

LAURA S. HAMILTON, CHRISTOPHER JOSEPH DOSS

# Supports for Social and Emotional Learning in American Schools and Classrooms

Findings from the American Teacher Panel



**P**ractices to support students' social and emotional learning (SEL) are common in K–12 schools across the United States. Educators, policymakers, and researchers use *social and emotional learning* to refer to a wide variety of supports for students' interpersonal (e.g., teamwork, leadership) and intrapersonal (e.g., self-regulation, resilience) competencies. There is great interest in SEL among educators and education leaders, reflecting a growing evidence base for the importance of addressing students' social and emotional competencies and well-being, in addition to their academic learning (Aspen Institute, 2019a). The coronavirus disease

## KEY FINDINGS

- A large majority of teachers expressed confidence that they could improve students' social and emotional competencies. At the same time, many teachers believed that factors beyond their control had a greater influence on students' SEL than they did themselves and that pressure to improve student academic achievement made it difficult to focus on SEL.
- Three-quarters of teachers received some PD that addressed SEL during the 2018–2019 school year. The topics that PD was least likely to cover were adapting SEL practices to different cultures or linguistic backgrounds and using student SEL data.
- Teachers' sense of well-being was positively associated with their reported emphasis on SEL practices. Teachers in lower-poverty schools reported higher levels of well-being compared with their counterparts in higher-poverty schools, although the differences were small in magnitude.
- Elementary teachers reported higher levels of school supports for SEL than secondary teachers did.
- Half of teachers did not know whether their states or districts had adopted SEL standards. Teachers who perceived that their state or district had adopted SEL standards indicated greater use of SEL practices than other teachers; whether the state had actually adopted standards was not a predictor of teachers' reported use of SEL practices.
- The use of SEL curricula or programs was a more common way for elementary teachers to support students' SEL, while secondary teachers reported greater reliance on community engagement, teacher/student check-ins, and student involvement in school decisions.
- Teachers in lower-poverty schools reported using peer mentoring, project-based learning, and guided inquiry to a greater extent than those in higher-poverty schools.

### Abbreviations

AES	Affective Experiences Scale
ATP	American Teacher Panel
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
CMO	charter management organization
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
PBIS	positive behavior implementation and supports
PD	professional development
SEL	social and emotional learning
YCEI	Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which not only shuttered school buildings across the country but also increased stress and anxiety in many households, has highlighted the need for schools to support students socially and emotionally, in addition to academically.

In this report, we present results from a spring 2019 survey of a nationally representative sample of K–12 public school teachers about their approaches to supporting students' SEL and the factors that might influence those approaches. After summarizing selected literature on SEL in schools and briefly describing our survey methods, we discuss key findings related to teachers' beliefs about SEL, their emotional well-being, professional development (PD) on SEL, school-level supports for SEL, and district and state SEL standards. All of these conditions can contribute to the likelihood that educators will adopt high-quality SEL practices. We then summarize teachers' responses to questions about their SEL practices, present some analyses of relationships between those practices and contextual conditions, and conclude with a discussion of implications for policy and practice. Although we gathered these data before schools closed because of COVID-19, these findings will continue to be relevant as educators work to

enact SEL practices in both in-person and remote instructional contexts in future school years.

Although SEL is defined and conceptualized in a variety of ways, a framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is widely used in schools. According to CASEL, SEL “is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, undated-a).

Youth develop these competencies through their families, neighborhood experiences, and interactions with such organizations as out-of-school-time providers (Hurd and Deutsch, 2017). Schools also play a crucial role in the development of SEL competencies because of the large amount of time most students spend at school and the opportunities that schools have to promote SEL through academic instruction and other activities. Moreover, the policy environment increasingly supports schools’ role in promoting SEL. For example, the Every Student Succeeds Act provides opportunities for schools to use federal funds to promote and assess students’ social and emotional well-being (Grant et al., 2017; Yoder, Dusenbury, et al., 2020). Moreover, state SEL standards for K–12 students have become increasingly common (Dusenbury and Weissberg, 2018; Dusenbury et al., 2020), and in late 2018, the U.S. Department of Education funded a new technical assistance center with a focus on SEL and school safety (see Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety, undated).

Educators’ commitment to supporting their students’ social and emotional development is widespread, as several recent national surveys have demonstrated (Atwell and Bridgeland, 2019; Education Week, 2020; Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019). This commitment likely stems from several factors, in addition to the federal and state policy context described earlier. First, research demonstrates that when educators engage in effective SEL practices, numerous short- and long-term student outcomes improve. These outcomes include specific social and emotional competencies, reduced problem

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behaviors and emotional distress, and academic achievement and postsecondary success (Grant et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2020; Mahoney, Durlak, and Weissberg, 2018; Taylor et al., 2017). Second, leaders in postsecondary education and workforce development increasingly are calling on K–12 schools to ensure that their graduates develop the social and emotional competencies that they will need to thrive in future careers (see, e.g., Posamentier, 2018; Yoder, Atwell, et al., 2020). Parents also have called for schools to address SEL; a survey conducted by Learning Heroes, for example, found that most parents want their children’s schools to help promote the development of social and emotional competencies while acknowledging that families have primary responsibility for this development (Hubbard, 2018). Finally, a growing number of advocacy organizations, curriculum developers, assessment vendors, and others who support or market to educators are encouraging SEL adoption and offering an array of products and resources for schools (see Bryant et al., 2020, for a discussion of the market for SEL products).

## Purpose and Focus of This Report

In this report, we present results from a spring 2019 survey administered to a nationally representative sample of K–12 teachers via the RAND Corporation’s American Teacher Panel (ATP).<sup>1</sup> We fielded the survey to 1,998 teachers, with 1,238 responding, for a completion rate of 62 percent. We weighted the final sample to ensure that it was nationally representative in terms of teacher characteristics (e.g., years of teaching, race/ethnicity) and school characteristics (e.g., geographic location, enrollment, student racial/ethnic composition).<sup>2</sup> Although other recent surveys (Atwell and Bridgeland, 2019; Education Week, 2020; Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019) have shed some light on how principals and teachers support and engage in SEL, these surveys have not provided detailed evidence about many of the practices and conditions that characterize high-quality, schoolwide SEL. Moreover, most previous survey reports have not relied on high-quality, probability-based sampling to produce nationally representative estimates. The survey results we present in this report provide a national picture of several practices, supports, and conditions that reflect a whole-school, systemic approach to SEL, which research suggests can benefit children (Domitrovich et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016).

Research on what systemic SEL implementation looks like on the ground and how it varies across different types of schools is limited. Although our survey results cannot provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of any of the approaches or supports we examine, our data allow us to (1) document the prevalence of these approaches and supports across the country and in schools serving particular groups of students and (2) explore some relationships between practices and such contextual factors as teachers’ participation in PD and their own sense of well-being on the job. To that end, we address the following research questions, all of which are based on the perspectives of K–12 public school teachers:

1. To what extent are contextual factors that can support SEL present in schools nationally and in subgroups of schools?

2. What SEL practices do teachers and schools adopt, and how do these practices vary across subgroups of schools?
3. Do SEL practices differ as a function of SEL standards?
4. Do SEL practices differ as a function of teachers’ well-being?

Our survey sample allowed us to examine differences in responses among teachers working in different contexts. For many of the findings, we present results separately for teachers in elementary and secondary schools. We define an *elementary school* as any school whose lowest grade served is grade 3 or below and whose highest grade served is grade 8 or below. All other schools are considered secondary schools. We also examined differences by school urbanicity, racial/ethnic composition, and poverty level. Specifically, we looked at urban and nonurban schools, where urban schools follow the definitions in the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data. We also analyzed differences by higher- and lower-poverty school status. We define a school as a *higher-poverty school* if 75 percent or more of the student body qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch. This is an imperfect measure but is consistent with definitions used by the NCES in reporting national trends (Hussar et al., 2020). Finally, we also looked for differences between schools that serve majority White populations and those serving majority students of color. However, these results largely mirrored the results by school poverty and we therefore do not include them in the report.

The results presented in this report provide evidence regarding how schools are attempting to promote SEL, what conditions are in place to support SEL, and how these practices and conditions differ across schools. This information might be useful to policymakers, funders, and support providers (e.g., local education agencies or technical assistance providers) as they consider what kinds of resources or guidance teachers need to engage in high-quality SEL. By documenting disparities in SEL practices and resources, these data can inform the work of organizations that support the implementation of SEL in schools and help them ensure equity. The findings also can help researchers identify topics that could

benefit from deeper investigation. In particular, these national data can supplement more-targeted and more-intensive data collection to provide a broad picture of the contexts in which students across the United States are engaging in SEL.

In the next section, we provide a more complete description of the practices in which educators can engage to promote SEL, followed by a brief overview of the contextual conditions that our survey examined. We then present findings on these contextual factors and on teachers' reported SEL practices. We conclude with a discussion of implications for policy and practice.

## How Schools Can Promote Students' Social and Emotional Development

Educators can adopt a variety of approaches, alone or in combination, to promote students' social and emotional development. Broadly speaking, these approaches fall into the following three categories (Aspen Institute, 2019a; Dusenbury et al., 2015):

- **developing a positive climate.** Osher and Berg, 2018, describes school climate as “the collective phenomenon that both reflects and creates the conditions for the development of social, emotional, and academic competence in both adults and students” (p. 4). These conditions include trusting, warm, and supportive relationships between students and adults and among students. Teachers and other school staff can create such a climate through informal practices, such as encouraging all adults in the building to greet students warmly when they arrive. They also can adopt formal programs, such as positive behavior implementation and supports (PBIS) programs.<sup>3</sup> Positive climate can be enacted and measured at both the classroom and school levels. Research indicates that supportive climates foster improved student academic learning in addition to improved social and emotional competencies (Allensworth et al., 2018; Pianta, Hamre, and Allen, 2012; Schweig, Hamilton, and Baker, 2019).
- **providing explicit instruction on SEL.** In addition to creating school and classroom environments that can support SEL, educators can explicitly teach social and emotional competencies to students. Many schools have adopted published curricula to do this, but educators also can develop their own lessons and strategies that target one or more social or emotional competencies directly. Although these approaches are designed to promote SEL, many also have been shown to improve academic achievement and other outcomes (Grant et al., 2017; Jones, Brush, et al., 2017; Mahoney, Durlak, and Weissberg, 2018).
- **integrating SEL into academic instruction and other activities.** The final category of approaches involves incorporating pedagogical practices that can support SEL into academic instruction or other activities, such as peer-mentoring programs. Doing so does not necessarily require fundamental changes to academic learning expectations. Johnson and Wiener, 2017, describes ways in which academic standards in mathematics and English language arts incorporate social and emotional development. Instructional activities that teachers use often, such as cooperative learning or student-led discussion, can be designed to promote SEL in ways that align with academic curricula and with commonly used frameworks for effective teaching (Yoder, 2014). Furthermore, research suggests that the development of academic skills, such as language acquisition, can benefit from simultaneous efforts to support social and emotional competencies, such as emotion regulation (Jones and Kahn, 2017), and can reduce the instructional burden of trying to promote academics and SEL separately (Bailey et al., 2019).

These categories are useful for describing ways that schools can provide SEL supports for students, but the distinctions among them are not always clear-cut. SEL “kernels of practice,” for example, are targeted, brief strategies or routines that can be embedded into academic instruction or used in a stand-alone way to promote a specific SEL

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High-quality SEL—particularly if it is designed to be relevant and responsive to students’ cultures and backgrounds and to cultivate a sense of psychological safety and belonging—can foster students’ learning and success in school.

competency (Jones, Bailey, et al., 2017). Similarly, pedagogy that promotes the integration of SEL into academic instruction can help create a supportive classroom climate. Conceptualizing these categories as three separate sets of approaches can result in an insufficient appreciation for the ways in which these categories can build on and complement one another as part of a systemic, schoolwide approach to SEL that “aims to integrate SEL into daily interactions and practices at multiple setting levels in the school using collaborative efforts that include all staff, teachers, families, and children” (Oberle et al., 2016, p. 278; see also Weissberg et al., 2015).

The specific approaches that educators adopt are likely to depend, in large part, on the ages of their students. Research on child and adolescent development shows that SEL follows a developmental progression, that some skills should be fostered before others, and that the contexts in which skills are taught should align with students’ developmental stages (Denham, 2018; Jones and Kahn, 2017). Evidence also suggests that, although skill-building approaches can be effective among elementary school students, adolescents are more likely to benefit from activities that improve climate and address students’ desire for status and respect from peers (Yeager, 2017). These differences are reflected in the availability of SEL curricula that emphasize explicit instruction on social and emotional competencies, which is greater at the elementary level than it is at the secondary level (Grant et al., 2017).

SEL approaches vary by age and are often offered inequitably across schools serving high- and low-need students, despite the promise of SEL as a

way to promote equity of opportunities for success in school, college, and careers (Aspen Institute, 2019a; Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019; Jones and Kahn, 2017). Students of color and those in underresourced schools often lack opportunities to develop not only academic skills but also the full set of competencies they will need to succeed and thrive as adults and to engage fully in civic life (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski, 2018). High-quality SEL—particularly if it is designed to be relevant and responsive to students’ cultures and backgrounds and to cultivate a sense of psychological safety and belonging—can foster students’ learning and success in school (Aspen Institute, 2018). Any effort to document how schools enact SEL practices and strategies can benefit from a consideration of differences by age of students and by measures of school resources or student needs.

