



## EPISODE 5

# Social and Emotional Learning In and Out of School

### LUCAS HELD

Welcome to Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning, a new series of podcasts from The Wallace Foundation. I'm Lucas Held, director of communications at Wallace, and I'm delighted to have you join us today. This podcast series features conversations exploring the findings from the first two years of an initiative in which six communities are exploring whether and if so, how, children can benefit from intentional partnerships between schools and out-of-school time programs to build social and emotional skills and what it takes to actually do this work. This effort is called partnerships for social and emotional learning initiative or what we have affectionately come to call PSELI. The six communities in the initiative are Boston, Dallas, Denver, Palm Beach County, Florida, Tacoma, Washington, and Tulsa, Oklahoma. I want to thank our research partners at the RAND Corporation whose findings and early lessons we'll explore in depth over this series.

The first report, *Early Lessons from Schools and Out-of-School Time Programs Implementing Social and Emotional Learning*, is available without charge on the Wallace and Rand websites. We hope its findings will be useful, whether you're a district and out-of-school time provider, or a group of both collaborating, as well as to policymakers. In today's episode, we'll discuss integrating social and emotional learning across the school day. And out of school time, we'll hear about the challenges to achieving this across these two learning environments and the practical steps that schools and out-of-school time programs can take to develop mutually reinforcing social and emotional learning practices and routines.

And I'm delighted to welcome our two guests today. We have Kim Price who is manager of social, emotional academic learning. And that's an acronym that is pronounced seal at Denver public schools. And we also have Katherine Plog Martinez, who is a consultant with the forum for youth investment. Who's supporting the Denver, Tulsa and Tacoma PSELI communities and Katherine previously, co-led the Denver Afterschool Alliance. So thank you both very much for joining us today. And let's start out with you, Katherine. Um, why is it important? Why should, uh, districts and, uh, out of school time, uh, intermediaries

and programs think about, uh, linking SEL, uh, across these two environments.

**KATHERINE PLOG  
MARTINEZ**

Thanks so much for having us today, Lucas, and I really appreciate that question. When I think about that question, I often start from my place as a parent and thinking about my own kids. When we think about young people, it is so critical and for them to really be successful, the more continuity they can have across different environments, the better. So it's great. If kids are receiving social, emotional learning in school, it's even better if they're receiving social, emotional learning in school and afterschool. And it's amazing if that social emotional learning can be consistent and connected across school and after school, instead of kids having to figure out, wait, am I supposed to manage my emotions here?

They know that everywhere people are looking to them to be able to name their emotions, to build strong relationships, to plan and connect with each other. And it just makes it easier as a kiddo to navigate that, but it also makes those outcomes stronger because those lessons are being reinforced. And so, again, from that parent lens, what I see for my kids is the more places they're experiencing it, it also gives it credibility. It's not just moms saying it, but it's the teacher saying it and the person in the cafeteria saying it and their afterschool program saying it as well.

**LUCAS HELD**

Thank you, Katherine. Uh, and Kim let's, let's get your perspective on that basic question. Katherine talked about, uh, making it easier for kids to navigate and also the power of reinforcement was the word she used, extra credibility. Um, do those resonate with you?

**KIM PRICE**

Yes, absolutely. I think Katherine was right on and thinking about the unique opportunity that we have to connect with our students, especially some of our most vulnerable students who are, um, perhaps at our schools from seven in the morning to seven at night. And if we can have a continuous through line that, um, is speaking, social, emotional, academic learning for these students, we are increasing their opportunity to be successful both in school and out of school and in life. And when we can do the heavy lifting on our part, um, and have continuity of language, continuity of rituals and routines, behavior structures, um, positive supports, um, we are creating an environment where our students can really thrive.

**LUCAS HELD**

So you've seen, uh, uh, uh, anecdotally at least, um, an impact on, on the student body.

**KIM PRICE**

Absolutely. We know that some of times, um, well we know that relationships are very important and for some of our students, those relationships happen beyond our every day, uh, teachers in the classroom, perhaps they happen with our out-of-school time leaders, coaches, uh, with other folks in the building. And when we have taken the time to focus on those relationships, through social, emotional language, um, we've seen our students really bond with particular adults in their building and form relationships that build confidence, that build, um, support structures that create trust, um, and really create a sense of belonging. And we know when we have that sense of belonging, that our students really thrive. And so we've seen some specific students just really grow from having these trusting relationships rooted in social, emotional language.

