

## CHAPTER FOUR

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# FROM MODEL IMPLEMENTATION TO SUSTAINABILITY

*A Multisite Study of Pathways to Excellence  
in Social-Emotional Learning and Related  
School Programs*



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Consider the term “school *system*.” It implies the regular and systematic functioning of a school—and a grouping of schools—to meet targeted goals for its members. Just as an individual’s physical system involves interdependent parts and relies on a flow of energy and adequate care to result in good health and productivity, so a school system comprises multiple parts with varied functions. Likewise, schools as systems require infusion and management of resources to yield the best outcomes for students. Intentional consideration and care for the organism, whether the individual or the school system, is necessary for optimal health. It is commonly recognized that the social and emotional well-being of an individual has a significant impact on physical health and productivity. Similarly,

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AUTHOR’S NOTE: Patricia Galitos served as principal researcher for this project.

attending to the social and emotional well-being of a school system is critical for achieving optimal outcomes for students.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has come to be recognized by many as an essential ingredient in the formula for successful preparation of students to achieve in school and throughout life (Cohen, 2006; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). SEL programs have been analyzed, empirically studied with sound research design, and strongly supported by both data and a track record of observable success nationally and internationally (Elias, 2003). For these reasons, SEL is now seen as an essential ingredient in education.

In brief, SEL is the process by which individuals achieve

the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. (Elias et al., 1997, p. 2)

Promotion of SEL addresses such component skills as self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working cooperatively, and caring about oneself and others (Elias et al., 1997). Without social and emotional competence, a child's achievement in school may be hindered by poor ability to tolerate frustration or disappointment, being distracted by conflicts between workmates, or an inability to find solutions to discouraging challenges and obstacles. It would be difficult to work in a school system and not bear witness to the importance of SEL for the growth and success of students throughout their school careers.

## **WHAT DOES SEL LOOK LIKE IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM?**

As the art of instruction has advanced because of such techniques as cross-subject learning, more active participation and discovery by learners, and revisiting and deeper exposure of topics across grade levels, so has our understanding of how SEL can be promoted effectively throughout the school day (Elias & Arnold, 2006). Direct classroom instruction of SEL principles can occur, and numerous curricula have been shown to be effective in teaching these principles (Collaborative

for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003). Principles of SEL can be infused throughout a school's curriculum, such as when students are taught and asked to apply problem-solving steps to a character's dilemma in a story, or when principles of collaboration and conflict resolution are taught, modeled, and reinforced in group work. A supportive school climate, in which administration and staff use the language and processes of SEL, reinforces student use of skills of social and emotional competence. Extracurricular activities provide further opportunities for practicing social and emotional skills, when structured and managed with sensitivity to SEL guiding principles. Students can also be encouraged to participate in community service activities. Opportunities exist throughout the parts and processes of every school system for promoting and reinforcing SEL. And of course, parents have a keen interest in promoting their own children's SEL; they can find this to be an arena in which their interests and those of the school coincide (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2006).

Let's return for a moment to the image of the school system as a living organism with interrelated parts and functions. Those parts and functions complement one another, and they must achieve balance in using resources, sharing space, and growing over time. In the schools, this means that the introduction of any new program or initiative must be done with consideration of the overall context of that school system, and with attention to how that program will fit with—and balance with—existing realities. Would a surgeon implant a new organ in a patient without first checking the individual's medical history, blood type, and general condition of health? Would no care be taken to ensure that the correct instruments were used, and that well-established procedures were followed? Following the surgery, would the individual be discharged immediately, with no attention given to his or her recovery needs? In the longer term, would no attention be given to how well the organ had been accepted and integrated into the patient's physical system? Clearly the answer to each question is no.

There is another corollary to the transplant analogy that must be made. Inception of an SEL initiative requires an exceedingly thorough consideration of the entire system at the very beginning. In medicine, many problems can arise after an organ has seemingly been successfully inserted into its new host. Ultimate success depends on proper follow-through and attention to its integration into the new system over time. Similarly, even SEL initiatives that are sound in their content and strongly evidence-based can flounder in their new settings,

just as a healthy organ transplanted without care or adherence to proper procedures may be rejected. (It is worth noting that while SEL initiatives are the focus of this chapter, the application of the analogy and the subsequent discussion may be applicable to a wide

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range of related school programs and services, such as character education, substance abuse, violence/bully/harassment prevention, and service learning.)

Thus, it is critical to look separately but concurrently at implementation and sustainability. *Implementation* refers to the manner in which an SEL initiative is brought into and established within a school

system. Particular attention must be given to the initial procedures that are followed and the monitoring of initial activity. Fortunately, an evolving set of standards for programs and practices has been identified as effective in promoting SEL in schools (Elias et al., 1997; Novick, Kress, & Elias, 2002). Correspondingly, the overall initiative may not thrive if programs and practices are not implemented correctly in scope or sequence, if inadequate attention is paid to how the programs and practices are received by the existing school system, or if any resulting immediate “post-surgery” needs are not monitored and addressed. While effective SEL programs vary in presentation, it has become clear that implementation is aided by programs developing scope-and-sequence plans for school systems to consider from the inception. In addition, programs should define their key elements and the timing and “dosage” of their delivery. The inception of an SEL program in a particular school system may understandably call for some tailoring of the implementation plan, but attention must be given to retaining essential components.

Once an initiative is introduced into a school system and its content and procedures become familiar, the process of implanting an SEL program may feel completed. Beyond the point of having the components of a program implemented fully in a school, however, it is critical to consider whether the program will be sustained as a permanent and integral part of the system. The fast pace of school life, changes in personnel, annual budget schedules, ever-evolving trends in education—all of these factors and many others present challenges

to planning for long-term success in integrating an SEL initiative into a school. How many teachers, principals, and other school staff have been heard to say, “We used to have that program in our school, but after a few years it died out”? Or, even more disheartening, “They’re all the same. We’ll have this one for a few years, and then we’ll have something else.” The frustration and, at times, the feelings of helplessness that result from this too-predictable cycle may do serious harm to educators’ faith in the positive impact that a sustained initiative can have on the social, emotional, and academic development of students.

Returning to our medical analogy, consider the many technological advances that have resulted in more sustained well-being of patients. Various procedures, from the replacement of dental fillings to the replacement of hips, need to be repeated less frequently now than in past years for the health and comfort of the individual. Due to an advancing awareness of the best materials and practices, people can enjoy greater use and sustainability of their physical systems. Similarly, proper planning, selection, and maintenance in working with an SEL program in a school system can result in its longer-term sustainability, allowing students and staff alike to realize the fuller potential and benefits of its continuing implementation.

Understanding this progression, the need is clear for increased knowledge of the factors that promote healthy sustainability of SEL and related initiatives once healthy implementation has taken place. Such knowledge is best derived from programs that have been in place and operated effectively over extended periods of time.