### **Contextual Conditions That Can Affect SEL Implementation**

Implementation of a schoolwide approach to SEL is most effective when all levels of the education system provide coordinated strategies, resources, and supports (Meyers et al., 2019). For example, per the Consensus Statements of Evidence from the Council of Distinguished Scientists convened by the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (the SEAD Commission),

Drawing on evidence from a range of disciplines and perspectives, it is clear that social and emotional skills and competencies develop in a complex system of contexts, interactions, and relationships. Therefore, it is important for organizations to take a systems approach to promoting development in these areas—addressing adult skills and beliefs; organizational culture, climate, and norms; and routines and structures that guide basic interactions and instruction (Jones and Kahn, 2017, pp. 5–6).

According to this systemic view, students' opportunities to develop social and emotional competencies in school can be influenced by a large number of conditions related to family, neighborhood, and community context, along with federal, state, and local policies (Weissberg et al., 2015). The survey data we present in this report cannot fully speak to all these factors. Instead, we focus on five categories of conditions or supports that are especially likely to influence the SEL environments that students experience in school and that can be measured via a teacher survey. Two of these factors relate to teachers' own capacity to engage in SEL: (1) teachers' beliefs about the value of SEL and about their role in promoting it, and (2) teachers' job satisfaction and sense of well-being. The third factor, PD for teachers, can equip teachers with the relevant knowledge and skills they need to engage in high-quality SEL. The fourth factor is school-level supports for SEL. Finally, we extend our investigation beyond the school walls to consider the standards and assessments that districts and states have adopted and that are likely to influence SEL practices in schools and classrooms. Although research that brings together all of these aspects of systemic SEL is limited, some studies suggest that teacher- and school-level conditions, along with the broader policy context, are likely to influence effective SEL practices and, ultimately, student outcomes (Domitrovich et al., 2019; Meyers et al., 2018; Oberle et al., 2016). We briefly summarize research related to each of the five contextual factors in the following sections.<sup>4</sup>

## Teachers' Beliefs About SEL

Teachers' beliefs about their own efficacy to support children's social and emotional development and about the value of doing so are associated with high-quality implementation of SEL programs and practices in the classroom (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). A low sense of efficacy could reflect a perceived lack of training or guidance, or it could stem from a belief that educators' efforts to promote their students' social and emotional competencies cannot overcome the influences of parents or others on these competencies. If teachers do not believe that they can improve students' SEL, or if they do not view this as a priority for their work, they might be disinclined to offer substantial SEL supports for their students even if they have access to training and materials (Brackett et al., 2012; Durlak and DuPre, 2008). Teachers' beliefs and mindsets regarding SEL are also crucial to ensure that SEL promotes equity and addresses the strengths and needs of all children and youth (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski, 2018; Wacker and Olson, 2019).

## Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Well-Being

Teachers face numerous stressors, and in a recent Gallup survey, 46 percent of them reported high levels of daily stress—a rate that was higher than that of any occupation surveyed other than nursing (Gallup, 2014). This stress can affect teachers' own well-being, which, in turn, is likely to detract from their ability to support their students' social and emotional development and their academic performance (Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli, 2016; Hoglund, Klinge, and Hosan, 2015; Oberle and Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Teachers' well-being can be affected by several aspects of their jobs and by non-work-related factors, but one significant influence is the quality of the climate and culture of the schools in which they work (Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli, 2016). Another influence is teachers' own social and emotional competencies, which enable them to deal with job-related stress effectively (Jennings, Minnici, and Yoder, 2019). Teachers' overall job satisfaction is another predictor of their well-being and the well-being of

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Teachers' job satisfaction and well-being can both reinforce and be influenced by the conditions in their schools—particularly the extent to which the school has a supportive climate.

their students (Toropova, Myrberg, and Johansson, 2020). Therefore, teachers' job satisfaction and well-being can both reinforce and be influenced by the conditions in their schools—particularly the extent to which the school has a supportive climate.

### Teacher Participation in SEL-Related Professional Development

To provide high-quality SEL, teachers need to acquire particular skills and be able to draw on them in the classroom. However, most teachers do not receive extensive guidance on SEL in their pre-service preparation programs (Hamilton, Doss, and Steiner, 2019). To support their students' social and emotional well-being, teachers need PD not only on SEL pedagogy but also on how to build their own social and emotional competencies (Aspen Institute, 2019a; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Recent research on SEL in schools suggests that teachers who understand the academic, social, and emotional contexts in which students learn are positioned to create supportive learning environments and promote students' SEL, whereas other teachers might not be (Allensworth et al., 2018; Aspen Institute,

2019a; Marsh et al., 2018). The type of PD that is offered likely will matter: Although research on the effectiveness of approaches to SEL PD is limited, more-general research on PD for teachers indicates that PD tends to be most effective when it is tailored to teachers' needs and contexts, provides opportunities for feedback and practice, and is sustained rather than occurring through a one-time event, such as a workshop (Garet et al., 2001; Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan, 2018; Kretlow and Bartholomew, 2010; Wei et al., 2009).

### School-Level Supports for SEL

The factors discussed so far have emphasized what teachers bring to the table and what training exists to support teachers, but teachers' SEL practices depend in large part on the messages and resources their school leaders provide. Important school-level supports for teachers' instruction include a clear vision for SEL and implementation guidance from school leadership (Allensworth et al., 2018; Aspen Institute, 2019b; Jones, Bailey, et al., 2017; Shriver and Weissberg, 2020). Principals and other school leaders help establish the organizational conditions that facilitate teachers' SEL work (Allensworth et al., 2018; Toch and Miller, 2019), and research on how principals influence student outcomes suggests that this influence occurs, to some degree, through the development of a supportive school climate that emphasizes high expectations and continuous improvement (Allensworth and Hart, 2018). A clear vision from school leaders can be particularly important for SEL implementation, given the lack of consensus around what SEL means and the lack of widespread understanding of what good SEL practices look like (Aspen Institute, 2019b; Durlak et al., 2011; Jones and Doolittle, 2017).

### SEL Standards and Data Use

The final set of conditions that we examine reflects the growing awareness of how state and local standards and assessment data can influence educators' practices. *Standards* “refer to statements about ‘what students should know and be able to do,’ recognizing that states may use different terms, such

as *competencies, learning goals, or benchmarks*” (Dusenbury et al., 2020, p. 3; italics added). Standards can serve several purposes: establishing a common language, communicating expectations for student learning, and indicating that particular student outcomes should be prioritized (CASEL, undated-b; Hamilton, Stecher, and Yuan, 2012).

Similarly, SEL assessments, which are becoming widely available (Hamilton et al., 2018) can help inform instructional decisions and make SEL competency definitions concrete (Taylor et al., 2018). The changing state and local policy environments that we briefly discussed in the introduction have affected educators’ access to SEL standards and assessment data that might guide their instruction. States are increasingly adopting SEL standards to guide curriculum and instructional decisions in both early childhood and K–12 education (Yoder, Dusenbury, et al., 2020). Although, as of this writing, no states have adopted statewide SEL competency assessments for accountability purposes, several have incorporated culture and climate measures into their accountability systems to track the social and emotional supports provided to students (Jordan and Hamilton, 2019). Some school districts have incorporated measures of social and emotional competencies and climate into their continuous improvement processes and use the results to inform district- and school-level policy and practice (Davidson et al., 2018; Hough, Byun, and Mulfinger, 2018).

## Results

We first present results from survey questions that addressed each of the five contextual factors (teacher beliefs about SEL, teachers’ well-being, PD, school-level supports, and standards and data use). Next, we present a summary of responses to questions about classroom- and school-level SEL practices. We then describe findings from analyses of relationships between SEL practices and policy context and present results of analyses of relationships between SEL practices and teachers’ well-being.

## Teachers’ Beliefs About SEL

Our first set of findings focuses on teachers’ beliefs about SEL and their role in promoting it. Generally, teacher self-efficacy (i.e., their degree of confidence in their ability to improve students’ social and emotional competencies) was high, with roughly 90 percent of elementary teachers and slightly fewer secondary teachers agreeing that they could get through to even the most-difficult students and that they were good at improving student SEL (see Figure 1). Similarly large percentages said that they believed SEL was important and could improve students’ academic performance. However, teachers identified some limits and barriers to promoting SEL. About 80 percent of teachers believed that factors beyond their control had a greater influence on student SEL than they did, and that pressure to improve student academic achievement made it difficult to focus on SEL. Furthermore, more than half of teachers reported being overwhelmed by the social and emotional challenges of some of their students. Elementary school teachers’ beliefs were consistently more favorable than those of their secondary school counterparts. We observed no other differences between subgroups of schools.

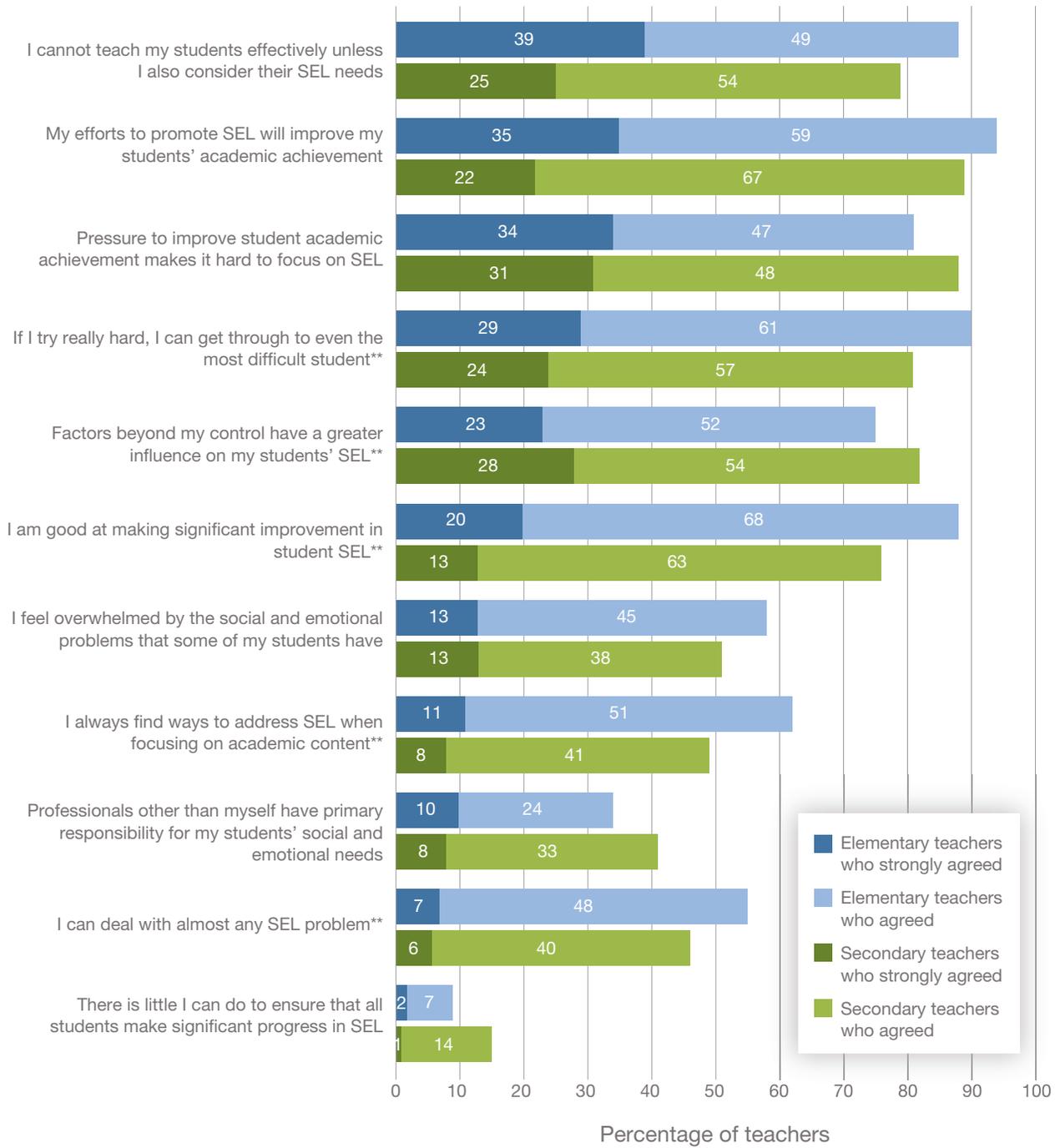
## Teachers’ Job Satisfaction and Well-Being

In this section, we present results from questions that address teachers’ well-being, including a set of questions related to job satisfaction and burnout and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI) Affective Experiences Scale (AES). Figure 2 shows rates of teachers’ agreement with statements reflecting their feelings about their work and their schools. These results suggest generally high levels of satisfaction, and, for the most part, responses did not differ significantly between elementary and secondary teachers. At the same time, burnout was prevalent, with about half of teachers indicating that they felt burned out by their work.

