lives and learning</li> </ul>
Social emotional learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledges what strengths students bring with them to help them connect with others, develop relationships, set goals, and thrive inside and outside of school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees MLs as lacking the foundation to be fully integrated into the school community, resulting in students not feeling welcome in school</li> </ul>

## EQUITABLE SEL FOR MLs

---

While SEL is increasing in importance in the United States, there is a disconnect between SEL in general and SEL for MLs. An analysis of 33 SEL programs conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that SEL programs do not tend to be designed in a way that centers equity for students (Jones et al., 2021). **These researchers define equitable SEL as “SEL that affirms diverse identities; incorporates student cultural values, practices, and assets; fosters positive identity development; promotes student agency and voice; and acknowledges and addresses persistent environmental stressors such as racism, transphobia, homophobia, and classism”** (Jones et al., 2021, p. 40). As a result of a lack of a focus on equity “baked in” to SEL programs, educators who work directly with students must adapt SEL programming to ensure it is culturally relevant and accessible for diverse learners. As such, educators should approach SEL frameworks with the unique perspective of MLs in mind to ensure students’ identity, culture, and context are represented and honored (Calderón & Montenegro, 2021; Honigsfeld et al., 2022).

## IMPACT OF CULTURE ON SEL FOR MLs

---

As we consider which skills, behaviors, values, and perspectives are commonly prioritized and elevated by SEL programs and practices, it is important to understand the ways in which culture shapes our understanding of which of these skills and behaviors are considered important and appropriate, for whom, and why. Culture plays a significant role in determining areas such as behavioral norms and expectations related to interpersonal interactions, communication styles, and how we express emotion. These areas vary greatly across and within cultures by such factors as gender, age, and other facets of identity (Jukes et al., 2018; Savina & Wan, 2017). Due to the large role of culture in MLs’ lives, educators must ensure that SEL curriculum provides an accurate reflection of students’ cultural norms and leverages these norms through instruction. To that end, Downes and Cefai (2016) suggest students and parents be consulted as SEL curriculum is being developed.<sup>6</sup>

Let’s take a deeper dive into how MLs’ culture can have an impact on their academic performance and well-being. Niehaus et al. (2012) compared emergent MLs and non-MLs. When they have social and emotional issues, emergent MLs tend to experience more difficulties with staying on task and maintaining attention than non-MLs. They also tend to experience more anxiety, sadness, and loneliness than non-MLs. Niehaus and Adelson (2013) conducted a study of more than 1,800 Spanish-speaking MLs and students from Asian language backgrounds that focused on students’ self-concept and its impact on such factors as academic performance, physical well-being, and social emotional well-being. The study found that Spanish-speaking MLs were at greater risk for internalizing and externalizing problems. In addition, MLs who spoke Asian languages tended to rate

---

<sup>6</sup>Please see Chapter 8 for guidance on including ML student voices in SEL decision-making.

themselves low for peer relationships (e.g., making friends and being liked by peers). In 2014, those same researchers studied how more than 1,000 third-grade MLs' perceived academic and social emotional skills relate to their academic achievement. The researchers found that more parental engagement of MLs predicted fewer social emotional concerns for MLs. In addition, fewer social emotional problems were linked to higher achievement scores. When MLs' social emotional concerns in the classroom increased, their academic achievement decreased. They experienced such internalized problems as worry, anxiety, loneliness, and sadness.

An important study by Castro-Olivo (2014) was conducted on a program called *Jovenes Fuertes* (Strong Teens) to study the effects of an adapted SEL program on Latino middle and high school-aged MLs' social emotional outcomes. The *Jovenes Fuertes* program was a validated, culturally adapted version of the *Strong Teens* program, which incorporated eight dimensions for multilingual students: language, persona, metaphors, content, concepts, goals, methods, and context. It was translated into Spanish and was delivered by multilingual, multicultural educators. The main focus of the program was to help students cope with life as an ML and with the ensuing acculturation process, and it included applications of SEL to MLs' daily lives. In particular, the study assessed the program's effects on students' knowledge of SEL and resiliency. The study's findings included that the program was effective in improving students' social emotional resiliency and knowledge of SEL. The program also provided students with valuable skills that prepared them to deal with adverse situations.



- What stood out to you in terms of research on SEL programs that are inclusive of MLs?

---

---

- Are MLs' experiences reflected in your school's or district's SEL programs and practices? If so, how?





---

---


## PRIORITIZING SEL IDEAS

We have shared a lot of information with you so far in this chapter. Let's pause and reflect on where you are in your thinking. Please refer to Figure 1.1 (your note-taking tool) and complete Figure 1.10, Chapter Idea Note-Taking Tool With Sense of Urgency, which will help you rank ideas.

**FIGURE 1.10** • Chapter Idea Note-Taking Tool With Sense of Urgency

KEY IDEA 	MY REACTION 	IMPLICATIONS FOR MY CONTEXT 	SENSE OF URGENCY* 			
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4


\*1: Not urgent at all 2: Somewhat urgent 3: Urgent 4: Extremely urgent



- Which ideas stood out to you?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Which would you like to learn more about?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Which would you like to discuss with a colleague?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How would you rank your sense of urgency in prioritizing these ideas?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## SEL FOR MLs ENTRY POINTS

Let's now take your ideas and couple them with your current context. Please answer the following question:



How are you supporting social emotional learning for MLs in your context?

