

15 Social-Emotional Learning Interventions for School and District Teams



About This Resource

Education leaders are on the frontlines of a new, uncertain educational system in 2020-21. With students facing heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and learning loss, it's more important than ever to measure, understand, and support [social-emotional learning \(SEL\)](#).

This resource includes a set of SEL intervention ideas to help district and school teams meet the social-emotional needs of each and every student. These low-lift, actionable strategies are designed to build relationships, foster sense of belonging, and improve the emotional climate in school communities.

This resource is perfect for:

- **District Leaders:** Explore ways to improve your district-wide SEL action plan and share these intervention ideas with your school teams.
- **School Leaders:** Bring these interventions to PLCs, staff meetings, or Student Support team meetings to embed social-emotional learning into the fabric of your school.
- **Teachers and Counselors:** Try these interventions with your students (both in-person and virtually) to strengthen relationships and support student wellbeing.



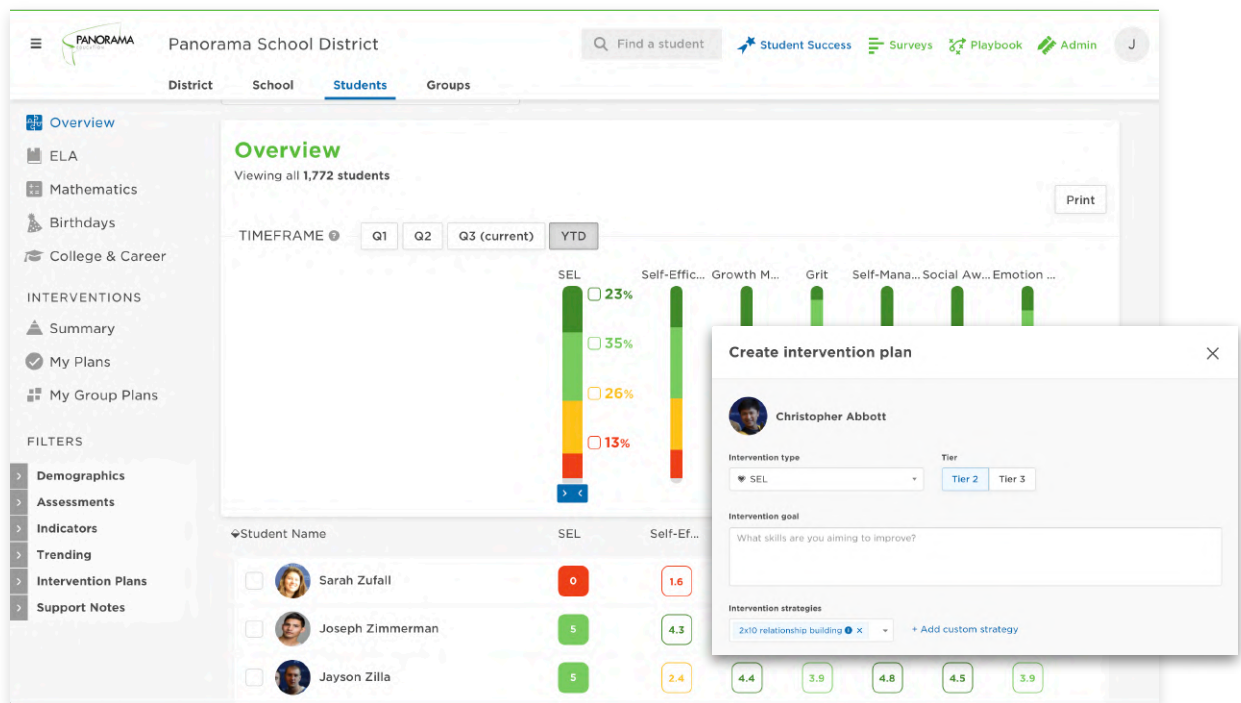
Do you have questions about this resource or about Panorama?

Please get in touch with us at contact@panoramaed.com.

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About Panorama for Social-Emotional Learning



[Panorama for Social-Emotional Learning](#) helps districts support systemic SEL with research-backed surveys and actionable data reports. Panorama's leading analytics platform makes it easy for educators to collaboratively explore survey data, identify and communicate about at-risk students, build and track intervention plans, and access interventions to build students' SEL skills.