Although few dimensions of job satisfaction varied by the grade level or urbanicity of a school, we observed significant differences by school poverty level. Overall, teachers working in lower-poverty

FIGURE 1

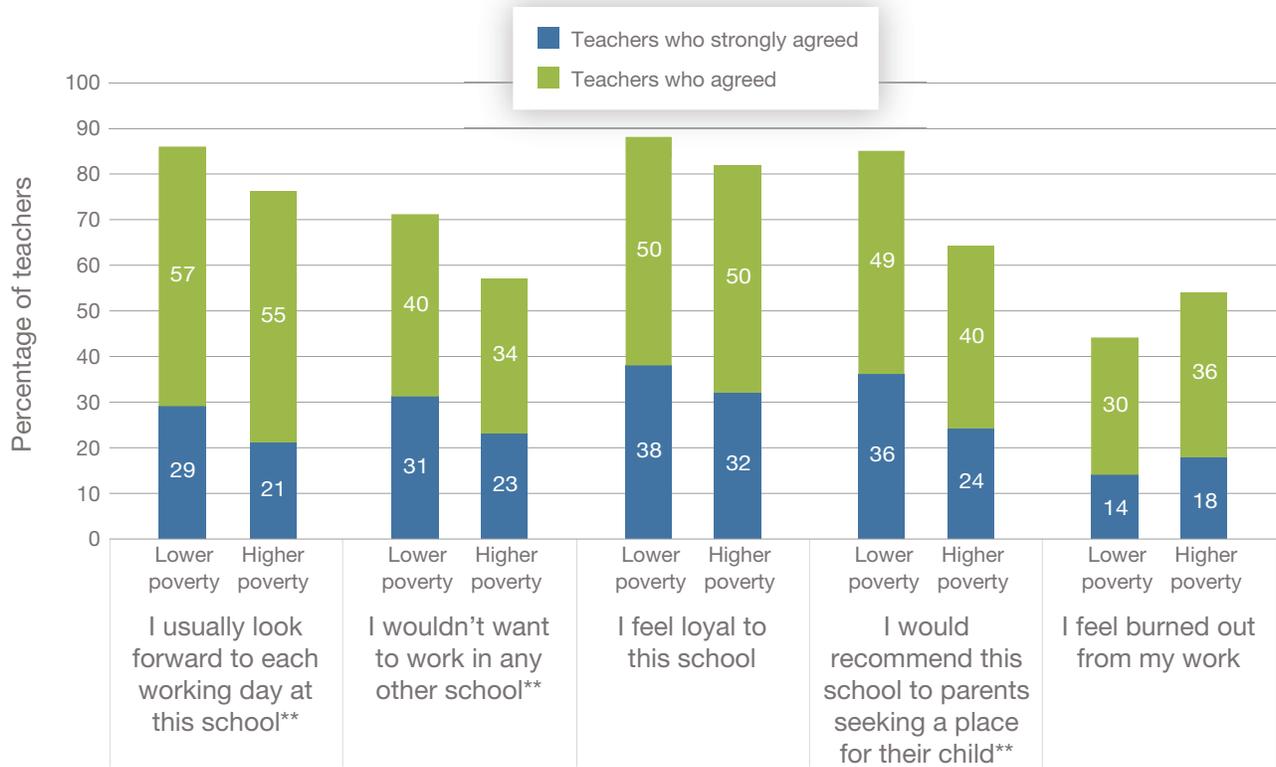
Percentages of Teachers Who Agreed with Statements About Self-Efficacy and Responsibility for SEL



NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences between the proportion of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who at least agreed (agreed or strongly agreed). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,212-1,214$ . \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . The survey question was "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your work with students this year (2018–2019)?" Response options were "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." The row labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each statement is provided in the online appendix.

FIGURE 2

Percentages of Teachers in Lower- and Higher-Poverty Schools Who Agreed with Statements About Their Experiences at School



NOTES: We used NCES definitions for higher-poverty schools and lower-poverty schools (Hussar et al., 2020). A *higher-poverty school* is defined as serving 75 percent or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and a *lower-poverty school* is one that serves fewer than 75 percent of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Linear probability models were used to estimate differences in proportions of teachers in lower- and higher-poverty schools who at least agreed (agreed or strongly agreed). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,212-1,213$ . \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The survey question was “How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your experience at school during this current school year (2018–2019)?” Response options were “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.”

schools expressed higher levels of satisfaction compared with their counterparts in higher-poverty schools. Teachers in lower-poverty schools were more likely to agree or strongly agree that they looked forward to work each day, that they would not want to work in another school, and that they would recommend their school to other parents. All three differences were significant at the 1-percent level. The data do not provide evidence regarding why job satisfaction was higher in lower-poverty schools than in higher-poverty schools, but these disparities might stem from the numerous challenges that educators face in schools that are underresourced or that serve high-need students and families. Despite these differences, it is important to note that even

in higher-poverty schools, a majority of teachers expressed job satisfaction on each item.

Job satisfaction and sense of burnout could be related to teachers’ general sense of well-being on the job, so we also examined results on the AES, which measures three types of well-being. *Social well-being* reflects a sense of connectedness to the school and concern for others. Such responses as feeling accepted, included, empathetic, thankful, isolated, and alone are included in this domain. *Emotional well-being* refers to experiencing pleasant and unpleasant feelings in school, including feeling excited, joyful, fulfilled, annoyed, frustrated, and worried. Finally, *eudaimonic well-being* is the purposeful and creative engagement in work. This

domain includes such responses as feeling inspired, amazed, determined, accomplished, bored, and exhausted. For each feeling, teachers responded to a five-point scale to indicate the frequency with which they experienced that feeling during the previous two weeks at work. Higher values on the scale indicated greater frequency. For our analyses, we reverse-coded scores for negative emotions so that for all items, higher values indicated greater well-being (i.e., more often feeling positive emotions and less often feeling negative emotions).

We examined relationships among scores on the three scales and found that teachers who scored high on one scale tended to score high on the others. Thus, the three domains of educator well-being are related to one another, although YCEI also designed each scale to capture unique aspects of well-being (Floman, 2019). We also examined the relationship of each well-being scale with teachers' reports that they felt burned out from their work (using the question shown in Figure 2). As expected, all of these correlations were negative. That is, as teachers reported a higher level of each type of well-being, they were less likely to report feeling burned out. All of these correlations are provided in Table B.3 in the online appendix.

In Table 1, we present mean scores for each type of well-being and their means in elementary, secondary, higher-poverty, and lower-poverty schools. Teachers reported the highest levels of social well-being, whereas their scores on the eudaimonic well-being scale were lower. Because a four indicates a response of "much of the time" and a three

indicates "some of the time," this difference implies that, on average, teachers felt connected to their schools and others much of the time and that they were purposely and creatively engaged in their work slightly less often.

Like the items measuring teacher satisfaction, we observed some differences by school and poverty level. Teachers in higher-poverty schools reported significantly lower levels of well-being compared with their counterparts in lower-poverty schools, although the differences were small in magnitude. Although average scores on the eudaimonic well-being scale did not differ by poverty level, teachers in elementary schools exhibited a greater sense of well-being on this dimension than those in secondary schools. We did not detect any differences in well-being by school urbanicity.

### Teachers' Participation in SEL-Related Professional Development

We asked teachers several questions about the types and content of PD they received. Our first question about PD asked teachers to indicate whether they had participated in any of several types of formal or informal PD that addressed SEL during the 2018–2019 school year, and it also included an "other" SEL-focused PD option. Approximately 25 percent of teachers reported no SEL-related PD during the year. The most commonly reported types of PD were informal dialogue with colleagues about SEL (63 percent of all surveyed teachers); professional learning

TABLE 1  
Teacher Self-Reported Well-Being, as Measured by the Affective Experiences Scale

Scale	All Teachers	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Poverty	Lower Poverty
Social well-being	3.91	3.96	3.87	3.85*	3.93*
Eudaimonic well-being	3.40	3.45**	3.35**	3.34	3.42
Emotional well-being	3.57	3.58	3.56	3.46**	3.61**

NOTES: We used NCES definitions for higher-poverty schools and lower-poverty schools (Hussar et al., 2020). A *higher-poverty school* is defined as serving 75 percent or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and a *lower-poverty school* is one that serves fewer than 75 percent who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Linear probability models were used to estimate differences in average scale scores. Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models. Each well-being scale is the average of the underlying emotions. Teachers were asked about 48 emotions.  $N = 1,224$ . Asterisks indicate whether differences between elementary and secondary or higher- and lower-poverty schools are statistically significant. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The survey question was "This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Please indicate how frequently you have experienced each feeling and emotion over the past few weeks at school." Response options were "none of the time," "a little of the time," "some of the time," "much of the time," "all of the time." Negative emotions were reverse-coded. See the online appendix for all items in each scale.

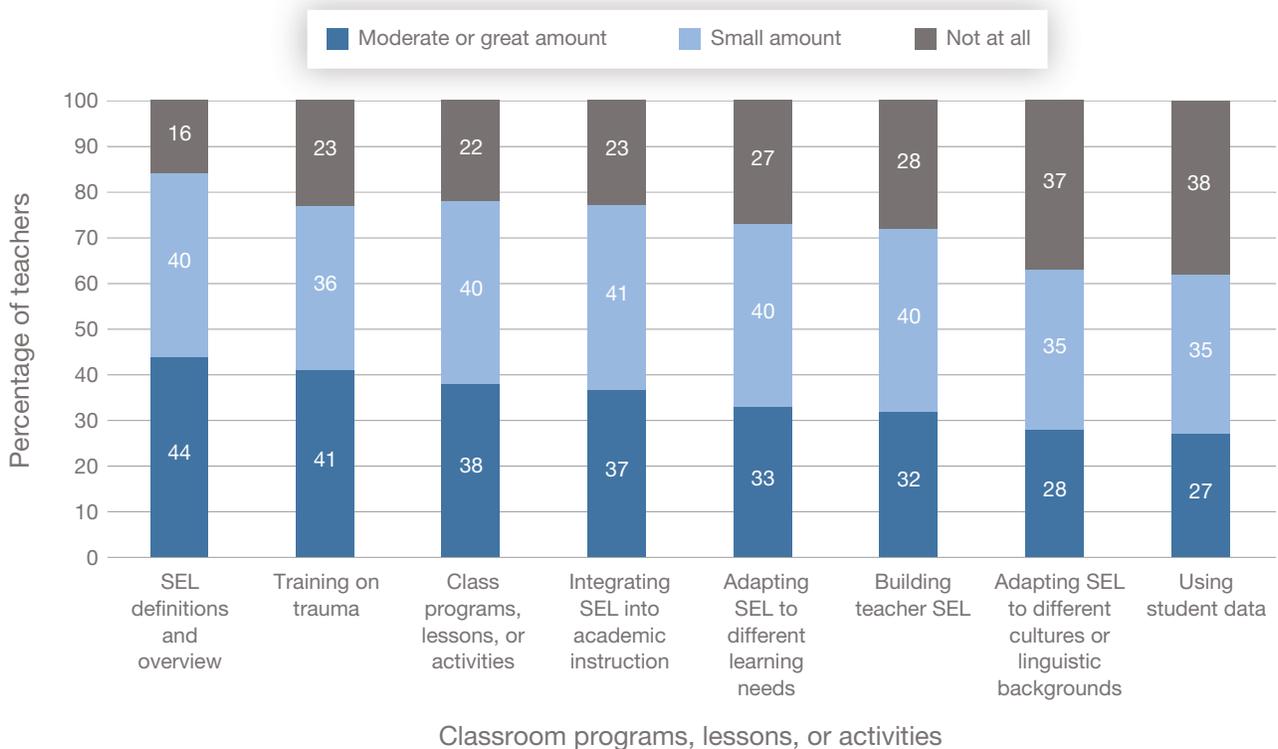
networks (39 percent); and taking a course, workshop, or seminar (37 percent). Roughly one-quarter of teachers reported receiving coaching or mentoring. The finding that informal dialogue was more common than other approaches might be a sign that formal PD to address SEL was not widely available, but it could also reflect teachers valuing their colleagues as sources of ideas and guidance. This finding is consistent with those from an earlier ATP survey, which indicated that when teachers seek out new academic or behavioral interventions, they often turn first to their colleagues for guidance (Hamilton and Hunter, 2020).

We observed few differences between elementary and secondary teachers, other than that a higher percentage of elementary teachers reported participating in professional learning networks. Teachers in urban schools were more likely to take a course, workshop,

or seminar and were more likely to participate in informal dialogue with colleagues compared with those in nonurban schools. Teachers in lower-poverty schools also reported participating in informal dialogue with colleagues at higher rates than those in higher-poverty schools.<sup>5</sup>

The 75 percent of teachers who indicated receiving any SEL-related PD were asked to rate how much this PD focused on each of several topics related to SEL. Figure 3 shows that teachers reported receiving PD on a wide variety of topics. For each of the topics listed, a substantial majority of teachers indicated that their PD emphasized SEL at least a small amount. However, 37 percent reported no PD on adapting SEL practices to different cultures or linguistic backgrounds, which is cause for concern in light of both the promise of SEL as a means to support culturally relevant instruction and the failure of

FIGURE 3  
Teachers' Reports of How Much Their SEL-Related PD Focused on Various Topics



NOTES: Survey weights are used in tabulations. *N* = 927–929. The survey question was “Think about the SEL-related professional development you have received this school year (2018–2019, including summer 2018). How much has your professional learning focused on the following topics?” Response options were “not at all,” “a small amount,” “a moderate amount,” and “a great deal.” “A moderate amount” and “a great deal” were combined into one category. The column labels provide abbreviated text. The full item wording for each statement is provided in the online appendix.

many programs and practices to adequately address students' cultural assets and differences (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski, 2018; Jones and Kahn, 2017). A similar percentage of teachers reported no PD on using student SEL data. We did not observe any subgroup differences.