## **THE MULTISITE STUDY OF MODEL, WELL-IMPLEMENTED, EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS**

Fortunately, in recent years the foundation was laid for learning about the factors that influence successful implementation and sustainability of SEL programs. In 1997, a foundational text for understanding effective SEL programs was published, delineating guidelines for planning and implementing high-quality initiatives. *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* (Elias et al., 1997) incorporated insights gained from visits to schools operating validated SEL programs across the United States. Twenty-three model programs were identified in the book’s appendix.

As conscious thought in the field of SEL has evolved to focus on successful sustainability of initiatives, the programs and schools included in the 1997 guide were identified as a natural resource for investigating critical factors affecting sustainability. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) undertook a follow-up study of the status of model sites listed in the book (see Box 4.1). Its purpose was to determine whether sites had sustained their SEL initiatives, how SEL was occurring in sites at the present time, how sites had negotiated challenges and obstacles of program development, and what factors would determine the ultimate sustenance or deterioration of the initiative.

**Box 4.1** Programs Represented in the Model Site Sustainability Study

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Facing History and Ourselves

I Can Problem Solve

North Country Whole School SEL Model

Open Circle

Promoting Adolescent Choices Training (PACT)

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

Preschool Stress Relief Project

Primary Mental Health Project (PMHP)

Raising Healthy Children

Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program (RCCP)

Responsive Classroom

Second Step\*

Social Competence Program for Young Adolescents

Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving\* (SDM/SPS)

Success for All

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\*More than one site visit was completed related to this program.

Knowledgeable individuals at school sites and SEL program offices were contacted and interviewed regarding the trajectory of growth observed over time in schools that had integrated SEL initiatives. In telephone interviews, participants answered questions regarding their experiences and observations. They were asked for insights

about the development of programs in the time since the original inquiries and visits that constituted the 1997 guide. Sites in continued operation for this length of time were considered to be in a phase of sustenance, having survived the challenges of initial implementation and integration into the school system. Program representatives offered the added insight of experience in working with additional school sites that had operated for at least that amount of time.

Given what was known about successful implementation (which will be reviewed in the following section), an interview structure was developed to investigate the pathways traveled by participating sites in achieving, or losing sight of, sustainability. Areas explored included

- Current program components and how they developed and changed since inception of the SEL program
- History of program operation (time allotted; materials; staff roles; staff training; funding; decision making and troubleshooting, etc.; and changes in these factors over the years)
- Progress of the program (satisfaction with program over time, how value is determined, how progress is communicated, and changes over time)
- Observations regarding factors that sustained (or impeded) the program over time

In the fall of 2002, introductory letters explaining the project and inviting participation were sent to the 11 sites visited in the original review, as well as an additional 12 sites that were not visited but were listed in the book as “flagship” examples of particular programs. Letters also were sent to those district central offices administering the programs operating in the sites, with the intention of allowing willing participants to share their broader experiences regarding sustainability in multiple sites with which they have worked. Seventeen recipients replied to the inquiry letter, and follow-up phone calls were made to others to request participation.

Ultimately, 21 interviews were conducted, representing 15 programs included in the original guide. A diverse group of individuals participated. Professional roles of school-based interviewees included teacher, school-based coordinator, school counselor, principal, director of curriculum, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Participant roles from program offices included program coordinator, director of implementation, director of outreach, director of school services, and national director. Participants shared experiences

from program sites in a number of states, including California, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, and Washington. As a result, the experiences and perspectives of the individuals represented provided a rich array of data from which to glean valuable lessons for sustaining programs.

## FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Michael Fullan (2005), whose name has become synonymous with work on sustainability over the past two decades, recognizes that there is no consensus on a precise definition of sustainability, nor on its key components. There is, however, broad agreement that sustainability is a label that can be applied to an innovation that lasts for a number of years beyond its inception. A specific timeline is not appropriate, as programs in different context have different cycles, thus creating various metrics for making judgments about sustainability. While there is pressure in academic circles to come up with definitive lists of the elements of sustainability, it is wise to recognize that different contexts may produce differing lists. Examining the similarities and differences in these lists across contexts will provide

the best means of shaping the construct of sustainability, and will also result in the most precise guidelines for the practical application of measures to enhance sustainability in particular situations (Cherniss, 2005).

The word *vision* implies seeing past the current state of affairs to what is possible for tomorrow and beyond. What is the scope of vision

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*What is the scope of vision with regard to the systematic incorporation of SEL into the schools? . . . At what point do we say that today's vision has materialized into a real, "sustained" part of a school's functioning?*

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with regard to the systematic incorporation of SEL into the schools? Do we look as far as tomorrow, next month, next year, or the next 5 years? At what point do we say that today's vision has materialized into a real, "sustained" part of a school's functioning?

As we consider the specific context of school-based SEL curricula, at its simplest, a change may be considered sustained when it continues past the point of initial implementation to become a regular part of school practices. Hargreaves and Fink (2003) encourage



adopting a more complex but perhaps more thorough view of sustainability. Essentially, they say that true sustainability is reflected when a change is incorporated into a school without upsetting the balance of resources or other parts of the system. Compatibility with the system may require ongoing flexibility of practices to promote and reinforce SEL, as opposed to the conceptualization of a set list of practices that may be prey to extinction if the school schedule, budget, or other requirements conflict with the practices as initially implemented. This fits perfectly with my introductory discussion of the school as a system, as well as the relevance and importance of considering the school system as a complex, dynamic organism.

Greenberg and Domitrovich (2002) build on Chen's (1989, 1990) emphasis on the implementation system. The authors describe an "implementation support system," which encompasses the supports needed for successful implementation, from preplanning through to a consensual recognition of an intervention as being established successfully. Five dimensions of support are described by the authors, including (1) preplanning, including level of commitment and incentive for change; (2) quality of materials; (3) a technical support model, referring to aspects of training, supervision, and monitoring; (4) quality of technical support; and (5) implementer readiness, referring to program deliverers' feelings of preparedness and belief in the program.

In this context, I shall streamline these dimensions into broad phases of implementation, in order to lend a temporal quality that can aid in thinking about the life cycle of implementation efforts. Consider these three phases: (1) readiness, which includes preplanning activities and selection of a program; (2) implementation, which encompasses attention to supports such as quality materials, training and monitoring, and technical support; and (3) validation, which reflects feedback to the school community (including implementers) that supports belief in the program and aids in guiding its further implementation.

