**TOOL: Supporting Student Members of the SEL Team**

Including student members on a SEL team or any school leadership team primarily composed of adults requires a commitment from adults to support youth leaders, both during and between meetings. Here are some ways that adults can create equitable space for students in their role on the SEL Team:

**Understand the Value of Student Involvement**

* ***SEL implementation benefits.***  As SEL teams reflect on and develop SEL practices in a school, it is essential to include the voices of those who are impacted the most -- students. The more students are engaged and can see their ideas acted upon, the more they will participate and take ownership of activities and initiatives within their schools.1
* ***Students benefit.*** The opportunity to become a member of the SEL team gives students the opportunity to become leaders and develop valuable SEL skills of managing priorities, interacting with new people, accepting others, learning from mistakes, and taking on responsibility. Furthermore, participation on the team provides an opportunity for young people to develop a stronger sense of belonging to the school and community as well as to learn strategies they can use to create positive change in their classrooms or communities.
* ***Adults benefit.*** The opportunity to listen and act on student voice, especially when divergent from adult thinking, explore issues from different perspectives, and form relationships with students outside of those in their classroom helps staff to grow as educators and become better informed as school leaders.

**Guidance for Adults in Supporting Students**

Students should be treated as full members of the team and be expected to fulfill responsibilities expected of all team members. However, since they have less experience in a professional role, they may need additional guidance from adults. Below are some ways that adults can support student team members:

* **Prepare students for their role.** Meet with students prior to the first meeting to learn about their goals and motivation for joining the team and ensure that they understand the commitment. Ensure that they understand that participation is voluntary and that they do not feel pressure to join. Discuss the following:
  + The goals of the SEL team and expectations of team members.
  + Meeting routines, procedures, and relevant background.
  + Their interests and comfort level regarding involvement in meetings, normalizing that they may feel less comfortable volunteering for tasks and speaking up initially but may want to challenge themselves to participate more over time.
  + Any concerns or questions that the students have about participation on the team.
* **Prepare the team to receive student members.** Prior to students joining the meeting, hold a team discussion regarding the following:
  + How to welcome students and put them at ease.
  + How to show students they are influential and not merely token members.
  + How to encourage students to share their perspectives and be involved in informed decision-making.
  + How to listen to and accept student input with an open-mind.
  + Revisit meeting protocols to guide interactions and support students with understanding information that is discussed (e.g., Add an item to the agenda for students to report out, ask questions, or lead an activity).
* **Structure opportunities around student strengths and interests to engage them as influential team members and increase responsibility over time.** For example, students may:
  + Facilitate a check-in, welcome/inclusion activity, or closing activity.
  + Provide regular updates to the team regarding SEL-related activities taking place in student-led groups or teams (e.g., student council, student committees).
  + Plan and facilitate activities such as summits, student conferences, and assemblies.
  + Assist in delivering presentations or professional learning about schoolwide SEL for the school community.
  + Participate in the assessment of SEL implementation or school climate by participating in walkthroughs, developing student surveys, or facilitating interviews with peers or adults about SEL.
  + Communicate about SEL activities via social media.
* **Be an ally or mentor.** Make connections with students that extends beyond meetings by:
  + Discussing what students see as their strengths and areas in which they would like to grow as a leader.
  + Scheduling a regular one-on-one check in with students to determine the degree to which they feel they have a voice on the team.
  + Asking about and affirming student interests and goals.
* **Build student leadership capacity.** Adults can build students’ leadership skills and provide them with learning experiences to support their role on the team. Adults may consider:
  + Preparing youth to be facilitators and co-facilitators of meetings or presentations and giving students the opportunity to speak first.
  + Teaching students how to collect and analyze data, and create opportunities for youth participatory action research, where students create their own research questions and use observations and feedback from peers to draw conclusions about what’s going well and what can be improved.
  + Engaging in developmentally appropriate conversations about complex issues that impact education, such as racism, resource inequities, and opportunity gaps.

**Develop a Process for Engaging Students as Team Members**

It is important that the process for recruiting student members is equitable and ensures selection of students that represent the diversity of the student body. Student members are not necessarily traditional leaders or “model” students. SEL teams should consider the following when identifying potential student members:

* How many student members will be on the team? (recommendation 2-3)
* Which student groups should be engaged? (Is there a demographic group that has been historically underrepresented or that has been struggling?)
* What will be the process for engaging students? (e.g. nomination and/or application)
  + How will the team “advertise” and recruit for the opportunity?
  + If nominated, will teachers and/or students nominate prospective team members?
  + What is the application process?
* Should there be membership criteria? (e.g., grade levels, classes)
* What are the requirements for participation? (e.g. attending minimum # of meetings)
* Will there be “term limits” for student participation?

For more guidance, see [Tool: Key Responsibilities of a Student Member of an SEL Team](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/key-responsibilities-of-a-student-member-of-an-sel-team/).

**References:**

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