**KATHERINE PLOG  
MARTINEZ**

Lucas. That makes me think that Kim and I both answered your question from the perspective of students. Um, but we've also seen that relationship growth in adults. And that's another reason to have that continuity. Um, in Denver, I've really watched the team go from talking about school and after school to talking about a community. And when the adults feel they're part of a shared community and they feel like they belong and are connected, it becomes easier for them to build those relationships with students. And they each bring their unique connections to the community and to kids into the conversation and into the service of their students.

**LUCAS HELD**

That's a really interesting, uh, transition, uh, Katherine, I'm wondering RAND in its, uh, a study on the early lessons found that there was a kind of a power differential to, to get over. Was that, uh, something that, uh, that, that, that you had to think about in your kind of, um, uh, advisor role to this project, and then Kim love to get your thoughts on that as well later?

**KATHERINE PLOG  
MARTINEZ**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I was in a unique position when I was supporting the Denver Afterschool Alliance that I actually sat in the district. And so have, have experienced that in terms of leading my own staff pre PSELI and there is a differential we need to own that education K-12 education and after-school programs come to this work from

different starting points. They have different expectations in front of them. They have different education that they bring to the table, but they also each bring really unique strengths and benefits. And what I have seen as I've supported communities, we've talked a lot about how do you openly have that conversation and what I've seen, you know, really to point to Denver, um, it's happening in other communities as well, but a number of schools where the school leader, um, the school seal champion and the out of school time provider have really been able to identify what are the things that we do really well during the day, that would be great in afterschool. And what are the things that they're doing really well in afterschool that we can bring into the day. And when we think about those strengths that each brings, it becomes less about who's in charge, who has more authority and becomes more about how collectively can we learn and grow and improve.

#### **LUCAS HELD**

So it sounds like people got a view kind of complementary strengths in each of the sector. Kim, was this, from your perspective, a challenge that had to be overcome?

#### **KIM PRICE**

Absolutely. I think that, um, one of the biggest growths, if I remembering correctly, um, in some of the RAND data, was that mindsets and perceptions for shifted about out of school, time providers and, um, their role that they have at the school, um, from being a teacher myself, we had students go to afterschool programming and, you know, I just had them line up and I said, the, by see you later. And I, I had no idea what they were doing with their time. And I think as an organization, um, something that the Denver Afterschool Alliance has really done well is elevate what has happening afterschool to shift those mindsets from being, um, perhaps seen as babysitters, um, to truly partners in a child's education and a student's education and having the opportunity to, um, support growth within that, for that student.

And so I, um, teachers, educators really shifted their mindsets when we started, uh, creating space for these partnerships, for conversations, where they could collaborate about a student, they could, in fact, even in some cases, look at student data, um, that was in school and out of school and they could collectively problem solve, um, and, and come up with some great ideas specifically around perhaps supporting behavior or, um, if a teacher was having a hard time connecting with a kid because these relationships grew, they could reach out to their out of school time partner and say, Hey, I'm just having a really hard time

connecting with Marcus. Um, and the out of school time professional would be like, did you know that he, uh, you know, has three sisters at home and, you know, all of these things are happening and they're like, Oh, and they could really come together and wrap their arms around, um, the students through these, these relationships, these mutual relationships that had been built. And this, this acknowledgement that we really are one school, one team, one community that all has the same focus on the success of our students. And so that growth was, um, unexpected, I would say, um, in shifting those perceptions. And I think part of, one of the biggest levers to the success of the PSELI, um, programming.

**LUCAS HELD**

Very interesting. Um, and it's so interesting. You're both talking about, uh, mindsets because in, in, in many accounts of organizational change, folks tend to immediately go to, okay, what are the three things we're going to do tomorrow? What are the three practices, but you're pointing to the kind of mental maps people have in their heads as something that may be as a, uh, if not a precursor than a kind of necessary accompaniment to, to, uh, practices. So really interesting. Let, let's talk about what it took to make this, uh, partnership work. So I think folks have heard from you about benefits for students, uh, additional continuity reinforcement, um, should districts and out of school, time organizations thinking about this, be ready to, uh, invest time in this. What, what does it take a lot of work to have this, uh, these mindsets change and to, to make the partnership work? So maybe let's start with Katherine and then go to Kim.

