



Daily SEL for Leaders - Nurturing Resilient School Leadership in Montana

How a partnership between the School Administrators of Montana (SAM) and Daily SEL equipped 25 diverse school leaders, tackling daily burnout and turnover crises, with the social-emotional skills and resiliency necessary to lead in today's uncertain education landscape.

Demographics:

Montana Public Schools Overview:

- Approximately 45% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, highlighting the economic challenges faced by many families
- Special education rates show that around 12% of students have unique learning needs
- Native American students constitute 14% of the student body, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive education.
- Montana, consistent with the nation, has an annual 20% principal attrition rate and 18-19% teacher attrition rate.
- The number of emergency teacher licensures has doubled in the last two years in Montana.
- Over 50% of new teachers leave the state or profession within the first three years of their careers.

Daily SEL for Leaders Cohort Participants:

- Principals, superintendents, university leaders, and instructional leaders from Montana.
- A cross-section of leaders dedicated to enhancing social-emotional learning.
- Total of 25 leaders across the state, representing the diverse landscape of Montana's education system.

“The training process was seamless and engaging. I noticed exceptional facilitation and a well-structured curriculum. There were no points of friction, and the program’s design facilitated effective learning and collaboration among participants.”

- SAM Participant

Challenge:

Educators and leaders in Montana, mirroring national trends, grapple with a crisis of well-being and turnover. Across the country, a staggering 20% principal attrition rate and 18-19% teacher attrition annually amplify concerns. In [Montana](#), the number of Emergency Authorization of Employments has risen over 90% and doubled in two years. Additionally, over half of newly licensed teachers leave the state or profession within the first three years. Leaders lacking in social-emotional skills struggle to support teachers effectively, contributing to burnout. The SAM leaders, recognizing this crisis, sought to address the root cause by prioritizing the social-emotional health of education leaders.

Research Supporting the Challenge:

- Annual attrition rates of over 20% for principals, with 28% indicating a plan to leave the principalship soon (National Center for Education Statistics).
- Estimated annual attrition rate of 8-12% for teachers, with 44% leaving within five years (National Center for Education Statistics).
- 80% of teachers self-report burnout as a serious problem, and 28% exhibit symptoms consistent with clinical depression (American Federation of Teachers).
- Job demands, stress, and energy depletion are significant factors contributing to burnout and attrition (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Granziera, 2021).

Target Outcomes:

1. Alleviate Educator Burnout: Equip leaders to manage stress and reduce burnout, fostering a more resilient educator community.
2. Foster Relationships and Communication: Build leadership capacity for positive relationships, open communication, and effective collaboration.
3. Strengthen School Cultures: Enhance school cultures that prioritize student well-being and effective learning by attending to the social-emotional needs of leaders.
4. Strengthen Educator Retention: Improve leadership SEL as a catalyst for creating school environments that encourage teacher retention.

Implementation:

There is little justification in the literature to support the notion that schools can increase teacher retention or efficacy without attending to increasing school leaders' and teachers' social-emotional skills, and without explicitly evaluating and addressing imbalances between the job demands and resources that teachers (and the leaders) experience. With that in mind, Dr. James Bailey and Randy Weiner implemented their carefully designed, research-based cohort model focusing on two key strategies: improving educator social-emotional skills, and balancing job-demands and resources to enhance teacher retention, which ultimately impacts student learning.

The SAM SEL Leaders Cohort unfolded across eight insightful sessions, each addressing crucial aspects of social-emotional leadership skills:

1. **Introduction to Leadership SEL:** Leaders gained an understanding of the complexity causing stress and burnout, setting the foundation for the cohort.
2. **Self-awareness:** Concrete practices to increase self-awareness and metacognition were explored, improving relationships and decision-making.
3. **Self-management:** Capacity building in impulse control, organizational skills, and goal-setting for creating a supportive environment.
4. **Social skills:** Application of self-awareness and self-management to complex social interactions, fostering positive relationships.
5. **Relationship skills:** Leaders applied previous skills and explored new ones to improve leader-teacher relationships.
6. **Responsible decision-making:** Addressed inclusive decision-making processes and power dynamics.
7. **Job Demands and Resources Model:** Leaders gained insights into balancing job demands and resources for teacher retention.
8. **Developing Support for Others:** Leaders delved into advanced personal SEL skills to support the emotional states of teachers.

Research Supporting Implementation:

Decades of supporting research indicate the importance of providing social emotional support and skills to leaders, particularly in the education sector.

- Social-emotional leadership skills, including self-awareness and relationship skills, emerge as **crucial resources for teacher satisfaction and commitment** (Ladd, 2011; Da'as, 2021; Ford, et al., 2019; Gui, 2019).
- School leaders' support for teachers **significantly** influences their decision to stay in a school or leave (Barsade & Knight, 2015).

A school leader from Hardin School District highlighted the impact, beginning with the very first session:

“Among the 8 sessions, one that particularly stood out was the first session. Not only did everything build off the basic foundation that was introduced, the insights gained from this session impacted my leadership approach, positively influencing teacher performance and contributing to an improved staff culture.”

- Taylor Sidwell
Principal in Hardin School District

“The SAM SEL Leaders Cohort has been a transformative experience, and I am grateful for the positive impact it has had on my leadership journey and the overall school environment.”

- SAM Participant

Results:

The implementation of Daily SEL for Leaders skills led to a positive shift in the participant's school culture. Challenges related to social-emotional wellness were addressed, and the cohort equipped leaders with tools to navigate these challenges effectively. Reflecting back on the experience, one participant noted, "Before joining the SAM SEL Leaders Cohort, we faced challenges related to social-emotional wellness. However, since participating, we are starting to see a positive shift. ***The cohort equipped us with tools to better navigate these challenges, fostering a more resilient and emotionally aware leadership team.***"

"The SAM SEL Leaders Cohort has been instrumental in helping me achieve my goals of open communication and staff support. The program provided valuable insights and strategies that have enhanced our approach to social-emotional learning, ultimately working to a more positive and thriving school culture."

- SAM Participant

About Daily SEL for Leaders

Educators, administrators, and district leaders are urged to embrace the opportunity of Daily SEL for Leaders. The success of the SAM SEL Leaders Cohort illustrates the transformative impact of prioritizing leader social-emotional well-being. Explore the three levels of professional development, join a cohort aligned with your growth goals, and contribute to a more emotionally intelligent and resilient school community. Your commitment to Daily SEL for Leaders is an investment in retaining skilled educators and nurturing a thriving learning environment for every student. As one valued leader shared, "For those considering Daily SEL for Leaders, my advice is to embrace the opportunity wholeheartedly. The program offers invaluable tools and perspectives that can transform leadership approaches and contribute to a more emotionally intelligent and resilient school community."

