How Imagine Purpose 6–12 Aligns to

Effective Social and Emotional Learning Instruction

Executive Summary

The Challenge

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the "process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply *the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions*" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2019). Research shows that well-implemented SEL instruction can significantly improve student achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Osher et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017), promote prosocial behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Yeager, 2017), decrease suspension and discipline issues in school (Zins et al., 2004), and reduce mental health and substance abuse issues and criminal activity as adults (Jones et al., 2015). Data show that SEL programs can have a large impact on earnings (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). A review of six SEL intervention programs showed that for every dollar invested, there was an economic return of $11 (Belfield et al., 2015).

While school leaders recognize the importance of providing targeted SEL programming to propel student success, many administrators struggle to find the funding and resources to do so. To address this issue, a growing number of educators and administrators are turning to technology to help scale and enhance social and emotional learning programs (Stern et al., 2015 ; World Economic Forum, 2016).

A Purposeful Solution

Recognizing the importance of SEL in supporting academic success, improving behavior and school culture, and social skills development for success in college, career, and life, Imagine Learning formed a partnership with Imagine Purpose in 2018 to provide SEL curriculum options. Imagine Purpose is a web-based course provider that offers SEL-focused curriculum and professional development resources for middle- and high-school students. It offers six online SEL courses that are designed to help students develop the productive attitudes and prosocial behavior needed for success in learning, careers, relationships, and life. Each evidence-based course is aligned to the five most critical SEL competencies outlined by CASEL (CASEL, 2019): developing self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success; using social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; demonstrating decision-making skills; and showing responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts. Because courses are online with a comprehensive set of video-based lessons, Imagine Purpose's engaging, multimedia-rich curriculum can be flexibly implemented and delivered either in person and supported online or with in-person discussion. Imagine Purpose courses have been implemented with students across 30 countries since 2010.
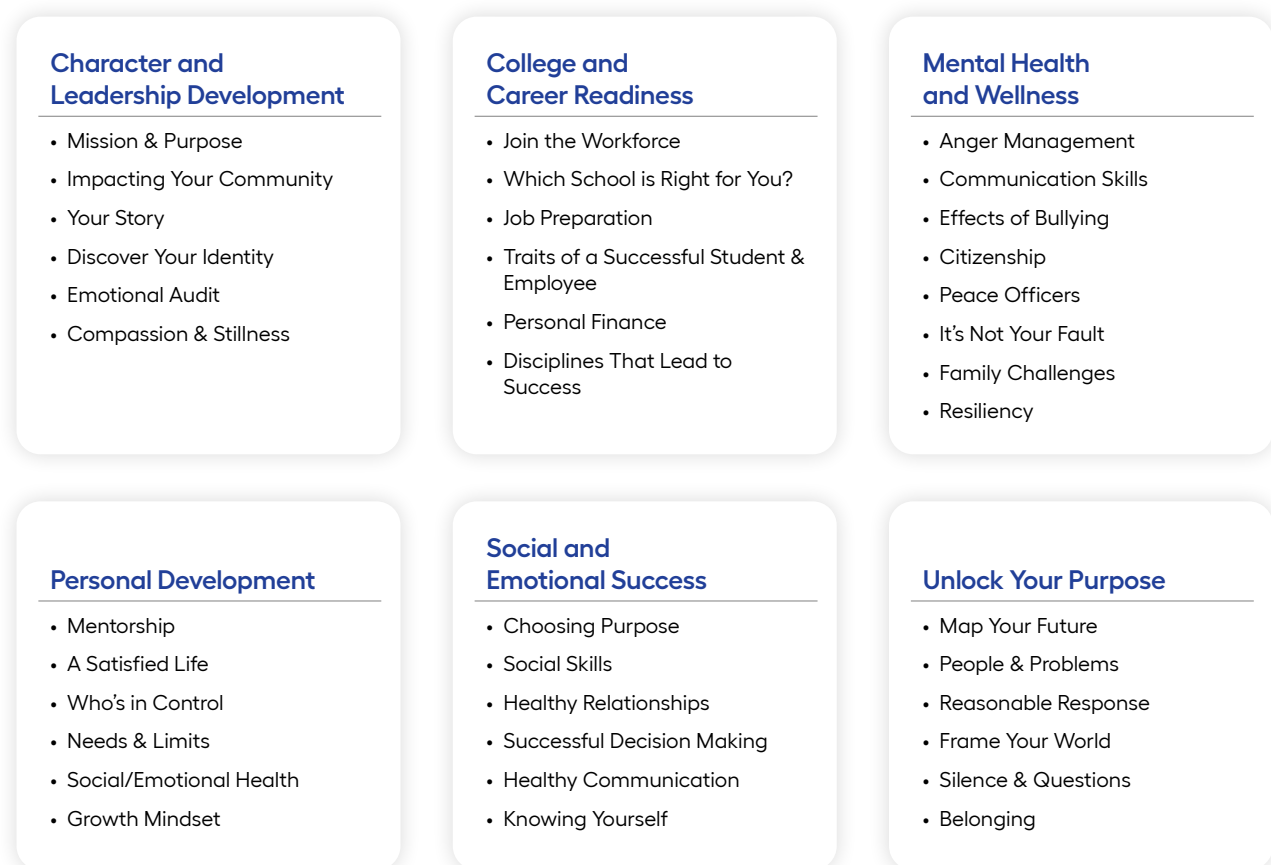
Character and Leadership Development

