Every educator knows that families are critical to student success, which is why parent involvement matters when districts pursue SEL initiatives.

It’s inevitable that parents will have questions about social emotional learning — which is commonly shortened to “SEL.” They’ll want to know why their district is investing in SEL initiatives, why they should take it seriously, and what makes the new SEL program any different from other learning programs.

Being prepared with facts, stats, and real-world proof about the impact of SEL initiatives on school communities can make a world of difference for students, especially when it comes to fostering a sense of continuity between life at school and life at home.

Parents who ask questions about SEL are often looking to teachers and administrators to connect the dots between big-picture SEL ideas and their own children. And this is precisely why any educator should be prepared to engage parents as their partners in success by having answers at-the-ready to these 5 common questions that family members ask about SEL initiatives.

**Question #1: How Can SEL Initiatives Help My Child Grow Academically?**

Often, parents will be delighted to hear that SEL has proven links to academic gains. One joint study spearheaded by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) revealed that students in SEL programs achieved 11 percentile-point academic gains. SEL’s emphasis on social intelligence and resilience helps students sustain academic achievement over the long term.

In fact, our experiences working with school districts have validated this truth. By using our SEL programs, Chicago Public Schools saw a 28% increase in A’s and a 60% drop in D’s and F’s. And 95% of students who took our courses said they felt more confident and able to reach their academic goals.
Question #2: What Skills Will My Child Develop through Applying SEL Principles?

Engaged parents want to do all they can to help their children succeed — both in their academic journeys and their future careers. As a Forbes article noted, today’s employers are seeking a new breed of 21st-century skills – including many skills that go beyond what’s covered in traditional academic disciplines.

What are some of the most sought-after skills among top employers? “Problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation,” says Barbara Kurshan at Forbes.

When students are taught to apply SEL principles, they’re actually focusing on cultivating soft skills. In essence, they’re practicing self-awareness while developing social intelligence that they can carry with them into future work environments.

Question #3: Can SEL Initiatives Help a Student Improve Their Behavior?

Parents of students who receive deeper levels of MTSS intervention (Multi-Tiered System of Support) often have special concerns about their child’s ability. For example, they may worry about their child falling behind or displaying disruptive behaviors.

While devising and acting upon a robust MTSS framework is essential to working with the parents of resource intervention students, strengthening the SEL practices within a school’s MTSS can help these students gain ground and succeed.

But, don’t take our word for it, a study in the Journal of Adolescent Health saw that SEL intervention in middle schools resulted in a sharp drop in self-reported aggressive behaviors. Students in schools with SEL initiatives were 42% less likely to participate in physical aggression, when compared to peers in control schools.

The social skills students learn through SEL can truly transform their lives. Point parents to this peer-reviewed study in Child Development, which found that students who had received social skills training were less likely to engage in problematic behaviors – such as substance abuse and crime.

Question #4: How Does SEL Affect the Learning Environment at School?

Today, many parents have concerns about how school culture affects their children. While some parents worry about bullying and peer pressure, others feel that schools over-emphasize testing and create a high-stress environments. Frequently, these very valid concerns are shared by educators themselves, which is why embracing a commitment to SEL can make a world of difference.

By embracing SEL initiatives, districts show that they’re dedicated to fostering a positive school culture that emphasizes acceptance, growth, and collaboration. Because SEL equips students with confidence and a sense of agency, they start to see themselves as active agents who can contribute to the creation of a positive school community.
Similarly, with SEL programs in place, teachers can gain tools and a common language that they can leverage to further infuse SEL into school culture. When students, parents, and educators all work together to drive change forward, it suddenly becomes possible to transform school culture.

**Question #5: How Can I Put SEL into Practice at Home?**

When parents ask this question, it’s a sign that they see the value of SEL and want to be supportive. Capitalize on this energy by devising ways to involve parents at home.

At minimum, encourage parents to have children set SEL-based goals. Remind parents to reinforce their child’s strengths and accomplishments, while encouraging their children to identify their feelings aloud.

According to experts at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, there are many tactics that educators can use to involve parents in SEL engagement initiatives. One simple tactic is to send home educational materials.

Alternatively, implementing SEL initiatives at school events can help re-invigorate mandatory or existing school activities — such as class celebrations or open houses. And, if the resources exist, appointing an SEL liaison for parents or creating an SEL resource center can go a long way toward ensuring that SEL skills find their way into students’ homes.

**Family Engagement Leads to SEL Success**

Through SEL initiatives, students learn critical skills they can apply in every setting—at home and beyond.

For students to embrace this truth, outreach to families is a crucial step. Schools must engage parents in SEL initiatives, and it’s essential to be ready when parents approach educators with questions. After all, it’s only when parents get the educational resources, data, and real-life SEL examples they need that they have the potential to emerge as passionate SEL champions.