



**Morningside Center** for Teaching Social Responsibility

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**A Report on**

**The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Policy Pilot:  
A Collaborative Project of  
Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility  
and  
The New York City Department of Education**

**2006-2007 School Year**

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The report is a living document. I look forward to comments from other readers, especially on “Lessons Learned” and “Next Steps.” I hope that the report will provoke fruitful discussion about how to promote more effective and systematic implementation of social and emotional learning in the NYC public schools and beyond.

# Preface

This report is an account of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Policy Pilot, a joint project of the New York City Department of Education and Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility (formerly Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area/ESR Metro), a nonprofit organization with a 22-year track record of running effective SEL programs in the NYC public schools. .

The Project has had substantial positive effects on the participating schools. It has also yielded a rich mine of experience and insight that will improve our efforts to make SEL an integral part of every child's education.

Following the **Executive Summary**, **Section I** tells why and how the SEL Policy Pilot came into being and how it was implemented. **Section II** gives an overview of the schools' accomplishments and challenges we faced.

As part of their needs assessments, schools administered surveys to collect data on student perceptions of the school environment. The data from these surveys helped shape planning and decision-making in many of the schools. Since the data are also of general interest, **Section III** of the report includes samples of the findings.

**Section IV** shows how five very different schools used the opportunity provided by the SEL Policy Pilot. **Section V** analyses what program elements made the greatest contribution to the Project's effectiveness. **Section VI** suggests ways to improve implementation of this or similar projects. **Section VII** lays out next steps for the SEL Policy Pilot.

Tom Roderick  
October 2007

## Executive Summary

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, the NYC Department of Education, and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) are collaborating on a pilot project aimed at helping NYC public schools systematically evaluate and plan for social and emotional learning school-wide.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process by which we develop our capacity to understand and manage feelings, relate well to others, make good decisions, deal well with conflict and other life challenges, and take responsibility for improving our communities—from the classroom to the world.

In schools where SEL is well implemented, students develop their social and emotional competencies; become partners with adults in creating vibrant learning communities; and learn to care about and respect other people, including those different and far away. A growing body of research shows that they also do better academically. At its best, SEL is not an add-on “program,” but a set of attitudes, practices, and policies fully integrated into the life and culture of the school.

The SEL Policy Pilot got its start in July 2005, when Morningside Center (then called Educators for Social Responsibility Metro) brought together a group of practitioners, researchers, and NYC Department of Education officials to consider how to implement SEL more effectively and systematically in the NYC public schools. After a series of meetings during the 2005-2006 school year, we initiated the SEL Policy Pilot Project. The project is a public-private partnership, with the NYC Department of Education providing substantial resources and Morningside Center raising funds from private sources.

During 2006-2007, the Project engaged a group of 19 schools in Region 6 (Brooklyn) in a process of self-assessment and planning aimed at improving their implementation of SEL. The schools used a planning protocol developed by CASEL, the Chicago-based organization founded by Daniel Goleman that is a national leader in the field. The protocol guides a school through a process of developing a shared vision, assessing needs and resources, creating action plans, and choosing an evidence-based SEL program.

Participation in the SEL Policy Pilot was voluntary. In April 2006 a request for applications went out to all 120 schools in Region 6. Thirty-one submitted applications, and we chose 20 (one later dropped out): five elementary schools, one K-8 school, seven middle schools, and six high schools. Most of the students in the 19

schools are Black, including large numbers of Caribbean Americans. Most are poor or low-income. According to the school report cards, during 2004-2005, seven of the schools had rates of suspensions and police incident reports well above the city average. Fighting is an issue in many of the schools. Safety—physical and psychological—was the paramount concern that led most principals to involve their schools in the Project. Most had recently taken some steps to improve student behavior, but felt they still had a long way to go. They hoped the SEL Policy Pilot would help them create a more positive environment for learning and enhance their efforts to foster ethical, socially responsible behavior in their students.

CASEL provided a two-day workshop in July 2006 to launch the Project. All 19 principals attended, and each brought three or four colleagues. Morningside Center provided ongoing support throughout the year, including the assignment of a coach (in most cases, a retired principal experienced with SEL) to each school.

The Project has been an outstanding success. Seventeen of the schools formed steering committees that led their schools through the planning process and produced action plans. Fifteen of them selected research-based programs to implement beginning in September 2007. Five moved beyond planning to make substantial improvements during the 2006-2007 school year. Four planned major systemic changes to foster SEL (for example, dividing a large school into academies). The schools are now implementing these plans and programs.

Schools found SEL to be a powerful unifying conceptual framework for understanding, improving, and coordinating a wide range of school activities formerly seen as separate and distinct. They administered student surveys prepared by our research colleagues, and thus were able to base their action planning on solid data about student perceptions of the school environment. The coaches were instrumental in the success of the planning process at most of the schools. The steering committees put “children first” by getting key stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, support staff, and administration—working together as partners. By tapping the wisdom of people broadly representative of their school communities, steering committees produced action plans that were on target. New leadership emerged: Sensing that their voices were being heard, many steering committee members worked above and beyond the call of duty. Broad participation in creating the action plans led to strong buy-in for their implementation.

We will do some things differently next time. Most important, we will be more prescriptive. Schools sometimes took too long to address obvious problems or reinvented the wheel. We will suggest, for example, that one of the first acts of a steering committee should be to assess the areas outside the classroom where fights,

teasing, and bullying often occur—lunchroom, playground, hallways, and restrooms—and implement immediate changes if needed. Such improvements don't need to await the completion of a visioning process and a systematic needs assessment. We plan to create easy-to-use instruments steering committee members can use to evaluate a school's performance in these areas as well as tips and best practices for making the lunchroom more congenial and the playground, hallways, and restrooms safer.

Findings from our student surveys underline the importance of SEL. Forty-seven percent of elementary school students indicated that they had had to fight to protect themselves since the beginning of the school year. Eighty-two percent of middle school students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "Students in this school treat each other with respect." These findings are consistent with the findings of the Learning Environment surveys administered by the NYC Department of Education. Since students can't do their best work in a hostile, chaotic setting, the findings suggest that improving school and classroom climate must become a key strategy in our efforts to boost academic achievement. CASEL's SEL planning process, improved and adapted as we propose, offers great promise for helping schools do just that.

Since we have more work to do in supporting the schools and developing the planning model, Morningside Center plans to continue the Policy Pilot for another year. We will:

- Follow up with our 19 schools, seeing them through the final steps of the planning process
- Make improvements in the planning protocol and pilot them—as a major step toward turning a *process* into a fully developed *model* for school improvement
- Market the model to other New York City public schools
- Advocate for policy changes at the city and state levels.

# I. The SEL Policy Pilot: An Overview

## **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Social and emotional learning is the process by which we develop our capacity to understand and manage feelings, relate well to others, make good decisions, effectively handle conflict and other life challenges, and take responsibility for improving our communities. The term grows out of the work of Daniel Goleman, author of the 1995 best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence*, and founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a national leader in promoting high quality SEL. Goleman argues that social and emotional competences are crucial to success in life and that schools should help young people develop them.

A growing body of scientific research demonstrates that SEL and academic achievement go hand in hand. In an analysis of more than 300 research studies, researchers Roger Weissberg and Joseph Durlak have found that an average student enrolled in a social and emotional learning program ranked at least 10 percentile points higher on achievement tests than students who did not participate in such programs. They also had significantly better attendance; their classroom behavior was more constructive; they liked school more; they had better grades; and they were less likely to be suspended.