**KATHERINE PLOG  
MARTINEZ**

The short answer is yes, it takes a lot of time. Your, your comment about really wanting to start with the tactical resonated so much. So I was still with Denver during the planning year and the first year of the Pacelli grant. And we had probably an overly ambitious plan. We intended to get to curriculum with kids in the first year. And, and what you identified on what Kim is speaking to around mindsets really was our big, early learning that we actually needed to get to where we wanted to. We had to go slow to go fast. I know people say that a lot, but we had to pause and we had to really focus on the first and there were multiple ways to focus on the adults. One of them was in helping adults think about their own, um, SEAL skills and competencies, but the other and the place where it takes time is in spending time together.

We talked about building a community. You can't build a community if you're not sitting in a room together. So our, our, um, implementation teams for social, emotional and academic learning, and this is true. Most of the PSELI communities have built school and OST partner implementation teams. They have to meet regularly and consistently, they have to have time eventually to get to the point that Kim talked about talking about individual kids, but starting with the conversation about what is it that you do, and how does SEAL fit into that? How does social emotional learning fit into that? And what might you bring to the table and what do we bring to the table? And they also have to spend a lot of time practicing some of the SEAL practices themselves. Most of the communities use what we call the three signature practices, warm welcome, engaging activities, and optimistic closures. Those provided times for the adults to connect as human beings, they needed to get to know each other, um, as people to know what they brought, not just in terms of their role and their organization, but as a human being.

**LUCAS HELD**

Kim, how about, how about from your end, um, should districts be, uh, prepared to really invest, uh, time into this to make it work?

**KIMBERLEY  
WILLIAMS**

Um, you know, I absolutely agree with Katherine and that it does take time. Um, but I think even more so is intention. I think we, we have a lot of, of time meetings, all of these things scheduled, um, and, you know, especially this year, this past year that we've had, we know a lot of things don't go as planned. And so I think it isn't necessarily about finding more time, but how can you leverage the current time that you do have? And I think that is something that we just heard in a meeting yesterday with some of our, um, school-based staff was, you know, we, we have found a time to, to meet regularly, but not just found the time, uh, prioritized that time and made the best use of that time. And so even if it's, you know, walking down the hall together, or, um, I think some of the biggest learnings we saw was, um, our out of school time staff would come just a little bit early and visit classrooms and see kiddos in their classrooms and see the language on the walls and see that, that duality of, of, um, common language and systems in place. And so just that little shift to, um, but five, 10 minutes, what really, um, was a leverage point for, for our staff. And so, yes, it's, it's about time, but, you know, I hope people aren't hearing like more meetings or, or something like that because nobody needs any more of that. But how can you leverage current meetings?

**LUCAS HELD**

Um, let, let's briefly hit on a couple of, um, specific, uh, uh, challenges that, uh, brands, uh, uh, study raised. Um, one was the, um, challenge of the lack of readily available, uh, SEL curriculum designed for OST, which made it a little tough to, uh, coordinate, uh, with, uh, with schools. Um, I, so is that, is that an issue and any kind of advice that has emerged from your work for other districts on this question of curricula? Uh, let's let me, uh, turn to Katherine for that.

**KATHERINE PLOG  
MARTINEZ**

It definitely has been a challenge. And I think luckily over the course of the PSELI initiative, we're seeing more SEL curriculum designed for the out-of-school-time space. So that's exciting, but that still doesn't fully solve the challenge that you're, you're pointing to and identifying. So I think what we've seen different places doing, and in Tulsa, a number of the schools have selected a theme that they're focusing on for the month. And then it allows opportunity to think about, okay, in the day school, we might be addressing that in part with our curriculum and our explicit instruction.

In afterschool, we can think about how we infuse that into our different activities, maybe where we have an arts unit that we're doing, or we're thinking about poetry, and we can bring those themes into the afterschool space, even without that curriculum. I think in both the school and out of school time space, we have found that while having a curriculum is important, we also need to build skills of our teachers and providers and educators, to be able to adapt that curriculum, to fit their specific community and to continue to think more about how they integrate whatever the lesson of the curriculum is into all the other aspects of learning and programming. So while yes, it's a barrier. I think that doing what we do best in out of school time space in terms of really intentional program design is more important to overcoming that challenge than having a curriculum is.

**LUCAS HELD**

And Kim, that kind of echoes your earlier comments about, instead of thinking either or schooler OST out of school time, that is thinking about unique strengths and benefits. Um, it, so I gather you, do you think that this, um, uh, limited amount of a curriculum that's focused on OST for SEL is a, uh, an impenetrable barrier?