---

---

---

- I use a packaged program my school/district purchased.
- I plan and teach stress management and/or mindfulness strategies to MLs.
- I check in with MLs informally to see how they're doing.
- I leave SEL up to school counselors.
- I am not supporting MLs with SEL at this time.

Which box(es) did you check?

---

---

---

Next, since you have more information on the sense of urgency for SEL that is inclusive of MLs as well as research that undergirds this need, Figure 1.11 outlines several preliminary questions to ask yourself in order to determine what your entry point might be to begin to incorporate SEL practices for MLs at the school or district level. We have provided an example in the first row. We advise that you start small and not begin with a schoolwide SEL program or initiative at this time. We suggest that you read through the book, noting what resonated with you from each chapter so you can prioritize which SEL competencies and practices you may wish to incorporate for MLs as you examine the programmatic and systematic considerations in your context. In Chapter 2, we will delve into the five SEL competencies.

**FIGURE 1.11** ● SEL for MLs Entry Points

QUESTION	MY RESPONSE	COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, OR EXAMPLES
1. Does your school or district have an SEL program for all students?	Yes	I have a starting point, but I'll want to think carefully how this program is inclusive of MLs.
2. If yes, what does the program look like or what is it called?		
3. If yes, how are MLs incorporated in the program?		
4. How many other educators in addition to you are interested in adapting SEL so that it is more inclusive of MLs?		
5. What are these educators' roles?		
6. How many new or current initiatives are there in your school or district for all students?		
7. What are the goals of these new or current initiatives?		
8. How many new or current initiatives are there in your school or district that are focused on MLs?		
9. What are the goals of these new or current initiatives for MLs?		
10. What level of stress do you think your colleagues are under?		

In addition, ask yourself these personal reflection questions:



- How valued do you feel at your school?

---

---

- How well do you think your expertise related to MLs is recognized?

---

---

- How much time and what type of structure are you given to collaborate with other colleagues to support MLs?

---

---

- How much choice are you given in curriculum and materials?

---

---

- How well do you feel your own SEL is prioritized at your school?

---

---

## INTENTIONALLY INTEGRATING SEL FOR MLs

Let's think a little more deeply about how we can center SEL as a natural component to integrate into the school or district that will benefit students and teachers instead of one more stressful addition to educators' already full plates. We firmly believe that SEL can't be viewed as one more thing; it has to be seamlessly integrated with the school and district's vision and goals, as well as intentionally woven into the fabric of daily instruction. To do so, schools and districts need to have structured conversations regarding their vision, mission, goals, curriculum, and inclusion of diverse perspectives to determine how SEL will be integrated so that it is not a stand-alone initiative. To that end, we believe that SEL must not be a

stand-alone program during a designated period or time of day or one more box for teachers to check each day. In order for SEL to be fully integrated, we need to examine our current systems, determine what’s working and what isn’t, and advocate for changes in systems that do not currently position MLs for success. You can play an important role in doing so, and you will be engaging in self-reflection throughout this book to help you determine your priorities to best support your MLs.

As you think about integrating SEL for MLs into your classroom, school, or district, it is important to think about many aspects. Figure 1.12 provides several considerations to help you be intentional about integrating SEL for MLs into your school or district’s instructional practices. We also suggest you give thought to who you could collaborate with as you integrate SEL for MLs. We also leave space for you to add in your own considerations, guiding questions, and possible next steps. We have completed the first row as an example for you.

**FIGURE 1.12** • Considerations for Integrating SEL for MLs: Initial Planning Phase

CONSIDERATION	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Alignment of SEL with school or district vision	How does our plan to integrate SEL for MLs align with our school vision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share the alignment with the school staff for their input</li> <li>• Share the alignment with ML parents for their input</li> <li>• Revise alignment statement</li> </ul>
Alignment of SEL with school or district mission		
Alignment of SEL with school or district goals		
Inclusion of ML population in SEL practices		
Obtaining teacher buy-in		
Obtaining ML family buy-in		
Obtaining ML student buy-in		
Other:		
Other:		



## CONCLUSION

---

In this chapter, we laid the groundwork for the urgent need to write this book. We shared why we wrote this book and linked our purpose in doing so to our core beliefs. We underscored the sense of urgency for this book and provided a snapshot of trends in the dire state of adolescent mental health in the United States. We highlighted who MLs are and defined what SEL is and what it is not. Then, we delved into the growing importance of SEL in schools as well as research on the positive impact of SEL for students' well-being and academic success. Finally, we shared an assets-based mindset when it comes to MLs and explored culture's impact on SEL for MLs. Finally, you were left with some tools to prioritize which areas stood out to you and reflect on some entry points to intentionally begin this work. In Chapter 2, we will focus on the CASEL SEL framework and how we have adapted it to be inclusive of MLs.

## Summary of Key Ideas

---

- SEL has been prioritized more by school districts and states in response to events over the past few years.
- SEL is not intended to identify student deficits, fix problems, ensure compliance, or control students.
- SEL is essential for MLs' academic achievement and well-being, and we must consider the impact of students' culture on SEL for MLs.

## Chapter 1 Reflection Questions

1. After reading a summary of the research related to SEL for MLs, what is your biggest takeaway?
  2. What is your urgency in taking action to integrate SEL for MLs into your practice?
  3. What would you like to learn more about as you read Chapter 2?
-

Do not copy, post, or distribute