

Collaborating on a Vision

Greece Central School District, New York

With its five-year strategic plan just finishing up, Greece Central School District (GCSD) in New York was ready to think about how it would sustain its SEL work and take it to the next level. Charged with this leading this effort, SEL Fellow David Blahowicz sought to build a team of SEL champions by strengthening their commitment to and knowledge of SEL, then leveraging that team to develop a guiding vision for the work going forward.

SEL Champions, Assemble!

As a first step, Blahowicz assembled a new team to serve as his SEL champions: The Climate and Culture Committee. To ensure a representative mix of teachers and leaders, he developed an application process that allowed him to assess each applicant both terms of their interests and background as well as the mix of voices he was drawing upon.

Before launching the work to develop the district's SEL vision—one important strand of the committee's work—Blahowicz wanted to “level-set” to ensure that all members had foundational knowledge of SEL as well as opportunities to experience it for themselves. He set the tone by embedding the [3 SEL Signature Practices](#) into all committee meetings, opening with a welcoming inclusion activity, offering engaging activities, and wrapping up each gathering with an optimistic closure to reflect on the work done and look ahead.

He also provided activities designed to engage participants directly in SEL and to build comradery across the team, including a [Paseo](#) or “identity circle,” which he first experienced in an SEL Fellows workshop. In this activity, committee members shared aspects of their personal identities and delved into their self-conception, biases, and cultural backgrounds.

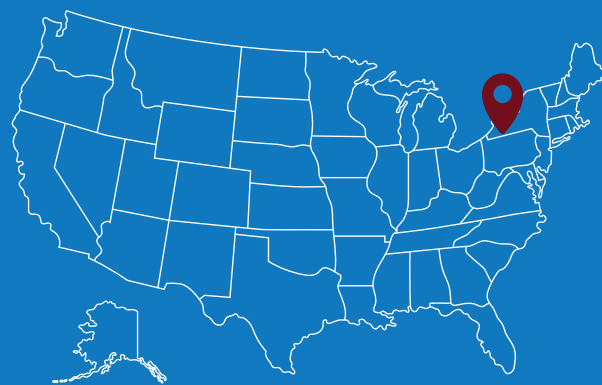
Alongside these experiential forays into SEL, the team also built their knowledge of the field, diving into [CASEL's 5 SEL competencies](#) and cross-walking it with New York State's [Culturally Responsive Sustaining Framework](#). By aligning these frameworks, the committee developed a guiding theory of action for what teachers, staff, and the committee itself must do to impact students.



Meet SEL Fellow

David Blahowicz

Special Education Teacher,
Interventionist, and
Teacher Leader



Welcome to Greece Central School District

- 11,000 students
- “We envision an inclusive school community that empowers all stakeholders to take risks as agents of change who will develop self-awareness, empathy, resiliency, and healthy relationships while embracing diversity

Challenge: Developing a team and creating a vision

“It’s great to have access to resources, but it is also so important to learn and grow as a human being. The focus needs to be on the individual—on personal and professional growth.”

Developing the Vision

At the same time, Blahowicz took the committee through collaborative activities designed to help them develop their [SEL vision](#):

“My Hopes”: “My hope is _____ because _____.” Participants were encouraged to fill in the blanks to explore and share their hopes for themselves, students, families, staff, and the district as a whole. The goal: to unearth the many, varied reasons they had come to the work. Blahowicz put their key words and phrases on posters, and participants took a “gallery walk,” circling and starring phrases that resonated. The words that got the most “likes” revealed the district’s true values, which would help drive the vision statement.



My Hopes

The New York Times Story: Team members were told, “Imagine a copy of The New York Times featuring a story about GCSD’s achievements in SEL implementation. What would make up the story?” Then they were asked to plan out all the elements: the cover story, the sidebars, the quotes, the feature articles, and the photo. By “writing the story,” the team had a chance to flesh out their vision: who would be involved, what the key tasks were, who it would impact, what the ideal outcome would be.

Through these activities, the committee members shared their “why” for the work as a way to generate an SEL vision that reflects the needs and wishes of the district.

Blahowicz emphasizes the importance of orchestrating this kind of collaboration. “You need to ask, ‘How do you set up those systems and structures to bring together all the voices?’” he says.



The New York Times story