## **Origins of the SEL Policy Pilot**

Despite its importance, SEL has received little attention from educational policy-makers in recent years. In an effort to change this, Morningside Center (then ESR Metro), having received a seed grant from The Third Millennium Foundation, convened a high-level meeting of researchers, practitioners, and NYC Department of Education officials in July 2005 to consider “how to implement social and emotional learning more effectively and systematically in the New York City public schools.” NYC Department of Education officials attending the meeting included Michele Cahill, then Senior Counselor to the Chancellor for Educational Policy, and Carmen Farina, then Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning. All in attendance agreed on the importance of SEL. On behalf of the Department of Education, Michele Cahill agreed to follow up with Tom Roderick.

The Project took shape in a series of meetings during the 2005-2006 school year. Participating in the meetings were Michele Cahill; Shane Mulhern, then Executive Director of the Department of Education’s Office of Youth

Development and School-Community Services; Tom Roderick; and Dr. J. Lawrence Aber, Professor of Applied Psychology and Public Policy at New York University and principal investigator for two rigorous scientific evaluations of Morningside Center's SEL programs.

### **Launching the Project**

In March 2006, Michele Cahill and Shane Mulhern allocated \$300,000 for an "SEL Policy Pilot Project." The aims were to

- Inform Department of Education policy regarding SEL
- Test the effectiveness of a school-based SEL planning protocol developed by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning).

The Department of Education's \$300,000 allocation was to provide 20 schools with \$10,000 each to facilitate CASEL's self-assessment and planning process during the 2006-2007 school year. The funds would also pay for a coordinator in the Region selected for the Pilot and for CASEL, which is based in Chicago, to provide introductory training for school teams and supply them with CASEL's *Implementation Guide and Tool Kit*. Morningside Center agreed to raise private funds for its role of providing ongoing support to schools during the planning process, documenting implementation, and writing a report on the Project.

Region 6 was chosen as the site for the Policy Pilot because the Region's challenges were deemed typical of regions across the city and the Region's leadership was expected to be supportive. Region 6 no longer exists; it was dissolved last summer along with the other eight regions as part of Schools Chancellor Joel Klein's reorganization of the New York City school system. But during the 2006-2007 school year, Region 6 encompassed Community School Districts 17, 18, and 22 in southern Brooklyn and included about 120 schools. A majority of the students in these schools are Black, including large numbers of Caribbean Americans. A majority of the students qualify for free lunch—an indication that their families are poor or low-income.

In April 2006, a Request for Applications went out to all 120 schools in Region 6. Thirty-one schools submitted applications, and in May we chose 20 for participation in the Project. Guiding selection of schools was our desire to have about an equal number of elementary, middle, and high schools and a good mix of schools that are large and small, new and old, traditional and innovative. Orientation for principals from the selected schools took place in June.

In July CASEL provided a two-day workshop attended by the principal and up to four members of a planning team from each of the participating schools. Participants gave the CASEL trainers a standing ovation at the end of the training. School teams left with great enthusiasm for initiating the planning once school started up again in the fall.

## **The Schools**

We stood strictly by our requirement that the principal had to attend CASEL's July training. When a principal of one of the selected schools bowed out at the last minute, the number of schools was reduced to 19. Here is the list of the 19 participating schools:

- Five elementary schools: PS 91, PS 139, PS 251, PS 269, PS 316
- One K-8 school: PS 138
- Seven middle schools (five large, two small and new): MS 2, IS 68, JHS 78, JHS 234, MS 246, MS 334, MS 353
- Six high schools (three large, three small and new): High School for Youth and Community Development (Erasmus Campus), Midwood High School, Paul Robeson High School, High School for International Arts and Business (Wingate Campus), STAR Early College High School (Erasmus Campus), Tilden HS.

About 65% of the students in our 19 schools are Black many of them Caribbean American. About 15% are Latino. The remaining 20% are Asian, Native American, and White. The majority of students are poor or low-income.

According to the school report cards, in 2004-2005 (the most recent year for which there are data on the school report cards), seven of our schools had rates of suspensions well below the average for schools of comparable size. Three had rates about the same as the average. For two, no information was available (they are too new). And seven had rates well above the average.

Four of our schools had numbers of school police incident reports well below the average. Five had numbers about the same as the average. For three there was no information. And seven had numbers substantially over the average.

The data from student surveys administered as part of our Project suggest that fighting is a major issue for our schools. When asked if they had been in a physical fight during the current school year, 23% of elementary school students surveyed said they'd been in a physical fight with another student once or twice and an additional 19% said they had been in a physical fight more than twice—for a total

of 42%. At the middle school level, the numbers were 29% and 12% respectively—for a total of 41%. At the high school level, the numbers were 16% and 4%—total of 20%.

Fighting may be just the tip of the iceberg. Sixty percent of elementary school students surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Students at this school treat each other with respect.” The number for middle schools was 82% and for high schools 76%.

On a more positive note, 92% of elementary school students surveyed, 81% of middle school students, and 80% of high school students indicated that their teachers treat them with respect.

Our 19 schools were among the 31 that responded to a Request for Applications that went out to 120 schools. These 31 were a self-selected group of schools interested in SEL and together enough to get a proposal out. In their applications, most said they were addressing SEL to some extent, and were seeing some improvement in children’s behavior (fewer suspensions and violent incidents). However, they felt that they still had a long way to go and hoped that this initiative would help them build on the efforts they had been making to build a positive school culture.

Specifically, the schools wanted to be part of the SEL Policy Pilot because they hoped it would help them make their schools safe for all students. They wanted to eliminate violent incidents (including the excessive amount of fighting) as well as the suspensions that are usually a consequence of a serious fight. They wanted to create a positive climate for learning, eliminating teasing and bullying. And they wanted their students to grow as ethical, social responsible people.

### **CASEL’s School-Based Planning Protocol**

CASEL’s protocol guides a school through a ten-step process of self-assessment and planning aimed at promoting high-quality, school-wide, sustained social and emotional learning. Although SEL programs are essential for developing students’ social and emotional competencies and anchoring SEL in schools, CASEL views SEL not as a program, but as a set of attitudes, practices, and policies fully integrated into the life and culture of the school. As such, SEL is a vision of education and a powerful organizing framework for analysis and action. We can look at everything that goes on in a school and ask: to what extent does it contribute (or not contribute) to students’ positive social and emotional development? In short, CASEL sees SEL as a lever for school improvement. As a

school integrates SEL into its daily life—from the playground to the classroom to the principal’s office—students feel safer and more motivated to learn, adults get more satisfaction from their work, and student achievement goes up.

CASEL’s protocol is essentially a strategic planning process. The principal commits to a school-wide SEL initiative and forms a steering committee of key stakeholders. The committee develops a shared vision, conducts a needs and resources assessment, identifies areas of concern and sets priorities, creates action plans, chooses an evidence-based program and oversees its implementation (including professional development), monitors the overall effectiveness of SEL at the school, and makes adjustments as necessary. Throughout the process, the steering committee periodically presents its ideas to the staff as a whole for feedback.

The protocol is based on several key principles:

- You get better decisions and more buy-in if you involve key stakeholders as decision-makers
- Actions and programs are more likely to hit the mark if they are based on thoughtful consideration of objective data about the school’s needs (for example, data from student surveys), and
- Programs are more likely to be effective if evidence-based (that is, if their effectiveness has been validated by scientific research).

CASEL’s *SEL Implementation Guide* provides detailed instructions for each of the ten steps in the process, and the accompanying *Toolkit* offers some 30 concrete tools to support schools in carrying out the steps. For example, the *Toolkit* includes: a PowerPoint presentation a principal could use in an initial presentation to staff; recommended SEL readings; a checklist for establishing a steering committee; and a model letter for parents explaining SEL. When a school is ready to select an evidence-based SEL program, steering committee members can turn to another CASEL publication, *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader’s Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional (SEL) Programs*.

### **Implementing the SEL Policy Pilot at the school level**

Our expectation was that during the 2006-2007 school year, the participating schools would complete at least the first six steps of the CASEL planning protocol—up through selecting a research-based program for implementation during the following school year (2007-2008).

