

SEL, Equity, and the Re-Opening Town Hall: Advancing A National Conversation for School Social Work



A Question and Answer Resource Guide



School of Social Work
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



School Social Work
Association of America



Mahomet-Seymour CUSD #3

Introduction

The SEL, Equity, and the Re-Opening Town Hall: Advancing a National Conversation for School Social Work was hosted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work (UoI SSW) on September 10, 2020.

The town hall was facilitated by *Christy McCoy*, School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) President-Elect. It featured presentations from *Dr. Stephanie Ochocki* and *Sheri Olson* from SSWAA, *Karen VanAusdal* from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), *Ami Flammini* from the Midwest PBIS Network, *Dr. Kevin Tan* from the UoI SSW, and *Dr. Nicole Rummel* from the Mahomet-Seymour CUSD #3.

This Q&A resource guide is based on questions that we received from school social workers around the country. The questions are categorized into four sections: (1) SEL-focused, (2) equity-focused, (3) school social work profession-specific, and (4) general practice related questions. This guide is not meant to be a comprehensive response to these questions, but was developed to provide you with useful resources to support your work. The resources are drawn mostly from those developed by [SSWAA](#), [CASEL](#), and the [Center on PBIS/Midwest PBIS Network](#), although when appropriate, we highlighted materials from other sources.

This guide is developed by Dr. Kevin Tan with the support of Grace McClowry, UoI SSW research assistant and MSW student. The town hall presenters provided recommendations on the resources included in this guide. Additionally, we thank the staff from the UoI SSW (Amy Frederick, Becky Ponder, and Tony Hillen) who provided the administrative support in organizing this town hall and for producing this guide.

If you would like more resources, do join SSWAA as a [member](#). This will give you access to the [School Social Worker Resource Library \(SWRL\)](#). You are also encouraged to join [SSWAA's SEL and Practitioner of Color \(POC\) committees](#) to further our profession's work on SEL and equity.

School social workers have been serving our nation's students and families for over 100 years. Now is the time for our profession to illuminate the path forward especially for those students and families from historically underinvested, underrepresented, and marginalized communities. Under the weight of the contemporary challenges faced by society, SSWAA has adopted the theme of [Beacon of Hope: School Social Workers Lighting the Way](#). Indeed, may our profession lead the way forward with the work that we do.

We thank you for your service.

#beaconofhope #blacklivesmatter #together4SEL

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Opening Address for SEL, Equity, and the Re-Opening Town Hall: Advancing a National Conversation

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to tonight's webinar: *SEL, Equity, and the Re-Opening Town Hall: Advancing a National Conversation for School Social Work*. We are excited to have such a great turnout, and I want to thank all of the organizations who have supported this effort. These include the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, or CASEL; the Midwest PBIS Network; the School Social Work Association of America; Mahomet-Seymour CUSD #3; and our own School of Social Work.

As you all know, a conversation like this could not be more timely. There has not been a period in my lifetime during which our national situation has been more contentious, troubling, and uncertain. We are in the midst of a pandemic with no clear end in sight, which has wreaked havoc on our way of life and again brought to the forefront serious health disparities and other inequities. We simultaneously have been confronted with graphic evidence of police violence, which has helped to reawaken attention to the depth of racial discrimination and disparities in this country. And we are in the midst of what will be one of the most contentious Presidential races in American history, which promises a significantly conflictual aftermath regardless of the outcome.

American families are caught in the crossfires of these concurrent circumstances – both tangibly and interpretationally. From a tangible standpoint, families are battling to make ends meet in an economy devastated by the pandemic, while also often educating children remotely and battling their fears and uncertainties. From an interpretational standpoint, it is difficult for people to know who to believe or to have a firm sense of where they can turn for help. Children and youth are growing up in the midst of this, and it is difficult for me to imagine what they are thinking as both their school lives and family lives often have been turned upside down. It is obvious that they are facing a great deal of pressure and uncertainty, not to mention highly compromised learning environments.