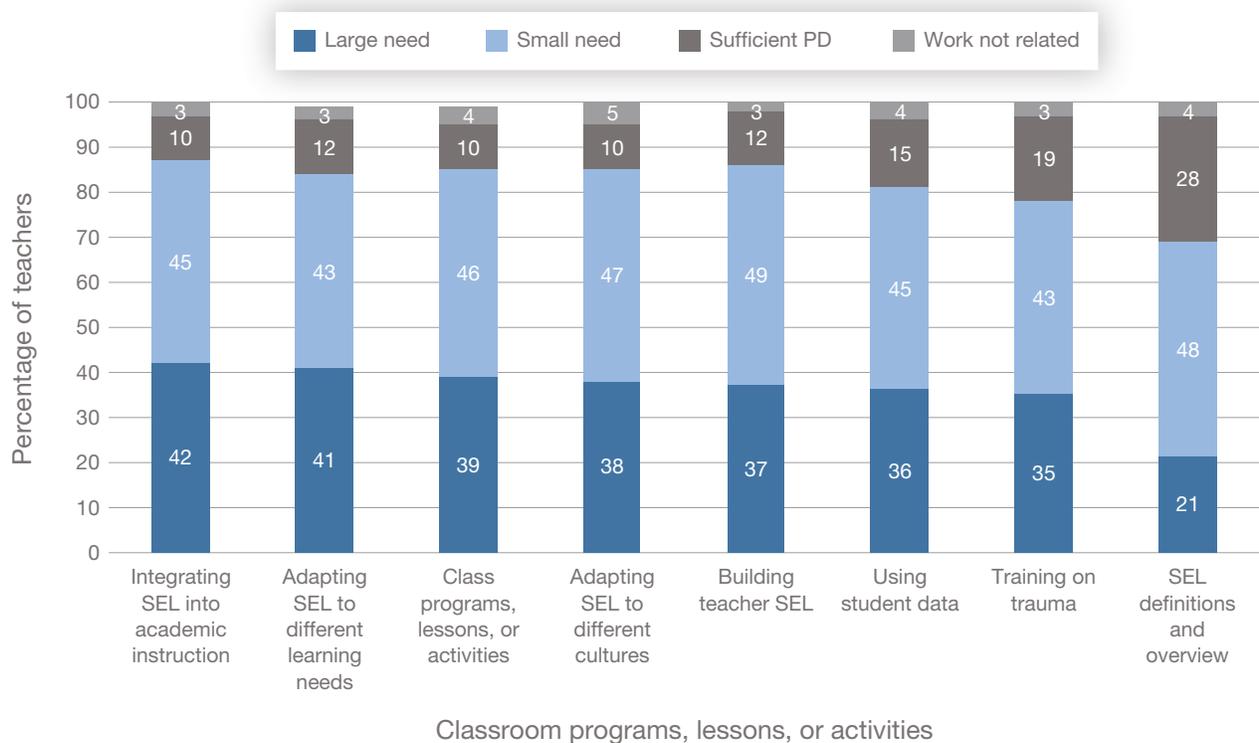
The survey asked all teachers, including those who reported not receiving any SEL PD, to indicate their degree of need for additional PD on the topics shown in Figure 3. Figure 4 presents these results and shows that, despite the teachers' relatively high level of confidence in their ability to improve students' social and emotional competencies (see Figure 1), most teachers believed that they could benefit from more PD. Roughly 80 percent of teachers indicated need for additional PD on each of the topics covered in the survey, except for the "definitions and overview of SEL" topic. We identified no differences

by urbanicity. However, there were significant differences by school poverty level. Teachers in higher-poverty schools indicated a greater need for more PD on SEL definitions and overview; SEL programs, lessons, or activities for use in classrooms; adapting SEL to different cultures; and building their own SEL skills.

### School-Level Supports for SEL

Although most teachers expressed a belief that they could and should promote SEL, as shown in Figure 1, their responses to another set of questions suggest that they lacked access to some supports that might help them do this. Figure 5 shows that more than one-third of teachers reported that their school had a clear vision for SEL, and even fewer agreed that the school had a clear set of SEL practices or a roadmap.

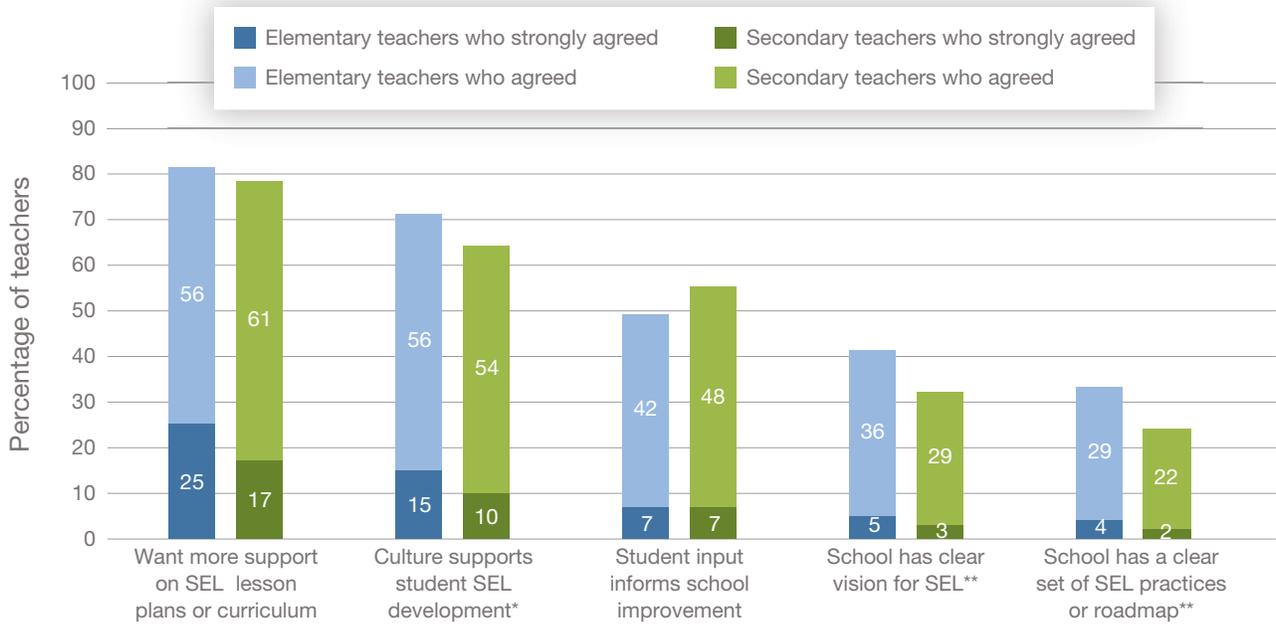
FIGURE 4  
Teachers' Reports of the Extent to Which They Needed Additional PD on SEL-Related Topics



NOTES: Survey weights are used in tabulations. *N* = 1,229–1,230. Not all bars sum to 100 percent because of rounding. The survey question was "How much do you need additional SEL-related professional development (PD) on the following topics to support your work?" Response options were "no need: my work is not related to this topic," "no need: I have sufficient PD on this topic," "small need," and "large need." The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

FIGURE 5

Percentages of Teachers Who Agreed with Statements About School-Level Supports for SEL



NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences between the proportion of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who at least agreed (agreed or strongly agreed). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,224-1,228$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The survey question was “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about social and emotional learning in your school during the current school year (2018–2019)?” Response options were “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

Consistent with the low rates of agreement with the latter item, 80 percent of teachers agreed that they would like more support on SEL curriculum or lesson plans. Responses about a supportive school culture and about the use of student input were more favorable. We observed some differences by school poverty level; teachers in lower-poverty schools were more likely than other teachers to report that their school culture supported student SEL development (71 percent and 55 percent for teachers in lower- and higher-poverty schools, respectively) and that student input informed school improvement (54 percent and 46 percent).

Consistent with the generally high levels of agreement that school culture supported SEL, Figure 6 shows that most teachers expressed positive opinions about school leadership and relationships. Rates of agreement with the statements in Figure 6 were approximately 75 percent or more, with one exception: “administrators and staff collaboratively

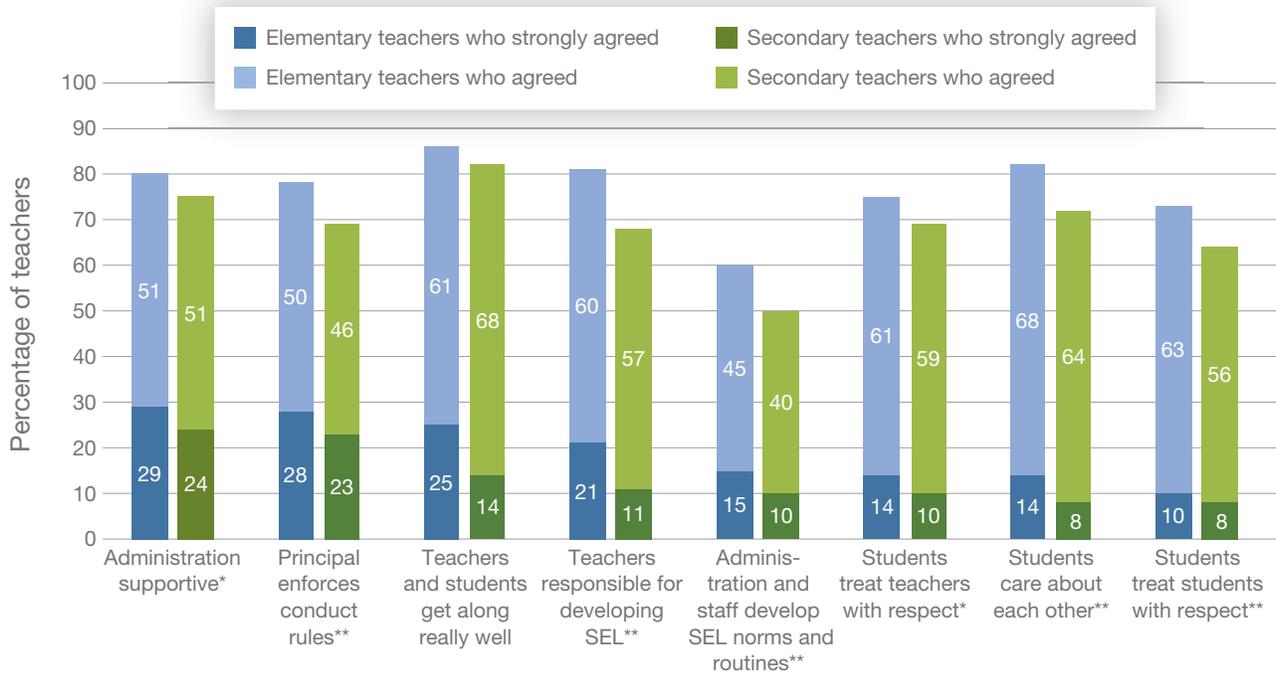
develop SEL norms and routines.” Elementary teachers were significantly more likely to agree with most items than were secondary teachers, except for “teachers and students get along really well.” More than 80 percent of teachers in both groups agreed with that statement. Although we observed few differences by other school characteristics, teachers in lower-poverty schools were more likely than those in higher-poverty schools to report positive student-teacher and student-student interactions.

### SEL Standards and Data

Given the potential value of standards and data to guide SEL instruction, we included in the survey a few questions to gauge whether the districts or states in which teachers worked had adopted SEL-related standards and measures. Figure 7 shows results from a question that asked teachers whether their state or district had SEL standards to guide instruction;

FIGURE 6

Percentages of Teachers Who Agreed with Statements About Their School’s SEL Environment



NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences between the proportion of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who at least agreed (agreed or strongly agreed). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,206-1,212$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

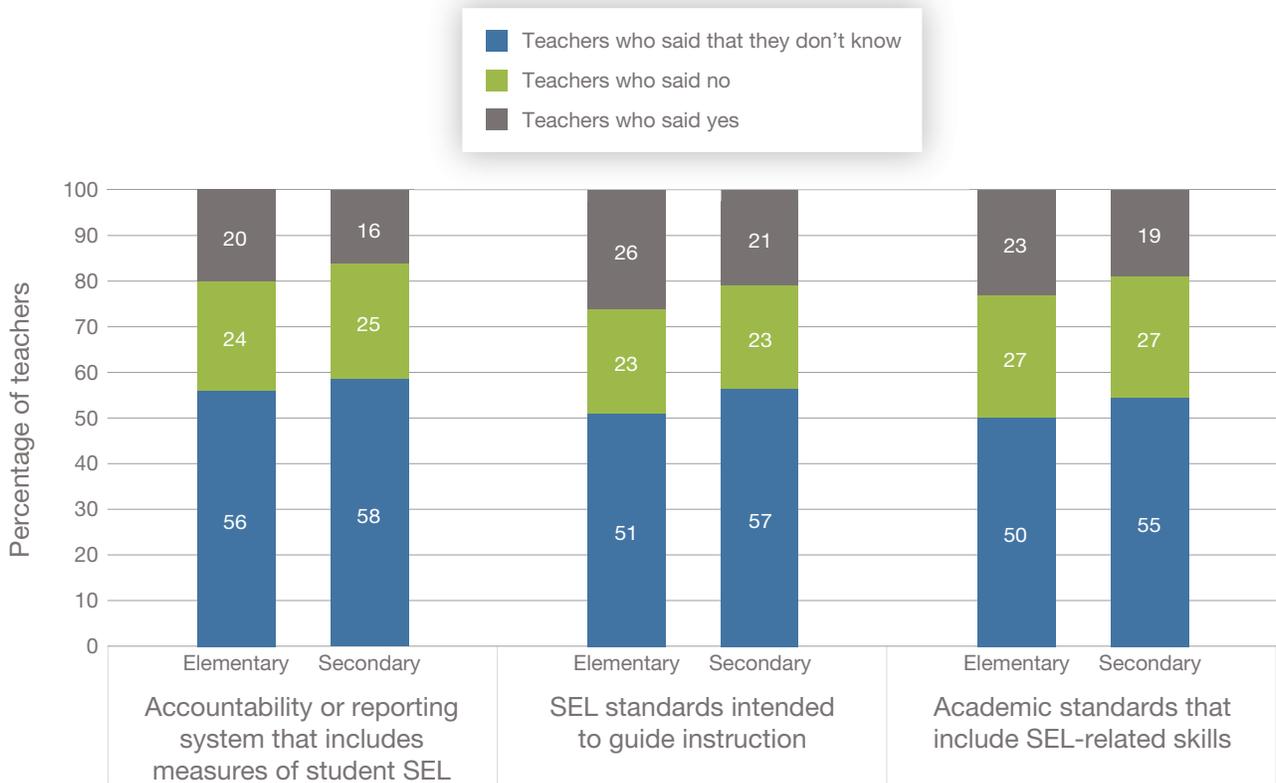
The survey question was “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school this school year (2018–2019)?” Response options were “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

whether their state or district’s academic standards, such as math or English language arts, included SEL-related competencies; and whether the state or district had an accountability or reporting system that included SEL-related measures for students. A striking finding shown in Figure 7 is that a majority of teachers responded “I don’t know” to each of these questions. We do not know why so many teachers said that they did not know about these policies. It is possible that teachers in certain grades or subjects might not be fully aware of standards or assessments that affect those in other grades or subjects, or simply that they are not as attuned to policies related to SEL as they are to other policies. Among those who marked yes or no, there was a roughly even split between these responses for all three questions. We observed no school subgroup differences on these questions.