Inspired by CASEL's two-day workshop in July, all of the schools intended to begin implementing the SEL planning protocol in late August or early September 2006. Region 6's coordinator for the Project, a retired principal, visited schools in the fall to check in about how they were doing and to offer his support. But SEL planning activity was generally light in the fall as schools were overwhelmed by the challenges of launching a new school year. Morningside Center supported the regional coordinator and provided phone consultation with schools upon request while waiting for word on private grants.

In December New York Community Trust awarded Morningside Center a grant of \$50,000 for the SEL Pilot Project. Phyllis Marino, then Director of the Office of Youth Development at the Department of Education's central headquarters, allocated \$62,000 for a contract with Morningside Center to provide coaching and training for the SEL Policy Pilot Project.

In January and February Morningside Center hired, oriented, and assigned six SEL coaches to support schools in implementing the planning process. These coaches were all people with SEL training and extensive school experience; many are retired principals. Region 6's coordinator for the SEL Policy Pilot became the coach for five of the schools. The coaches each provided an average of six days of coaching visits per school.

In February Morningside Center completed *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Policy Pilot: Checklist, Time Line, and Resources*, which boils down the large CASEL binder into a user-friendly list of steps and sub-steps, and provides additional tools to support schools in the planning. (A copy is available upon request.)

On March 3, Morningside Center provided a workshop attended by most of the principals, their planning teams, and the coaches. The workshop, the coaches and the *Checklist* re-energized the teams, and helped them regroup and see what they needed to do in order to complete the planning process.

With support from their coaches, the great majority of the schools completed the planning process by June, including the selection of a research-based SEL program for implementation in the fall.

Throughout the year Morningside Center collected information to document the Project. Documentation included: coaches' logs of their site visits to schools; coaches' exit interviews with principals; surveys completed by steering committee members; SEL Pilot Project binders submitted by some schools (which included

minutes of steering committee meetings, agendas of professional development sessions, vision statements, graphic organizers capturing the needs assessment process, and action plans); narrative reports from coaches describing schools' journeys; oral reports from coaches in meetings and phone conversations; and site visits, workshops, and interviews conducted by SEL Policy Pilot Project Director, Tom Roderick.

## II. Accomplishments, Challenges, Next Steps, and Support

### Accomplishments for the Schools

Seventeen schools established SEL steering committees that led their schools through the six steps and produced action plans for the 2007-2008 school year. Steering committees ranged in size from three people (in very small schools) to 12 people. A typical steering committee comprised the principal, a guidance counselor, teachers representing various grades in the school, the parent coordinator, and students (in some high schools). In one large high school, the principals' cabinet doubled as the SEL Steering Committee, and many cabinet meetings were devoted to SEL planning.

Fifteen schools selected evidence-based programs for implementation in 2007-2008. In lieu of selecting an evidenced-based SEL program, one large high school is creating its own course to address SEL topics, and a middle school will be using in-house staff trained by the Department of Education to create a peer mediation program.

Five schools exceeded our expectations, moving beyond the first six steps to implement substantial improvements in SEL implementation during the 2006-2007 school year.

Four schools planned for major systemic changes aimed at improving implementation of SEL. These changes are now taking place. In two of these schools—both large high schools—the principals decided to divide their schools into four academies (effective September 2007), and engaged their SEL steering committees in decision-making and planning for the reorganization and for the introduction of advisories. In two middle schools the SEL steering committees helped win staff support for the creation of an advisory program, selected evidence-based programs to provide the content for advisories, and made arrangements for professional development in August and September.

Eighteen schools administered the student surveys. Steering committees at 15 schools studied the reports on the survey data seriously, incorporated them into their needs assessments, and considered them in developing their action plans. The one school that didn't administer the student surveys—a large high school—had already administered a student survey of its own making and chose not to survey the students a second time. The failure of three schools to give the surveys

serious consideration was probably due to their receiving the reports so late in the school year. The surveys would have been more beneficial to all of the schools if they had been ready in the fall instead of April.

Steering committee members got a chance to develop their leadership abilities by taking responsibility for improving their school. These newly empowered leaders contributed substantial energy, intelligence, and creativity to the planning process and were instrumental in bringing their colleagues along. Strong internal leadership for SEL planning and implementation emerged in at least 14 of the schools.

Through their participation in workshops and other project activities, steering committee members increased their understanding of SEL and its importance. Through presentations at faculty meetings and professional development sessions, they educated their colleagues about SEL—not simply as a program but as a lens through which to view all of the school’s activities and as a lever for school improvement. And they built buy-in for SEL throughout the school community.

When asked if the Project had changed their understanding of SEL, steering committee members gave a variety of responses: “I see it now as broader than a program.” “It gave us a new angle for talking about what we’ve been doing for a long time.” “I now see the scope of SEL. It provides a common language—I see that a number of programs and activities we’d been thinking of as different and distinct are really under the same umbrella—SEL” “I understand much better now how SEL promotes academic achievement.” “I realize that this process is going to take time. If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go with others.”

## **Challenges**

The SEL Policy Pilot faced many challenges. Five schools managed to move the planning process forward in the fall, but most did little until Morningside Center’s coaches began working with them in February. The March 3 workshop provided an important boost as well. Under the circumstances, schools accomplished a great deal, but they would have accomplished more if we had been able to assign coaches in October and convene principals and their planning teams in the fall as well as in March.

Development of the surveys had to await funding as well. Data from the surveys helped shape planning and decision-making in many schools. It would have been even more helpful if those data had been available to schools in the fall.

A challenge cited by principals and steering committee members was finding the time for meetings and scheduling the meetings so that all members could attend regularly. Steering committees had to compete for staff time with many other activities, including after-school programs.

A related challenge was staying focused when faced with the day-to-day exigencies of running a school.

Then there were site-specific challenges. Shortly after the beginning of the school year, one of the large high schools learned that it was going to be phased out over the next four years and replaced by several small schools. Three of the schools had brand-new principals.

### **Next Steps for the Schools**

For most schools, next steps during the 2007-2008 school year are to

- Implement their action plans, including the new programs they have chosen to introduce in the fall
- Monitor implementation of their action plans and programs and make adjustments as necessary
- Continue to identify challenges to effective implementation of SEL and develop creative solutions
- Continue to educate the school community about SEL and its importance.
- Maintain the SEL Steering Committee and the collaborative approach to implementing SEL effectively in the school

### **Support**

When asked what helped schools on their journeys, principals and steering committee members put the coach and the commitment of steering committee members at the top of the list. Also mentioned were

- the \$10,000, which compensated steering committee members for meeting time and covered supplies, educational materials, and professional development
- “the structure,” that is, the CASEL planning process as well as the *Checklist, Timeline, and Resources* prepared by Morningside Center
- the July workshop conducted by CASEL and the March 3 workshop conducted by Morningside Center
- the SEL idea itself, which provides a unifying framework for thinking about an array of school programs and activities formerly regarded at separate and distinct.

- the student surveys, which shaped action planning and program decisions in a number of schools.

### **Role of the Coaches**

Coaches played a crucial role in supporting implementation of the planning process in 12 of the schools.

At five schools, strong internal leadership drove the process without help from a coach. In one of those cases, the steering committee found the coach “unhelpful.” In another, the principal said from the beginning that she didn’t need a coach. Scheduling problems kept school and coach from connecting for substantive work in the other three schools.

When asked about the role of their coach, the most common response from principals and steering committee members was that the coach “kept us focused.”

In five schools, the coaches (most of whom were retired principals) became confidants of the principal and provided crucial assistance on everything from working with a steering committee to planning an ambitious advisory program for next year.

Coaches also helped steering committees run their meetings more effectively; they planned and facilitated professional development sessions for staff, including weekend retreats for several schools; and they provided resources and ideas.