It is in this unique context that school social workers, teachers, health professionals, and many others are striving to help families and their children keep moving forward as well as possible. There could not be a more critical time for this work, and I applaud you for all you are doing. I hope tonight's conversation will be one small but important step in a positive direction.

Again, thank you so much for joining us tonight.

Steve Anderson, Dean
School of Social Work
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Section 1: SEL-Focused Questions

Students

- **What would you consider to be the crucial subjects to address for the social emotional well-being of young students currently?**

We recommend that you review [SSWAA's position paper](#) on the role of school social workers as it relates to the COVID-19 health crisis. Additional resources to review include [CASEL's Reunite, Renew and Thrive](#) SEL Roadmap document, and the document by the Center on PBIS on [Responding to the COVID-19 Outbreak through PBIS](#).

- **How can you teach social skills remotely? Can you show us some of your activities?**

[SSWAA](#) has consolidated a list of COVID-19 related resources. [CASEL](#) has also curated a list of resources that is relevant for teaching social skills remotely. Additionally, [Midwest PBIS Network](#) and the [Center on PBIS](#) provided a list of resources as it relates remote school practice. Some specific activities that you can utilize include [adapting Check-in Check-out for Distance Learning](#) and [creating a PBIS Behavior Teaching Matrix for Remote Instruction](#).

- **Are there any resources using SEL to addresses school avoidance or lack of student participation in the current online learning environment?**

The Center on PBIS has provided a list of helpful [suggestions and strategies](#) specific to improving attendance and chronic absenteeism during remote instruction. This document from [Attendance Works](#) proposes a framework for monitoring attendance that is applicable for schools operating in a virtual or blended model.

- **Is there guidance for this school year on universal SEL screeners?**

Our colleagues at the National Association of School Psychologists have provided a thoughtful consideration on universal screening that you can find [here](#). If you are currently not implementing a universal screener, now is probably not the time to install something new. However, item 2.3: Screening in the [Tiered Fidelity Inventory \(TFI\)](#) grounds to the concept of multiple data sources to identify students needing more support. Review [Guidance on Adapting Check-in Check-out \(CICO\) for Distance Learning](#) and Midwest PBIS Network's [September Coaches Network Meeting](#) for considerations for data decision rules during remote instruction. CASEL's document on [Choosing and Using SEL Competency Assessment](#) is also a helpful resource.

Staff / School + District Implementation

- **Who should teach SEL in schools?**

SEL can be and should be taught by everyone. A discussion by CASEL on how to assemble an SEL team is provided [here](#). Within a multi-tiered system of support, Midwest PBIS Network would also encourage the message that SEL is everyone's job. The role of school social workers is to become SEL leaders in your district and building and provide professional development that enhances the skills and confidence for all staff. Visit the Midwest PBIS Network's [Role of the Clinician](#) page and specifically the recordings on professional development for more.

- **Where does one start in developing an SEL program and what suggestions are there for building on the program?**

We refer you to CASEL's [guide to establishing school-wide SEL](#). Specific guidance is provided depending on [where you are](#); whether you are merely curious about implementing SEL, or at the beginning stage, already implementing SEL or are currently partnering with other organizations on SEL. CASEL provides four [guidelines](#) for keeping SEL at the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Create a foundation for SEL
2. Attend to the well-being and mutual support among adults
3. Promote SEL for young people
4. Reflect on how things are going and adjust as you learn

PBIS provides the ideal framework for promoting SEL competencies and monitoring implementation and outcomes. The [Teaching Social-Emotional Competencies within a PBIS Framework](#) describes how school leaders can install SEL within one framework rather than through competing initiatives.

- **How schools and districts can (and why they should) implement SEL at structural/systemic/policy level?**

CASEL has developed specific information and resources on SEL as it relates to [classroom-](#), [school-](#), [district-](#)level, and in [homes and communities](#). Additionally, the Center for PBIS has developed a set of resources for implementing PBIS at the [district and state-level](#).

