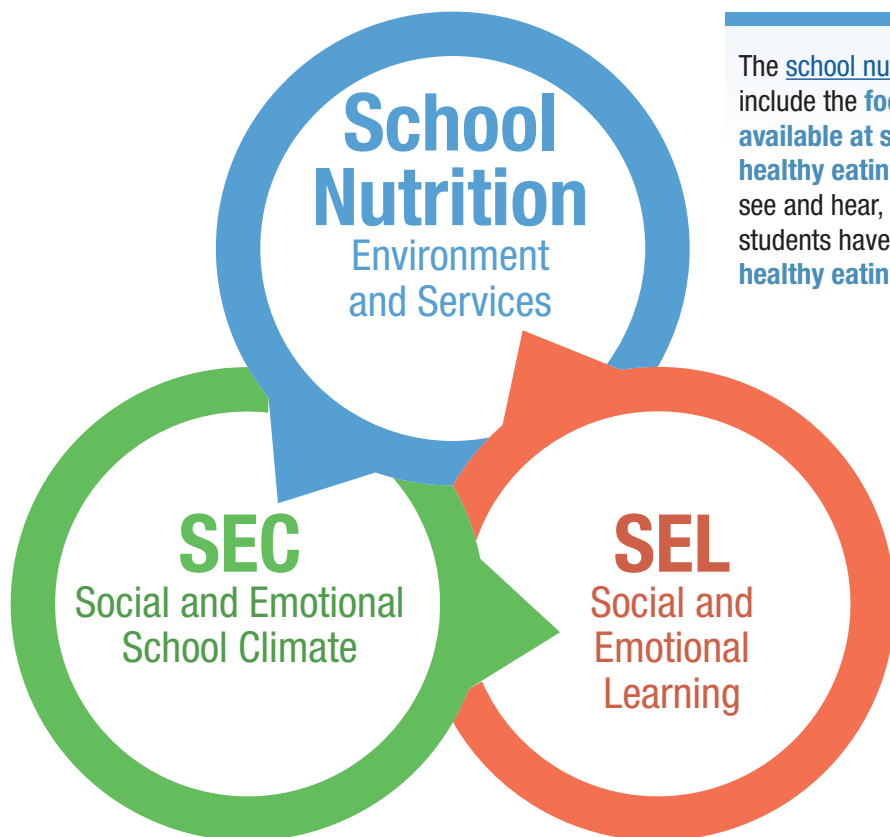


# School Nutrition Policies and Practices Can Support the Social and Emotional Climate and Learning

The [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) framework shows how multiple aspects of the school environment support students' health, well-being, and academic success. This brief describes connections between the school nutrition environment and services, the social and emotional climate (SEC) in school, and activities that support students' social and emotional learning (SEL).



The [school nutrition environment and services](#) include the **foods and beverages that are available at school**, the **messages about healthy eating and nutrition** that students see and hear, and the opportunities that students have to **learn about and practice healthy eating**.<sup>1,2</sup>



A positive [SEC](#) helps facilitate effective teaching and learning by **helping to develop students' SEL**, including:

- managing emotions,
- setting and achieving positive goals,
- feeling and showing empathy for others,
- establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and
- making responsible decisions.<sup>3</sup>



The SEC includes the social factors that can affect an individual's **emotional well-being and behavior**, and **social and emotional development**.

A positive SEC helps create **safe and supportive learning environments** that can impact student engagement in:

- school activities,
- relationships with other students, staff, family, and community, and
- academic performance.

**School nutrition policies and practices can affect the overall SEC.**

For example:






- Providing adequate seat time for meals gives students the opportunity to socialize and connect with their peers.
- Encouraging teachers to eat meals with students can help reinforce healthy eating behaviors and strengthen relationships with students.
- Communicating to parents, teachers, and staff about how to access school meal programs and the benefits of these programs can promote equity.<sup>2</sup>
- Keeping private which students receive free or reduced-price meals or have meal debt can help eliminate stigma associated with participation in school meal programs. This can help create a safe school environment that discourages bullying or embarrassment from singling students out.



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# Schools can support healthy school nutrition policies and practices and reinforce SEL core competencies at the same time.

Although schools may use specific SEL programs, curricula, and instructional practices to help students develop important social and emotional skills, SEL core competencies can be taught in many ways and in different settings.<sup>4</sup> The table describes each of the SEL core competencies and provides examples of school nutrition policies and practices that reflect these competencies.

Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies <sup>4</sup>	School Nutrition Policies and Practices that Support Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies
<p><b>Self-awareness:</b></p> <p>The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nutrition education teaches students               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» to be aware of how it feels to be full and how it feels to be hungry.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>» to recognize how healthy diet influences emotional well being and how emotions may influence eating habits.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-management:</b></p> <p>The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nutrition education teaches skills, including               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» how to politely accept or turn down food.</li> <li>» how to stop eating voluntarily, according to internal cues.<sup>5</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>School does not use food (e.g., candy) as a reward for good behavior or academic performance, because this can interfere with developing intrinsic motivation.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>School limits food-based fundraisers and celebrations, which can encourage students to ignore internal hunger cues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Awareness:</b></p> <p>The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooking demonstrations or taste test activities are an opportunity for students to try new foods and be reminded that people differ in what they like to eat and that that's okay.</li> <li>School meals are an opportunity to practice politely accepting or turning down food.</li> <li>School policies address weight-based bullying and teasing.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>Nutrition promotion materials feature students who are reflective of the student body, including diverse race/ethnicity, students with disabilities, and different body shapes and sizes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationship Skills:</b></p> <p>The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate seat time during school meals allows students to both eat a nutritious meal and socialize with peers.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>Providing meals in the classroom can promote a sense of social responsibility if students take turns helping with tasks, including helping to deliver and distribute meals and cleaning up spills.<sup>6</sup></li> <li>When teachers eat meals with students, students can connect with a supportive and caring adult.<sup>6</sup></li> <li>School gardens and cooking classes can foster teamwork and strengthen relationships between peers and with teachers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsible Decision-making:</b></p> <p>The ability to make constructive choices by considering ethics, safety, social norms, potential consequences, and the well-being of self and others.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nutrition education teaches about food marketing strategies to influence decisions and making healthy choices.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>School promotes use of share-tables to help reduce food waste.<sup>7</sup></li> <li>Self-serve options (e.g., salad bar) encourage students to take only what they will eat.</li> </ul>

Schools can support healthy dietary behaviors, help cultivate a positive SEC, and facilitate SEL by

- ▶ **ASSESSING** school nutrition policies and practices for alignment with SEC principles and SEL core competencies,
- ▶ **INCORPORATING** SEC and SEL into existing policies (e.g., local school wellness policy)<sup>8</sup> or school improvement plans,
- ▶ **USING** instructional practices and nutrition education content that align with SEL core competencies, and
- ▶ **COMMUNICATING** with parents about the connections between school nutrition, SEC, and SEL, including benefits for students' health and academic success.