



# STATE BRIGHT SPOTS: SEL AND THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

## PROMOTING SEL FOR STUDENTS | BRIEF 1 OF 3

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The [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARP) Act (2021) provides a \$122 billion historic federal investment to help states and districts safely reopen schools while addressing students' academic, social, and emotional learning in response to COVID-19. Under ARP, states and districts are required to spend 5 percent and 20 percent of funds respectively to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions and ensure that interventions respond to the academic, social, and emotional needs of students.

CASEL has recommended [three priority areas](#) for social and emotional learning (SEL) investment that can assist states and districts in optimizing ARP for student success:

1. Promote SEL for students.
2. Support adult SEL competencies and capacity building.
3. Align SEL efforts across schools, families, and communities.

This “Bright Spots” brief highlights policy innovations around Priority Area 1—promoting SEL for students—through state investments in evidence-based SEL to support academic recovery and social and emotional well-being, the need for which was made abundantly clear by COVID-19.

According to research, “[58 percent] of parents reported that their children’s academic development had been negatively impacted by the pandemic,” while 61 percent of parents reported the same when it came to their child’s social and emotional development ([Hanno et al.](#), 2021). Parent concerns about learning loss and student well-being were confirmed by this year’s National Assessment of Educational Progress results, which showed historic declines in student achievement in reading and math ([NAEP](#), 2022). Additionally, a recent report by the [Government Accountability Office](#) found that 1.1 million teachers nationwide reported that they had at least one student who never showed up for class in the 2020–2021 school year (2022). The [U.S. Surgeon General](#) has noted the devastating impact of COVID-19 on youth (2021). For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 51 percent rise in suicide attempts among teen girls ([Yard et al.](#), 2021).

According to the [United States Department of Education](#), an initial review of submitted ARP plans showed that a majority of states described efforts to expand SEL, with funds targeted to support students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic (2021).

**Our analysis dives deeper into examples of how states are leveraging ARP funds to improve SEL for all students.** We found that ARP is having a significant impact with states leveraging funds to support SEL sustainability and expansion. In addition to creating policy guidance to reinforce the use of funding for evidence-based programs, states are investing in expanding external SEL partnerships, integrating SEL with existing efforts, and supporting continuous improvement.



Below are highlights from our analysis of state ARP spending plans to support students' SEL. *CASEL does not direct the way states and districts spend federal dollars. The information provided in this brief is from publicly available information.*



**The Arizona Department of Education** is distributing \$3 million of its ARP funds to the Boys & Girls Club of the Valley, whose [Whole Child Approach](#) program focuses on promoting recovery by introducing and teaching developmental skills that reinforce success in school, work, and life.

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**The Connecticut State Department of Education** (CSDE) is using ARP and earlier ESSER funds to establish the [Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative](#)—a groundbreaking, first-of-its-kind research collaborative of public and private universities across the state. This collaborative is designed to conduct evaluation studies of COVID-19-related projects funded through the CSDE and/or conduct research studies on areas of importance that may emerge due to COVID-19. Evaluation projects related to promoting SEL for students include the Summer Enrichment grant program, Identifying Effective and Equitable Socio-Emotional Supports for Students and Educators, and the Remote Learning Audit.

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**The Delaware Department of Education** is spending \$1.25 million of its ARP funds to provide an additional year of support for implementation of Delaware's [Social, Emotional and Behavioral Wellbeing Plan \(SEBW\)](#). The SEBW Plan provides leveled support to individual educators, school teams, and district-level teams and integrates and aligns systems related to SEL, such as data and practices within the broader Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework.

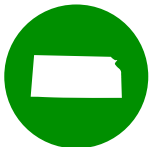
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**The Georgia Department of Education** partnered with the [Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network](#) to administer more than \$27 million in community and statewide grants to community-based organizations that operate comprehensive out-of-school time programming year-round, over the summer months, or after school. The goal is to provide evidence-based afterschool and summer enrichment programming that supports student learning and provides whole child supports, thus removing non-academic barriers to learning for students most impacted by COVID-19. Grants are currently supporting students' learning, connectedness, and well-being. Applications for the grant were required to describe how the organization would "help youth explore new interests, build social and emotional skills, connect with peers, and build positive relationships with caring adults."



**The Illinois State Board of Education** (ISBE) is building on a \$67.5 million investment in SEL from ESSER II funds by investing another \$48.4 million of ARP funds into statewide SEL programs. Illinois is using these funds to establish a [community partnership grant program](#) and seven [SEL Hubs](#) throughout the state. These SEL initiatives provide students and staff with a continuum of supports to meet their social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. Illinois awarded a total of \$86.4 million through 136 Community Partnership grants, promoting alignment between the services students receive in and out of school by deepening connections between schools, community-based organizations, and mental health providers. Awardees develop and implement an action plan that integrates student wellness supports, increases access to mental health services, expands learning opportunities, and engages families. Additionally, to deepen SEL practices across the state, ISBE has invested in seven SEL Hubs that coordinate professional development for educators in regions across the state, including supporting district participation in the [Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing \(REACH\) Statewide Initiative](#) from the Center for Childhood Resilience at Lurie Children's Hospital. The REACH model enlists districts in creating an interdisciplinary SEL team, conducting a trauma needs assessment, and developing and implementing an action plan to meet the needs of students and educators.