- **How do we promote staff buy-in to prioritize mental health/SEL with decreased face to face instructional time with students? What are the best ways to support staff in virtual setting?**

CASEL's resource on [SEL through Distance Learning: Teacher Self-Assessment](#) is a helpful resource. We also believe in the importance of focusing on adult self-care. CASEL has information as it relates to [strengthening adult SEL](#). You may also find their materials on [promoting adult SEL and cultural competence](#) helpful. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) has put out two useful articles on [teacher stress](#) and strategies for teacher [self-care](#).

Section 2: Equity-Focused Questions

- **What are best practices to prioritize racial equity in SEL?**

You may find it helpful to review CASEL's [Equity and SEL Cultural Analysis Framework](#), their discussion on [transformative SEL](#), and critical practices on utilizing [SEL as a lever for equity and excellence](#).

Review the PBIS's [5-Point Intervention Approach for Enhancing Equity in School Discipline](#) to consider a comprehensive approach to reducing discipline disproportionality in schools.

- **How do we avoid using SEL to enforce patterns of oppression in this time (e.g. targeting "angry" black boys)?**

You may be familiar with CASEL's five core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL has developed a [list of considerations](#) that you should consider in promoting SEL through an equity lens. This [brief](#) on promoting transformative SEL is also useful to review.

[The PBIS's Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide](#) can also support schools in assessing current practices and identifying strategies to ensure or enhance implementation within a cultural responsive approach.

- **How do we address racial and educational equity, activism, and manage teacher attitudes and expectations, keeping in mind the racial/cultural trauma that educators/SW can do when implementing SEL without an equity lens?**

The [Notice.Talk.Act at School](#) mental health program developed by the American Psychiatric Association is one of many approaches that can be used to address issues of racial equity. This article on [Four Core Priorities for Trauma-Informed](#)

[Distance Learning](#) is also helpful to review. Other helpful resources are the Center on PBIS's Guide for School Teams on [Using Discipline Data within SWPBIS to Identify and Address Disproportionality](#) and their presentation on [Neutralizing Implicit Bias in School Discipline](#).

- **How do we support Special Education students and students who are disproportionately affected by not having access to internet or computers during remote learning?**

The Center on PBIS highlights [5 key practices](#) for teachers and families to support all students, including students with disabilities, at school and home. You can also find a webinar [here](#) on Remote Tools and Strategies for and Special Education services.

- **How can MTSS/SEL policies and interventions be culturally appropriate and relevant given its development in majority white perspective? What steps have been taken to ensure that SELs are inclusive?**

This [document](#) by the US Office of Special Education summarizing evidence-based and responsive classroom strategies based on PBIS principles is a helpful resource. This [brief](#) from Pennsylvania State University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation addresses and provides solutions to barriers relating to SEL and equity. This [reflection](#) on why we cannot have SEL without equity by CASEL is a useful resource.

- **What are some key practices for creating buy-in on equity talks and examples of community engagement or policies that promote equity in education?**

The Center on PBIS has two helpful resources that can serve as talking points for community engagement around equity: [PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide](#) and a guide for district and school teams on [Key Elements of Policies to Address Discipline Disproportionality](#).

Section 3: School Social Work Profession-Specific Questions

General

- **What is the role of a School Social Worker?**

SSWAA has an official definition on the [role](#) of the school social worker, and NASW provides further details on the school social work [standards](#). SSWAA has a [resolution statement](#) on the role of the school social worker in addressing students' mental health needs and a [position statement](#) that is specific to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For specifics on the role of the school social worker within a three-tiered prevention framework, visit the Midwest PBIS Network's [Role of the Clinician](#) page.