- Mission & Purpose
- Impacting Your Community
- Your Story
- Discover Your Identity
- Emotional Audit
- Compassion & Stillness

College and Career Readiness

- Join the Workforce
- Which School is Right for You?
- Job Preparation
- Traits of a Successful Student & Employee
- Personal Finance
- Disciplines That Lead to Success

Mental Health and Wellness

- Anger Management
- Communication Skills
- Effects of Bullying
- Citizenship
- Peace Officers
- It's Not Your Fault
- Family Challenges
- Resiliency

Personal Development

- Mentorship
- A Satisfied Life
- Who's in Control
- Needs & Limits
- Social/Emotional Health
- Growth Mindset

Social and Emotional Success

- Choosing Purpose
- Social Skills
- Healthy Relationships
- Successful Decision Making
- Healthy Communication
- Knowing Yourself

Unlock Your Purpose

- Map Your Future
- People & Problems
- Reasonable Response
- Frame Your World
- Silence & Questions
- Belonging

Figure 1. *Imagine Purpose 6-12 courses.*

Theory of Change

Figure 2 provides a conceptual model of how Imagine Purpose is intended to facilitate social and emotional development. The first column lists the resources that are needed (professional development, computers, headsets, and classroom space) to successfully launch Imagine Purpose activities (online curriculum, scaffolded support, small-group instruction, family engagement) and generate the outputs (SEL awareness, behavior modification, minutes of instruction, and materials sent to parents on SEL skills) that lead to short-term outcomes (increased social-emotional competence).

Figure 2. *Imagine Purpose's Theory of Change.*

Implementation

Resources	Activities	Outputs
• Teacher professional development	• Teachers use Imagine Purpose regularly	• SEL awareness
• Computers	• Students watch online videos	• Behavior modification
• Online curriculum and assessments	• Students receive scaffolded support	• Minutes of instruction
• Headsets	• Teachers provide feedback on written responses	• Family engagement that reinforces classroom practices
• Time set aside to use Imagine Purpose instructional routines for whole-group instruction	• Teachers lead whole-group or small-group discussions	
• School or central office staff person to oversee the program	• Students engage in discussions and activities with caregivers or mentors	

Outcomes

Short-Term Outcomes	Medium-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
• Increased social–emotional competence:	• Improved student engagement	• Reduced aggressive behaviors
• Self-awareness	• Attendance	• Reduced disciplinary referrals
• Self-management	• On-task behavior	• Improved academic achievement
• Social awareness	• Task completion	• GPA
• Relationship skills	• Improved attitudes	• Standardized test scores
• Responsible decision-making	• Improved classroom behavior	• Increased graduation rates
• Increased self-regulation	• Greater attachment to school	• Decreased dropout rates
• Increased communication, collaboration, conscientiousness, conflict resolution, and leadership skills		

A Research-Based Solution

Researchers and practitioners have pinpointed five hallmarks of effective SEL programs. These research-based practices are incorporated into Imagine Purpose.