Today, 17,000 schools and 1,500 districts serving 10 million students trust Panorama, including the New York City Department of Education, Dallas Independent School District, and San Francisco Unified School District.

[Get a Demo](#)

Intervention #1

2x10 Relationship Building

Support students by providing them with a set of calming techniques and deep breathing strategies to support their self-regulation and self-control skills.

Introduction:

Educators (or school leaders) select a student and set a goal to engage in a brief conversation with that same student for **2 minutes a day on 10 consecutive days**. In this way, we seek to build students' social awareness, self-awareness and relationship skills by modeling empathy and active listening while conveying care.

Instructions:

- Choose one student who you would like to strengthen your relationship with.
- Find this student and start a conversation with them. To build a productive relationship with a student, adults will likely have to initiate the connection.
- The focus of these conversations should be about:
 - **Brevity.** These conversations should last two minutes or under.
 - **Student Voice.** Invite them to share something non-academic with you about their day or life.
 - **Honesty.** Model transparency and authenticity by sharing something personal/non-academic with the student.
- The content of your conversation should not relate to the student's schoolwork or behavior.

This intervention was inspired by:

Wlodkowski, R. J. (1983). Motivational opportunities for successful teaching [Leader's Guide]. Phoenix, AZ: Universal Dimensions.

Intervention #2:

Rose, Bud, Thorn

Courtesy of inspirED (via Panorama's Playbook)

“Rose, Bud, Thorn” is a protocol that prompts students to describe their emotions, promoting empathy, social awareness, and gratitude. Participants share a “Rose” (positive in their lives), a “Bud” (something they are looking forward to), and a “Thorn” (something they feel they need support with).

Instructions:

1. Prompt students to reflect on a “Rose,” “Bud,” and “Thorn” for either the day so far, the last week, or the month.
2. Ask students to jot down their reflections and prepare to share their answers with the group.
3. Have students “turn and talk” in small groups, or share out to the whole group, in a whip-around style.

Other Tips:

“Rose, Bud, Thorn” can integrate seamlessly into academic instruction. Students might complete a “Rose, Bud, Thorn” as a bell ringer or exit ticket to foster metacognition about their own learning process. This protocol is also a great conversation starter in 1-1 interactions with students.

For example, while a middle schooler might respond “Good” to a standard “How are you?” asking them to identify their highs, lows, and in-betweens might engender a more authentic reflection. Finally, through the lens of restorative practice, “Rose, Bud, Thorn” is an excellent prompt for classroom and community circles.

About inspirED. inspirED is a collaboration between Facebook and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence that aims to bring social and emotional learning (SEL) and greater well-being to high school students around the country.

Intervention #3:

“Superstar” Icebreaker Game

Courtesy of Playworks (via Panorama’s Playbook)

Icebreaker games promote respect, encourage playfulness, promote inclusion, and build a sense of community.

Introduction:

Icebreakers are an effective and fun way to help students explore and deepen relationships. Some ice breaker games focus on learning each others’ names while others encourage students to share information about themselves or simply be silly in front of others. Participation in these icebreakers also helps students feel more comfortable engaging in further games and activities, and are a great tool for new groups of students at the start of the year. Superstar is a simple, quick, and equipment-less game to try.

Instructions:

1. *Pre-Game:* [Watch this overview video explaining how to facilitate “Superstar.”](#)
2. *Pre-Game:* Explain the purpose of the game and the rules. Demonstrate together with another student what to do (find a commonality not previously known).
3. *Practice:* Announcing the practice round, watch for how students are pairing together. Are they partnering with a student they know less well? What are the topics they are sharing? Do they need help thinking through more examples? Pause the practice round after several minutes and reflect on examples that the students are offering.
4. *Play:* Play the game for real!
5. *Post-Game:* Conclude with some reflection questions, such as: how many of you found somebody who also likes ____? Was there something you discovered that you have in common with one partner but not another?

About Playworks. Playworks helps kids to stay active and build valuable social and emotional life skills through the power of play. Playworks is the leading national nonprofit leveraging the power of play to transform children’s emotional health.

Intervention #4:

Empathy Exercise

Courtesy of Teaching Tolerance (via Panorama's Playbook)

Encourage students to be more empathetic and increase perceptions of connectedness in your classroom.