To supplement the findings regarding teachers’ awareness of standards, we determined which states actually had SEL standards as of fall 2018 (the beginning of the school year to which the survey questions referred) using information gathered by CASEL (Dusenbury, Dermody, and Weissberg, 2018).<sup>6</sup> The CASEL team identified states that had K–12 SEL standards and those that offered SEL implementation guidance or tools.<sup>7</sup> We compared the responses shown in Figure 6 for teachers across three groups of states: those with no K–12 SEL standards or guidance (25 states), those with SEL standards (14 states), and those that provided SEL guidance but not standards (11 states).<sup>8</sup> It is important to keep in mind that our survey asked about state or district or charter management organization (CMO) standards, so it is possible that some teachers in states without standards would mark “yes” because their district had

FIGURE 7

Percentages of Teachers Who Indicated That Their State or District Had SEL Standards and Measures



NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences between the proportion of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who responded “I don’t know.” Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models. *N* = 1,229. No differences were statistically significant.

The survey question was “Please indicate whether each of the following statements characterizes your state, district, or charter management organization (CMO) standards and accountability system during the current school year (2018–2019).” Response options were “yes,” “no,” and “I don’t know.” The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

standards. Even so, this analysis is potentially useful because it provides information about teachers working in states with standards and who were unaware of that fact.

Table 2 shows how teachers’ reported knowledge of state, district, or CMO SEL standards varied as a function of whether their states had SEL standards or guidance. These results indicate that teachers’ reported knowledge was not related to whether their state actually had SEL standards as determined by CASEL. A noteworthy finding in Table 2 is that, among teachers in states that CASEL reported as having SEL standards, only about one-quarter of them answered “yes” to the survey question about whether their state, district, or CMO had SEL standards.

Twenty-two percent answered “no,” and roughly half said that they did not know. Thus, most teachers in states with SEL standards were unaware that these standards existed.

Figure 8 presents the percentages of teachers who reported collecting or receiving various types of SEL data. A large majority reported collecting or receiving each type of data either once per year or never. The most common type of data teachers indicated was school climate or culture data. In fact, this category of data was the only one that a majority of teachers reported receiving at all. The relatively widespread availability of information about climate and culture could reflect the fact that many districts and states require or encourage schools to field surveys

TABLE 2

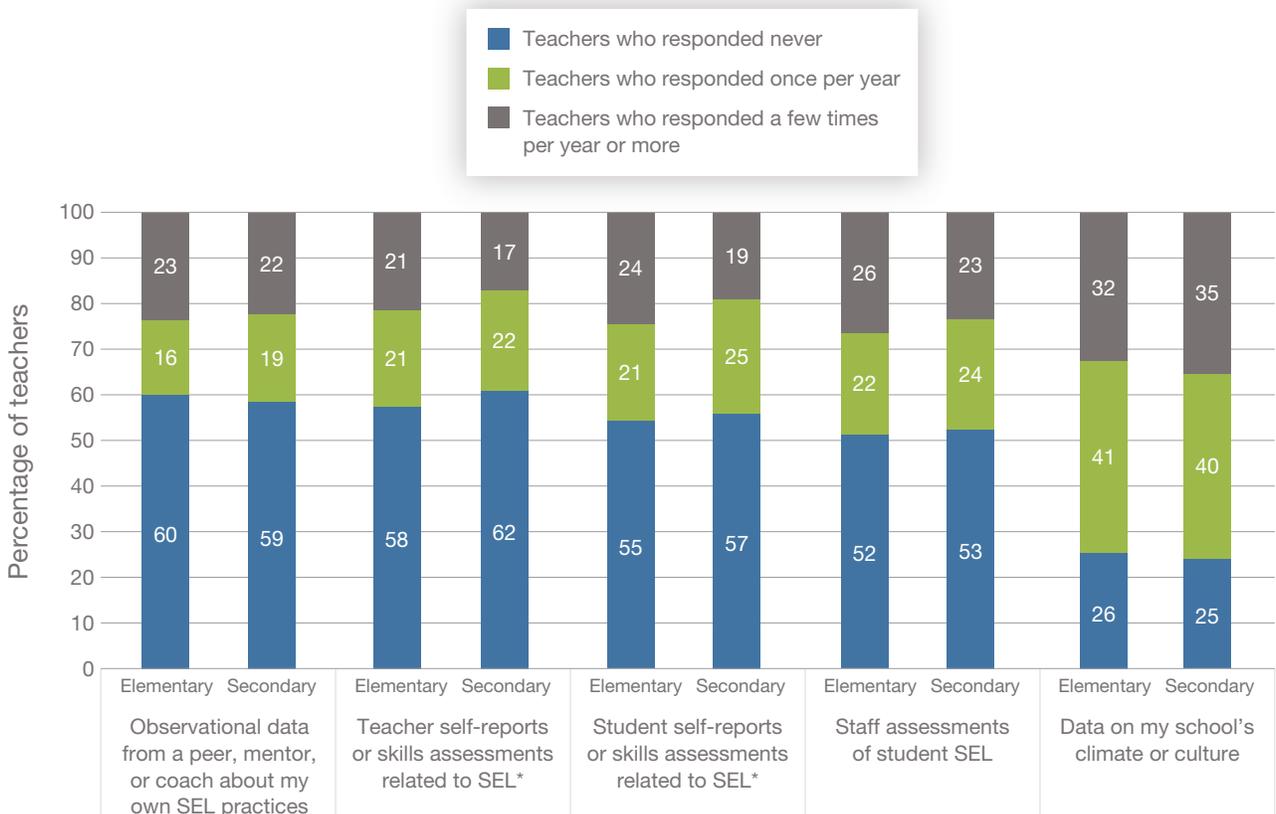
Teacher-Reported Knowledge of Their State, District, or CMO SEL Standards, by State-Level SEL Policy Environment

Teacher Perceptions	Overall (%)	State <i>Actually</i> Has Neither SEL Standards Nor Guidance (%)	State <i>Actually</i> Has SEL Standards (%)	State <i>Actually</i> Has SEL Guidance But Not Standards (%)
No (my state, district, or CMO does not have SEL standards)	23	24	22	22
Yes (my state, district, or CMO has SEL standards)	23	22	27	22
I don't know	54	55	51	57

NOTE: Survey weights were used in all tabulations. *N* = 1,229.

FIGURE 8

Percentages of Teachers Who Reported Receiving SEL Data



NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences between the proportion of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who responded a few times per year or more (a few times per year or monthly or more often). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models. *N* = 1,230. \* *p* < 0.05.

The survey question was "In general, how frequently do you receive or collect the following types of information related to SEL?" Response options were "never," "once a year," "a few times a year," and "monthly or more often." The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

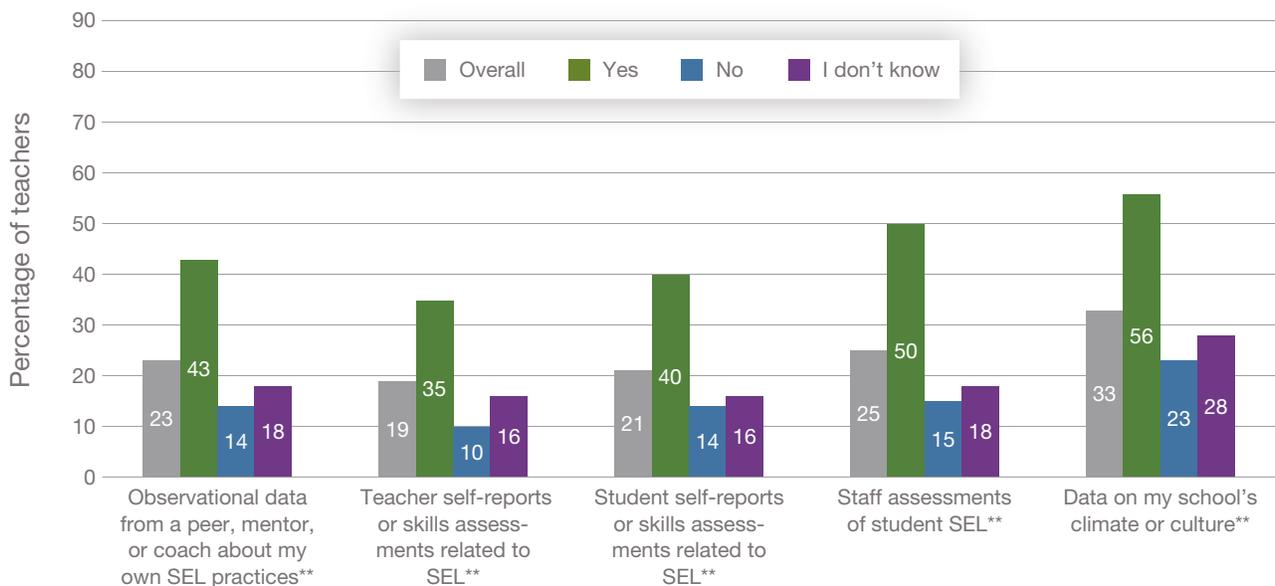
on these dimensions. Elementary teachers more commonly reported collecting or receiving student self-reported SEL data than did secondary teachers. The only subgroup difference we observed was that urban school teachers were more likely to receive or collect data on school climate or culture at least a few times per year or more than were teachers in other schools.

The final analysis we present in this section explored the relationship between access to SEL data and (1) teachers' perceptions regarding whether their district, CMO, or state had SEL standards; and (2) CASEL's objective categorization of states based on whether they had SEL standards. These analyses are of interest because standards might be expected to be accompanied at the school or classroom level with measures to help teachers gauge students' progress toward those standards, so we hypothesized that data access would be higher among teachers whose states had standards and those who reported that their states, districts, or CMOs had standards.

Reported frequency of receipt or collection of data was, in fact, higher for teachers who indicated that their states or districts had SEL standards than for teachers who said that their states or districts did not have standards or that they did not know (Figure 9). We observed similar patterns for the questions about academic standards that included SEL and about accountability systems that included SEL measures: Teachers who marked "yes" to these items reported greater data use than teachers who marked "no" or who said that they did not know.

When we instead examined data access as a function of CASEL's categorization of states, we did not observe any differences in responses across the three groups of states (see appendix Table B.12). This result is not surprising in light of many teachers' apparent lack of awareness of whether their state had SEL standards. In short, teachers' reported access to data was associated with whether they believed that there were SEL standards at the state or district or CMO level, but was unrelated to whether

FIGURE 9  
Percentages of Teachers Who Reported Receiving or Collecting Various Types of SEL Data, by Perceptions of District or State SEL Standards



NOTES: This figure shows percentages of teachers who reported collecting types of SEL data by teachers' perceptions of whether their states or districts had SEL standards (see Table 2). Response options were "no" (my state, district, or CMO does not have SEL standards), "yes" (my state, district, or CMO has SEL standards), or "I don't know." Linear probability models were used to estimate whether all three responses ("yes," "no," and "I don't know") were equal. Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,229$ . \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . The row labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

teachers' states had actually adopted SEL standards or guidance.

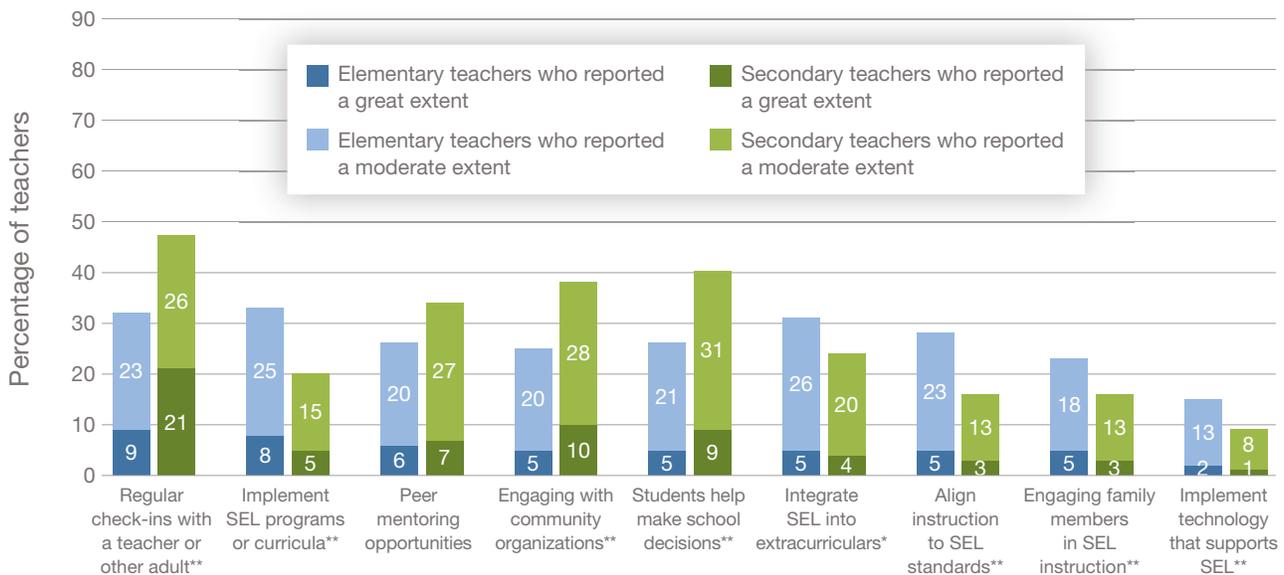
## School and Classroom Practices to Promote SEL

A survey cannot accurately document the rich and diverse strategies that teachers and schools use to support their students' social and emotional development, but it can help identify prevalence and patterns in approaches used across different contexts. Our survey included questions designed to capture information about a sample of practices that fall under each of the three main categories described earlier: explicit SEL instruction, integration, and climate. These three categories are not always distinct, and in the results, we include some activities that fall neatly into one category and some that cross boundaries.

