STUDENT SUCCESS NETWORK

Guide to Lead with Transformative SEL

Your Network, Your Resources.

In this guide, we've hand-selected insights members have shared in Network convenings and conversations, as well as promising practices from experts in the field, to help us build and sustain *cultures* of trust, care and strong relationships in the year ahead.

Over recent years, **we've learned that one-off activities are not sufficient to grow youth SEL, but that we have to *create environments* which are responsive to the sociopolitical and racial context that we live in, to actually see improved outcomes.** However, we also recognize that we won't be able to fall back on standard practices and procedures during this time of uncertainty and unprecedented disadvantage, so we're using this time as an opportunity to build on what we've learned. We're also aiming to streamline our efforts across the Network to help practitioners feel equipped and encouraged to meet this moment.

This is an opportunity to lean into [Transformative SEL](#), and build on knowledge from resources like our practitioner-informed [Foundations for Youth SEL Development While Remote](#) in our work ahead.

The tips shared in this guide pinpoint the various ways that we are figuring things out together and focus on the following central themes:

- **Strengthening relationships with program participants**
- **Engaging participants' interests, whole identities, and experiences in program**
- **Lifting up participants' assets to create safe and supportive spaces**
- **Managing practitioner stress in program**
- **Leaning into innovation in program**

Guiding questions: What can we do now to prepare? What can we do in the first two weeks and months of the school year? How will we keep this going as the year progresses? What should we prioritize given where our resources are well suited to have impact? What are our assets and leverage points?

The approaches included in this guide are organized to:

- **FOCUS ON TRANSFORMATIVE SEL:** ideas to create safe, supportive and equitable learning environments
- **ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS:** the who, how, and why to consider when making decisions
- **INNOVATE TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS:** new ways to use data and existing relationships for improvements
- **OFFER ACTIVITIES BY GRADE LEVEL:** ideas for employing transformative SEL with different age groups

In addition to the other resources included in this guide, the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of schools [report](#) was a key reference in organizing and synthesizing comprehensive guidance for culturally responsive reopening.

FOCUS ON TRANSFORMATIVE SEL

> **Focus on adults: Put staff well-being & SEL competency at the center of school & program culture. Design opportunities where adults can connect, heal, manage their stress and build their skills and mindsets to effectively embody, teach, model, and coach student SEL.**

- **Develop a [trauma-informed perspective](#).** You, your colleagues, and your participants are experiencing disruption that can lead to stress or overwhelm. Take care of yourself. Maintain relationships with your colleagues and participants. -Cecily Mitchell-Harper, Ramapo for Children

- **Use professional development offerings to support trauma-informed care practices (e.g., affinity groups, restorative healing circles, mindfulness and meditation, and yoga) offering all staff members the opportunity to address the intersections of trauma with culture, history, race, gender, location, and language, and acknowledge the compounding impact of structural inequity.**

- **Use the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) as a clinical resource to destigmatize students' individual responses and increase educator empathy.**

- **Provide [adults opportunities to examine their identities, values, mindsets, and actions](#).** Pages 7-12 of Transforming Education's SEL for Educators Companion Guide include action-oriented resources for reflection, conversation, collaboration, and continued growth as practitioners create spaces for adult SEL development. Practices can be adapted for different environments & contexts.

- **Practitioners should consistently engage in reflective practices to learn about their own identities, experiences, and potential biases, and how they might influence interactions with students and families.**

> **Focus on relationships: Build structures that maximize supportive connections, either in-person or through distance learning.**

- **Make intentional efforts to get to know all of the students in the program, both academically and personally.** Incorporate personal check-ins with students regularly and track interactions to ensure that all students are engaged.

- **Find ways to celebrate students' academic mastery, growth, and other strengths regularly.**

- **Use advisory class or other structures so that every single adult in the building has a group of students of whom they are responsible for keeping track, talking 1-1 regularly, building relationships with families, identifying resources of support, etc.**

- **Adapt Facing History's [Teacher Checklist](#).** The checklist's questions and suggested resources can help you create guidelines and routines with your students as you get started with remote programming. The list is also helpful to refer back to as your students' needs evolve and change.

- **Create a classroom contract by adapting Facing History's [Contracting for Online Learning](#).** Classroom contracts are a tool to create inclusive and respectful learning communities, whether they are in-person or online. With schools closing and many classrooms moving to digital spaces, contracting for online learning can mark a transition to a different kind of learning community and can help practitioners and students establish new norms to meet the challenges of the moment.

- **Foster connectedness with students by adapting Facing History's [Student-Centered Approaches to Online and Distance Learning](#)**. This grid offers ideas, strategies, and resources to help you and your students connect, reflect, inquire, and discuss in both synchronous and asynchronous digital spaces.

- **[Adapt a trauma-sensitive lens in an equitable way](#)**—while remote—in a time of rapidly increasing stress. This resource includes actions that trauma-sensitive school leaders and other experts are taking to apply the trauma lens with cultural sensitivity in today's time of crisis. Key examples include coordinating with and learning from families and community partners to co-create spaces where students feel accepted (their whole identities) and supported. It also discussions actions for supporting educators who are living with their own stressful situations.