Introduction:

This short exercise helps students reflect on how empathetic they are in specific situations using a short self-reflection questionnaire.

Instructions:

1. Collaborate with students to develop a definition of empathy by asking students how they define the term and sharing examples of empathetic behavior that they have seen in their peers.
2. Distribute copies of the [“Are You Empathetic”](#) guide to students. Remind them that this questionnaire isn’t a test, and that it is designed to help them reflect on their own behaviors and attitudes. Ask them to consider each situation and to respond to the questionnaire honestly.
3. Encourage students to reflect on one behavior they could change to make them more empathetic - ask students to write their idea down on the questionnaire. Consider asking students to share a behavior or action they’ve agreed to take in the next week to become more empathetic.
4. After 1-2 weeks, ask students to share what they’ve learned, emphasizing specific situations where their decision to behave with more empathy made a difference in how they were able to relate to a classmate or family member.

About Teaching Tolerance. Teaching Tolerance is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center and is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving inter-group relations, and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children. Teaching Tolerance provides free educational materials, a self-titled magazine, and award-winning film and curriculum kits.

Intervention #5:

Cooldown Process

Courtesy of the EASEL Lab at Harvard

Providing students with a step-by-step process to de-escalate when experiencing high intensity emotions.

Instructions:

- Lead students through the step-by-step process:
 - (1) Pause.**
 - (2) Identify feeling(s).**
 - (3) Choose something that helps you cool down.**
 - (4) Go!**
- Consider hanging-up a [Cooldown Poster](#) somewhere visible in school buildings or classrooms to offer it as a tool for students (as needed).

Virtual Adaptation:

- Screen-share a Cooldown Process visual (see below) as you review each step with the class via Zoom, GoToMeeting, or Google Hangouts. If desired, have students create their own short videos or audio-recordings explaining what the Cooldown Process looks like or feels like for them.



About the EASEL Lab at Harvard. The Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory, led by Dr. Stephanie Jones of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, explores the effects of high-quality social-emotional interventions on the development and achievement of children, youth, teachers, parents, and communities.

Intervention #6:

Self-Talk Superhero

Courtesy of the EASEL Lab at Harvard

Providing students with opportunities to practice using positive self-talk during challenging situations.

Instructions:

1. Explain what self-talk is (e.g., the way we speak to ourselves in our own mind).
2. Model for students what self-talk looks like by sharing an example of your own internal dialogue during a difficult situation. Consider including examples of positive versus negative self-talk Explain how negative self-talk can decrease one's confidence and dampen one's mood, while positive self-talk can do the opposite.
3. Ask students to share times when their self-talk has helped them persevere.
4. Have students close their eyes and imagine their own tiny little hero sitting on their shoulder, always ready to encourage them.
5. Allow students to share what their **self-talk superhero's** favorite words or phrases are. (Share a few examples from your own self-talk superhero to model it!)

Virtual Adaptation:

- Provide online spaces for students to share affirmations or words of encouragement to one another. Consider using virtual chat rooms, video conferencing tools, or creating a [notes of gratitude and appreciation submission form online](#). Challenge students to practice this exercise regularly on their own & have them track this practice on a calendar or checklist.

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Intervention #7:

Feelings Journal

Courtesy of Second Step (via Panorama's Playbook)

Help students become more aware of their feelings and what they can do to regulate strong feelings.

Instructions:

Have students keep a daily feelings journal for one week. At least once each day, have students record their feelings and in what situations they arose. In addition to recording their feelings each day, have students respond to different writing prompts:

- **Day 1:** Describe one or more situations when your feelings could get out of control. What is the feeling you might experience in that situation? What word or words could you use to signal to help stop your escalating feelings?
- **Day 2:** In the situation you described on Day 1, let's say you decide to use deep, centered breathing to help you calm down. Describe in full sentences what you do when you use this technique.
- **Day 3:** In the situation you described on Day 1, what are three positive things you could say to yourself that would help you calm down?
- **Day 4:** Describe in full sentences two other things in addition to deep, centered breathing and positive self-talk that you could do to help yourself calm down.
- **Day 5:** Reflect on your week. Did you use any techniques for calming down this week? If yes, did they help you? Which technique worked best for you? Which technique didn't work? How might these techniques help you in the future?