1. SAFE Instructional Practices (Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit)

A meta-analysis of 213 SEL studies reveal that SEL programs that have a sequenced step-by-step training approach, use active forms of learning, focus sufficient time on skills development, and have explicit learning goals have a greater impact on student behavioral and academic outcomes than SEL programs that do not include SAFE practices (Durlak et al., 2011).

IMAGINE PURPOSE INCORPORATES ALL FOUR SAFE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN ITS COURSES

- **Instruction is sequenced:** Imagine Purpose lessons capitalize on a coordinated progression of activities designed to optimize and inspire student learning. Each course consists of 80 instructional videos led by dynamic experts from around the world. After students watch each brief video, they complete a Check on Learning task. To accelerate and transfer learning, students apply new knowledge in Call to Action assignments throughout the course and engage in rich discussions with teachers, caregivers, and peers. Readings and written response activities further hone students' self-reflection skills, often based on research or interviews.
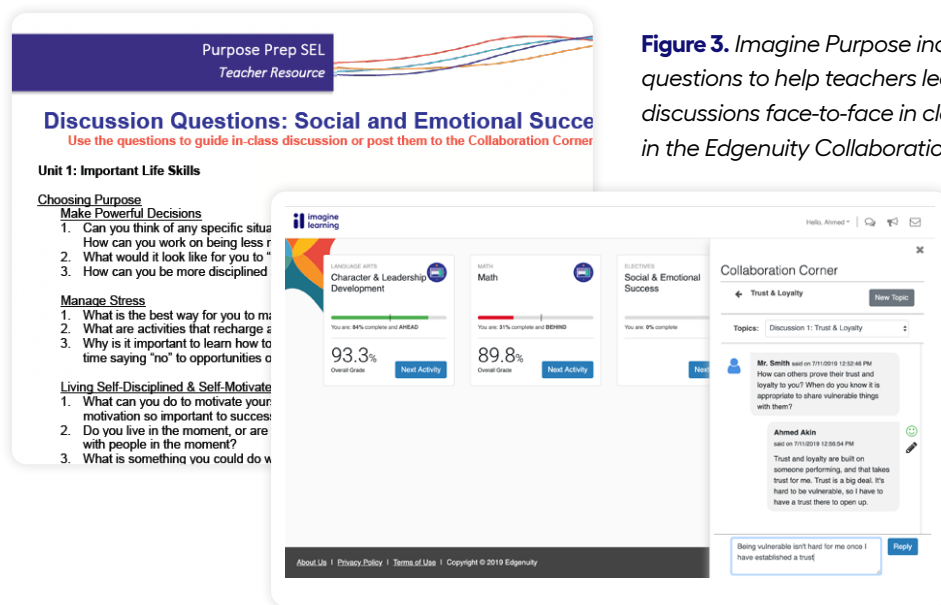

Figure 3. *Imagine Purpose includes questions to help teachers lead discussions face-to-face in classrooms or in the Edgenuity Collaboration Corner.*

- **Instruction is active:** Imagine Purpose capitalizes on compelling storytelling techniques to connect critical SEL skills to the emotional lives of students. A diverse group of experts use personal experience and student-centered language to bring SEL content to life and make it relatable and relevant. For example, in one lesson, the on-screen expert describes how he was told that he would

never amount to anything when he was young, so he began taking on that identity. He started selling drugs, joined a gang, and ultimately went to jail. He discusses how forgiveness and redefining his identity helped turn his life around. In another video, the on-screen expert discusses how his father hung an empty picture frame on the wall to teach him that every human has the power to draw or map out their own life.