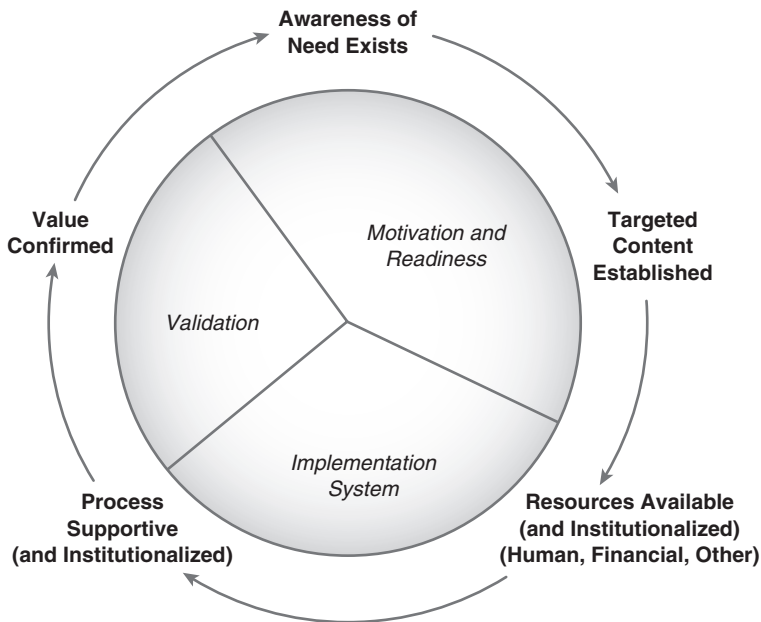
The importance of understanding sustainability for school-based SEL initiatives appears intuitive. If SEL is worth promoting, as we believe has been established firmly, then it is worth promoting as a natural and permanent part of a school's operation. This premise is easy to agree with. What often proves trickier in reality, however, is allocating resources of time, energy, and often money to understand and develop sustainability in an environment that is as fast-paced and demanding as a school. Crises can emerge daily and require instant resolution, budgets operate on annual schedules, state and federal

requirements change from year to year, key administrators often shift assignments in 2 or 3 years—and it is widely known that many longer-term school employees are accustomed to cycles of “here today, gone tomorrow” initiatives that ultimately are not sustained.

In an environment that may not offer much time for reflection and planning, short-term “fixes” may seem to be the most feasible options, or may even become the norm due to a lack of emphasis on planning for sustainability. Thus, the importance lies not only in understanding what fosters the sustainability of school-based changes, but also in promoting that knowledge and helping schools plan for sustainable change in ways that are most appropriate for each particular school system.

Figure 4.1, which is drawn from the key references above, as well as a wide-ranging literature review (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Backer, 2000; Blankstein, 2004; Commins & Elias, 1991; Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2006; Johnston, Hays, Center, & Daley, 2004; Zins, Elias, Greenberg, & Pruet, 2000), guided the conceptualization of sustainability:

**Figure 4.1**



**AUTHOR:**  
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Three elements must exist:

1. *Motivation and readiness* to sustain the program
2. An *implementation system* in place that allows program to be sustained
3. *Validation* of program value to allow sustainability and fuel motivation

Each element has situations and events that actualize it:

1. *Motivation and readiness* are signified by awareness among the school population that a need exists for such a program or intervention, and the selection of a program.
2. The *implementation system* comprises the resources (quality and amount) available to support the program and the process used to guide its functioning. Specific to sustainability, indicators of a sustainable implementation system may include the degree to which these resources and processes are institutionalized.
3. *Validation* exists when members of the environment perceive a benefit to sustaining the program, whether that perceived benefit is due to subjective or objective evaluation of outcomes and advantages. (Validation then serves as fuel for continued motivation and readiness.)

Based on these dimensions, we created a site-visit interview and assessment guide, piloted it at several sites not part of the study, and then refined it into the final version presented in the appendix at the end of this chapter. Three site visitors, who also participated in the creation of the guide, were trained in the procedures, practiced them at various sites, and then were sent individually to conduct the assessments. No visitors were sent to a site using a program with which they were involved in any way.

The results of interviewees' responses yielded valuable information about the factors existing in school systems where SEL programs had been initiated before 1997. Some interviewees offered critical information about trends in sites where SEL initiatives were implanted and accepted, becoming part of the natural life of the

schools. Others offered equally important information about factors that contributed to the withering or rejection of SEL initiatives from school systems that hosted them. Together, these insights form a blueprint for planning for sustainability.

## SUSTAINABILITY: INTERVIEW FINDINGS AND QUOTES

Insights gleaned from our 21 interviews demonstrated that there are recognizable pathways both to sustainability and to program attrition. Some programs chart a strong course from the beginning; others take a wrong turn but are able to regain their footing and continue along a reliable road to sustainability. Still others lose their way, and the program fragments or disappears entirely, sometimes due to having taken dangerous shortcuts or to being run off the road by negative forces.

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Information about 14 specific school sites was used to develop four logical categories of program functioning. These categories depict both the current level of functioning ascribed to the particular program at its school site as well as the course of its development over time. The

categories of *sustained*, *re/developing*, *detached*, and *discontinued* all were represented within the group of 14 schools.

*Sustained* sites feature programs that are integrated into various aspects of school life, with skills and concepts visibly taught, reinforced, and applied. Sustained sites have maintained or expanded their level of program activity and positive results over a period of years, due to structures and practices they have put in place. *Re/developing* sites have many positive features of sustained sites but are still in the process of entrenching sustainable practices, perhaps because of a period of weakening followed by renewed interest and improved planning, or perhaps because of a greater length of time needed to overcome obstacles to growth. Hence we use the combined term to note that some are still developing toward sustainability, and others are working to return to that status. Programs operating in *detached* sites may be easily discontinued, as program

concepts and language have not been integrated well into the curriculum and life of the school; the program may be viewed as an “add-on” or “extra” curriculum that can be dropped at any time. In *discontinued* sites, there is no longer any planned, schoolwide implementation of a program, although individual teachers may continue to use some of the materials. Findings are summarized in Table 4.1. The fact that two curricular programs included in the present study were found within the “sustained” grouping and also within the “detached” and “discontinued” groupings is quite telling. A particular program does not guarantee sustainability.

## FINDINGS FROM SUSTAINED SITES

It’s part of our culture. I could leave tomorrow and it would be okay.

—*School principal*

At the time of the study, 6 of the 14 schools had achieved sustainability of their SEL programs. While these sites shared several important qualities, the most apparent was the passion each interviewee held for the SEL program being discussed. Each interviewee clearly not only believed in the potential of the program for benefiting students’ lives, but also had been affected by the real, positive results he or she had witnessed directly in a school building. When the interview tapes were transcribed and field notes were added, seven themes emerged most clearly across sustained sites. Each will be illustrated below.

### **There Is Clear Commitment, Participation, and Reinforcement of Program Implementation From Key School Administrators**

Definitely what derails it are changes in administration, shifts in administrative support. That’s huge.