At the end of the week, have students reflect on the range of feelings they recorded during the week and if their feelings changed from day to day.

About Second Step. The Second Step Suite provides an integrated framework for protecting children and promoting their social, emotional, and academic success. The Second Step SEL program has simplified an approach for safe, supportive schools.

Intervention #8:

Good News

Courtesy of Wings for Kids (via Panorama's Playbook)

As students share good news, they work to display self-confidence, practice naming and sharing emotions, and take turns listening to each other.

Introduction:

“Good News” is a time for children and adults to share experiences related to a current lesson/unit of study, or to just share exciting news. It is a ritual that can be used to begin or wrap-up time together.

Instructions:

A "Good News" topic is shared with the whole group and then one at a time volunteers take turns standing up and sharing their response. The teacher or adult helps facilitate and asks follow-up questions to the student who is sharing. Some examples of self-awareness topics include:

- Tell us what emotions you felt on the way to school and why you felt that way.
- Tell us something someone did for you this week that made you feel loved.
- Name one thing or situation that makes you feel nervous. Why?
- What part of your day do you feel most excited about? Why?
- Name something unique about you and why you like that about yourself.

Allowing time for students to share and get to know one another helps build a sense of community and belonging. It provides a safe place for students to practice speaking confidently in front of a group and to practice active listening.

About Wings for Kids. Wings for Kids uses an early and comprehensive approach grounded in the principles of positive youth development and evidence-based social emotional learning practices to foster the mindsets, skills, and confidence within each child.

Intervention #9:

Positive and Constructive Feedback

Courtesy of Wings for Kids (via Panorama's Playbook)

This method is used to increase positive behaviors and/or handle more negative behaviors in a quick & effective manner.

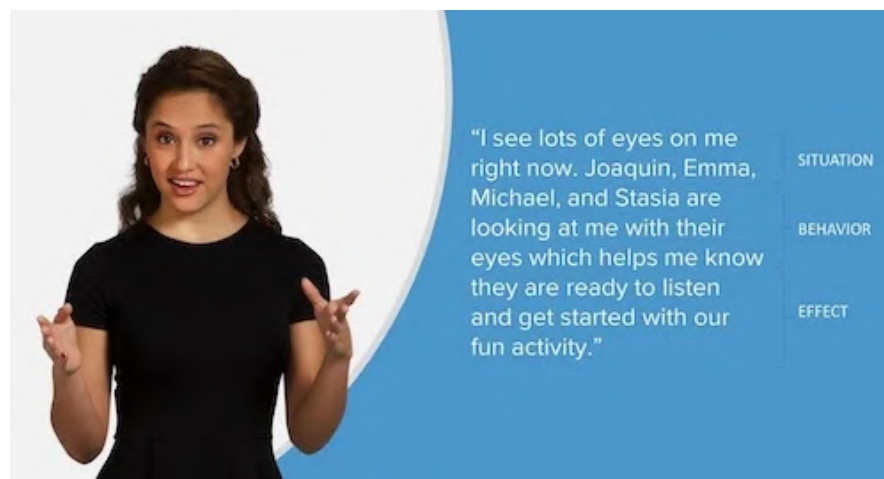
Introduction:

This simple technique can be used to give both positive as well as constructive feedback to help shape behaviors and reinforce the ones we wish to continue. This technique encourages adults to use self-awareness and self-management to give attention towards students in a helpful way.

Instructions:

When a situation arises, share feedback with the student(s) involved.

- *Describe the situation* → name exactly when and where the behavior occurred
- *Describe the behavior* → tell the student(s) exactly what they did
- *Describe the effect* → say what specifically happened as a result of the behavior



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Intervention #10:

Support Systems

Courtesy of Better Kids (via Panorama's Playbook)

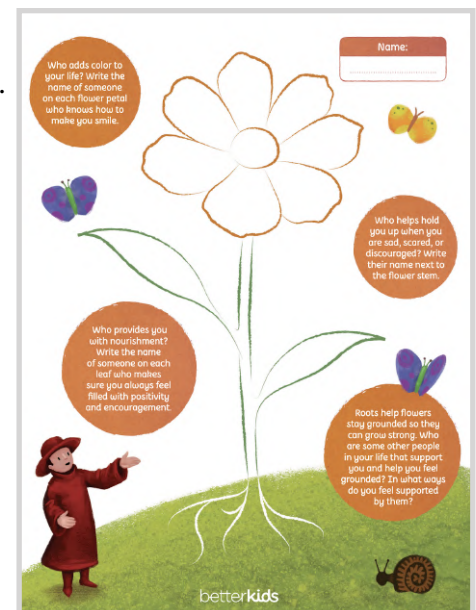
Students are able to identify their support systems and recognize how they feel supported by those individuals.