Our first set of responses regarding practices comes from a question that asked teachers to indicate the extent to which they or their schools used various approaches to promote SEL (Figure 10). Many of

these approaches could be adopted at the school or classroom level. Teachers reported providing SEL instruction in a variety of ways, and the extent of use of many of these practices differed by grade level in ways that might be expected, based on literature that we discussed earlier. Our review highlighted the greater availability of explicit SEL curricula and instructional resources for younger students and a need for SEL approaches that emphasize youth voice and relationships for adolescents, and the results shown in Figure 10 are consistent with these differences. For example, use of SEL curricula or programs was more common among elementary teachers, whereas secondary teachers reported greater reliance on community engagement, teacher/student check-ins, and student involvement in school decisions. The reported extent of use of these practices did not differ by school urbanicity, and only one differed by school poverty: Teachers in lower-poverty schools reported the use of peer mentoring to a greater extent than those in higher-poverty schools. The practice that the lowest percentage of teachers

FIGURE 10  
Percentages of Teachers Reporting That They or Their School Used Approaches to Promote SEL to a Moderate or Great Extent



NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences between the proportion of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who responded at least a moderate extent (a moderate extent or a great extent). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,216-1,220$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The survey question was "To what extent have you or your school used the following approaches to promote SEL during the current school year (2018–2019)?" Response options were "not at all," "to a small extent," "to a moderate extent," and "to a great extent." The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

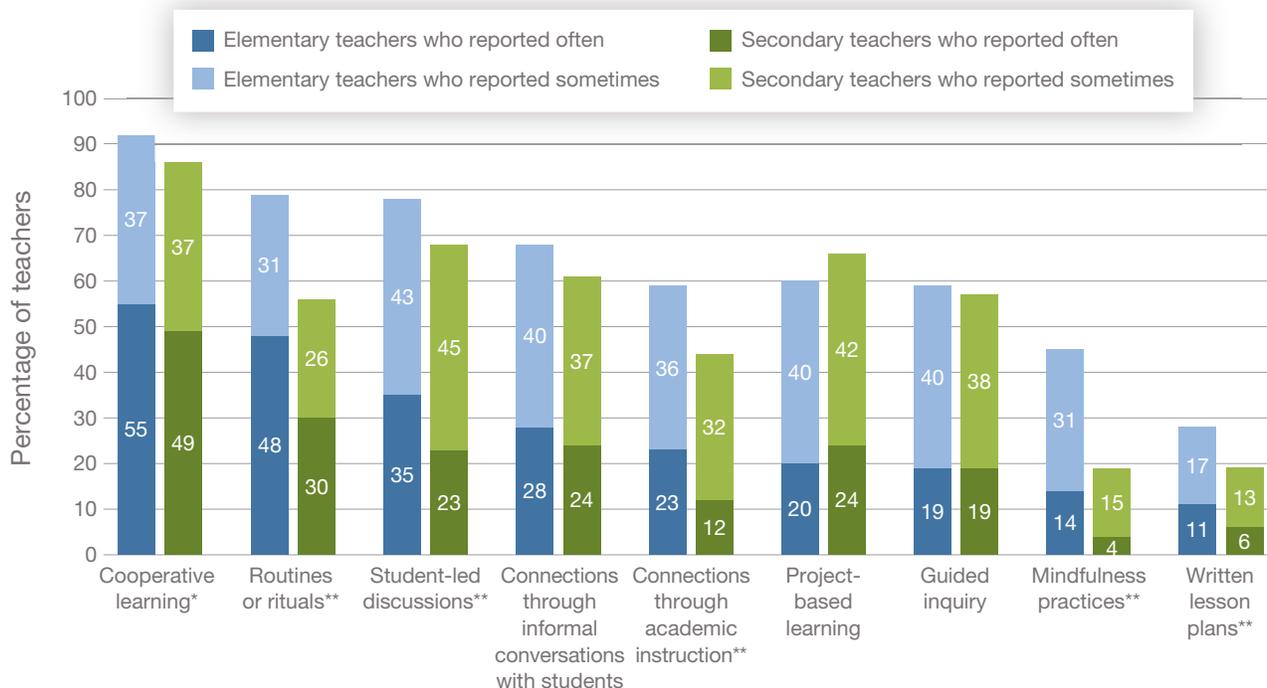
in both elementary and secondary schools reported adopting, to at least a moderate extent, was “implementing technology that supports SEL.”

We asked teachers about a variety of practices that they might use in their academic instruction to capture ways of integrating SEL into classroom pedagogy or schoolwide practices. As shown in Figure 11, the most commonly reported practice was the use of cooperative (small-group) learning; roughly 90 percent of teachers reported that they did this at least sometimes, followed by student-led discussions. We observed relatively large differences between grade levels in the use of mindfulness practices and routines and rituals; significantly greater percentages of elementary teachers reported using these practices than secondary teachers. Few teachers in either grade span reported using written lesson plans to promote SEL. Our examination of other subgroup differences

showed that teachers in lower-poverty schools were more likely than those in higher-poverty schools to report engaging in project-based learning and guided inquiry, and those in urban schools reported using mindfulness practices at higher rates than other teachers.

The final question we examine in this section addresses schoolwide efforts to promote positive climate and safety (see Figure 12). These do not include the full range of climate-related SEL practices, in part because some of those were covered elsewhere (e.g., in Figure 11, we provide responses about relationships, routines, and rituals). In Figure 12, we focus on approaches to responding to student behavior, along with practices related to school safety. Again, we observed several differences by grade level, with reported use of PBIS, point systems, and targeted behavioral interventions higher in elementary than

FIGURE 11  
Percentages of Teachers Who Reported Using SEL-Supporting Practices Sometimes or Often

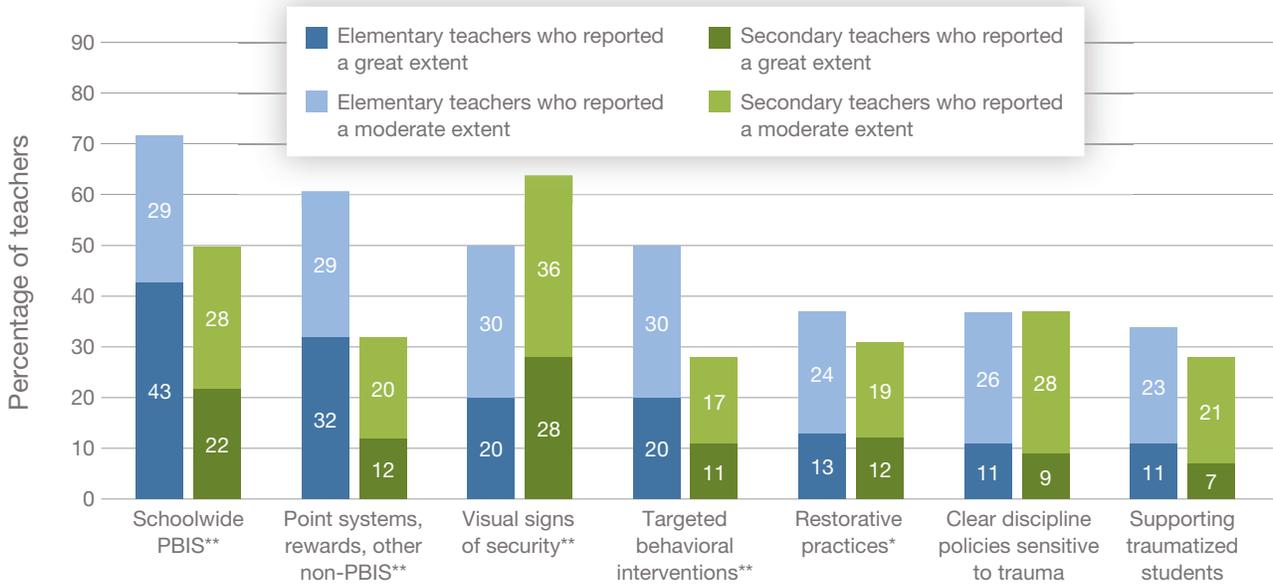


NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences in proportions of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who responded at least sometimes (sometimes or often). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,215-1,218$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The survey question was “How frequently do you use the following instructional practices in your work with students during the current school year (2018–2019)?” Response options were “not at all,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” and “often.” The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

FIGURE 12

Percentages of Teachers Who Reported Schools Using Various Strategies to Improve School Climate, Student Behavior, and Safety to a Moderate or Great Extent



NOTES: Linear probability models were used to estimate differences in proportions of teachers in elementary and secondary schools who responded at least to a moderate extent (a moderate extent or a great extent). Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,217-1,219$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . The survey question was “To what extent have you or your school relied on the following strategies to improve school climate and safety during the current school year (2018–2019)?” Response options were “not at all,” “to a small extent,” “to a moderate extent,” and “to a great extent.” The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

in secondary schools. Reported reliance on physical signs of security, such as metal detectors, by contrast, was higher in secondary schools. In fact, more secondary teachers reported relying on visual signs of security to improve school climate and safety than on any of the other practices included in the survey. Reported use of these climate and safety practices did not differ by school poverty or urbanicity, with one exception: Reported use of restorative practices (a nonpunitive approach to resolving conflict and addressing infractions) was higher in urban than nonurban schools.

**Teachers’ Practices and SEL Standards**

In this section, we present analyses that examine the extent to which teachers’ practices as reported on the survey were related to their perceptions regarding SEL standards and to whether their state had adopted SEL standards. We would predict that teachers’ reported emphasis on instruction in SEL and on

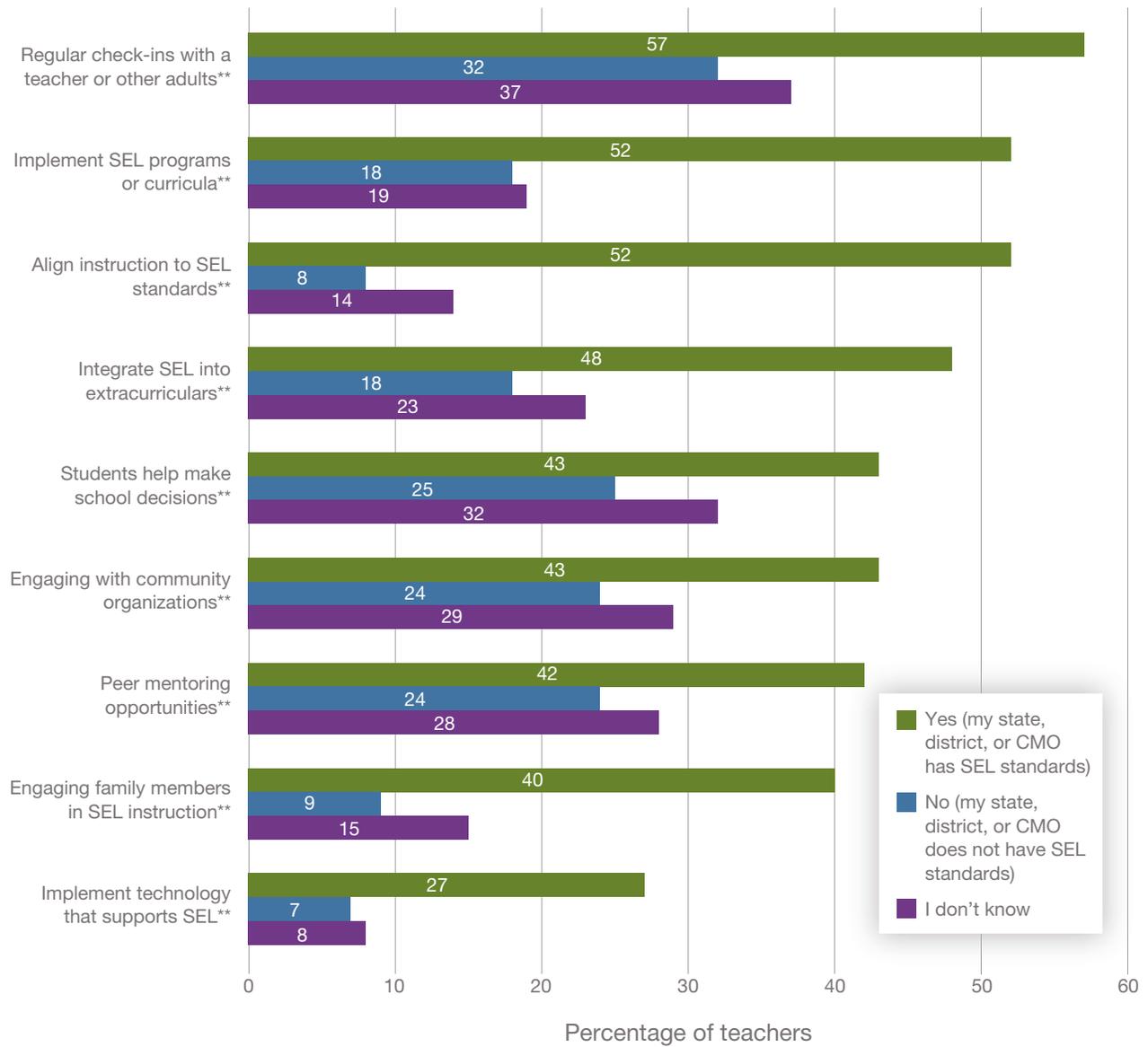
improving climate would be higher in states that had SEL standards and among teachers who believed that their states or districts had such standards.