Engaging scenarios and assignments are designed to stimulate interest and curiosity. Students don't just passively watch; rather, they complete assignments that require them to curate, synthesize, and research information. The program allows students to collaborate with peers and teachers to think deeply about timely, relevant SEL topics that matter to them. Teachers are encouraged to engage students in Lightning Share activities in which students summarize course material and answer discussion questions in 60 seconds or less. In addition, Call to Action activities empower students to role-play and practice new behaviors, and enable educators to provide feedback on student reflections.

- **Instruction is focused:** Imagine Purpose recognizes that targeted practice is a fundamental requirement for building fluent social–emotional abilities. In each lesson, students focus on building one of the following skills:
    - Self-awareness: Students complete writing assignments where they label their emotions, think deeply about what triggers their emotions, and reflect on how their emotions affect others. Students are tasked with completing mindfulness exercises where they identify their own strengths and limitations, identify values and interests, and build self-esteem. For example, in the Learn to Date Yourself activity, students are tasked with completing an activity alone. They go for a walk or to a coffee shop, restaurant, movie theater, or museum to get to know themselves. They then document their experience, noting what they like, what they don't like, what they want, and where they are headed.
    - Self-management: Students create vision boards that present a collage of words and pictures that represent their goals and dreams. Students practice setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) behavioral and academic goals, and develop strategies to overcome obstacles to meet those goals. Students also try out grounding techniques to manage stress, develop optimism, and display grit and perseverance.
    - Social awareness: Students learn to identify, predict, and evaluate other people's feelings and reactions. Historical and current events are used to teach the importance of diversity and understand a variety of points of view and perspectives. For example, in one Call to Action assignment, students analyze how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s respect for others, social awareness, perspective-taking, and empathy skills created a movement and brought greater equality to the United States.

- Relationship skills: Students learn strategies to navigate peer pressure and negotiate conflict constructively. They also work on communicating clearly, listening actively, and building empathy. For example, in the Five-Minute Connect activity, students practice expressing gratitude and appreciation toward peers. In the activity, a student is paired with a partner. Each student takes turns completing the following sentences aloud:
  - I appreciate you because...
  - My favorite thing about you is...
  - I'm thankful for...
  - I trust you because...
- Decision-making: Students learn how to think critically and analyze decisions based on moral, ethical, and safety standards. Using case studies, students learn how individual decisions can affect others.

- **Instruction is explicit:** All Imagine Purpose lessons have explicit learning goals. Each unit begins by presenting the objectives and specific skills students are expected to learn. Goals are written in student-friendly language and are directly connected to assignments and tasks.

Essential Question, Learning Objectives & Success Criteria

Learning Objectives: Success Criteria:

1. Learn what it means to be "conscious" in our decisions and life and how to engineer mindfulness in every area of our living.
2. Understand the importance of mindfulness practices and principles and how to apply them in life
3. Evaluate different forms of communication, and understand how communication can affect our relationships to become healthy or unhealthy.
4. Learn how to explore and know yourself inside and out through self-awareness and different tricks to evaluate yourself.

What is mindfulness, why is it important, and how can I practice it within my everyday life?

Figure 4. *Imagine Purpose clearly articulates the learning objectives and success criteria for every unit.*

2. Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Instruction

Children's cognitive and social–emotional skills develop and become increasingly sophisticated with their age and ability. For example, in the elementary school years, students are focused on learning to build the neural connections needed to remember and store rote academic facts (Semrud-Clikeman, 2014). They are building foundational knowledge and are just beginning to identify emotions, control impulses, and build reciprocal relationships (Denham, 2018). In middle school, neural connections increase, and inferential thinking becomes more prominent. Students begin to gain more autonomy, comprehend complex emotional situations, and resolve conflicts within groups (Denham, 2018). Throughout high school, students make significant gains in abstract thinking, exhibit improved social cognition, and are increasingly motivated to experiment with new interests and establish their own identities and values (Steinberg et al., 2011; Williamson et al., 2015). During this developmental period, there is a marked shift toward reward-seeking and succumbing to peer and academic pressure, while

self-regulation skills decline (Steinberg, 2008; Williamson et al., 2015). Because elementary-, middle-, and high-school students' social and emotional needs are so different, researchers agree that effective SEL instruction must be developmentally appropriate (Durlak et al., 2011).

