

CHAPTER 2

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INTEGRATING AN SEL COACH IN YOUR SYSTEM

ANOTHER COACH? WHY SEL COACHES WHO FOCUS ON WHOLE SCHOOL SEL ARE NECESSARY

As you will learn in this book, the SEL coach/lead implementer is most like a systems coach. Because social and emotional competencies affect everyone in the system, a coach is there to guide all educational stakeholders in practices that support these skills. It is important to provide clarity for your role: What makes the SEL coach different, similar, and vital for Social Emotional Learning success?

SEL coaches collaborate with colleagues to identify areas of need and develop systemic solutions. The word *coach* is defined as a person involved in the direction, instruction, and training of the operations of a team or of individual people. A coach may also be a teacher. An SEL coach has the additional responsibility of moving a system. Systems change takes a broader view to determining what changes can be made to impact our day-to-day lives in a positive way. With a systems mindset, the SEL coach looks at individual, group, whole school, and community influences particularly as they relate to social and emotional competencies. This may mean looking at a particular policy that negatively affects the school environment, or practices within the classroom, or the way an individual can effectively emotionally regulate. You will look at curricula and practices with an eye on how they will affect the system as well as individuals. You will not only look at the specific practices of individuals but also how those practices impact the rest of the system, especially the students.

SEL Coach versus Instructional Coach

Though SEL and instructional coaches have some similarities, it is important to understand what makes these roles different. Instructional coaches focus on the teaching and learning aspects of teacher performance and improvement. Areas such as student achievement and learning targets are their key areas of concentration. By comparison, SEL coaches focus on schoolwide efforts to improve the positive cultures of both school and classroom environments. The goals you set are designed to affect the overall well-being of both students and adults. This includes working with teachers, administrators, students, and families. Both instructional and SEL coaches benefit schools, increase efficiency, and contribute to creating a positive culture.

Instructional coaches often focus on student achievement. System coaches focus on creating a productive environment. The instructional coach can rely on specific learning targets, the students can be regularly assessed, and the coach and teacher can determine what type of instruction can meet the individual student needs (Sweeney, 2011). System coaches need to keep many different things in mind while providing coaching. They are monitoring the entire system to determine the focus of their practice. “The role of change coaching does not necessarily exclude direct work with teachers or an interest in classroom instruction, but rather understands classroom instruction as one piece of a larger systemic unit requiring change. This change coaches work with district and school leadership to build capacity of the system to support and evolving professional environment toward enhanced student outcomes” (March & Gaunt, 2013, p. 6).

SEL COACH VERSUS INSTRUCTIONAL COACH

Similarities

- Focus on instructional practice that effectively meets the needs of their specific students
- Not evaluative
- Use student evidence to make informed decisions
- Partner with leadership and teachers

Differences

- Instructional coaches are driven by student-learning goals
- Instructional coaches use state mandated standards-based learning targets, but SEL standards are not mandated in every state
- SEL coaches partner with every educational stakeholder in and outside the school environment

SEL Coach versus PBIS Coach

When comparing SEL and behavior or PBIS coaches, SEL coaches focus on enhancing the social and emotional well-being of all stakeholders through curricula, practices, and schoolwide systems. They implement SEL strategies with both students and adults, including both staff and families. SEL coaches target developing lifelong social and emotional competencies in the classrooms and all corners of the campus. Behavior or PBIS coaches are typically responsible for schoolwide behavior and discipline data collection, focusing specifically on behavior and discipline. They also set and teach behavioral expectations and acknowledge students for meeting these expectations. Both SEL and behavior coaches promote positive skills and environments rather than punitive or exclusionary discipline. They both also promote interventions at all tiers and expand and sustain the implementation of programs and interventions throughout their school or district.