We found that teachers’ reported SEL practices were unrelated to whether their states had adopted SEL standards, according to the CASEL analysis. It is especially noteworthy that we saw no difference for “align instruction with state, district, or CMO SEL standards.” Teachers in states that had SEL standards were no more likely than other teachers to endorse this item. We found only one difference on items related to improving school climate and safety: Teachers in states with no SEL standards reported greater reliance on physical security measures, such as school resource officers, metal detectors, and security cameras, compared with teachers in other states. This finding might suggest that SEL standards lead to lower reliance on these security measures in schools, perhaps as a result of school or district leaders’ awareness of how the standards promote more-positive approaches to school safety. However,

we have no way of confirming that hypothesis, and in general, whether states had adopted SEL standards or disseminated SEL-related guidance was not a predictor of teachers' reported use of practices related to SEL instruction, climate, or safety.

We conducted a similar set of analyses of responses to questions on SEL practices and climate and safety, but we examined differences by whether teachers reported having SEL standards rather than by the CASEL categorization of states. Figure 13

FIGURE 13  
 Percentages of Teachers Who Reported That Their School Used Various Approaches to Promote SEL to a Moderate or Great Extent, by Perceptions of District or State SEL Standards



NOTES: This figure shows percentages of teachers who reported that their school used certain approaches to promote SEL by teachers' perceptions of whether their states or districts had SEL standards (see Table 2). Response options were "no" (my state, district, or CMO does not have SEL standards), "yes" (my state, district, or CMO has SEL standards), or "I don't know." Linear probability models were used to estimate whether all three responses ("yes," "no," or "I don't know") were equal. Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models. N = 1,238. \*\* p < 0.01. The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

provides results for the analysis of teachers' reported use of SEL-related practices.

The figure shows the share of teachers who reported using the SEL approach to a moderate or great extent based on their perception of their state or district's standards. Teachers who said that their states or districts had SEL standards said that they or their schools had enacted these practices at higher rates than teachers who said that they did not have SEL standards or that they did not know. Responses regarding academic standards that addressed SEL and accountability systems that included SEL measures followed the same pattern.

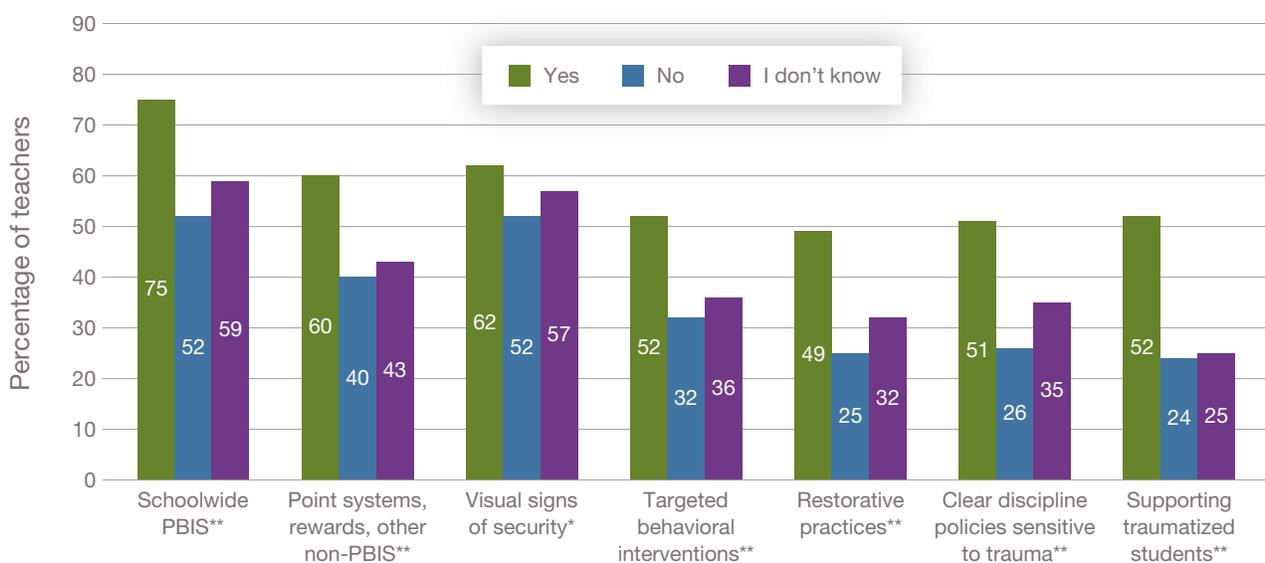
Our corresponding analysis for the climate and safety items showed that teachers who said that their states, districts, or CMOs had SEL standards reported greater use of these practices than other teachers, although some of the differences were fairly small, particularly for physical security measures (see Figure 14).

We then explored whether teachers' use of pedagogical practices that integrate SEL into academic

instruction (which we call *SEL-supporting pedagogy*) were related to their perceptions regarding whether their district or state had SEL standards, whether district or state academic standards addressed SEL, and whether teachers' district or state accountability or reporting system included SEL measures (the three items shown in Figure 7). This analysis is of interest because SEL standards and measures, along with an understanding of how academic standards address SEL, could lead teachers to incorporate pedagogy that promotes students' social and emotional competencies into their regular instruction. Although our results cannot support a causal conclusion about this, they can provide suggestive evidence that could inform future analyses of policy effects.

We created a composite measure of SEL-supporting pedagogy by averaging teachers' responses to the survey question shown in Figure 11; specifically, project-based learning, guided inquiry, cooperative learning, student-led discussion, and integrating SEL into academic instruction.<sup>9</sup> We then examined the relationship between this measure of pedagogy and

FIGURE 14  
Percentages of Teachers Who Reported Schools Using Various Strategies to Improve School Climate and Safety to a Moderate or Great Extent, by Perceptions of District or State SEL Standards



NOTES: This figure shows percentages of teachers who reported that their school used strategies to improve school climate and safety by teachers' perceptions of whether their states or districts had SEL standards (see Table 2). Response options were "no" (my state, district, or CMO does not have SEL standards), "yes" (my state, district, or CMO has SEL standards), or "I don't know." Linear probability models were used to estimate whether all three responses ("yes," "no," or "I don't know") were equal. Linearized standard errors and survey weights are used in all models.  $N = 1,238$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . The column labels provide abbreviated text; the full item wording for each is provided in the online appendix.

teachers' perceptions of whether they were subject to the aforementioned types of SEL policy, controlling for several school and teacher characteristics. The results in Figure 15 show that reported use of SEL-supporting pedagogy was higher when teachers believed that their state, district, or CMO had each of the three types of SEL policy regimes. Those who responded that they did not have these standards or did not know reported lower use of SEL-supporting pedagogy.

Similarly, in results not shown, teachers who reported having SEL standards or who said that their state or district academic standards addressed SEL were less likely to report that pressure to improve academic achievement made it difficult to incorporate SEL. Although a similar pattern is seen for teachers reporting SEL measures included in accountability or reporting systems, the difference was not significant.

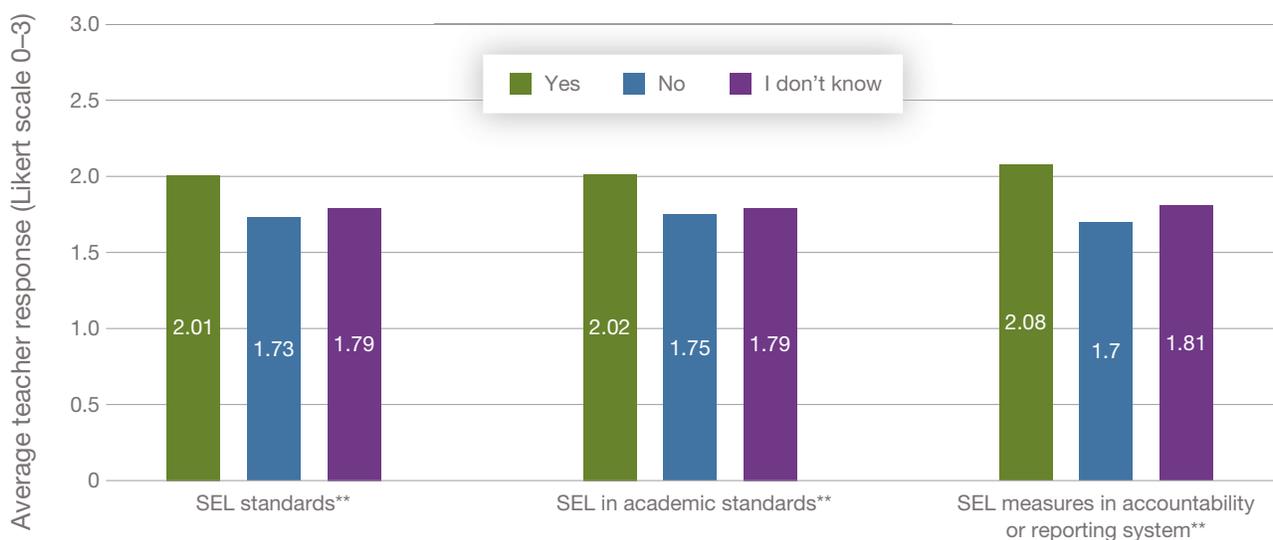
Together, these findings provide a consistent story that teachers' perceptions about whether there were SEL standards that had been adopted to guide instruction were associated with their propensity

to engage in practices that supported SEL and in practices that they might have associated with SEL, such as using behavior-management strategies. Again, causal inferences are not warranted based on this cross-sectional survey data, and CASEL provides information about state (but not local) standards. Nonetheless, the findings are suggestive of the idea that teacher perceptions of standards might be better predictors of their practice than are actual standards.

### Teachers' Practices and Well-Being

Prior research suggests that teachers' well-being is associated with their likelihood of engaging in SEL practices. In our final set of analyses, we sought to understand whether teacher well-being was connected to the SEL practices they and their schools employed after accounting for several school and teacher characteristics. Because these relationships might be affected by other characteristics of schools (e.g., whether they are elementary schools) or teachers (e.g., years of experience), we used regression analysis to examine these relationships. This

FIGURE 15  
Relationships Between SEL-Supporting Pedagogy and Teacher Perceptions of SEL Policy



NOTES: This figure shows percentages of teachers reporting SEL-supporting pedagogy by teachers' perceptions of whether their states or districts had SEL standards (see Table 2). Response options were "no" (my state, district, or CMO does not have SEL standards), "yes" (my state, district, or CMO has SEL standards), or "I don't know." Each bar shows the result of a separate regression of teacher reports of SEL integration into academic instruction on the relevant perception of SEL policy and covariates. Covariates include indicators for higher-poverty schools, elementary schools, and middle schools, as well as teacher experience, gender, race, and education. The outcome is the average Likert score of items describing teacher integration of SEL into instruction from Figure 9. The underlying Likert scale ranges from 0 to 3, which represents responses of "not at all," "rarely," "sometimes," and "often," respectively. \*\*  $p < 0.01$  in a test that rejects the null hypothesis that all three estimates are equal.

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Teachers value SEL and believe that they can improve students' social and emotional competencies, although they would like additional PD on several SEL-related topics.

approach allows us to determine whether there is a relationship between teachers' well-being and SEL practices and to ensure that we are not finding a relationship simply because another factor, such as teacher experience, influences both well-being and practices. We provide more details about these analyses, along with our results, in the online appendix to this report.

We conducted two sets of regression analyses for each of the three well-being scales. The first analysis comprised the well-being scale, teachers' SEL practices (which was an average of responses to the items shown in Figure 10), and a set of teacher and school characteristics. The second analysis included all of these variables plus a measure of school supports for SEL. The school support measure was an average of responses to the following items: "my school has developed a clear vision for SEL," "my school has a clear set of instructional practices or a roadmap for getting to specific SEL outcomes," "the culture of my school or program supports the development of children's social and emotional skills," and "staff use student input to inform school improvement."

Our first set of analyses—without the school supports measure—showed relationships between SEL practices and each of the well-being scales. Teachers who reported engaging in SEL instruction to a greater extent also indicated higher well-being. However, when we looked at results for the second set of analyses, which controlled for school supports, we no longer saw that relationship for two of the three well-being scales. Only eudaimonic well-being, or a teacher's purposeful and creative engagement with their work, was related to teachers' SEL instructional approaches. This result suggests that teachers with higher levels of eudaimonic well-being were more

likely than other teachers to report using SEL practices extensively than were teachers with lower levels of eudaimonic well-being, even if they worked in schools with similar supports for SEL. This relatively simple analysis of data from a single survey provides only a starting point for understanding these relationships, but it does demonstrate the potential value of examining different aspects of teachers' well-being in the context of research on SEL practices and support by pointing to differences in patterns of relationships.