—*Training director*

The single most consistent finding throughout all of our interviews was the importance of supportive school administrators. In some exemplary cases, a strong, thoughtful, committed administrator

**Table 4.1** Summary of School Sites and Sustainability Features

	Setting	Grades	Structure <sup>1</sup>	Administration <sup>2</sup>	Funding	Training <sup>3</sup>	Materials <sup>4</sup>	Evaluation <sup>5</sup>
<i>Sustained</i>								
I Can Problem Solve	Suburban PA	Elementary	Committee	Active	Government grant	Internal	Adapted	Yes
SDM/SPS Special Education	Suburban NJ	Elementary	Coordinator Committee	Active	Government grant startup, school budget for ongoing	Internal	Adapted	Yes
North Country Whole School SEL Model	Rural NY	Elementary Middle	None	Active	Tuition	Informal	Adapted	No
Second Step	Suburban WA	Elementary	Coordinator	Changed Supportive	(Not Available)	Internal	Fidelity	Yes
SDM/SPS	Suburban NJ	Elementary	Coordinator	Changed Supportive	Government grant	Internal	Fidelity	Yes
Social Competence for Young Adolescents	Urban CT	Elementary Middle	Coordinator Committee	Highest level supportive to active Midlevel unsupportive to supportive	Grants	Internal	Adapted	Yes
<i>Re/Developing</i>								
SDM/SPS	Suburban NJ	Elementary	Committee	Changed Active	Government grant startup, school budget for ongoing	Informal, planning for further training	Fidelity	No
RCCP	Suburban NJ	Elementary Middle High	Coordinator	Changed Supportive	Government grant	Internal	Fidelity	No

	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Structure</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>Administration</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Funding</i>	<i>Training</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>Materials</i> <sup>4</sup>	<i>Evaluation</i> <sup>5</sup>
SDM/SPS Special Education	Suburban NJ	Elementary Middle High	Coordinator Committee	Active	Government grant	Internal	Adapted	Yes
PACT	Urban OH	Middle High	Coordinator	Active	Government grant	External contract	Fidelity	Yes
<i>Detached</i>								
PATHS	Suburban WA	Elementary	Coordinator	Invisible	Government grant	Internal	Fidelity	No
Second Step	Urban WA	Elementary	Coordinator	Changed Invisible	Government grant	Internal	Fidelity	No
<i>Discontinued</i>								
Raising Healthy Children	Suburban WA	Elementary	None	Invisible	Research grant	Discontinued	Fidelity	Yes
SDM/SPS	Suburban NJ	Elementary	Coordinator	Changed Unsupportive	Government grant	External contract	Fidelity	Yes

## NOTES

1. *Structure*. "Committee" if existing or newly created committee had regular consideration of program and any decision-making power regarding the program; "coordinator" if any specific individual in the school was designated as point person and managed functions such as coordinating training, providing consultation and support, and planning future directions; "none" if neither existed.
2. *Administration*. "Active" if administrator sent clear, regular messages to staff about importance of program, modeled its concepts, and enabled and supported staff to implement program; "changed" if key administrator(s) had changed since 1997; "invisible" if no influence reported; "supportive" if provided instrumental support in procuring funding, time, or space; and "unsupportive" if reported actively to have blocked implementation of program
3. *Training*. "Discontinued" if no formal or informal introduction to program reported; "external contract" if school contracts with program office to deliver training to staff; "informal" if staff introduced by unstructured conversation, modeling, or transmission of materials from experienced teachers; "internal" if in-house staff prepared to train new staff
4. *Materials*. "Adapted" if school staff modified or added to curricular materials or developed new program components based on program principles; "fidelity" if program implemented according to original curriculum and suggested program components
5. *Evaluation*. "No" if no tracking of progress reported; "Yes" if some type of data collected regarding student knowledge or behavior change

was the driving force that kept the school focused on SEL and thus continuing to improve program delivery. In other cases, programs

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*The stronger and more visible the support from the administrator, the more likely it was that the program would remain vital and infused throughout the school.*

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were coordinated and managed more directly by other staff members, but in each of those cases, staff reported that the program would not exist without the support of key administrators. Support and commitment of other staff members also was identified as critical, but the absolute consensus was that without some level

of support from key school administrators, programs were not likely to be sustained. The stronger and more visible the support from the administrator, the more likely it was that the program would remain vital and infused throughout the school.

### Communication Is the Key

School administrators invested in sparking the enthusiasm and commitment of their staff talk to their staff, and talk to them often. With regard to bringing the SEL program into the schools, administrators in sustained sites gained support by either engaging staff at meetings in selecting from a group of validated SEL programs to implement, or explaining in detail why a particular program had been selected.

Once a program is selected and implementation has begun, administrators planning for sustainability act as examples of the ultimate goal: the incorporation of program vocabulary, skills, and concepts into the everyday life of the school, in order to promote greater social, emotional, and academic success of students. Administrators use the vocabulary in staff meetings. They model decision-making strategies for staff, and use program skills to help resolve conflicts that arise in daily interactions. By consistent modeling, administrators deliver the message that the program being taught is to be used by everyone in the school building. This is part of the change process that trickles down to how staff members interact with students, and how students interact with one another.

Administrators of schools sustaining SEL practices talk about those practices, and talk about them often. One school principal began every staff meeting with the question, “Who has a Second Step [an evidence-based SEL program] story to share?” School staff




know that SEL is a priority of their administrators, because it is talked about regularly. These actions also convey the message that SEL instruction is not a project-driven goal to be highlighted during implementation but then considered “done” once it is running somewhat smoothly. On the contrary, ongoing reflection, discussion, and thoughtful action are real-life applications of SEL to educational practice and are important for true sustenance of effective SEL promotion.

A powerful strategy for securing the energy and commitment of staff is to foster their leadership capabilities and their ability to contribute ideas and talents to program development. This was mentioned frequently as a key ingredient for creating a sense of schoolwide ownership and investment in SEL initiatives. School administrators welcomed ideas and input from staff, found ways for staff to share innovative practices aligned with the SEL program, and developed coordinator and committee roles with significant responsibilities for staff members to fulfill. Strong administrators offered leadership and guidance to aid in maintaining the integrity of program concepts, skills, and directions, but staff truly were empowered to feel ownership—and a resulting passion for and commitment to the SEL programs. This transmission of investment and some leadership in SEL initiatives may also bring about a more unified vision among administration and staff regarding goals and methods of the program, resulting in an enhanced ability to stay true to program tenets even as the program grows and is shaped to fit the unique characteristics of a given school.

School staff need resources in order to take on varied levels of involvement and responsibility with an SEL program. Time is the factor mentioned most often. The competing demands of the typical school day are intense, when combined with the ever-increasing charge to be academically accountable in the broader context of our nation’s education system. Even for staff members who believe deeply in the importance of SEL, time can be a prohibitive factor in developing a sustainable program. School administrators play a powerful role in freeing up time for staff to work on program development, including attending trainings and working on infusing program concepts into the curriculum or

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developing supplemental lessons. This can be accomplished by arranging for substitutes to cover classes, designating regular staff meeting time for program development, or offering incentives for additional time spent outside school hours. Administrators in best-sustained sites understand that this is not a temporary strain on the system that must be borne until the program is established; rather, there must be realistic plans for sustaining these strategies in order to provide the ongoing attention and care that any permanent instructional aims within a school require.