- **Invite employee feedback, and take it seriously, and prioritize [remote DEI strategies](#) to [foster authentic connections with your employees while remote](#).** In order to develop a strong connection among your remote employees, you need to know how they feel; one-on-one wellness check ins can be a great way to reach people. Team leaders and colleagues should help others feel included, serving as a fair-minded ally — someone who treats everyone equally — to offer protection to buffer the exclusionary behavior of others. Exchange stories about how you have coped with challenges similar to what your teammates are experiencing and see what suggestions other teammates have for improving the situation. Belonging is important for your team to feel like they belong to something they value — and that they have the power to bring about change when it's needed.

- **Adapt [virtual Crew lessons](#)**. Created by Shatera Weaver, Dean of Culture at MELS, an NYC Outward Bound School. Crew is a distinctive structure in all NYC Outward Bound schools and is similar to many advisory systems, but so much more than a grab bag of team-building activities. Crew is a small group of students that gathers regularly with an educator who creates structures and activities meant to instill a sense of community for all members. More **[here](#)**.

ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Meaningfully involve community partners, families, and students in developing a vision, goals, and plans for the year.

- **Map your key stakeholders, including youth.** Who are they? How can you engage them? What can they contribute? What do they want and need? Start with Making Caring Common Project's [Relationship Mapping Strategy](#) for in-person or online application.

- **Make decisions *with* key stakeholders.**

- **Read articles and have discussions before making decisions to incorporate best practices, re-imagine processes, and keep equity at the forefront during this crisis.** EHTP senior leadership used values-based decisions to help with difficult conversations. -Mel Jackman, EHTP

- **Collaboration Tools for Building SEL Across the School Day and Out-of-School Time.** These resources were developed specifically for school communities that are looking to align SEL practices across the full day - from before school, through classes, lunch and recess, until the last student leaves after-school programming. In this process, you will prioritize the relationships, communication skills, and context necessary for this collaborative approach to SEL

- **Seek flexibility and guidance from governing bodies, like Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and each of your funders as soon as possible.** Many funders are being understanding and flexible around program shifts and reporting timelines.

INNOVATE TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS

Use data as an opportunity to share power, deepen relationships, and continuously improve support. Recognize that white dominant culture and antiquated pedagogy don't inspire creativity or change. Use this time to pause and imagine what the future of our work can look like if we diverge from the status quo and invest in inclusive and liberatory strategies that engage students and enable their agency to transform their lives and the world around them.

- **Elevate students' voices in reflecting and acting on data.** Prioritize collaboration with students in examining root causes and barriers to attendance, learning, and engagement and action planning. Start with our tools such as the Youth-Informed Survey Administration one-pager and Data Discussion Worksheet. However, also be prepared to acknowledge and explore why students might not feel like they have the power, energy or voice to contribute or lead during this time.

- **Youth storytelling can be a powerful tool for data collection, youth engagement and healing from the trauma caused by the pandemic.**

- **Partner with families and community members to improve.** Prioritize strengthening partnerships with community members through the process of collecting, reflecting, problem-solving, and taking action from data.

- Ten of our members shared strategies to reassess priorities, innovate to meet emerging needs, engage stakeholders, and safeguard data. **See our Guide to Data & Evaluation During COVID-19.**

- **Check out the Navigating COVID-19 section** of our Resource Library for a wealth of tips and resources to be innovative with remote engagement. Key picks include the Google Classroom for Remote Teaching and Learning: A Visual Guide for Teachers and many more.

- **Offer students the chance to explore how to apply skills and strategies in new contexts and in nuanced ways (e.g., within the classroom, after school, and in their home communities).**

Across grades:
- **Consider modified scheduling.** Consciously review the demographic breakdown should a split schedule be necessary. You want cohorts of students to mirror your overall demographics as much as possible. Consider how a split schedule might further exacerbate isolation of vulnerable students (i.e. when you have two Black students in an AP or college level course).
Be attentive to the needs of students who have had to pick up work or increase their work hours during the crisis and how a split schedule might impact them (work with them to determine the best arrangements).

Middle & High School

- A resource from [Out of Eden Learn](#), **Connecting Our Own Lives to the Past is an [activity](#) for students ages 3-19 to dialogue and build understanding with peers about how their own lives connect to the past or history**. In this era of interconnection, disconnection, and rapid change, the exercise combines offline activities with online interaction and invites young people to: 1) slow down to observe the world carefully and listen attentively to others; 2) exchange stories and perspectives with one another; and 3) make connections between their own lives and bigger human stories.

- A resource from [Digital Dilemmas](#), **Digital Dilemma: Social Media and COVID-19 is an [activity](#) designed to deepen students' thinking, perspective taking, communication skills, and agency.**

High School

- **Youth Communications offers a [guide](#)** with lesson plans to help your students practice important literacy skills, deepen critical thinking skills, and talk with their peers about important issues including dealing with responsibility, living with depression, or adjusting to a new life and new expectations.

College Access

- **Goal-setting (PDSA) works in the new normal**. Continue to support students in using the goal-setting strategy in a remote learning environment so that they develop the habit of goal-setting and reflection through practicing regular goal-setting, on-track/off-track exit tickets, and end-of-cycle reflections, and will be more likely to complete their courses, be awarded credits, and graduate.

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College Success

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We're looking for more. To add to or edit this guide, please reach out to Kelly Nelson, Director of Capacity Building at **kelly@ssn-nyc.org**.