Experts also agree that SEL is unlikely to be effective if it is not culturally sensitive and responsive (Cressey, 2019). Studies show that students learn best when they can connect what happens in school to their cultural contexts and unique heritage, lived realities, and the issues they care about (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Muñiz, 2019; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013). Research indicates that culturally responsive instruction (using cultural referents to impart knowledge) improves students' self-efficacy, self-esteem, attachment to school, and student achievement (Muñiz, 2019; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013).

IMAGINE PURPOSE INSTRUCTION FOR GRADES 6–12

Imagine Purpose offers courses that focus on college and career readiness, unlocking purpose, character and leadership development, personal development, mental health and wellness, and social and emotional success. The focus of course content, however, varies based on a student's grade level. For example, in grades 6 through 8, the program addresses middle-school students' experience of increased autonomy and perspective-taking abilities by targeting **personal development, character and leadership development,** and teaching students **how to find their unique purpose.** Students learn how to document their goals, dreams, skills, interests, and values. They are taught how to make informed and responsible decisions, as well as hone individual leadership styles, and enhance their abilities to grow and sustain healthy relationships. The goal is to help students take control of their future and successfully transition from middle school to high school.

In grades 9 through 12, the focus of the curricula shifts to emphasize identity development, resilience, risk prevention, and empathy. Courses target the development of healthy **social and emotional skills, mental health and wellness,** and **readiness for life beyond high school.** Activities equip students to be able to manage their emotions and balance them with a meaningful and vibrant social life, as well as cope with and overcome adversity and trauma. Courses help students understand the consequences of substance use and abuse, and empathize with others to create long-lasting relationships. Interactive activities help students reflect on circumstances and possible solutions to problems, build a framework for citizenship, embrace the value of diversity, and appropriately use their voices to fight injustice.

Imagine Purpose is committed to delivering culturally responsive instruction. Before courses are published, a team of experienced classroom teachers and experts review instructional materials for bias and sensitivity. Careful efforts are taken to ensure students with a variety of socioeconomic and geographic upbringings can access and relate to the material.

Published courses are taught by 80 content experts who hail from a variety of industries and walks of life (i.e., mental health professionals, social figures, educators, athletes, philosophers, celebrities, CEOs, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs).

Diversity (what it is, why we need it, how to embrace it, and how to combat prejudice), inclusion (how to build bridges with people who are different), and respecting people's differences are reoccurring themes in Imagine Purpose's online lessons.

Imagine Purpose's professional development also strives to be culturally responsive. Educators are taught strategies for how to acknowledge the contributions of all students, regardless of culture. They are also given tips on how to open the lines of communication so that they can directly support students.

SHORT WRITING ANSWER

Lesson: Know Yourself, Love Yourself

Prompt:

In this module, Herman talks about knowing and loving yourself. This can be difficult, but the more we practice it and learn to appreciate our lives, the better we get at it and the easier it becomes.

Your culture plays a vital role in your identity and self-esteem, Herman said. Your culture includes your parents, peers, and others who help lay the foundation of your life.

Evaluate the statement above and share whether you agree with it. Reflect on your upbringing and the people who have influenced you. Do you agree that culture plays a vital role in who you are and the level of self-esteem you develop as you mature? Share whether you agree with the reasoning of his statement, and then provide evidence to support your opinion.

Identify whether you believe any of these statements are false, and then explain why. Please write in complete sentences.