One striking finding that emerged from our interviews was that sustained sites often, over time, had staff members involved in creating supplementary materials or related programs and generally tailoring the original SEL program to meet the needs of the particular school. The intuitive risk of this evolutionary process is that the resulting SEL practices may not retain absolute fidelity to the formats, concepts, and skills of the original program. In the strongest model sites, it was clear that administrators provided oversight for carefully planned additions or departures from the original program protocol, in order to continue developing a valid and viable program. Even in one school in which the daily responsibility of coordinating the SEL program was given to another staff member, the school administrator was able to speak in detail about the curricular additions that had been brought in and developed internally.

It also is common that some members of a school staff will be uncertain about a program or unsupportive of it. Administrators in sustained program sites tended to address these issues head-on. Communicating with staff members is vitally important, in terms of explaining early on that there may be snags that occur in developing implementation, as with any change in the school system, and that communication to raise and help solve problems is welcome. Similarly, administrators spoke of intervening when a particular staff member discredits the program or deride another staff member's efforts toward implementation. Interviewees from two nonpublic school sites referred to the ultimate ability to release from employment any staff members who were significantly and enduringly mismatched with the school's culture and philosophy. An administrator at another sustained school site acknowledged that, even with training and good intentions, some staff may be more adept at implementing lessons and modeling skills for students, and that it may be valuable to ensure that students also are exposed to program instruction and skills in planned activities with school counselors or other staff.

Similarly, an insidious erosion of SEL program implementation can occur if new staff are not trained to implement the program, and if existing staff are not provided with refresher trainings as needed. Sustained sites tended to have an ongoing, regular plan for providing this training, and understood that it was an important aspect of program continuity. All but one site had developed the capacity of staff members to train other staff within the school building, and in some cases the administrator took part in training staff. Administrators are critical gatekeepers for ensuring ongoing training, as time and funding are necessary to provide it.

Ultimately, administrators make sustainability more likely by planting roots that will spread, enabling the program to remain and thrive even in the absence of that administrator. Interview participants professed their belief that a committed, critical mass of involved staff existed and could continue to function in their roles if their administrator left. In one case, both the administrator and the school counselor who coordinated the program left within a relatively short period of time. By that time, several years into implementation, school staff were quite invested in the program. The new school counselor who entered the school was familiar with the program and resumed its coordination, working to orient the new principal, who continued to support it.

This highlights the importance of finding ways for the torch to be carried on when significant figures leave the school system. Selection of replacement staff who are qualified and oriented to continue the program and culture is one method of doing so. Engaging existing or new committees to become involved in curricular infusion, curriculum planning, and extracurricular applications, as well as providing ongoing training were also mentioned as ways of building leadership capacity while also fueling commitment through a sense of participation and ownership.

Finally, school administrators in sustained sites play an important role in procuring additional resources. Some administrators of sustained sites were involved directly in writing grants for continued coverage of expenses. Two schools receiving tuition funds were able to apply some of those funds toward SEL programming, which relies on the decision of the school administrator. An interviewee describing one school site that relied more upon teacher-driven grant applications and initiatives stated that this could not happen without the approval and support of the school administrator. Administrators participating in interviews also reflected clear awareness that staff

need specific time made available systematically for training and program development. One school administrator who had been leading SEL development for 16 years said, “You have to give people time and extra money to focus on it. You have to know it will take years to develop, and it’s ongoing.”

### Summary

Thus, a picture is painted of the administrator heading a school or school system hosting a sustained program and culture of SEL. This is a person who believes in the importance of SEL enough to inspire others to adopt a long-term vision of how and why they can promote better outcomes for children academically and in life by developing their social and emotional skills. This is a person who can motivate staff, and remain focused and motivated enough to ensure that implementation can proceed and expand in the school environment. Such an administrator is a critical ingredient for developing an SEL initiative that can be sustained.

### **A Core Group of Individuals, in Addition to the School Administrator, Strongly Supports the Program and Is Very Involved in It**

As I look at leadership and change, it may start at the top, but everyone should be together. One thing we did right was that it didn’t come from me; it came from the school, teachers saying something wasn’t right. A committee collected data, including teachers from every grade.

—School principal

Even with the staunchest support of the school administrator, SEL programs cannot thrive without the commitment of other members of the school community. Here we broaden our view of the school system to understand that sustainability of SEL programs requires integration of program concepts and practices into the fabric of school life.

At the most basic level, implementation of most curricular SEL programs requires instruction by school staff members—most often

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*A pervasive attitude among staff in many schools today is one of weary cynicism with respect to new programs that reflect current fads or unfunded mandates . . .*

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teachers. A pervasive attitude among staff in many schools today is one of weary cynicism with respect to new programs that reflect current fads or unfunded mandates related to students' minds or character or prevention of problem behaviors; because implementation often is not planned and carried out with attention to making it sustainable, such programs often fade away. Yet the need for attending to students' social and emotional development never fades, and thus program after program is introduced throughout the years to attempt to address these issues without any one program becoming infused enough into the school's daily life and culture to have the desired impact. Teachers today are bombarded with countless responsibilities and pressures. Implementing an SEL curriculum may receive low priority if it is perceived as disconnected from the academic mission of schools or as going through fruitless motions in order to fulfill the mandate of an administrator who may be gone in a few short years.

In successful, sustained SEL program sites, however, school staff largely were committed to and even passionate about instruction that incorporated SEL. Stories were told of teachers sharing their successful strategies with other teachers, devoting their own extra time to lesson planning, and even presenting to parents and professional audiences at conferences about their SEL approaches. Interview participants spoke about the magic that seemed to take hold when school staff felt attached to the SEL program, often because they had been involved in shaping it.

One program representative, reflecting on the progress of her particular program in different school systems, noted that implementation continuity was less vulnerable to change in administration in a site where teachers had taken a very active role in running the program. Teachers in that school wrote grants to procure funding and were active in coaching one another and planning implementation. In that district, when frequent changes in administration brought in new administrators who were unfamiliar with the program or seemed unsupportive, teachers approached them directly to gain support for continuity, and were successful.

The interviewee contrasted that experience with another district in which teachers liked the program but were not very involved in its development apart from classroom instruction. When a new administrator arrived and chose to implement a different program, there did not appear to be any constructive resistance, and staff members were retrained in the new curriculum. The willingness and ability to be a voice for the SEL program, whether in creating awareness for

new administrators or in addressing staff members who demonstrate negativity or difficulties with implementation, is critical for keeping the program pointed and moving in the right direction. Otherwise, these icebergs in the water can do permanent damage or even end the life of an SEL initiative.

One school counselor who coordinates SEL efforts in her school described her conscious efforts to include other staff members in adopting roles in program-related activities. She explained her concern that certain program components would not survive her tenure at the school, and her belief that those components would become a more permanent part of school functioning if there were a broader sense of ownership existed among staff. This makes logical sense, as the wider the base of people who are committed to and support the program and the more embedded the program is within other programs and goals of the school, the less precarious will be its balance in the face of the changing winds that affect schools.