Morningside Center was fortunate to hire highly qualified people as coaches. We found them through our network of professional contacts, built through many years of work with the NYC public schools. All were former principals. Three of the six had integrated Morningside Center’s Resolving Conflict Creatively Program into the culture of their schools when they were principals. Three had been trained in SEL leadership coaching by Dr. Janet Patti of Hunter College.

In a half-day session at Morningside Center, we oriented the coaches to the project, and gave them a copy of CASEL’s *Implementation Guide and Toolkit*, which they all studied and mastered. They attended the March 3 workshop for principals and core leadership teams. In three subsequent half-day meetings spaced out from March through June, the coaches came together for experience sharing and problem-solving about challenges at particular schools. Many of the coaches used Morningside Center’s *Checklist, Timeline and Resources* as a guide for their work—and found it very helpful. Tom Roderick planned and chaired the

sessions for coaches, and consulted with the coaches by phone, as needed. The coaches were an extremely intelligent, savvy, dedicated, and conscientious group—a joy to work with.

### **Building the Capacity of Morningside Center**

The overall success of the SEL Policy Pilot leaves Morningside Center, in collaboration with CASEL, equipped to replicate the project with any comparable group of schools that wants to engage in a systematic process of strategic planning to improve their implementation of social and emotional learning. CASEL's *Implementation Guide and Toolkit* was instrumental in the effectiveness of the Pilot as was their two-day introductory workshop for principals and planning teams. After CASEL's July workshop, Morningside Center took it from there.

Through the Pilot, we have

- created an effective year-long program design
- recruited, developed, and supervised a cadre of strong coaches
- published our *Checklist, Timeline, and Resources*, which helped schools focus their planning efforts
- prepared student surveys and provided reports for schools summarizing the findings
- provided a highly successful follow-up workshop for principals and their teams (on March 3)
- provided a list of schools which are implementing SEL effectively and are available for our participating schools to visit
- provided an annotated list of organizations and agencies approved as vendors by the New York City Department of Education that provide effective SEL services to schools
- documented the Pilot in detail.

The project succeeded even though our wait for funding prevented us from following the ideal timeline. If we could do it over and follow the ideal time-line, we would

- assign coaches to the schools by the end of September
- have schools administer the student surveys in October and get reports to them by November
- gather principals and core planning teams for workshops in November and in March, and then bring them together in May to celebrate the year's accomplishments
- encourage participating schools to visit schools with exemplary SEL programs, beginning in the fall

- encourage schools to begin researching evidence-based programs by February at the latest and to see programs in action and meet program staff as part of evaluating their appropriateness for the school.

Having helped our 19 schools use CASEL’s planning protocol, we see ways to make the process even more effective. Our suggestions boil down to being more prescriptive. We see a need to give schools more guidance about what to do to improve the climate of their schools and to provide additional tools for assessment and action. For a full discussion of this topic, see Section VI, Improving Implementation.

### III. The Student Surveys

The student surveys provide useful information about how students in an array of New York City public schools see the social environment in their schools. For this reason, the survey reports represent an important outcome of the SEL Pilot Project aside from their usefulness in the needs assessments and planning processes of the schools.

The surveys, adapted from multiple sources by researchers at New York University under the direction of Dr. J. Lawrence Aber, addressed four topics: safety, support, engagement, and social-emotional competencies. We subcontracted with Metis Associates, a respected evaluation firm, to enter and clean the data, and to provide reports summarizing student responses for each school as well as for all elementary schools together, all middle schools, and all high schools. (Copies of the reports for all elementary, middle, and high schools are available upon request.)

Since the cost of administering surveys to all students in the 19 schools was prohibitive, most schools (except the very small ones) surveyed just one grade: elementary schools administered the survey to third graders; middle schools, to eighth graders; and high schools, to tenth graders.

Below are typical examples of student responses from the reports:

#### Elementary Schools (All Surveyed Students)

Demographic information:

- 46% males, 54% females
- 94% were either 8 or 9 years old
- 64% Black/African American/Caribbean American
- 15% Mexican/Hispanic/Latino
- 21% Other

Safety

- Do you usually stay away from or feel uncomfortable in any of the following places because someone might hurt or bother you there?  
47.4% answered “Yes” for the playground  
41% answered “Yes” for hallways and stairs  
40.6% answered “Yes” for parts of the school cafeteria  
38.2% answered “Yes” for any school restrooms

- Since the beginning of the school year, have you had to fight to protect yourself?  
47.2% answered yes

### Support

- My teacher treats me with respect.  
92% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- Students in this school treat each other with respect  
Only 40% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement; 60% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- My teacher really cares about me.  
93% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- The students in this school really don't care about each other  
43% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

### Engagement

- Class is fun  
83% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- The topics we study are interesting and challenging  
88% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

### Social and Emotional Learning

- I know how to disagree without starting a fight or an argument  
72% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- If I get angry with a friend, I can talk about it and make things better  
79% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

### Middle Schools (All Surveyed Students)

#### Demographic information:

- 51.5% males, 47.5% females
- 84.4% were either 12 or 13 years old [9.8% = 11 years old]
- 66.3% Black/African American/Caribbean American
- 10.6% Mexican/Hispanic/Latino
- The Rest Other

### Safety

- Do you usually stay away from or feel uncomfortable in any of the following places because someone might hurt or bother you there?  
14.8% answered "Yes" for any entrances to the school  
23.1% answered "Yes" for hallways and stairs

19.9% answered “Yes” for parts of the school cafeteria

23.9% answered “Yes” for any school restrooms

- Since the beginning of the school year, have you had to fight to protect yourself?

35.5% answered yes

#### Support

- My teachers treat me with respect.  
80.8% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- Students in this school treat each other with respect  
17.9% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement but 82.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- My teachers really care about me.  
74.4% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- The students in this school really don’t care about each other  
49% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

#### Engagement

- Class is fun  
52.7% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- The topics we study are interesting and challenging  
71.3% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

#### Social and Emotional Learning

- I know how to disagree without starting a fight or an argument  
67.6% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- If I get angry with a friend, I can talk about it and make things better  
58.9% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

#### High School (All Surveyed Students—from all schools except Midwood High School, which did not administer the surveys)

#### Demographic information:

- 51.6% males, 46.6% females
- 77.3% were either 15 or 16 years old
- 86.8% Black/African American/Caribbean American
- 9.7% Mexican/Hispanic/Latino
- The Rest Other

### Safety

- Do you usually stay away from or feel uncomfortable in any of the following places because someone might hurt or bother you there?  
8.9% answered “Yes” for entrances to the building  
13.8% answered “Yes” for hallways and stairs  
12.6% answered “Yes” for parts of the school cafeteria  
15.3% answered “Yes” for any school restrooms
- Since the beginning of the school year, have you had to fight to protect yourself?  
20.2% answered yes

### Support

- My teachers treat me with respect.  
80.4% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- Students in this school treat each other with respect  
23.8% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement but 76.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- My teachers really care about me.  
69.1% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- The students in this school really don’t care about each other  
49% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

### Engagement

- Class is fun  
43% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- The topics we study are interesting and challenging  
70.1% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement

### Social and Emotional Learning

- I know how to disagree without starting a fight or an argument  
77.2% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement
- If get angry with a friend, I can talk about it and make things better  
68.4% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

## IV. School Journeys

Below are descriptions of how five schools used the opportunity presented by the SEL Policy pilot. Two are high schools, one large and one small; two are middle schools, one large and one small; and one is a large elementary school. (There were no new, small elementary schools in our pilot.)

**SCHOOL A** is a new small high school, one of several small schools that occupy a large building formerly the site of a failing large high school. The overwhelming majority of the students are Black/African American/Caribbean American and low-income.