**KIM PRICE**

You know, what I completely agree with Katherine is that it's, it can appear as an, uh, um, a barrier at first, but there are so many more aspects that I think, um, outweigh that, that obstacle. Um, the curriculum

is one piece of what we like to call the, the four legs of the stool, um, where, uh, explicit SEL instruction happens, right? Where we're teaching, uh, students language specifically self-awareness is, um, social awareness is right. Relationship building. And so in addition to that, which is, is a very important piece, it's about the climate and culture that we create, where we welcome self-awareness where we honor students that show up with it, where we name, um, relationships being built, where we say, Oh, wow, I really see you managing your, your emotions. Um, you know, how does that feel? And so that's the climate and culture that we're creating a social and emotional climate and culture, as well as integrating it into, um, the programming just like Katherine mentioned.

Um, you know, historically out of school time is, is, uh, you know, positive youth development opportunity for our students. Um, whether it's through sports, arts, creativity playing, et cetera. Um, how can we see those strengths, those competencies coming out and make those connections, right. So how can we integrate it? Um, it, in day school, we talk about integrating it into math, science, et cetera, after school, how can we integrate it into the actual, uh, the playground, the, the interactions, the, the circle time, all of the opportunity to reflect a quick reflection. How did that feel, um, is a great opportunity for kids to transfer those explicit language skills. And so I think it can initially be an obstacle just like, uh, it was, I would say in the day school as well, thinking what curriculum, what should we do? Lots of times we look for curriculums to be the answer, um, to what we're all looking for. And, um, any educator out there will say a curriculum is one piece of the puzzle. Um, it can certainly help, uh, but it's definitely not the, the solo answer.

## **LUCAS HELD**

And that's, that's really helpful. And it sounds like both of you in a sense are talking about some skills, some ways of interacting with students that in a way transcend a specific, uh, curriculum and thus can, uh, really, uh, be common uniting elements that, um, as you said at the start, um, reinforce where students, uh, uh, ways of, uh, uh, uh, ways of productively, uh, navigating, uh, conflict and, um, thinking about, um, thinking about tasks that they're working on, um, Kim, uh, one of the things that you've done to kind of encourage, uh, use of these practices approaches have been, uh, walk-throughs, uh, and quality rating tools, uh, maybe tell listeners a bit about how that worked in Denver.

## **KIM PRICE**

Yeah, thanks, Lucas. Um, I think that was part of our, our biggest learning, um, was many, when we talk about the work that we had been doing and many folks ask, well, what does it look like? Um, and so how could we create the picture of what it looks like, um, and what we were striving towards achieving. And so we had the opportunity through our partnership with castle, uh, to go down and visit with Nashville, um, public schools, Metro Nashville, public schools, and learn from them. They had created a walk-through tool, uh, where they really looked at, what would we see, um, in a social, emotional classroom? What would it sound like? What would it look like? What would adults be doing? How would students be reacting? Um, and so that we could give folks at a, um, in a sense, uh, look for, um, tool to say, um, this is, this is what we're looking for. So they knew what to strive for.

And so we took that time, um, with a lot of work with the Denver school after Alliance lead Miranda Cook, um, to really think about what would be mutual in these spaces that we would see in school and out of school. So when we talk about instruction, it was instruction and we talked about behavior, it was behavior. It wasn't necessarily like in school or out of school. We also incorporated common spaces like the cafeteria, the playground, uh, because we know that that's a great opportunity for a lot of social, emotional learning to happen, be tested, um, and an opportunity for students to show and demonstrate those skills. And so we said, okay, let's think about climate and culture. Let's think about academic instruction, explicit instruction. Let's think about integration and let's think about partnership and really think about what would it look like in Denver.

We also connected it to our educator evaluator tool and some of that language, we were intentional in incorporating our trauma informed language and practices that we had been focusing on as well as spent some great time collaborating with our culturally responsive team, to make sure that we could use some of that culturally responsive language, because we know that it all overlaps, like when we're talking about great instruction and climate, it happens in a safe, secure, culturally responsive trauma informed environment. And so we thought about what that would look like, and we created a tool that we could use during school and after school. Um, and we would walk through classrooms, um, and out of school spaces and just get a sense of, of what was happening and really use that tool to elevate strengths and build on strengths.

**LUCAS HELD**

And, and the reception for that among teachers. Uh, uh, how, how did that go?