### **Program Language and Skills Are Present in Multiple Aspects of Daily School Life**

In any K–3 classroom you will see the vocabulary posted. . . . At the same time we’re holding kids accountable for using it in the upper grades. It happens through literature, through resolving conflicts, through class meetings, through small-group support like social skills groups, newcomer groups, etc. We all use the same language and the same problem-solving process.

—*School principal*

We call it a “3D” program: discuss, demonstrate, and do. Every single day they introduce a social skill, discuss it, demonstrate it, use it, and review it at the end of the day. . . . Everybody knows in specials (art, gym, etc.) what the skill is to reinforce it.

—*School principal, referring to SEL program  
implemented for children with autism*

How do we know that an SEL program has been sustained in a school? Years after inception, the concepts, language, and skills of that program are being taught, reinforced, and used in multiple aspects of daily life. Concepts and skills are learned so that they may

be applied. Particularly with respect to social and emotional skills, there are rich opportunities throughout every student's day in which to apply those skills in order to enhance academic and interpersonal success. Giving "lip service" to teaching skills without applying and reinforcing them throughout the school environment truly undermines the importance and vitality of acting with social and emotional intelligence. Staff at schools where programs are sustained say that students "know" the words associated with the program and can explain and use them. This transcends the time spent, perhaps weekly, for direct instruction of the SEL program to permeate other classroom instruction time and school life in the hallways and beyond.

### **The Program Is Compatible With Needs and Activities in the School**

Our mission is to develop responsible citizens, problem solvers, and decision makers. That's why we chose the program. . . . It put more responsibility into the hands of the kids. We thought that was powerful and fit with the mission statement of our school.

—*School principal*

This school principal quoted above refers to a "fit" between the selected SEL program and the existing culture of her school. There are many implications of the seemingly simple suggestion to seek compatibility between program and school. Part of making this connection is explaining the program and its intended benefits thoroughly to staff. In sustained sites, administrators tended either to involve staff in selecting from a number of quality SEL programs to implement, or to go to lengths to explain why the program had been selected and to communicate and answer questions about the fit between the school and the program.

### **A Plan Exists and Is Followed for Perpetuating the Knowledge and Skills Needed to Implement the Program**

Training, we've always emphasized. But now we're emphasizing *ongoing* training and coaching and support, because as I've talked with clients over the years, the ones who are sustaining it

have got a system for staying on top if it, reminding teachers why they're doing it, keeping them excited, and helping them with snags.

—Program director

Initial implementation of an SEL program often begins with a round of training for school staff. A good deal of work, coordination, and anticipation may mark this first effort to prepare staff to begin the program. Pains may have been taken to allocate time for everyone to participate in training, funds almost certainly have been spent to pay for it, and the feeling may exist that the school is now fueled up and “on its way.” Without creating a plan for how staff will remain strong deliverers of the program in the face of natural turnover, changing times, and competing demands, implementation is likely to run out of gas. Break-downs are common when no regular maintenance occurs.

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*Sustaining sites had some mechanism for determining the need for and delivering training for new staff. Many also provided some boosters or repeated exposure for experienced staff.*

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Sustaining sites had some mechanism for determining the need for and delivering training for new staff. Many also provided some boosters or repeated exposure for experienced staff. Practices varied, ranging from annual trainings

to trainings repeated every 3 years, as well as requiring summer institutes and having an in-house professional development coordinator available for coaching and consultation. A number of sites arranged for in-house staff to be trained by program developers so that they then could train other staff members. However, these sites found it necessary to go beyond the typical turnkey or “train-the-trainers” model. Keeping a link to the program development office was a desirable goal. While it was rarely feasible to hire program developers to do all the necessary training, a relationship with program developers proved to be invaluable for troubleshooting implementation problems and for updating training content and methodology.

Interview participants clearly conveyed some refined, practical lessons for effective preparation of in-house trainers. The conditions must be favorable for school staff to become comfortable and skilled in training their fellow staff members in the program, and there must



be a realistic plan for continuing this practice over time. The process begins with selecting the right people to become trainers. While many school staff members likely would make solid trainers, the right people to start with are staff members who are experienced and comfortable with the program, respected by other staff, and interested in becoming trainers. One program training director referred to her experience that some school staff were not comfortable adopting the role of teaching other adults. These abilities should not be taken for granted, but considered carefully in selecting staff to participate in preparing to train their peers. This increases the likelihood that they will be engaged in and committed to their roles, as well as received favorably by the other staff they are to train. Moreover, more than one person should become a trainer. If only one is trained, and that person leaves the school system next year, what will become of the school's training system? Training staff is a big job, best shared by a group of people.

In addition to structured training, accessibility of support throughout the school year is another factor that emerged in our interviews. Interviewees discussing programs in sustained sites described atmospheres in which school staff members talked about SEL strategies regularly and could approach coordinators or other colleagues flexibly for support. This underscored the value of having a designated coordinator or committee members who have time and ability to fulfill their roles as central sources of information and support. In one school, a regular time was allotted each week when teachers could drop into the school counselor's office for consultation about that week's curricular lesson. In other schools, supervisors and even a professional development coordinator were available and invested time and energy in working with teaching staff on SEL strategies.


### **There Are Systematic Opportunities for Staff to Reflect Upon Progress of the Program**

[Part of our mission is] to be reflective and responsive. I think we're doing the same things we did 60 years ago, but being more articulate about them. Kids can speak about them more and reflect about them more than they could [back then].

—*School counselor*

Well-trained, committed staff members help to build the foundation for solid implementation and to allow the program to grow. One ingredient for the growth process appears to be the ability of staff members to reflect upon progress of the program. Conscious thought about what works well and what does not can illuminate the pathway to greater success in implementation. Beyond personal reflection,

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*Well-trained, committed staff members help to build the foundation for solid implementation and to allow the program to grow.*

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the opportunity to share with and learn from the perspectives and experiences of others can yield rich results that benefit the entire school community.

There are many benefits of regular reflection about progress in promoting SEL. Through reflection,

the school community may become more aware of what they are doing to promote students' SEL, and make their implementation more purposeful and thoughtful. As demonstrated by the school counselor quoted earlier, this can extend to modeling for students, who can benefit from reflecting upon their own efforts at SEL. In addition, through reflection, administration and staff may become aware of modifications they need to make to enhance program functioning. A raised level of continuing consciousness and participation can increase the sense of ownership and commitment that staff members feel for promoting SEL. Numerous interviewees spoke of the value they perceived of giving staff opportunities to voice opinions and ideas about the program, noting that people responded well when they felt that their input was valued.