Figure 5. In both online and offline activities, Imagine Purpose challenges students to analyze their own beliefs and biases, listen to others, and reflect on the broader ethical consequences for intragroup, intergroup, and institutional relations.

3. Accommodations to Meet the Need of All Learners

Neuroscientists have identified two types of memory that support learning: working memory (where we consciously process information) and long-term memory (a much larger body of connected information). Practice (when a motor or cognitive skill is repeated over time) transfers knowledge from working memory to long-term memory. Research shows that students learn more effectively if cognitive load—the burden placed on working memory—is reduced so that working memory can be devoted to important learning tasks (Sweller, 2008). Experts recommend using instructional scaffolding (supports

such as prompts, cues, or interactive tools) to accommodate students of all learning styles and abilities (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2011).

IMAGINE PURPOSE SUPPORTS FOR DIVERSE LEARNER NEEDS

Imagine Purpose includes a variety of supports to meet the needs of all learners:

- Videos are chunked into sections, and captions and transcripts are available for all content.

- Students can learn at their own pace, pause and rewind videos, mark up text, and take electronic notes.

- Teachers have options to customize the course settings (e.g., adjust the time allotted for assessments; change the grade weights for quizzes and written assignments) to make the level of challenge more appropriate for individual students.

- Read-aloud and translation tools help students with language needs.

- A digital notebook called eNotes enables students to take notes, record, synthesize, and organize their thinking.

- A dynamic glossary and a word look-up tool help students build their academic vocabulary, while transcripts and video captions enable students to follow along with the on-screen expert.

- Relevance is optimized through topics that are relevant to students' lives and application to real-world situations.
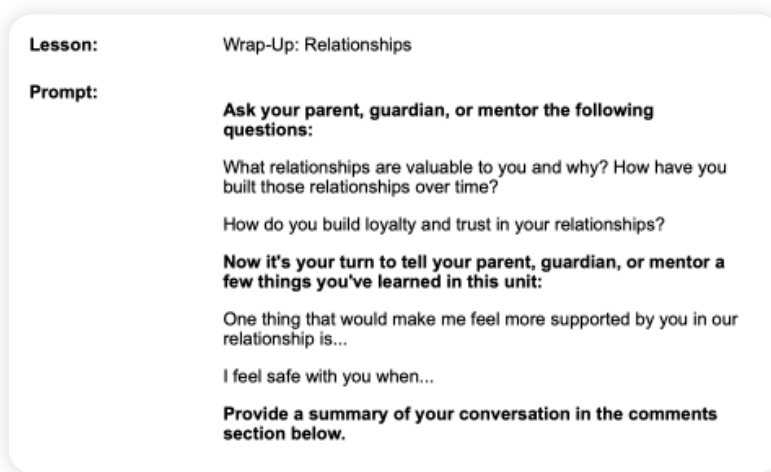
4. School–Family Partnerships

Experts agree that "families are a child's first teacher and an essential factor in the cultivation of social and emotional competencies throughout a child's life" (CASEL, 2017, p. 2). Research shows that promoting parent–child interaction in SEL learning activities is associated with improved academic achievement and behavioral outcomes (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Garbacz et al., 2015; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007).

IMAGINE PURPOSE LESSON ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT SCHOOL–FAMILY PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Imagine Purpose recognizes the importance of school–family partnerships. Each course includes four caregiver/mentor activities that provide opportunities for students to apply and extend the skills they have learned and to practice at home. Activities focused on the home aim to connect family members to the school community by engaging in discussions that foster deep reflection on SEL competencies. For example, in a lesson on self-awareness, students ask caregivers/mentors about a time in their life when they struggled with self-esteem and what they did about it. They also ask whether they ever had angry or extreme emotions that made them feel out of control and what they did about it. Students then share one of their strengths and weaknesses and something they learned from the lesson. After students have the conversation at home, they provide an outline of the conversation and share it with the classroom, building home–school connections.