SEL COACH VERSUS PBIS COACH

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand and sustain implementation throughout the school or district• Use data to guide direction of the work• Use interventions at Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 levels• Facilitate team meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PBIS coaches are responsible for specific schoolwide data collection methods• PBIS coaches work with discipline procedures and data including defining majors and minors in the system• PBIS coaches are responsible for creating expectations, celebrations, reteaching opportunities, and reinforcement methods

SEL Coach versus MTSS Coach

SEL and MTSS, or multitiered systems of support, coaches align in several very important areas including promoting equity and taking specific needs into account. The motivations behind the two roles are slightly different. While MTSS coaches focus on specific achievement objectives, SEL leaders factor in environment, climate, and culture to promote better behaviors that lead to higher achievement. The driving force is implementing strong social and emotional initiatives to help students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

SEL COACH VERSUS MTSS COACH

Similarities

- Promote equity for all students in the learning environment
- Invest in understanding systems that impact our students and staff
- Provide feedback on the fidelity of interventions
- Use problem-solving processes that consider unique needs of school or system

Differences

- MTSS coaches focus on closing the achievement gaps
- MTSS coaches use a variety of assessment strategies to determine academic needs
- MTSS coaches use multiple sources of data to improve teaching and learning

SEL Coach versus Sports Coach

Another form of coaching in schools is sports coaching. Though these two positions may not appear to be similar, there are some overlapping components. Both groups provide encouragement to students and understand the concept of motivation. Your role, however, will be to motivate teachers and students to create more productive and positive environments. Remember that in many positions within the system, there will be some overlap. You will work as a team to make things better throughout the school system.

SEL COACH VERSUS SPORTS COACH

Similarities

- Provide encouragement to stakeholders
- Understand motivation
- Understood to have multiple tools at disposal to use in different circumstances
- Create different strategies for different circumstances

Differences

- Sports coaches work mostly with students only
- Sports coaches may still use punishment for not accomplishing goals
- Sports coaches have more intensive time to focus on specific skills

COLLABORATION WITH ROLES IN YOUR SYSTEM

As you begin to communicate your multiple roles and responsibilities in the system, it might help to develop a visual like the one below. The purpose is to demonstrate some of the collaborative work that can be shared between these roles. Creating a collaboration visual can help educational stakeholders better understand how they can work with the SEL coach. The purpose is to provide as much clarity as possible and give the other stakeholders a road-map for contact points between the different roles.

WHAT IF SEL COACH IS NOT YOUR ONLY ROLE?

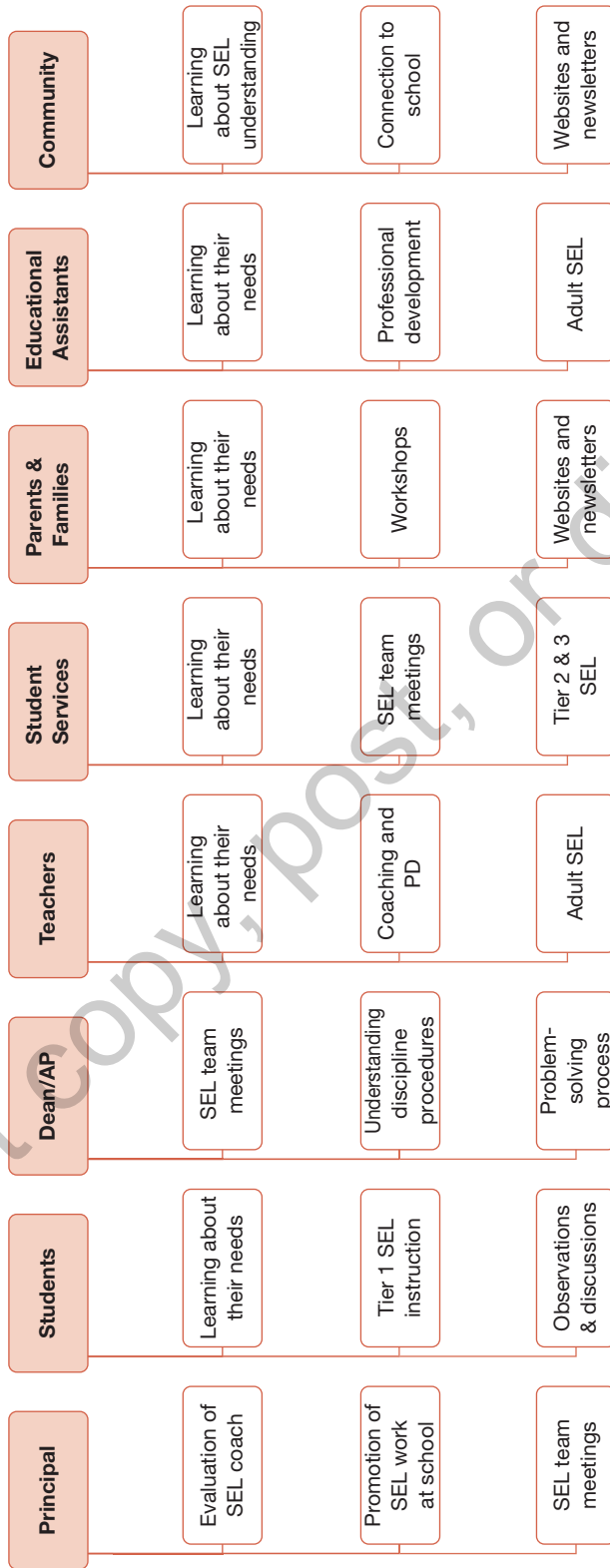
Your school may be fortunate enough to include multiple layers of a hierarchy that include a director of SEL, SEL coordinator, SEL coach, and other specialized roles. Or you may be the only one in your system responsible for SEL, but it is your full-time job. Or you may have another role in your system, and you are adding or have been asked to perform the role of SEL coach alongside your current role. The roles and responsibilities that are contained in this chapter may be spread over a few different people or it may be all in one person.