“In the spring of 2006,” reports our coach, “[SCHOOL A] was struggling with a dysfunctional campus culture. Inexperienced leadership [had] created competitive and isolating school structures, from bell schedules to resource use, producing a hostile, segregated and inimical environment for students and their teachers.” The principal of SCHOOL A was the exception. An experienced administrator, he immediately saw the SEL Pilot Project as a possible vehicle for addressing the divisiveness and tension. His vision was a more congenial and supportive place for all, while maintaining the identities of the individual schools. His aim was to make his school and the campus as a whole a model of collaboration.

The principal organized a steering committee with a good balance of veteran and rookies—people seasoned and knowledgeable along with new professionals with openness and energy. To chair the committee, he appointed a trusted colleague, who was assistant principal for the building and head of the athletic program for the campus. This person provided superb leadership for the committee. The committee met regularly, discussed their vision for the school, assessed needs and resources, brainstormed ideas, and came up with a number of initiatives, which they implemented in cooperation with the other schools:

- A Student Leadership Team
- A campus basketball tournament (organized by the Student Leadership Team)
- Youth Leadership Forums (in which formal and informal leadership from the four schools met weekly to discuss and organize student voice)
- A planting and gardening club that created a community garden
- A campus arts festival involving students and art teachers from all four schools
- An action plan for a campus-wide learning center using peer tutors from each of the four schools.

- An action plan to institute a peer mediation program beginning in the fall of 2007.

The role of students was key to these successful efforts to bridge the divides among the schools. Two organizations were working to develop student leadership in the schools: New Visions and The Coro Leadership Program. The SEL steering committee collaborated with these two partners, organized weekly meetings of students representing all four schools, and encouraged people to attend each other's meetings in order to consolidate efforts.

The culmination of the year was the campus arts festival, which took place on a Saturday in June outside the school near the community garden created by the students. The festival displayed a hundred pieces of student work, included food and music, and drew students, parents, and members of the community.

In summing up the impact of the Project, one steering committee member wrote: "SEL has provided a brilliant vehicle for the integration of all the schools on our campus on many levels, especially with respect to the socialization of both the students and adult population."

In reflecting on the reasons for their success, steering committee members noted the support of the principal, the commitment and dedication of steering committee participants, regular meetings, the fact that ideas got implemented, and the coach from Morningside Center, who kept the committee on track, listened well, and "shared a number of wonderful ideas that enabled a smooth start for our team."

**SCHOOL B** is a large high school with a student body that is primarily Black/African American/Caribbean American and low-income.

SCHOOL B's principal is a strong and dynamic leader. Our coach joined the principal's cabinet, which consisted of the assistant principals and key teachers and doubled as the SEL steering committee. The cabinet focused primarily on SEL and undertook two ambitious projects: dividing the school into four academies by September and instituting advisories.

The coach planned and facilitated a retreat for the steering committee on the weekend of May 18-20 at a conference center in Tarrytown, NY. The focus of the retreat was planning the new advisory program. She also planned and facilitated a full day of professional development on SEL and advisories for the entire staff on June 7. Our coach reports that during the June 7 session she heard staff say over

and over that “this [advisories] is just what the school needs, this is what has been missing.”

The weekend retreat was a great success—as is evident from the binder of retreat documents that one of the steering committee/cabinet members put together. Complete with photos, notes of discussions, student survey findings, and action plans, this spiral-bound book is entitled, *How Do We Take the Me and Turn It into the We? The Aspiring, Inspiring, Inevitable Future of [SCHOOL B's] New Advisories*.

The student survey findings had a powerful impact on the principal and the committee. They were shocked to see the results indicating that the students did not trust each other. (According to the surveys, only 20% of students felt students in the school treat each other with respect. Sixty percent of students felt students don't seem to like each other much or care about each other.)

The data led steering committee members to grapple with important questions: For example, here from the binder is a brief summary of their discussion of the survey findings in the area of “support”: “The students trust adults more than they trust each other. Now that we have them on our side, how do we use that to our advantage? Why do students dislike, distrust, or disrespect others? Why can't they rely on each other? How can we get them to care about others and empathize with others?”

In their discussions at the retreat, they also noted a contradiction between the student behavior they observe and survey data indicating that students have a positive view of their SEL competencies. “Ironically, many students feel that they can handle problems effectively, but dean referrals, suspensions, and fights prove differently. They feel comfortable talking to us, but not each other. Some know that they lack the skills to problem solve, but how do we change that? And, are we responsible or equipped to teach SEL?”

Using a four-step process recommended by Morningside Center in our *SEL Policy Pilot Checklist, Timeline, and Resources*, our coach led the steering committee in addressing how to improve the quality of students' relationships with each other. They defined the problem, discussed underlying causes, proposed general approaches for addressing it, and then brainstormed a number of specific actions they might take. Here is their list:

- Advisories (as a vehicle)
- “Challenge Days”

- Find a community issue with broad appeal that will bring together all constituencies to take action (parents, students, teachers, administration and support staff)
- Activities from “No Place for Hate.”

Their action plan on this topic includes detailed steps for carrying out these actions and names of people assigned to carrying them out.

At the retreat the steering committee also planned the first month of advisory sessions, using materials from a curriculum called *Overcoming Obstacles* and *The Advisory Guide* from Educators for Social Responsibility.

By April, when schools received the reports on the student surveys, School B was already well along in it planning. Although the student survey findings did not lead to the decision to institute advisories, they influenced the choice of curriculum for advisories, and helped the principal win enthusiastic support for his innovations. He shared the student survey data with the entire staff on June 7, and faculty saw immediately that the findings strongly supported the need for academies and advisories.

The school seems poised to implement academies and advisories in September 2007. The moves have been carefully planned, and the majority of the staff is on board. Reasons for success at SCHOOL B included: an energetic principal determined to turn is school around, the retreat, which allowed steering committee members to concentrate on collaborative planning away from the day-to-day challenges of running a school; caring and energetic steering committee members; and the Morningside Center coach, who formed an excellent relationship with the principal and shared her extensive knowledge and experience in SEL and school administration with the committee. When asked what helped the school accomplish what it accomplished, the principal wrote: “Having a coach who understands the demands on a high school principal and who can make practical suggestions.”

**SCHOOL C** is a large middle school with a student body that is primarily Black/African American/Caribbean American, and low-income.

Our coach, a retired principal, had been hired by the principal of SCHOOL C and was already working as her SEL coach when the school received the SEL Policy Pilot Request for Applications in April 2006. When the school was accepted into the Pilot, the principal asked her to chair the steering committee.

The steering committee met twice a month from September through June. The coach and principal did a presentation to the entire staff in September and asked for volunteers for the steering committee. Seventeen volunteered. Eventually the committee became a hard-working group of eight. They went through all of the steps in the process: they created a vision statement, which was subsequently discussed and approved by the entire staff; reviewed existing policies and practices; discussed the student survey findings; and developed action plans for implementation in the 2007-2008 school year.

The student survey findings led to awareness of the need to strengthen students' social and emotional competencies. Steering committee members were pleased with findings that the students generally felt supported by teachers, but they were extremely concerned to learn that students did not feel the same caring and support from each other. (For example, 84% of surveyed students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "Students in this school treat each other with respect.")

A direct result of the steering committee's work was the school's decision to institute advisories beginning in September, to make conflict resolution the core of the advisory program, and to use *Resolving Conflict Creatively* as the curriculum. The student survey findings shaped these decisions by reinforcing the need to provide instruction aimed at developing students' SEL skills.

On their surveys, steering committee members indicated that they appreciated meeting and planning with the blessing of the administration. In the course of the year, several strong leaders emerged on the steering committee, and these teacher leaders were helpful in gaining support for SEL from the staff. Steering committee members facilitated small groups in the day-long professional development session on June 7 devoted to introducing the staff to the conflict resolution curriculum. Additional professional development took place in August.