## **Implications for Policy and Practice**

This report presents nationally representative data on how K–12 public school teachers across the United States and the schools in which they work engage in SEL practices with their students. It also summarizes these teachers' perspectives on the importance of SEL and on the conditions that might facilitate or hinder their efforts to promote it. Consistent with other research that we summarized in the introduction to this report, our survey results indicate that teachers value SEL and believe that they can improve students' social and emotional competencies, although they would like additional PD on several SEL-related topics. We found that a large majority of teachers reported emphasizing SEL programs and practices but that elementary and secondary teachers tended to adopt differing approaches, with elementary teachers placing more emphasis on SEL curricula or programs and secondary teachers placing more emphasis on approaches that involved community engagement, relationships, and student voice. We also observed a positive relationship between teachers' perceptions

of school supports for SEL and their reported SEL practices. The disparities we observed between lower- and higher-poverty schools, combined with the lack of focus of teacher PD on culturally relevant SEL, suggest a need for continued efforts to ensure that all students have access to SEL opportunities that are personally meaningful and that will prepare them for college, careers, and civic life. The data also point to ways that policymakers and others could contribute to improved SEL practices. We discuss several implications of our findings in this final section.

**Teacher job satisfaction and well-being were generally high, but our data revealed disparities across schools that warrant further investigation.** The positive results for questions about job satisfaction and for the AES are encouraging, despite the relatively high rates of reported burnout. However, responses to these questions varied across schools, and some teachers clearly are experiencing higher levels of well-being at work than others. Of particular concern are the differences in both job satisfaction and more-general well-being between schools serving higher numbers of economically disadvantaged students and those serving more-affluent populations. Furthermore, we know that many teachers experienced heightened levels of stress and concern as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cipriano and Brackett, 2020) and that some of these concerns are more widespread in schools serving large percentages of students of color and low-income students than in other schools (Hamilton, Grant, et al., 2020), so it will be important to continue to monitor this and develop resources and strategies for teachers to address their own social and emotional well-being.

**Teachers' reported SEL practices were related to their sense of well-being in school, but the reasons for that relationship are unclear.** This relationship might indicate that teachers who experience more positive emotions on the job are more likely than other teachers to engage in SEL because those positive emotions equip them to focus on their students' SEL. Alternatively, it could suggest that participating in SEL in school leads to higher levels of satisfaction. We cannot determine the specific nature of the relationship between well-being and practices or the role that school-level conditions play in this relationship, but the findings point to a complex

relationship between how teachers feel and how they can help their students. Education leaders and policy-makers should keep teacher well-being at the front of their minds when determining how to help teachers provide SEL in schools.

**PD to support SEL appears to be common, but teachers reported that their PD lacked emphasis on some important topics, and they indicated that they need more PD.** Although 75 percent of teachers said that they received some SEL-related PD during the 2018–2019 school year, a majority of teachers expressed a need for additional PD on several topics. The two least-covered areas, according to teachers, were adapting SEL to different cultures and using student SEL data to inform instruction. Although these two topics did not stand out from the others in the question that gauged teachers' perceived needs for additional PD, this might reflect, at least in part, some teachers' lack of awareness of the importance and benefit of culturally responsive SEL supports or the use of data to adapt instruction to students' SEL strengths and needs. The relatively low level of access to PD about adapting SEL to different cultures is especially noteworthy—and potentially concerning—in light of growing calls for schools to address racial injustices and implement inclusive practices.

The fact that so many teachers reported a need for SEL PD is consistent with the high priority that teachers place on supporting students' social and emotional development and indicates a clear desire among most teachers to improve their effectiveness at providing this support. We found that teachers in higher-poverty schools indicated a greater need than other teachers for more PD that addressed several topics, including adapting SEL to different cultures and building teachers' own SEL skills. Differences by school poverty levels could reflect disparities in resources for PD, differences in teachers' interest in improving their own capacity to support students socially and emotionally, or some combination of these factors. Providers of PD should consider ways to ensure that teachers have access to professional learning opportunities that address topics about which teachers said there is a lack of coverage or they need more help. Providers should be especially

attuned to understanding and addressing the needs of teachers in higher-poverty schools.

**Teachers relied heavily on colleagues for professional learning related to SEL, so it could be helpful to find ways to build on these collegial experiences.** Informal conversations and networks were the most commonly reported types of SEL-related PD that teachers reported receiving. These activities provide mechanisms for teachers to learn from one another. Moreover, because it takes place in teachers' workplaces and involves active engagement on the part of teachers, PD that relies on colleagues can help ensure that the learning supports are sustained and targeted to teachers' needs and contexts. An earlier survey found that teachers often seek guidance from colleagues regarding new interventions (Hamilton and Hunter, 2020), so SEL is not unique in that regard. Organizations that train teachers to engage in SEL practices and provide support for doing so should consider how to leverage these informal collegial networks. This involvement with networks could help support providers and maximize the likelihood that the ideas and resources provided by colleagues are of high quality and evidence-based to the extent possible. Support providers also should be aware of potential disparities in teachers' access to internal networks that provide high-quality professional learning opportunities. Teachers in higher-poverty schools also reported participating in SEL-related informal dialogue with colleagues at lower rates than those in lower-poverty schools and might benefit from efforts both to build the capacity of their internal networks and connect them with SEL-savvy educators in other schools.

**SEL standards and assessments are intended to promote awareness of and attention to SEL, but teachers likely will need guidance and resources for students to benefit from them.** Public school teachers are accustomed to working in a standards-based system; academic standards and aligned, high-stakes assessments play key roles in influencing decisions about curriculum and instruction. Although some states have adopted SEL standards, these are not nearly as prominent or visible as the academic standards, probably in large part because they are much newer and are not tied to annual assessments. In light of research on the risks associated with high-stakes

academic testing and the lack of SEL measures that have been validated for use in accountability systems (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015; Hamilton and Schwartz, 2019), it would be unwise to recommend moving to a standards-based accountability approach for SEL. However, if SEL standards and assessments are used primarily for formative, instructional purposes, they can help teachers understand how social and emotional competencies are defined and set learning goals for their students. We found that most teachers were unaware of whether such standards or assessments had been adopted in their states or districts, which implies that these teachers are unlikely to have drawn on SEL standards or assessments for instructional guidance. It is possible that standards and assessments are influencing teachers' instruction without their knowledge, such as through curriculum decisions that are made at the district level. Even so, if standards and assessments are to have the desired effect of shaping instruction, it will be important to ensure that teachers are familiar with their content and receive resources, such as PD and curriculum materials, to incorporate them into their instruction.

**Teachers' perceptions about SEL standards and assessments were related to their practices, suggesting potential benefits of SEL-focused policies.**

Despite many teachers' lack of awareness of state SEL standards, we found that teachers who *believed* that their state or district had SEL standards engaged in higher levels of several SEL practices than those who did not believe that there were standards. We observed similar relationships between teachers' practices and their perceptions regarding academic (e.g., mathematics or English language arts) standards that addressed SEL, as well as perceptions regarding SEL measures in accountability systems. Our survey data alone do not support causal conclusions regarding the effects of perceptions on practices, but they raise intriguing questions about the possibility of using policy levers, such as standards and assessments (perhaps along with other resources that might include guidance on evidence-based curricula, for example), to inform decisions about practice. Standards and assessments can be relatively cost-effective ways to influence practices among a large group of educators, but our results suggest that, at least in the case of SEL, knowledge about these

policies is incomplete, and this lack of awareness might hinder the broad adoption of SEL practices.

**Although most teachers described their school climates as positive, a reported lack of some schoolwide supports suggests a need for PD or other resources for school leaders.** The relatively favorable ratings of such aspects of school climate as relationships among students and between students and teachers are encouraging because these conditions can support students' social, emotional, and academic development. Many teachers did, however, report the lack of a clear vision and roadmap for SEL and indicated an interest in more guidance related to SEL lessons, along with the additional PD needs discussed earlier. In light of the influence principals can have on the teaching and learning environment in their schools and, in particular, their roles in setting a schoolwide vision for SEL (Aspen Institute, 2019b; Domitrovich et al., 2019), district leaders and others who provide support to schools should equip principals and other school leaders with the knowledge and resources needed to engage in instructional leadership around SEL.

**Secondary schools could benefit from guidance to take advantage of opportunities to promote SEL through classes and activities.** The differences we observed between elementary and secondary schools in their uses of SEL practices were largely consistent with research-based recommendations regarding age-appropriate strategies and differences in the availability of curricula by grade level (Grant et al., 2017; Jones, Brush, et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017). Even so, the lower rates at which secondary teachers enacted some practices—such as integrating SEL into extracurricular activities, student-led discussions, and academic instruction—suggest there are opportunities for teachers of adolescents to bring an SEL lens to the instruction and activities that many middle and high schools offer. These grade-level differences in practices align with differences in some of the statements about SEL beliefs and prioritization, including “I am good at making significant improvement in student SEL” and “I always find ways to address SEL when focusing on academic content,” both of which elementary teachers endorsed at higher rates than secondary teachers. Future research to better understand the reasons for these differences, along with

broader dissemination of guidance on social and emotional development in adolescence (including ways to promote SEL by integrating it into existing activities rather than fitting additional instruction into the already packed schedules in most middle and high schools) could help address these gaps.

**In light of the high likelihood of continued COVID-19–related disruptions that will include remote instruction—at least on an intermittent basis—teachers will need guidance to adapt their approaches to supporting students' social and emotional well-being.** According to teachers' reports, digital approaches to SEL were not widely used as of spring 2019, but as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, such organizations as CASEL and Transforming Education began issuing guidance to help educators support students socially and emotionally using remote-learning strategies and tools. It is likely that the adoption of digital SEL materials will grow, and teachers' relative lack of prior experience with such materials highlights a need for training and other resources to help them use these tools effectively. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only shuttered schools; it has led to widespread concerns about student trauma and stress as a result of the disruption, and both teachers and principals rate guidance on SEL as a significant need and priority for the 2020–2021 school year (Hamilton, Kaufman, and Diliberti, 2020).

The findings in this report provide national perspectives on SEL in schools, drawing on the perceptions and experiences of K–12 public school teachers. The findings shed light on how SEL practices and supports can depend on the population of students a school serves and explore how multiple aspects of teacher well-being are related to SEL practices. Although these results represent a snapshot taken at a single point in time, they complement other available evidence and can inform the work of those who set policy, determine funding, provide supports and guidance, or conduct research about SEL in schools. Decisions about policy, funding, supports, and research often are made without input from teachers, even though this is the group that interacts most directly and intensively with students to promote their social and emotional development. As schools and other organizations continue to explore

how to promote a broad variety of competencies among children and youth, it will be crucial to ensure that teachers' voices are represented in any debates about what schools need to provide high-quality SEL. Furthermore, it will be crucial to continue to document the well-being of those tasked with teaching U.S. children and the intricate ways in which their well-being is tied to their work and effectiveness as educators.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The ATP is a standing panel of K–12 public school teachers from across the United States who are recruited via probabilistic sampling methods to facilitate nationally representative survey samples.

<sup>2</sup> Please see the technical appendix to this report for additional details. It is available for download at [www.rand.org/t/RR397-1](http://www.rand.org/t/RR397-1).

<sup>3</sup> PBIS is a framework that many schools use to encourage and reward positive youth behaviors, often using three tiers of supports that are tailored to students' needs (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, undated).

<sup>4</sup> We have intentionally kept this review of literature very brief, highlighting a few key articles and reports. More-detailed discussions of relevant evidence are available in Allensworth et al., 2018, and Aspen Institute, 2019a.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the presentation of results, we mention differences by school poverty or urbanicity only when they are statistically significant after applying the robustness checks.

<sup>6</sup> CASEL has updated these reports in subsequent years, but the fall 2018 information was most relevant to the responses to our survey, which was administered in spring 2019.

<sup>7</sup> CASEL also identified several states with SEL standards for only pre-kindergarten and a few early elementary grades. Because our data include teachers in grades K–12, we classified these states as not having standards for the purpose of our analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Three states had SEL standards but no guidance. This group is too small to analyze on its own, so we have included these three states in the “SEL standards” category.

<sup>9</sup> The resulting scale had an internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha) of 0.721.

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## About the Authors

**Laura S. Hamilton** is an adjunct behavioral scientist at RAND. Her research examines social, emotional, and academic learning and assessment, along with state and local education policy. She holds a Ph.D. in educational psychology.

**Christopher Joseph Doss** is a quantitative researcher at the RAND Corporation who specializes in fielding causal and descriptive studies in education. His research has focused on evaluations of early childhood education policies, K–12 accountability policies, and alternative teacher and principal preparation programs. He holds a Ph.D. in economics of education.

## About This Report

This report presents results from a spring 2019 survey of a nationally representative sample of K–12 public school teachers about their approaches to supporting students’ social and emotional learning (SEL) and the factors that might influence those approaches. The American Educator Panels (AEP) are nationally representative samples of teachers and school leaders across the country. We are extremely grateful to the U.S. public school teachers and leaders who have agreed to participate in the panels. Their time and willingness to share their experiences are invaluable for this effort and for helping us to understand how to better support their hard work in schools. We also thank our reviewers, Catherine Augustine and Nick Yoder, for helpful feedback that improved this report, and we thank Blair Smith and Monette Velasco for their support in producing this report.

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If you are interested in using AEP data for your own analysis or reading other AEP-related publications, please email [aep@rand.org](mailto:aep@rand.org) or visit [www.rand.org/aep](http://www.rand.org/aep). More information about RAND can be found at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org). Questions about this report should be directed to [laurah@rand.org](mailto:laurah@rand.org) and [cdoss@rand.org](mailto:cdoss@rand.org), and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to [educationandlabor@rand.org](mailto:educationandlabor@rand.org).



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