**KIM PRICE**

You know, I would say that's a great question. That was a big learning curve for us. I think, uh, here in Denver, uh, the perception is that someone comes into your classroom, uh, with a piece of paper and a pencil, and they start writing things down that they they're evaluating you. And so we had a lot of work to do on, um, changing that perception. Uh, we went from, you know, being in classrooms from 40 minutes and, and typing everything that we saw and heard to just getting a sense and a feel of, of what it was like to be in that classroom and then coming out and really coming together to talk about what we had seen. And we were very intentional on the feedback that we provided and that it was, um, what we could say global or grade level specific we never spoke to,

Oh, the negative things we saw in specific classrooms. We just took some time to, to elevate those strengths and share the information with the schools and the out-of-school times together and say, Hey, w what does this mean to you? You know, how does this align with your, your strategy of what you've been working on? Um, and I think one of the biggest opportunities that we saw was the opportunity to increase student voice choice and leadership. And I think when we put that out to folks, they really began to look at their classrooms and their out of school time spaces a little bit differently is saying, you know, I never really thought about that. You know, how do we move past jobs, you know, um, and really get our kindergarteners to be leaders. And I would say that some of the biggest growth that we saw was teachers, um, educators really reflecting on the space that they were creating, um, for their students to really let them shine and be the, the co-creators of the classroom, um, where that they could really use those, those social, emotional skills.

**LUCAS HELD**

Well, thank you for your candor, uh, and talking about how something that didn't work at first, but, uh, you evolved it, and it sounds like you were using some of the social and emotional skills, if you will, to, uh, inform that adjustment. So I think a really instructive story. Let's, um, kind of close this discussion, but I want to turn to each of you and, uh, ask, uh, ask you to reflect on sort of what advice you might give to, um, districts and, uh, intermediaries or providers who were thinking about

this kind of collaboration. Let's, let's start, uh, start with you, Kim, and then, uh, we'll close with Katherine.

**KIM PRICE**

I think what comes to mind Lucas is that, you know, social, emotional learning isn't anything new. This has been something that's been around, um, and, you know, through the pendulum shifts in education, it's, it's, it has the opportunity to be elevated and, and through the, the time right now in our nation, um, and, and what we've all been experiencing in this last year is, is given people, uh, uh, a bright light to shine and to say, wow, this is really needed. And so I think the advice that I would give folks as you're doing it, so build on what you have in place, build on those, those strengths, um, build on that language, build on, um, there's pockets of success at every school, uh, elementary schools.

This is the essence of most elementary school teachers, right. They just, they want to build relationships. They, they want to teach kids this stuff. And, um, and so I would say leverage those strengths, um, and within those strengths, really think about how you can connect, uh, with other departments, other, um, other priorities, other community member, um, parents, all of those opportunities, all of that. And cause partnership has been the biggest piece. I would say that has been the growth for us, um, Denver public schools and the Denver afterschool Alliance have, uh, I would say the strongest partnership. Um, you know, we always are told across the PSELI, and I think that's because we really spent that time together to develop our own relationships.

**LUCAS HELD**

Thank you, Kim, uh, Katherine, uh, from your perspective, what advice would you give to, um, districts who are thinking about this kind of a partnership?

**KATHERINE PLOG  
MARTINEZ**

Yeah, I mean, my, my advice really, really builds from Kim's and I think you've heard us both emphasize it throughout that you have to intentionally start with the adults and having deep conversation about what partnership means. And I would say the same thing, even if a district is just doing this themselves, if you're partnering across district than out of school time, you'll have to have authentic conversations about where you're coming at this work from different places and how you can build together. But even if you're working just within your own system, taking time to think about relationships, taking time to think about what this means for different roles. Taking time to think about the

supports that come in is, is equally as important, but you have to start with the adults first and you have to think about relationships at every step of the way.

**LUCAS HELD**

Well, this has been a terrific, uh, conversation. I think it's reminded me of the, uh, old adage that, uh, in order to, uh, benefit students, you really have to, uh, think about the adults first, uh, because they are so influential. Uh, we've heard, we've heard about, uh, benefits to students from the, uh, from alignment. We've heard about the importance of mindset of mindsets. We've heard of transcending, uh, competencies that, uh, in effect sit above practices. We've heard about the need to, um, evolve the importance of, uh, onboarding and to think about the two sectors as having complimentary and distinctive, uh, assets. I think this, uh, advice is, uh, very helpful to people and I want to thank, uh, our two guests. Thank you both.