Noted one steering committee member: "[The SEL Policy Pilot] has concretized most aspects of what I believe is a necessary part of the school culture. Given the areas of concern we identified, SEL lessons should instill a sense of discipline through providing practices and meaningful ways to resolve conflicts. This should make for an environment that is conducive to learning and one that effects change in attitudes among students."

**SCHOOL D** is a small new middle school with a student body that is primarily Black/African American/Caribbean American, and Latino.

The Region 6 coordinator for the SEL Pilot Project served as the coach for this school. In October he did a workshop to introduce SEL to the staff and get volunteers for the steering committee. The steering committee started out large, but boiled down to three hard-working people—a good size for a school this small. The leadership of the school’s guidance counselor was key. New to the school this past year, she was strongly committed to SEL, and had the strong support of the principal.

In a November faculty conference, faculty members assessed their SEL competencies using Tool 6 from the CASEL Toolkit. In December the steering committee developed a vision for the school infused with SEL. In January and February, they began the search for an appropriate evidence-based program.

Although the steering committee was going dutifully through the steps of CASEL’s planning protocol, the process did not really take off until the school received its report on the surveys. At a weekend retreat in Tarrytown in April, the steering committee, joined by the principal and several other support staff, went over the student survey results in great detail. Like their counterparts in other SEL Policy Pilot schools, they were struck by the low opinion students had of their peers. (82% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Students in this school treat each other with respect.”)

After discussing the survey findings at the retreat, they decided to introduce advisories for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades, beginning in September 2007. They decided to make Resolving Conflict Creatively their advisory curriculum, and ordered copies of the RCCP teaching guide, *Conflict Resolution in the Middle School*. They trained peer mediators in June, and plan staff training in the RCCP curriculum for August. The student survey report galvanized the steering committee and the principal, and motivated them to take action.

The SEL Policy Pilot has changed the way the school’s principal views SEL. She said: “Initially I saw SEL as a curriculum. I came to see it as a much broader concept after the workshops and learning what other schools were doing. Using the CASEL model, etc. can change the climate of the whole school.”

Explaining the success of the planning process, she said: “[It was due to] awareness of the need for appropriate social conduct and the relationship to academic performance. It made teachers think about this. It provided a structure for how this can be accomplished. The surveys were very instructive so we can focus on what needs were perceived. It provided a lens for reflection on student experiences and adult input.”

**SCHOOL E** is a large elementary school with a diverse student body of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Whites. Over three quarters qualify for free lunch.

The school was already implementing the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) and several other SEL programs when the opportunity to be part of the SEL Policy Pilot arose. A steering committee of eight members carried out all of the steps in the CASEL planning process by meeting once a month after school and doing lots of work between meetings. Chairing the committee was a teacher with the title of youth developer, who runs the school's in-house suspension program ("the SAVE room").

Although the coach assigned to the school had a good relationship with the steering committee chair and provided some advice, the role of the coach in this school was minimal. The steering committee chair really drove the work.

As part of their needs and resources assessment, the steering committee created a survey and distributed it to staff to get feedback on the effectiveness of the school's SEL programs. Based on this feedback and steering committee discussions, the committee decided to expand the RCCP's classroom component and introduce peer mediation. Another program, deemed ineffective, was eliminated.

Through their own observations and student survey findings, committee members identified the schoolyard as a problem area. (34% of students surveyed indicated that they felt uncomfortable in the playground "because someone might hurt or bother them there.") Realizing that the children did not have enough to do during recess, they purchased games and gym equipment, and engaged school aides who supervise recess in organizing more activities. The result was a marked decrease in incidents on the playground.

A sub-committee of the steering committee reviewed the school's policies for dealing with student misbehavior (including bullying) and recommended improvements. One result was a revamped discipline policy with clearer and more consistent expectations and consequences, based on the Chancellor's Regulations. To implement the plan, the administration has decided to redeploy staff so that during the 2007-2008 there will be two youth developers for the SAVE Program instead of one and more staff support for the peer mediation program.

Through analysis of the student surveys and feedback from staff, the steering committee realized that bullying was an issue the school needed to address; they decided to bring in an anti-bullying program called STAMP. In June the staff

participated in a professional development session designed to introduce them to the program, which is now being implemented.

Another problem the steering committee addressed was how to provide faster and more effective support when teachers have a serious problem with a student. The solution was the purchase of walkie-talkies and the implementation of a system for responding to teacher calls for help. This enabled the administration and the student support staff to provide more timely and effective support in crisis situations.

The steering committee was also concerned about staff morale. In addition to soliciting teachers' feedback about programs and responding more effectively to crisis situations, the committee initiated "Make Another's Day." In the office under a large "Make Another's Day" sign was an envelope and colored paper. All staff members were encouraged to make someone's day by leaving a note if the person had helped them or if they wanted to express appreciation for some reason. According to the steering committee chair, "From the administration to the custodial staff, people felt good about the appreciation they received."

When asked about their accomplishments, steering committee members noted: "There was more consistency in dealing with behavioral issues." "We looked at different pieces besides conflict resolution." "We developed a common language among staff when talking about SEL." "We achieved more effective coordination of the programs already in place."

The school's plans for 2007-2008 are ambitious. They include: implementing the STAMP anti-bullying program, observing "No Name-Calling Week," Resolving Conflict Creatively lessons in every class, expansion of peer mediation, and more. The principal and steering committee hope for continued funding for the SEL planning process, which they have found extremely beneficial. As the chair of the committee put it: "Although our school went through the checklist completely, we feel we targeted above and beyond the goals of CASEL. We focused on many more goals and have changed so much. The amount of growth in SEL within our school this year was incredible."

## V. What Worked

### **SEL as a Unifying Idea**

Participants found SEL to be a powerful unifying concept—and something of a revelation. The idea of social and emotional learning (SEL) as a lens for looking at everything that goes on in a school and as a lever for school improvement represented a conceptual shift for most. Like most educators, before taking part in CASEL’s July 2006 workshops, they had tended to see SEL as a program—and an “add-on” one at that. Through their participation they came to see SEL as a unifying conceptual framework for understanding, improving, and coordinating a wide range of crucial school activities formerly seen as separate and distinct. CASEL’s image of two school houses, one with puzzle pieces in a jumble and the other with the pieces fitting together in a coherent whole, captures this well. As the school journeys described in Section IV illustrate, we found that the great majority of the participating schools started out with their SEL efforts in a jumble. The CASEL planning process proved an effective way for schools to begin to improve their programs, policies, and practices, and bring them more into alignment—all to better serve their students.

The CASEL planning process was equally useful for all kinds of schools: small schools and large schools; new schools and schools with long histories; elementary, middle, and high schools; schools relatively new to SEL and schools already implementing substantial SEL programs. Each school had its own challenges, but they all benefited from the planning process.

The SEL Policy Pilot Checklist, Timeline and Resources piece, prepared by Morningside Center, proved to be a useful addition to the CASEL Implementation Guide and Toolkit. It boiled the planning process down to a concise checklist and provided additional planning tools that many schools found useful. It was especially useful for the coaches, who used it to guide their work with the schools.

### **A Powerful Habit of Mind**

The SEL Policy Pilot Project engaged steering committee members in a process based on a “habit of mind”—a way of thinking strategically about how make schools more effective. This habit of mind involves gathering a representative group of stakeholders, creating a vision, gathering data about needs and resources, creating action plans, implementing them, monitoring their implementation and making adjustments as necessary—always ensuring that there are communication

and feedback loops between the leadership and the wider school community. Having experienced the efficacy of this way of thinking, the leadership of these schools—administration, teachers, parents, and students—may be more likely to think this way in the future, with the result that their work will be more effective.

### **Developing New Leadership**

Steering committee members appreciated the opportunity to take a step back from their daily activities and look at the big picture. They enjoyed identifying problems and proposing solutions. They felt proud when their ideas were implemented to positive effect. They liked having the responsibility for making their own decisions rather than carrying out decisions imposed by somebody else. In many instances, participation on the SEL Steering Committee tapped the leadership potential of teachers and guidance counselors who had not previously had much opportunity to be leaders in their schools. The result was the release of new energy, ideas, and skills for addressing the school's challenges.