As an SEL coach or a lead implementer, you will serve many roles within your school community. It is not only important to understand the different roles that you play but how these roles overlap—specifically, how they relate in a multitiered system of support. It may be helpful to create a graphic that looks at how the different parts of your roles interact and intersect. It will help the educational stakeholders to understand what the combination of roles means for them.

THE IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEL COACH AND ADMINISTRATION/PRINCIPALS

Principals are under a tremendous amount of pressure. They are responsible for the difficult task of meeting the needs of several stakeholders while keeping the academic achievement of students top of mind. There is a cycle that occurs too frequently in our schools as it relates to our leadership. When principals leave the system, this negatively impacts student achievement because of the instability (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Also, many principal preparation programs do not teach social emotional competencies as being vital for those in leadership roles. Therefore, it may be challenging for principals to regulate the complex emotions and effectively handle the stress they will encounter as school leaders (Mahfouz et al., 2019).

Principals have a lot to balance when running their schools, and if they are not convinced of the need for change, it may not take a priority in their



building. When discussing the urgency for change with principals, emphasize the positive outcomes that can occur after implementation. One must address any concerns or questions to get to the heart of any misconceptions.

The coach and administrator share the goal of effecting positive change. The administrator takes the lead in crafting a vision and presenting it to staff, but they are both charged with the monumental and complicated task of making that vision a reality. Three driving forces should always guide the behaviors of the administrators and the coach. They are building individual relationships with their educational stakeholders, increasing teacher capacity, and strengthening teams (Hall & Simeral, 2008). These driving forces are critical for SEL implementation as well. And principals are perfectly positioned to help create the environment where it can happen. The SEL coach should consider the following about their building principal or administrator.

REFLECTIONS

1. What does your administration/principal currently understand about Social Emotional Learning?
2. What is their level of buy-in? Specifically ask about time for meetings or professional development, resources, and the budget available.
3. Have they made regular, public statements of support? If not, are they willing to?
4. Are they actively working toward getting faculty and staff buy-in?
5. Are they willing to participate in SEL team meetings?
6. Will they work toward building a vision that supports this work?
7. Will they embed the vision in the decision-making process?
8. Will they reinforce actions that fall in line with the vision?

THE SEL COACH IS THE NAVIGATOR

As a navigator, being an effective communicator is key to your success. Prepare yourself for process changes by assessing the areas where you have influence. While your school community may find change challenging at first,

remember that you are the navigator of the ship and can help your school move toward supporting students via proven SEL practices and processes. You will need to navigate the needs of your program and best practices with the principal, thus understanding the principal's perception and need for the SEL coaching role in the system.

