

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In a moment where there is a national spotlight of what safe and supportive schools look and feel like, Communities for Just Schools Fund (CJSF) is convening our national network of partners (youth, parent, and teacher-led organizing groups) to press back on harmful narratives about safety -- and instead place safety into the more holistic, appropriate container of **culturally-affirming social emotional learning**.



Across the country, school districts, researchers, and policymakers are adopting social emotional learning (SEL) as a framework to define and measure the set of skills students need to be successful in school and in life. However, these SEL conversations, practices, and curricula are too often based on white and cisgender patriarchal norms and values, which further enacts emotional and psychological violence onto Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ youth. The current narrative around SEL is that students must manage and regulate themselves and their emotions, conform and constrict their identities, and not express their fullest, most authentic selves.

The education justice movement has been beautifully and powerfully centering what true SEL can and should be -- a process of deep relationship-building, healing, and liberation. There is great opportunity to center SEL within organizer demands for culturally-affirming classrooms and schools before it is too late.

OVERVIEW

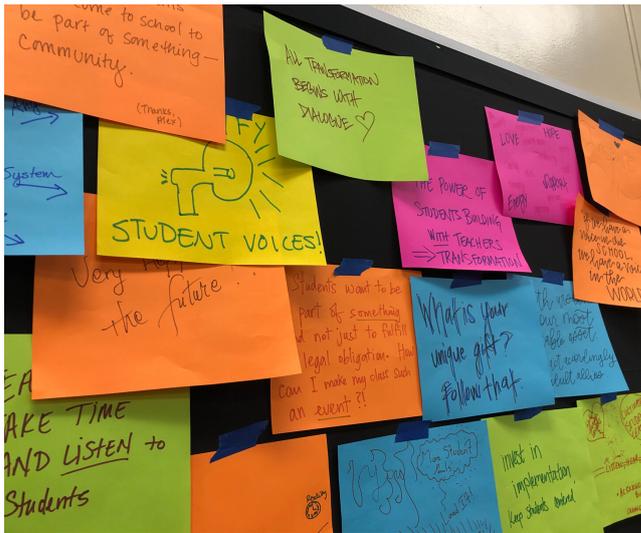
The Community of Practice is designed to highlight partners' expertise, create space for connection and synergy across groups, and equip them with the knowledge and tools to connect their existing organizing efforts to SEL and safety conversations.

We dive deeply together through learning exchanges, site visits, conference calls, and the final development of a roadmap toolkit to share the year-long learning process. The Community of Practice brings organizers, educators, researchers, and stakeholders together to problematize current SEL frameworks that are rooted in white supremacy, anti-Blackness, cispremacny, homophobia, and other forms of oppression.

Through the Community of Practice, CJSF and our partners and allies are:

- identifying and elevating partner efforts that center effective relationship-building strategies;
- examining culturally-affirming social-emotional learning (SEL) policies, practices, and research;
- collaboratively building a strong case for smart, connected school climate, safety, and culturally-affirming SEL policies and practices; and
- elevating our partners' work to change Black and brown students' educational and life outcomes by addressing broken racial and cultural narratives and pushing back against calls to further harden schools.





THE WORK

We've been to places like Long Beach, California to learn from **Californians for Justice** about their relationship-centered schools model; Alaska to learn about how the **Association of Alaska School Boards** is embedding cultural safety into their policies and practices; Minnesota to learn from the **Twin Cities Innovation Alliance** to explore liberatory and human-centered community data use in schools. We've collected survey and phone call data from our national network of partners to better understand how they are conceptualizing, defining, and doing culturally-affirming SEL work in communities every day. We've convened 40+ of our partner groups to engage in critical dialogue, examine and deconstruct SEL frameworks, and create space to dream and strategize together.



ROADMAP

At the end of the Community of Practice, we will have collectively curated and compiled a resources roadmap for use by members of the Community of Practice and others. This roadmap will include: sample policies for advancing culturally affirming social and emotional learning, collected from different states and localities; a toolkit of resources that can be used for assessing the cultural responsiveness of school climate and/or curricula; and guidelines and tips for effective narratives for organizing and advocacy on these issues. This roadmap is uniquely positioned to reach a national network of philanthropists, organizers, educators, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders. Our goal is to continue to propel the movement towards SEL policy, practices, and curricula that center the strategic praxis of organizing, which roots school safety in holistic well-being, freedom, and justice.



THE FUTURE

The work is far from over. SEL has become another tactic to further criminalize, punish, and police Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ students and harden schools. What we know from our partners is that students, families, educators, school staff, and communities feel most safe in school when they have deep relationships. We also know if SEL work isn't culturally-affirming, it's not SEL. We will continue to be present in policy spaces to ask the hard questions, to connect organizers and educators to ensure community voice is centered in schools, and elevate the power of organizing to create long-term systemic and structural change.