### **Coaches**

Coaches were essential to the overall success of the program. “The coach kept us focused” was the common refrain we heard from the schools. Some coaches went much further than that, of course--they planned and facilitated retreats, mentored principals, and filled in where there was a leadership vacuum. But since most schools found that time was their major challenge, the coach's first job was to make sure that stayed on task. Despite the schools' best intentions, when our coaches began work in February, they found that the planning process had already stalled in the majority of schools. The coach's presence and the March 3 gathering were necessary to move the process forward in most schools.

Coaches weren't necessary in all schools, however. In about 25 percent of the schools, strong internal leadership—from a teacher or a guidance counselor, supported by the principal—drove the planning process with little or no help from a coach.

Our coaches were all seasoned veterans of the New York City public schools, and most were retired principals with training and experience in implementing SEL at the school level. That enabled them to quickly establish credibility with principals and steering committee members, and contributed greatly to the effectiveness of their efforts.

## **The Student Surveys**

The student surveys proved to be extremely useful. They provided grist for discussion among steering committee members and faculties, galvanized teams to take action, and helped shape the actions they took. It was essential to have an evaluation firm enter the data and provide reports for the schools.

## **The Workshops**

CASEL's July workshop was extremely effective in introducing principals and their core leadership teams to SEL as a lever for school improvement. At the end of the two days, the group gave the CASEL trainers a standing ovation. The March 3 training conducted by Morningside Center was also very well received. Coaches worked with school planning teams in small groups using specific planning tools included in Morningside Center's *SEL Policy Pilot Checklist, Timeline, and Resources*. The result was to re-energize and re-focus the planning process at a time when most of the schools were floundering.

## **Visiting, Collaborating, and Networking with Other Schools**

In two instances, the steering committee of one school joined with that of another school for a joint retreat. In both cases, one school was more experienced with SEL programming than the other. The more experienced practitioners enjoyed sharing their expertise, and generated lots of enthusiasm from their counterparts at the other school.

At the CASEL workshop in the summer and the March 3 gathering organized by Morningside Center, participants enjoyed meeting colleagues from other schools and learning what other schools were doing.

We arranged for principals, steering committee members and coaches from three of our participating schools to visit schools outside of Region 6 that have exemplary SEL Programs. These visits proved to be inspiring—and helpful in the planning process for those schools.

In a school system where people too often feel isolated from each other, the SEL Pilot Project was catalyst for schools to work together and learn from each other.

## VI. Improving Implementation

### Be More Prescriptive

Based on our experience in guiding our 19 schools through the CASEL planning protocol, our main recommendation for improving the process is to make it more prescriptive. The planning process as described in CASEL's *Implementation Guide and Toolkit* is quite open-ended. The steering committee begins by creating a vision of the school infused with SEL. A needs and resources assessment follows. The committee creates action plans to address the needs, and chooses a research-based program. The process unfolds over a number of months, as the schools identify their needs and devise their own solutions.

At its best, the process leads to appropriate action closely tailored to the particular needs of the school. But it can also lead to a time-consuming exercise in “re-inventing the wheel.” For example, in doing a systematic review of their school's policies and practices, one steering committee realized that too many students were in the hallways when they were supposed to be in class. While it's wonderful that the SEL planning process led the school to identify this problem and take action, did the school really need to go through an elaborate planning process to have this realization?

A more prescriptive approach would build into the planning protocol the suggestion that one of the first acts of the steering committee should be to assess the areas outside of the classrooms where fights, teasing, bullying, and violent incidents most often occur: the lunchroom, the playground, the hallways, the stairwells, the rest rooms. Adding to the tools in the *Toolkit*, we would provide easy-to-use assessment instruments spelling out what to do look for in each of these areas. Steering committee members would divide into teams of two or three, each team taking one of the areas. The teams would observe, check off items on their assessment forms, and report at the next meeting. We would also expand the *Toolkit* to include tips and best practices for making the lunchroom more congenial and the playground, hallways, and restrooms safer. Using this approach, a steering committee might, within a few weeks, be able to identify problems and make recommendations leading to immediate, highly visible positive changes. These early victories would boost morale and show the school that the committee means business.

Another area the steering committee should address sooner rather than later is the school's policies for dealing with student misbehavior. Who are the students who

disrupt instruction—the repeaters, the kids who are constantly getting into fights? Are they getting the support they need to change their behavior? Are certain teachers responsible for most of the referrals to deans or to the principal’s office? Are those teachers getting the support they need? How can the student support staff (guidance counselors, social workers, deans, and administration) address student behavioral issues more effectively? Again, the *Toolkit* could provide a protocol for assessing the effectiveness of the school’s approach to dealing with student misbehavior as well as descriptions of best practices.

The 80-20 rule comes into play here. Eighty percent of the incidents that disrupt instruction may be caused by 20 percent of the students. And 20 percent of the corrective actions a school might take could very well lead to an 80 percent improvement in student behavior. A positive example is in the account of School E (see School Journeys Section IV, pages 31-32). The steering committee realized that fights on the playground were in part a result of kids’ not having enough to do. By purchasing playground equipment and organizing games and other activities, the school cut way down on the fighting. As a result, teachers spent less time dealing with the fallout from recess and had more time for instruction.

The CASEL planning protocol is useful as is. But we believe we can improve it by incorporating more specific guidance for schools. It’s a matter of balance. We can point out the typical problem areas so that schools don’t have to discover them (or fail to discover them) on their own. We can provide tools to help schools assess their performance in those areas. And we can share best practices so that they can benefit from the creative solutions other schools have devised and don’t have to reinvent the wheel.

### **Envision the planning as a spiral process rather than a linear one**

In guiding schools through the CASEL planning process during the 2006-2007 school year, we encouraged them to take one step at a time and maintain the given order: Step 1 first, then Step 2, and so on. Looking back we have concluded that this linear approach is not the most fruitful one. For example, Step 3 includes developing a shared vision. But that vision might be richer if informed by visits to schools implementing SEL programs, which our schools implemented as part of Step 6 (Choosing a Research-based Program). It would seem to be advantageous for steering committee members to visit schools with effective SEL programs toward the beginning of the planning process rather than at the end. It would also seem useful to think of the vision as evolving rather than fixed. The steering committee could create a vision early on and then revisit it as the planning process reveals new needs and possibilities. The steering committee could also do more

than one thing at a time: a subcommittee could be researching evidence-based programs while other subcommittees are assessing needs and current resources. As suggested above, the steering might identify some problems that could be addressed immediately, even before the visioning process. The best way to represent this process would seem to be a spiral moving upward rather than a line. Early on, the steering committee develops a vision, identifies some needs and resources, and takes action. As the planning process continues, the vision becomes richer, additional needs come into awareness, and new actions are taken. Vision, awareness, and action together unfold throughout the year rather than one following the other.

### **Assign coaches and do the surveys earlier**

There were three schools where the process did not go well. Since failures can sometimes be as instructive as successes, here are brief descriptions of these situations and some reflections:

- In one case, a new principal was overwhelmed and the guidance counselor he had counted on to chair the steering committee went on medical leave and never returned.
- In a second case, the principal and steering committee came into conflict because the committee made recommendations that the principal rejected. By the time our coach arrived on the scene, the hostility was great and he was unable to gain any traction.
- In the third case, the steering committee worked hard, completed the planning, and chose a research-based program, but experienced serious frustration along the way and many members ultimately ended up feeling burned-out. Here's an example of what caused their frustration: They were eager to administer the student survey early in the school year. Since our student survey was not ready, they went ahead and used the survey in the CASEL toolkit. Since there was no process in place for a research firm to enter the data and issue a report, steering committee members spent many long hours trying to do it themselves—an ultimately fruitless task.