Lesson:	Wrap-Up: Relationships
Prompt:	**Ask your parent, guardian, or mentor the following questions:**
	What relationships are valuable to you and why? How have you built those relationships over time?
	How do you build loyalty and trust in your relationships?
	Now it's your turn to tell your parent, guardian, or mentor a few things you've learned in this unit:
	One thing that would make me feel more supported by you in our relationship is...
	I feel safe with you when...
	Provide a summary of your conversation in the comments section below.

Figure 6. *Imagine Purpose extends learning into the home by including activities that ask students to work with a parent, guardian, or mentor.*

5. Ongoing Professional Development

Research confirms that the success of SEL programs depends on whether the essential elements are delivered with high quality and the intended frequency (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Experts agree that implementation quality is determined in large part by the training and ongoing support school staff receive (Wanless et al., 2015). As Jennings and Frank (2017) note, high-quality professional development should instruct teachers in the "program's theory, principles and strategies and to help them become familiar with required curricular activities, so that they can deliver the intervention with a high degree of fidelity" (p. 424). They also need ongoing support to integrate SEL concepts as they continue to implement programs throughout the year (CASEL, 2017).

IMAGINE PURPOSE'S EXPANDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Imagine Purpose delivers high-quality professional development that prepares teachers to cultivate and grow students' social and emotional development skills. Imagine Purpose implementation consultants bring together district officials, school leaders, and teachers to determine how Imagine Purpose will be integrated, positioned, and advocated for at each school. Imagine Purpose consultants help stakeholders create an implementation model, set measurable benchmarks (e.g., 90 minutes per week), and create a plan to achieve goals. During in-person training, educators learn about the program's theory of change, as well as how to navigate content both inside and outside of the learning management system. Teachers walk away with practical classroom management strategies, as well as best practices for growing relationships with students, facilitating interactive discussions and activities, and using data to drive instruction.

A detailed facilitator's guide provides a practical framework to coach and empower students using the SEL curriculum. Teachers learn how to guide students to discover their purpose, identify areas for improvement, and unleash their limitless potential. A three-pronged instructional routine helps students learn how to 1) be active watchers and listeners, 2) have safe and socially aware discussions, and 3) activate prior knowledge and engage in critical thinking.

Figure 7. *Imagine Purpose Routines and Facilitation Guides strengthen educators' social and emotional skills, and, as a result, enable SEL classrooms to flourish.*
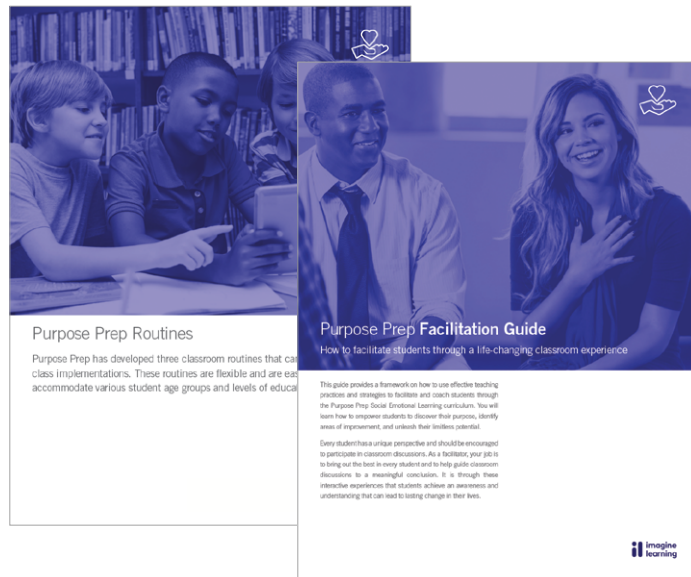
Conclusion

In conclusion, Imagine Purpose, provided in partnership with Imagine Learning, translates the best research in online learning, neuroscience, pedagogy, and educational psychology into its instructional design. The program's engaging curriculum, targeted support for diverse learners, family engagement elements, and focused professional development ensure that students develop the productive attitudes and prosocial behaviors needed for success in school, work, relationships, and life.

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