**The Kansas State Department of Education** estimates spending \$474,000 of its ARP funding to expand use of the [Kansas Can Competency Framework](#), which can be used to strengthen social and emotional skills. The framework already encourages districts to have strong SEL data collection, integrate SEL into academic learning, measure students' behavioral and social-emotional risk factors, and gather feedback from families to inform SEL.



Through the Office of Special Education and Early Learning, **the Kentucky Department of Education** is issuing \$2 million of its ARP funds to support regional special education cooperatives in their efforts to provide innovative learning opportunities and support for the districts they serve. One focus area for applicants includes life, social and emotional, and employment and occupational skills.



**The Maine Department of Education** spent ARP funds for a partnership with [SpiritCorps](#) to conduct a three-week, project-based, writing and self-discovery program designed for students from seventh to tenth grade. The series provided an opportunity for students to build confidence, strengthen connections, and foster community through storytelling. Funds were also used to support students' SEL and build 21st-century skills.



**The Maryland State Department of Education** has set aside \$133 million for [Maryland Leads](#), a grant initiative designed to support district LEAs in addressing learning loss in several forms. Among them are Reimagining the Use of Time, which encourages restructuring the schedule to allow for more tutoring, mentorship, service learning, career and college exploration, and social and emotional supports.

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From **the Minnesota Department of Education**, \$12.5M of ARP funds are being administered in Minnesota by Ignite Afterschool, for which nearly 60 percent of funds are supporting culturally specific, community-based organizations. Of the 21 youth-serving grant awardees, seven are focusing on the SEL of the populations they serve, including Somali and East African, and Hmong American youth.

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**The Oklahoma State Department of Education** has invested almost \$6 million in summer learning via partnerships with the [Oklahoma Alliance of YMCAs](#) and the [Oklahoma Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs](#) to expand and enhance summer learning across the state. The Boys & Girls Clubs will provide supports for academic recovery, SEL, and access to technology. The YMCA is hosting 63 summer youth development programming sites across the state to provide holistic youth-development programming designed to bolster student success by providing social and emotional skills training, academic enrichment programs, and mental health support.

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**The Oregon Department of Education** (ODE) is using \$9 million of ARP funds for [Culturally Specific Afterschool Learning](#) grants, which will provide opportunities for culturally affirming and enriching after-school learning programs for students (with a context-specific focus on students who are Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Latinx, and Pacific Islander). Programming must be anchored in four essential pillars of practice:

1. Addressing unfinished learning through academic and mental health support
2. Culturally affirming practices, including cultural identity development
3. Leadership and self-advocacy skills
4. Giving back to the community

ODE describes the third pillar as cultivating SEL-related skills such as self-awareness, problem-solving, goal-setting, communication, critical thinking, and relationship-building.



### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

We are encouraged by states using ARP funds to invest in SEL to improve student learning and social and emotional well-being. Research indicates the following:

“SEL has a powerful combination of evidence and support. These findings come from multiple fields and sources and include analyses of hundreds of studies that show SEL leads to beneficial outcomes related to social and emotional skills; attitudes about self, school, and civic engagement; social behaviors; conduct problems; emotional distress; and academic performance (CASEL, 2022).”

Additionally, cost-benefit research shows that for every dollar spent on SEL, there is an \$11 return on investment (Belfield et al., 2015).

### SETTING AN EXAMPLE

As states and districts continue using funds to support students' SEL, we recommend they look to the states listed above and focus their ongoing ARP investments on the following:

- Evidence-based and culturally affirming SEL programs and practices (Minnesota and Oregon).
- Expanded learning opportunities and external partnerships that integrate social, emotional, and academic learning across in-school and out-of-school time (Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Oklahoma, and Oregon).
- Continuous improvement and implementation of SEL statewide frameworks (Delaware and Kansas).
- Incorporate SEL with academic learning throughout the school day (Maryland).
- Research and evaluation of SEL practices being implemented using ARP dollars, in order to ensure more effective spending in the future (Connecticut).

Finally, as states continue implementing their ARP plans, CASEL offers actions [states](#) can take to promote systemic SEL and provides extensive free resources to support [district](#) and [school](#) implementation of systemic SEL.

Decades of research confirms that SEL supports academic achievement and student wellness. Therefore, it is our belief at CASEL that these innovative uses of ARP funds by states, which focus on accelerating learning, engaging students, and promoting social and emotional wellness, will help demonstrate the need for ongoing investment by the federal government.



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