It is critical to get your leadership on board before you can get this intervention off the ground. Principals play a critical role in the selection, effective implementation, and sustainability of SEL programs, policies, and practices (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Principal support is a key element, but not the only consideration that SEL coaches must consider. They are one part of the overall system. In future chapters, we will be looking at the important relationship between SEL coaches and other key educational stakeholders.

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Interview:

1. *What did you find was most effective about the program or practice?*

SEL implementation was needed and the tools we were provided initially were varied. Having a choice in the order of implementation gave us the flexibility to weave the demands of this initiative into our already full plates.

2. *What is the best way to increase schoolwide implementation of Social Emotional Learning in your experience?*

Having a small group of leaders create a plan that includes the most impactful components of an SEL approach is the best first step. From there, each building can take that plan and complete a self-assessment to determine to which degree of success they had integrated each component. Using the self-assessment, they would then plan next steps.

3. *What was your specific role and contributions in the SEL implementation process?*

I led the efforts at my building as the building principal.

4. *What was the first thing you did?*

The first thing I had to do was to sell the idea to my staff. Next, we created a committee to manage the process, and finally, we began implementing pieces at our building.

5. *Were there any surprises?*

Everything always takes more time than you think, and funding is never really enough or placed in the most effective way.

6. *What were the issues that you saw from a district perspective?*

Unfortunately, the district leadership was not all on the same page, and this led to changes in staffing both at the district and building levels, which impacted the support and smooth implementation. As a result, the program became watered down and the focus shifted from this initiative to another. When launching the intervention is not thought through, the needs of the audience and the needs of the initiative are not met.

7. *What were the key sources of support or resistance you encountered?*

“It’s one more thing” is a mantra heard often in education. It is true and the district should have waited until they had full funding (time, materials, etc.). They jumped in without a complete plan and this caused staff to resist the change.

8. *What do you recommend for SEL coaches to get to know and serve administrators in a meaningful way? Are there things they could be doing to build that relationship quicker and stronger in your opinion?*

Coaches should consult with principals and ask them, “What does your year look like?” prior to coming on board as the coach. They should let the staff know what their qualifications are and how those connect to supporting teachers. For example, share how the role you are leaving relates to their daily, classroom needs and explain how you plan to partner with them. As a principal, I am prepping my own professional development. If you accept the position, you have to understand that there should be time to meet with your building principal in the month leading up to the start of the school year. It is important to spend time watching how the world of your assigned school comes together to get some perspective. Develop relationships with everybody in the office and have those conversations around how a coach can get to know the teachers. A coach should expect to spend time developing relationships with all. For the first month, plan to spend time going to actively engage, not just passively observe, at the start of the day, in the lunchroom, in the hallways, during recess, and at the end of the day. Greet the kids and talk with them so they know who you are. In October, meet with each grade-level team and figure out how you can come into their classrooms to be in the background.

Better yet, find something you can do for the teachers you support in the classroom to create a presence and show the students that you belong here. You could offer to do something simple like going in to read a story. Look for low-level kinds of things that do not add to a teacher's plate but give you a chance to establish relationships with students and to show that you are there to support them. Continue having classroom visits and relationship building all year. In a nonevaluative way, let your principal know when and where you are seeing great things. After many months, possibly 5–6, offer to a teacher the opportunity to partner on a lesson.

As a coach, set aside time to have honest conversations with your principal. Discuss what is exciting to you, and what is worrying you, and ask for more help or clarification when needed. Let your principal know if a staff member is resistant and listen to advice on how best to approach that person. Letting teachers know that you are not coming to fix them, but rather that it is an honor to join them, is important.

9. *What is the best way to get feedback about the coach's work?*

As the coach works with staff, ask for feedback. Share that this is new and that you are interested in where the staff feels improvements can be made. Be transparent. If you know that a decision falls entirely on your shoulders as the principal, tell the staff. You can still share your thinking and invite guidance but state upfront that you have to ultimately be the decision maker. With all decisions that allow for their input, let your staff present their ideas or suggestions for improvement first. Listen to everyone and then present your position. Follow up with an invitation to “poke holes” in your thinking and then work to find consensus.

10. *What are the lessons you would pass on to other people in your role?*
Have patience, build your beliefs first, and then bring in the tangible changes to practice.