An Investing in Innovation (i3) Grant with the Association of Alaska School Boards

What is the i3 grant?

The Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) is a competitive grant funded by the US Department of Education. The purpose of the program is to expand the implementation of innovative practices that improve student achievement and can serve as models of best practices for other sites across the country. The Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) Alaska ICE has been awarded an i3 grant for Culturally Responsive Embedded Social and Emotional Learning (CRESEL).

What are the anticipated outcomes of CRESEL?

CRESEL supports district and school personnel in helping students effectively master SEL skills – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and decision-making – in ways consistent with their cultural context. Anticipated outcomes include: improved academic achievement; fewer behavioral problems; increased student engagement; improved school climate and cultural connectedness; and reinforcement of SEL in after-school, families and the community.

Who are the partners in CRESEL?

CRESEL is a collaboration between AASB, rural Alaskan school districts, state-wide and national partners. The implementation partners include participating Alaskan school districts, First Alaskans Institute, the Alaska Afterschool Network, and regional organizations. American Institutes for Research (AIR), which has worked with AASB for more than ten years on the School Climate and Connectedness Survey, is the evaluation partner. More than ten funding partners from across Alaska and the nation are contributing to CRESEL.

What are the key activities?

CRESEL has four core activity areas (A) District SEL infrastructure (B) School-wide SEL (C) Out of school time SEL (after school, family, community) and (D) Culturally responsive processes and practices. All of the activities will be implemented in collaboration with and support from AASB and/or other CRESEL partners as indicated.

**District SEL Infrastructure** (District Leadership Team, AASB): (1) Develop district-wide SEL vision, goals, and action plan (2) Review district specific data, e.g. SCCS, YRBS to inform SEL planning (3) Align SEL and the district teaching framework (4) Develop culturally responsive SEL K-12 learning standards and benchmarks (5) Participate in a state-wide learning community (6) Provide coaching support for sites to support SEL implementation in schools and district.

**School-Wide SEL** (School-Based Leadership Team, AASB): (1) Develop a site-based SEL action plan aligned with the district-wide plan (2) Integrate SEL into school-wide expectations, norms, and practices, e.g. PBS (3) Select evidence-based SEL approach that meets the district’s specific needs (4) Participate in professional development.

**Out of School Time SEL** (Alaska Afterschool Network, AASB): (1) Integrate SEL principles in organizing, planning, and carrying out after-school activities (2) Implement district SEL learning standards and benchmarks in afterschool programming, at home, and in the community (3) Participate in professional development to link parents to SEL.
**Culturally Responsive Processes and Practices (First Alaskans, Regional Partners, AASB):** (1) Facilitate family/community visioning conversations to guide culturally responsive SEL (2) Align SEL competencies with cultural values (3) Modify selected evidence-based approach to reflect community culture (4) Develop culturally responsive lessons and assessment (5) Participate in trauma-informed and culture-based professional development to build resiliency and cultural connectedness among students.

**What is an “evidenced-based SEL approach”?**

Evidence-based SEL approaches are well-designed strategies that systematically promote students' social and emotional competence, provide opportunities to practice these skills, and offer multi-year programming. Approaches are considered evidence-based when there is at minimum one carefully conducted evaluation that documents positive impacts on academic performance, pro-social behavior, conduct problems and/or emotional distress. Other considerations are whether the approach utilizes school-wide, family, and community strategies as well.

**What supports will the District receive?**

AASB will work closely with school districts, state and national partners to provide support for each of the core activity areas. Supports and resources include: (1) Facilitation, coaching and professional development for the SEL planning and implementation process (2) Training and resources for establishing trauma-informed schools and policies (3) Criteria for choosing an evidence-based SEL approach that is best suited to the district and community (4) Participation in state and district-wide SEL learning communities (5) Funds over the 3.5 years of the grant to pay for SEL materials, training costs, and stipends for the district project coordinator and SEL coaches.

**What is the District’s role in the grant evaluation?**

CRESEL evaluation is a control trial in which student and teacher outcomes in implementation schools will be compared to outcomes in delayed implementation schools (delay of at minimum one year). We’ll discuss the evaluation activities during the January conference call. The District’s role in evaluation involves:

- Coordinating with AASB and evaluators to ensure appropriate number of schools are participating in early interventions and delayed interventions
- Establishing local memorandums of understanding to support cultural and community alignment
- Assisting with data collection from teachers and permissions needed for student data collected (identifiers on grades 3-12 School Climate and Connectedness Survey, District Staff Survey, Teacher Survey using the mini Devereaux Student Strengths Assessment, and student performance indicators)
- Working closely with evaluators to understand the impact of SEL processes on academic achievement and to improve quality of implementation
- Participating in continuous quality improvement efforts and documentation for project as required

**What is the CRESEL timeline?**

The i3 grant award is over three and a half years and the timeline is reflective of a typical community planning process. The timeline has some flexibility. Year 1 will focus on putting the foundational pieces in place at the district level to support the project and to begin community conversations around culturally embedding SEL. The emphasis in Year 2 will be on ensuring that district-wide and school-based SEL planning activities are aligned and that staff receive essential professional development and coaching so they are prepared for implementation. Full-scale implementation of the evidence-based SEL approach chosen by the district may begin in Year 2 or Year 3. We’ll look at the timeline in more detail during the January conference call and collaboratively develop district-specific timelines after the conference call.

**What is the next step?**

Each district will work with AASB to develop a plan for the next steps of the project. After the January conference calls, AASB will contact you to schedule a phone meeting to map out district-specific dates and the schools that will be involved; discuss the funds the district will receive and develop a budget; and identify a district champion to coordinate the grant activities.

**Who do I contact with grant questions?**

Heather Coulehan, AASB SEL Coordinator
hcoulehan@aasb.org, (907) 462-1660