What opportunities for reflection were created? Mirroring the processes recommended for developing students' SEL, formal exercises as well as infused experiences were described by interviewees. Often interviewees spoke of an administrator's integration of program reflection into regular staff meetings or other staff gatherings. In some schools, groups of staff members met either during the school day or after school hours to develop and share lessons and strategies with which they had had success, thus enabling further dissemination and entrenchment of positive practices in their school. Reflection allowed for the further fine-tuning of a program and the further molding of it to fit the particular school environment. Written surveys were also used to collect information from school staff about

program operation, including such logistics as training schedules and formats. At the most informal level, the majority of interviewees in sustained sites referred to an ongoing dialogue between coordinators or administrators and staff members who would approach them to discuss ideas for program modifications or additions. When this approachability and responsiveness existed, the opportunity to share reflections often resulted in positive growth for the program. Moreover, reflection serves as a constant “early warning system” for potentially serious problems.

### **Information About the Program’s Effectiveness Is Collected and Reflected Upon, and Used in Planning Future Directions**

When we started pulling this together we were concerned about the evaluation component, because we needed to know it was effective. . . . My first year it was not unusual at lunchtime for 15 to 20 kids to be referred to my office. Now we’re down to 10 a year. My first five years in the building, I would receive a stack of bus referrals that would amount to about 50 to 55 a year. Last year there were 3! We can quantify that.

—*School principal*

Schools that systematically gathered information about the effectiveness of their program components generally were the best sustained. There were differences in how and what types of data were collected, but they shared an awareness of the value of documentation of program effects. Strategies included tracking discipline referrals, monitoring various problem-solving forms completed by students, and distributing surveys to students and staff. One school established personalized grades for effort that individual students devoted to developing different skills, such as giving a positive grade to a student who raised his hand to participate in class if expressing himself in that manner was difficult for him. The practice of formally acknowledging students’ acquisition and use of SEL skills through grades or progress reports would be a clear sign of the value and importance of working on those skills, and would reinforce the understanding that such skills can be taught and developed. Ongoing program evaluation

was taken very seriously in order to develop credibility in the district and to gain the support and commitment of the school community.

Many interviewees referred to the increasing pressure to select validated programs and demonstrate positive impact on student functioning in order to sustain funding and other aspects of commitment to SEL program implementation. However, data also must be gathered with respect for the integrity and developmental nature of programs. One program director who had worked with many schools to implement a particular SEL program emphasized the need for patience in pursuing evaluation of SEL outcomes. While data about such behavioral indices as bus or lunchtime referrals or classroom


conflicts may be collected from the first year, such gains are not likely to be seen until after the first full year of implementation.

This program director related the story of a particular school whose principal initiated tracking of discipline referrals after beginning

implementation of an SEL program. "In the first year, there was not that huge of an improvement," he reported. "But after two years, referrals dropped incredibly. After three years, it was unbelievable." The program director's next comment is important to take to heart for anyone invested in making a real change: "It's not all going to happen in one year. You need to keep going."

This piece of wisdom helps set realistic and productive expectations not only for program administrators, but also for school staff, parents, and other members of the school community who understandably will await the results of program implementation. This highlights the need for communication to the school community about the natural trajectory of SEL program effects. Without that awareness and understanding, programs may be abandoned rather than sustained with patience and, perhaps, some needed modifications. For example, the recent focus on addressing the problem of bullying may lead some schools to look for an entirely new program to focus specifically on bullying, rather than consider how their current SEL program targets the issue and how additions or modifications may be made within the context of the existing program to respond to changes in the school's needs.

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*Schools that systematically gathered information about the effectiveness of their program components generally were the best sustained.*

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## **NONSUSTAINED SITES: ILLUSTRATION FROM A DETACHED SITE**

While space precludes a parallel discussion of the other three types of program outcomes identified, the experience of one of the detached sites is particularly illustrative of how sustainability can be lost. A teacher from this elementary school explained, “Initially, we were the poster child for ideal implementation.” He then described all of the early measures that the school employed to build a thriving program. There was clear staff buy-in; strong administrative support; schoolwide training and involvement; and regular use of unifying practices, such as demonstrating role-plays on the school’s closed-circuit television station and announcing SEL goals for the week over the loudspeaker. An existing at-risk committee helped maintain program functioning. “I think probably the first three years were amazing to watch. Second and third graders already knew the steps, the vocabulary. You could see . . . that buildingwide implementation really made a difference. People on the playground were good about it. We saw major change in the average kid.”

Why, then, did the SEL program in this promising school site detach from the system into which it was being integrated? “We went from a building where it was a total goal [to one in which] it quickly went to the bottom of the heap. . . . Now I think there are 20 classrooms, and maybe four teachers are regular, meaning having lessons once a week or every other week. . . . If the [curriculum] is happening in a room, it’s happening. If it’s not, it’s not.”

This reflective teacher pointed to a confluence of factors that he believed were responsible for the downturn in focus on systematic SEL programming in his school. The primary influences that he identified were numerous changes in school administrators, ending with a current principal who did not emphasize SEL promotion, coupled with a lack of coordination and monitoring of effective SEL instruction.

The teacher also described the emphasis placed by the current administration on results of standardized testing, as well as the lack of momentum that existed within the school staff to continue valued practices. “We had two principals who said, ‘Yes, this is fine,’ but weren’t behind it as much. That, mixed with standards-based education. . . . If it’s not listed in the standards, people aren’t comfortable, and feel they don’t have time to get things done.”

At the same time, the teacher discussed reasons why staff may not have developed enough of their own energy to sustain integrated program functioning. When the principal who initially drove the focus on the school's SEL programming was on site, there was no additional coordinator assigned to oversee program functioning. More recently, a school counselor was hired in the building who was a strong proponent of the program, and she supported efforts by supplementing or substituting for teacher instruction of curricular lessons in classrooms. The participating teacher whom we interviewed commended the counselor's efforts, but noted that,

I think that's effective in terms of introducing the concepts, but if you don't have the teacher taking it over, then when the counselor leaves, the vocabulary is not continued. The basis of this program is how we're going to run our classroom. So I think that diminished the implementation of the program.

An at-risk committee also functioned to maintain some aspects of the SEL program, but the committee disbanded after a key teacher left the district.

Another concern that the teacher discussed was the importance of motivating teachers to continue the curriculum through sparking their involvement. He expressed his belief that—partly due to the regimented manner in which the curriculum was meant to be implemented—teachers experienced a lack of stimulation and ownership in the process of implementing lessons year after year. “If you've been doing it for eight or nine years, how do you keep it interesting, so it's not just the same old thing? It was a research-based program. You do it in this order, period.”

Compared to some of the sustained sites discussed previously, teachers were not inspired with the responsibility of finding ways to supplement the basic curricular program with compatible materials and infusion strategies that they created and then adapted to the specific needs of their students. The participating teacher talked about his own efforts to encourage teachers to apply the curricular lessons to the broader curriculum and daily learning experience of students in the school. “In my school, regarding literature connections, nobody knows about it unless I print it out and give it to them.”