- **How do school social worker best support students, families, and school sites in meeting student SEL needs?**

We recommend that you review SSWAA's school social work [practice model](#) as well as their national [SEL standards](#) in considering on school social workers can support students, families, and schools in addressing student needs. Consider ways to support strengthening the capacity of all staff to support the SEL needs of students. Visit the Midwest PBIS Network's [Role of the Clinician](#) page for four short recordings to help with shifting this role.

- **How to talk to school districts about benefits of hiring school social workers instead of outsourcing school social work services?**

SSWAA's [resolution statement](#) on the Impact of School Social Workers during COVID-19 would be a helpful resource. The New York State Association of School Social Workers has also released a [statement](#) that would be helpful in highlighting the important role of school social workers especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School Social Work + SEL

- **What resources are available to support school social workers with their role in a remote learning environment and promoting SEL?**

SSWAA has compiled a list of [resources](#) that can support school social workers in promoting SEL and supporting remote learning. Additionally, NASW has also

provided a list of helpful [resources](#). CASEL has also provided a list of [resources](#) specific to distance learning that is helpful to review. You may also find this resource on [Creative Interventions for Online Therapy with Children](#) helpful.

- **Are there virtual tools and assessment available for school social workers who will not be making home visits initially?**

You can find a webinar [here](#) on providing online mental health services. You may also find a resource such as [Closegap](#) on assessing students' social emotional status to be helpful.

School Social Work + Equity

- **What is the unique role of school social workers in providing SEL and promoting equity?**

You can find a [webinar](#) here discussing the specific role of school social workers as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also recommend that you review SSWAA's [position paper](#) in solidarity with Black Lives Matter.

- **How can school social workers take a leadership role in addressing issues of equity in their buildings and districts, especially in districts where the status quo is systemic racism? How do we address the ways in which our profession exists in a predominantly white context (e.g., lack of diversity, access, supervision)?**

The guide from [Teaching Tolerance](#) will be helpful on ways school social workers can respond to everyday prejudice, bias, and stereotypes in school settings.

- **What resources are available to help school social workers who are not Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) serve in BIPOC-majority areas?**

Do consider joining [SSWAA's Practitioners of Color \(POC\) committee](#) which aims to bring collective healing within institutions, build stronger bridges between social work and education through educational lenses, and challenge institutionalized oppression while finding joy in our cultural and professional identities

Section 4: General Practice Related Questions

- **What tiered interventions would you recommend for students?**

You can find foundational knowledge on setting up a multi-tiered systems of support from the [Center on PBIS](#) and [Midwest PBIS Network](#). CASEL maintains a website on [evidence-based SEL programs](#) that is relevant to be used in a multi-tiered model.

- **What are suggestions when working with at risk students from the border?**

You may find it helpful to review the work of Dr. Leticia Villarreal Sosa on a [trauma-informed approach to supporting immigrant students and families in school](#) and [advocating for Latinx children’s rights and supporting their healing from trauma](#).

- **Where can I find a comprehensive visual aligning: MTSS/RTI/PBIS/SEL/Restorative & Trauma Informed Practice/Cultural response?**

We recommend that you review Midwest PBIS Network’s [Interconnected Systems Framework](#) as it provides a structure and process of integrating PBIS and various school mental health supports into an integrated model.

- **What are examples of districts that are doing SEL and equity work effectively?**

CASEL’s [Collaborating Districts Initiative](#) is an example of districts effectively integrating SEL and equity work.

- **How do we address confidentiality issues when connecting with students on virtual platforms?**

SSWAA has compiled recommendations on [best practices in telehealth](#) and for providing [online mental health support](#). NASW has also provided guidance on seeking [informed consent with telehealth](#) and published a [practice guide](#).

- **Are there resources to help teachers identify signs of suicide during virtual learning?**

The National Association of School Psychologists provides a [discussion on comprehensive school suicide prevention](#) during this period of remote learning. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline also provides a [useful resource on supporting suicidal individuals over social and digital media](#).