



Greater Good in Education  
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

## THE SEL 3 SIGNATURE PRACTICES

*"Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone."*

—George Dei

### OVERVIEW

Guidelines (with examples) for using SEL practices to begin and end classes and meetings, and for engaging participants throughout.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning and end of staff meetings or professional development
- At the beginning and end of the day in classrooms
- Throughout the day with students, as check-ins and/or brain breaks are needed
- To build a cohesive staff
- To foster a safe, inclusive, and equitable classroom environment

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 5-10 minutes

#### LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

## MATERIALS

- None

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students and staff will:

- Foster a supportive and inclusive community
- Practice social and emotional skills during meetings, workshops, and classes

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Before starting a meeting or class, take a moment to take a few deep breaths and check in with yourself about how you're feeling. Then, call to mind something you're looking forward to. Does this brief moment of taking care of yourself give you a more positive outlook towards the upcoming meeting or class?

## INSTRUCTIONS

### OVERVIEW

Practices from the [SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook](#) are one tool for fostering a supportive environment and promoting SEL. They intentionally and explicitly help build a habit of practices through which students and adults enhance their SEL skills. While not an SEL curriculum, these practices are one concrete example of a way to help people understand and practice the goals of an overall systemic SEL implementation plan.

Intentionally chosen strategies, activities, and protocols such as the ones found in the [Playbook](#) foster interactions that model SEL in action and help create an equitable experience. They establish a safe container for equity of voice, for truly seeing one another, and celebrating one another as our fullest selves.

When used consistently and thoughtfully, the [Signature Practices](#) help to create productive habits that shape an organizational culture. If used randomly or without authenticity, they are unlikely to make a positive, systemic impact.

For more information, click [here](#).

- Note: **Before beginning, establish a shared agreement that it is always okay to pass.** Encourage participants to verbally say “Pass” or “Please come back to me” if that is their choice today.

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## WELCOMING INCLUSION ACTIVITIES

- Open each class period, meeting, or professional learning experience with a **Welcoming Inclusion, Activity, Routine, or Ritual** that builds community and connects to the work ahead.
  - Examples of Welcoming Activities, Routines, and Rituals:
    - Smile warmly and greet each person by their preferred name
    - Whole-group greeting activities
    - Morning circles
    - Interactive “do-nows,” such as peer-to-peer homework help
  - For more ideas, click [here](#).

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## ENGAGING STRATEGIES

- Embed **Engaging Strategies**, including brain breaks to anchor thinking and learning, throughout the experience. Engaging strategies offer many opportunities that vary in complexity to practice SEL skills. Engagement and learning individually (e.g., “[turn-to-your-partner](#)”) and collectively (e.g., “[Socratic Seminar](#)” and “[Jigsaw](#)”) are supported by intentionally chosen strategies and activities with sequenced steps that suit your group’s current needs. Build in a balance of interactive and reflecting experiences to meet the needs of all participants.
  - Examples of Engaging Strategies:
    - Think, Ink, Pair, Share (silent time to reflect; time to write; partner discussions; close with a group share out)
    - [Clock Partners](#) (prearrange partners for quickly pairing up for reflection and discussion)
    - Private think-time (facilitator wait-time)
    - [Mindful Minute Brain Break](#) (a calming activity, promoting focus and readiness to learn)
  - For more ideas, click [here](#).

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## OPTIMISTIC CLOSING ACTIVITIES

- Close each experience in an intentional way. An **Optimistic Closure** is not necessarily a “cheery ending,” but rather highlights an individual and shared understanding of the importance of the work, and can provide a sense of accomplishment and support forward-thinking. The closing activity may be reflective of the learning, help identify next steps, or make connections to one’s own work.
  - Examples of Optimistic Closure:
    - [One-Minute Accolade](#)
    - [Suit Yourself](#)
    - Something I learned today...
    - Something I’ll do as a result of this meeting is...
    - I am curious about...
    - Something I still question...
    - I am looking forward to tomorrow because...

- Something that still concerns me...
- For more ideas, click [here](#).

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How do the staff and/or students respond to these practices? Have they changed the tenor of your meetings or classroom? If so, in what way?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A study of reform efforts in 12 Chicago schools found that enabling positive, [trusting relationships](#) among staff members, including the leadership, were at the heart of school improvement.

In addition, positive relationships between [teachers and students](#) and between [students themselves](#) have been found to have tremendous benefits, including greater academic achievement and well-being, and increased prosocial (kind, helpful) behavior.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Trusting relationships among the adults and students in a school form the foundation of a safe and caring school climate. In order to build trust, research suggests several [key facets](#) must be present between people, such as a willingness to be vulnerable, holding benevolent intentions towards others, and being open with information.

SEL 3 Signature Practices can help cultivate these relationships by providing a supportive structure in which both adults and students can share honest thoughts, feelings, and ideas with each other.

## SOURCE

Adapted from the [CASEL SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook](#), developed by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#). CASEL, a nonprofit founded in 1994, defined social and emotional learning (SEL) more than two decades ago. Today, CASEL is a trusted source for knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based SEL and collaborates with leading experts and supports districts, schools, and states nationwide to drive research, guide practice, and inform policy.