All three of these situations might have turned out better if coaches had begun working with the schools in October instead of February. We could have spared the third school much frustration if our surveys had been available in the fall instead of the late spring. And perhaps getting data on student perceptions in the fall would have helped the second school focus on student needs instead of conflicts with each other. Early intervention by a coach might have helped the first school regroup and get back on track.

## **Take care in the formation of steering committees**

The SEL steering committees are critical to the success of the planning process. While most schools eventually formed effective committees, the Pilot has helped us see the need for giving schools more guidance in forming and selecting leadership for their committees.

In a couple of cases, committees initially floundered because too many people volunteered, and the committee's leadership wasn't strong enough to make meetings productive. In one school, a principal delegated leadership of the committee to someone who took the committee in an unproductive direction. The principal had to get involved to try to get the group back on track. Valuable time was wasted in the process.

The clash between the steering committee and the principal in the situation described above underlines the importance of being clear about the role of the steering committee and who has ultimate decision-making authority. Will the principal be a member of the steering committee as recommended? If so, will the principal chair the committee (not recommended)? Will the committee strive for consensus or make decisions by voting? Will the committee make recommendations with the understanding that the principal is the final decision-maker? The principal and the committee need to discuss these questions up front and come to a clear understanding.

In the initial training and in the *Implementation Guide and Toolkit*, we need to give more attention to how to get the right people on the steering committee, how to ensure that the leadership of the committee is effective, and how to ensure that everyone understands the steering committee's charge. The principal needs to be directly involved to keep the committee on target—especially at the beginning when the group is forming.

## **Encourage more visiting, collaborating, and networking among schools**

Principals and their planning teams would have benefited from more opportunities to come together. In addition to the session in March, a gathering in October would be useful in getting the planning process off to a fast start. A meeting in May would be an ideal way to celebrate the year's accomplishments.

It would also be useful to have smaller gatherings—one for elementary schools, one for middle schools, and one for high schools, for example; or a meeting for

schools planning to implement advisory programs—to discuss challenges and share ideas.

Early in the planning process, we should arrange for all schools to visit other schools with solid SEL programs. And we should encourage schools to join with others for joint workshops and retreats.

## VII. Next Steps

### **Follow through with our 19 schools**

Almost all of our schools completed the first six steps of the planning process, and have ambitious plans for the coming year. But we need to know what happens in the next leg of their journeys. Do they follow through to implement the programs they have planned? Does School A continue to promote collaboration among the four schools in its building? How do the new academies and the advisories at School B work out? Are Schools C and D able to implement their advisory program? Are the programs effective? Will School E continue to find ways to improve teacher morale? What challenges will the schools face? Will the steering committees continue to meet and address problems? Similar questions apply to all of the schools. To complete the CASEL planning protocol, schools still have Steps 7 to 10 to complete. Those steps include: providing professional development for teachers, launching SEL instruction in the classroom, and monitoring implementation of action plans and making adjustments as necessary. Having brought the schools this far, we owe it to them to continue to provide support for at least another year. By doing so, we will also learn a lot, as we did by helping schools through the first six steps.

### **Improve the planning protocol**

We need to implement our ideas for improving the planning process described in Section VI Improving Implementation. Especially important and challenging will be to strike the right balance between process and prescription, between guiding schools through a process of discovery and directing them to issues they need to address and sharing best practices for addressing them. To save schools time and energy, we will need to add a number of tools to the CASEL Toolkit, including instruments for assessing “quality of life” in the lunchroom, the playground, the hallways, etc. and strategies for addressing problems they identify.

By improving the planning protocol in these ways, we will take a big step toward transforming a planning *process* into a fully developed *model* for school improvement.

### **Market the process/model to other New York City public schools**

Our experience with the SEL Policy Pilot demonstrates that a collaborative school-based planning process is a promising strategy for promoting sustained, school-wide social and emotional learning. We could replicate the process with another group of schools now. By a year from now, we will be ready to do it even better.

The Project cost a total of \$453,000 and involved 19 schools—for a cost about \$23,840 per school. Of the total, half went directly to schools to compensate staff for participation in steering committee meetings and training and to purchase supplies and materials. The cost of Morningside Center’s services was \$137,000. Of that amount, \$75,000 came from private grants and \$62,000 from the Department of Education.

A year from now we will be able to replicate the Project less expensively and more effectively since significant portions of our expenses for this year and our projected budget for next year are development costs.

The SEL Planning Model we are developing in collaboration with CASEL will actually save schools money in the long run since it engages them in a thoughtful process, based on data, for assessing their needs, and guides them in selecting evidence-based programs to address those needs. The collaborative decision-making process that is at the heart of CASEL’s planning protocol fosters buy-in from staff. Huge amounts of public resources are wasted when schools invest in ineffective programs or programs that miss the mark or programs that provoke resistance from teachers because they were not consulted.

Chancellor Klein has recently transformed the New York City public schools into a market driven system in which principals have lots of autonomy in exchange for accountability. Principals are free to purchase the services they want for their schools, and they have more discretionary money to do so. Five of our schools are “empowerment schools,” which purchase all of the services they need at their own discretion. Eight of our schools have chosen to contract with Judith Chin’s Learning Support Organization (LSO) for basic support services. Under that arrangement, they still maintain some discretion to purchase services, but they pay the LSO for a package of services. Two of our schools have a similar arrangement with New Visions, a so-called Partnership Support Organization (PSO).

In this market-driven context, to spread the planning model to more schools, we will need an effective marketing strategy. This will involve identifying champions—principals who will spread the word about its value to others in their

support networks—and preparing effective marketing materials. Spurred by our champions, brochures advertising our SEL planning model would go out to the 500 empowerment schools. Our champions in Judith Chin’s LSO would advocate for the SEL planning model to be part of the package of options Judith Chin offers to the 300+ schools in her LSO. We plan to take steps such as these during the coming year.

### **Advocate for Top-Level Policies Supportive of Social and Emotional Learning**

This year the New York City Department of Education took a step toward making schools accountable for promoting social and emotional learning by administering “school environment” surveys to students, teachers, and parents. Findings from these surveys will account for 15 percent of the grade schools will receive as part of the new accountability process.

During the 2007-2008 school year, we plan to share our student surveys and their findings with Department of Education officials. Our student survey differs in certain respects from the survey used by the Department of Education. We hope to discuss the relative merits of both surveys and explore ways surveys such as these can be most useful to schools. We plan to suggest that when the findings of the school environment surveys are shared with schools, the schools are pointed to evidence-based SEL programs and planning models to address any weaknesses revealed by the surveys. In addition, we hope to discuss the “quality reviews” that schools undergo each year as part of the accountability process. We plan to suggest that assessments of a school’s implementation of social and emotional learning play a larger part in these quality reviews.

Our efforts at the city level will dovetail with efforts we will be making at the state level to get the Regents to adopt statewide standards in social and emotional learning, as required by the Children’s Mental Health Act, signed a year ago by then Governor George Pataki. We have joined with CASEL and advocates on Long Island to support a high official in the NY State Education Department, who is preparing a presentation about SEL for the October meeting of the NY State Board of Regents. Thanks to CASEL’s advocacy, the Illinois State Education Department adopted SEL standards several years ago and recently allocated funds to help schools meet them. We want to see New York join Illinois as a leader in promoting social and emotional learning.

### **In conclusion**

The SEL Policy Pilot has been a substantial success. The Project has had a positive effect on the great majority of participating schools. Morningside Center has developed its capacity to implement the planning protocol, and plans substantial improvements to make it even more useful. We see new opportunities to convince educational practitioners and policy makers of the power of SEL as a lever for school improvement. We look forward to continuing this important work during the coming year.

The End