This brought the teacher to his belief regarding the importance of having a coordinator responsible for supporting SEL programming in a school building. He talked about the time limitations that

affect teachers, and the need for someone to take responsibility for finding materials to link SEL concepts to the curriculum and making them accessible to teachers who do not have time to do such preparation themselves. Even in speaking about the importance of a strong coordinator, the teacher returned to the influence of the school administrator in ensuring program stability. “I think it goes back to somebody at the top in a school district saying, ‘I’m going to look at this in your building, and how you’re doing it and measuring it, and how it will look at the beginning and end of the year.’ Unfortunately, I think it takes something that rigid to happen. It’s not a bad thing, but in this climate, I think it’s the only way it’s going to happen.”

## CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, studies of sustainability are challenging—first, because they require innovations to be sustained; second, because they are linked to the specific context of the innovations being studied. Here the focus was on flagship settings for evidence-based SEL programs. One cannot presume that findings from this limited genre will have broad generalizability. Therefore, Box 4.2 presents a summary of our findings in the form of hypotheses, or starting points, for those considering or actively involved in implementation of SEL and related character education, prevention of problem behaviors, and service learning programs with the intention of seeing them sustained. They consist of suggested features of sites that tend to favor long-term, integral continuation of model programs. We divide these features into those that appear to sustain the motivation of sites to continue programs and those that seem to sustain their ability to do so. Both of these aspects seem essential for sustainability.

Future systematic research, as well as case studies within and across specific SEL programs and in varied contexts, will refine our conclusions and improve the guidance that they can provide. Further, examination of school-based interventions other than SEL, as well as interventions in nonschool settings, will establish the most general principles of sustainability of intervention programs. This is a vital area of inquiry, particularly as it is becoming clearer and clearer that continuity of interventions for children is necessary if they are to have their desired impact, particularly for students who may be considered “at risk” by virtue of their own developmental characteristics or disadvantage in the environments in which they are being raised (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003).

**Box 4.2** Summary of Suggested Features of Sites  
That Can Sustain Model Programs**Sustaining Motivation****Staff Commitment and Energy**

- Decision to initiate particular program made by some form of staff consensus
- Presentation to staff as serious, integrated commitment, not as extra or “feel-good” that will take years to implement fully and realize full behavioral and academic benefits
- Selection of initial staff to be trained based on their interest and on their positive status and leadership ability among staff
- Existence of core group of individuals (beyond school administrator) who strongly support the program and are very involved in it
- Involvement of teaching staff in shaping program. Beyond planning and decision making, they are engaged in adapting or creating new lessons and determining infusion strategies.
- Program tied to explicit mission/goals of school
- Systematic opportunities for staff (more than just coordinator, at least a team of people) to reflect upon progress of program and future directions
- Involvement of a committee (either existing or newly created, and including a coordinator or lead person) predicts stronger sustainability than existence of a single coordinator.
- Coordinator/committee able to troubleshoot and support teaching staff by easing access to materials and strategies

**Administrative Support**

- Clear commitment and willingness to participate actively on part of administrator
- Ability of administrator to make references to program concepts and progress with students and staff on frequent, regular basis
- Ability of administrator to model skills himself/herself in working with staff and students
- Clear message that staff are expected to implement and reinforce program
- Planning to allow specific time for staff to work on program development
- Awareness (by official or unofficial monitoring) of levels of implementation in building
- Ability to intervene with staff who are weak in program skills and implementation, or who are resistant to using them
- New administrators engaged in the program and open to continuing their support of the program.



- Decisions favor hiring and retaining staff who are compatible with goals of program.

### **Establishing Program Value**

- Programs are compatible with mission, needs, and activities in the school. Programs can be adapted to meet current needs based on changing data.
- Information about the program's functioning is continuously reflected upon to assist in planning future directions.
- In most successful sites, some type of data tracking indicated changes in student behaviors.
- Some sites were sustained where the majority of validation evidence and continued staff motivation came from informal perceptions of positive impact on students. This is less likely to be effective in the current and future accountability climate.
- Most recent indications are that there are increasing demands for "hard data" on student behavior in order to justify funding and time allotted to programs.

### **Sustaining Ability**

#### **Professional Development**

- Training of all staff in building, including administrators
- Preparation of staff to model and reinforce skills for students throughout the day. Program language and skills are present in multiple aspects of daily school life.
- Preparation and support for staff to allow students opportunities for practice of skills
- Periodic retraining (ideally no less often than every 3 years) for staff
- Preparation for *effective, reliable* transfer of training capacity to in-house staff
- Ongoing professional development and opportunities to reflect on the program and its concepts
- Ongoing connection (or reconnection) to program office that provided initial training can be critical if program is floundering in order to identify or obtain solutions to obstacles and continue toward sustainability.

#### **Funding Sources**

- Partnering with community agencies can increase access to funds and program options.
- Reliance on grants was a variable factor, often depending on commitment of administrator. Creating a need for schools to assume responsibility for some of the cost *may* increase commitment.

## APPENDIX

### Assessment Framework for Sustainability Site Visits and Interviews

#### General Questions

1. Is the program still in existence?
2. For each component of the program, ask about
  - Dosage
  - Fidelity to content (if curricular)
  - Manner
  - Number and type of interventions
  - *And* how these have changed since 1997

#### Motivation and Awareness of Need

1. Are school staff aware of the program goals? Do they perceive them as valuable goals? Have these goals changed over time, and if so, why? How has support and value of these goals changed, and why?
2. Is there any ongoing assessment of risk or needs? Has this been done regularly over the years? Why/why not? If so, have the needs changed?

#### Implementation System

##### Resources Available (and Institutionalized) (Human, Financial, Other)

1. Which staff are involved, and what are their roles in the program? How has this evolved or changed over time, and why? How would you describe the commitment level of involved staff, and how they perceive the program?
2. Are specific program materials being used, and are they considered sufficient? Have there been changes over the years? If so, what sort of changes? Have any such changes been well-received?
3. How is time allotted for program activities?

4. How are costs covered? Formalized as part of budget? Development over time?
5. Are staff who are not directly active in the program impacted by the program in any way, and are they indirectly supportive (or not unsupportive)? How has this developed or changed over time, and why? Is there any collaboration with or support from individuals or groups in the community outside the school?

### **Supports for the Process and Institutionalization**

1. Are short- and long-term goals set? At program's inception, was there an explicit vision and plan for how it would be sustained? Has this developed over time, and how/why? Is there an individual coordinator assigned to oversee daily functioning of the program? Is there any educational process for the committee or general staff regarding program goals and theory of change toward desired outcomes?
2. How is feedback on program functioning from school staff and students received and responded to? When did this begin, and how has it developed?
3. Is administration involved (school and district level)? If so, how? Has the nature of involvement changed over time, and if so, how/why? Is ongoing training or support provided for staff?
4. How are activities monitored, to be sure they occur and to identify needs for support? How has this monitoring developed or changed over time, and why?
5. How and to what extent is the program made visible in the school? How has this changed over time, and why?

### **Validation**

#### **Value Confirmed**

1. How is the value of the program for the district determined? Has this process changed over time?
2. How are results disseminated to the community? Has this always been the case?

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