Introduction:

During times of uncertainty, when routines are disrupted, it is important to identify who we feel most supported by. Looking at the essential parts of a flower can be a tangible way for students to identify their support systems.

Instructions:

- Download and distribute this [worksheet](#) to students.
- Explain what a support system is (e.g., a group of people including friends, family members, and other caring adults).
- Elaborate that each part of the flower represents someone in their support system.
- Complete your own worksheet to model what a support system looks like. Consider including individuals that students will know (e.g., other teachers or caring adults in your school community, parents, or friends).
- After students complete their own worksheet, discuss how each child feels supported by the various people in their support system.



About Better Kids. Better Kids helps educators and families support children's emotional well being through digital and hands-on social emotional learning games.



Intervention #11:

Temperature Check

Courtesy of CharacterStrong (via Panorama's Playbook)

To provide teachers an insight into students' lives so they can act upon the information they share in an intentional manner.

Instructions:

Choose a day of the week to conduct a **Temperature Check** with your students. This could be something they do at the beginning of class or when they are about to exit the classroom. Instruct students to take out a piece of paper and write down:

- *Their name*
- *How they are feeling (on a scale of 1-5)*
- *Why they chose this number and why they are feeling this way*

Virtual Adaptation:

- This check-in activity can be recreated for virtual use to ensure that students are still supported while learning from home and have opportunities to label how they feel while school buildings are closed.
- Send out a Google Form ([you can adapt/customize this one from our team Panorama Education](#)) as an asynchronous way to learn how students are feeling and what supports they need.

About CharacterStrong. CharacterStrong is an organization that provides curricula and trainings for schools internationally to help educators infuse character and SEL into the daily fabric of any classroom or campus.



Intervention #12:

4 at the Door + 1 More

Courtesy of CharacterStrong (via Panorama's Playbook)

This intentional way to greet students builds relationships and increases student engagement.

Instructions:

Any time students enter your classroom, stand outside your door to greet them using the following protocols:

Eye to Eye: Intentionally look students in the eye as they are entering class. There is not an expectation that students make eye contact back, as we need to be sensitive to various cultures/comfort levels. The purpose is to articulate: "I see you and you matter."

Name to Name: Learn the names of your students and use their names as they enter. Greet every student who enters your room by their name. If you don't know it, ask them and make it a priority to remember it. Once you have all of their names down start learning the names of others who are in the hallway. The role modeling of asking for someone's name demonstrates humility.

Elbow to Elbow: As much as possible, connect with students using elbow bumps (if allowed in your school). Remember that relationships are crucial and offering this kindness might be the only unconditional, caring contact that your student receives all day. One tip is to offer students the choice of how they would like to be greeted.

Heart to Heart: Connect with your students as human beings each day before they enter as students. Ask questions asking about their weekend, their hobbies, or how their day is going. This is a great opportunity to notice haircuts, celebrate birthdays, or congratulate about other successes.

+ One More: Engagement happens by having something purposeful for students to engage with right when they enter the room. This should quickly become an expectation and habit! Right when I walk into this class, students can use journal or notebook to reflect on a question or quote on the board. This should be a task related to the content of the day or something intentional to see how they are all emotionally entering the space. This content should feel engaging and relevant.

About CharacterStrong. CharacterStrong is an organization that provides curricula and trainings for schools internationally to help educators infuse character and SEL into the daily fabric of any classroom or campus.



Intervention #13:

Bear Belly Breathing

Courtesy of BreatheForChange (via Panorama's Playbook)

This mindful breathing exercise calms the mind, relaxes the body, and increases student engagement.

Introduction:

This simple activity for young students (K-3) is designed to help introduce them to mindful breathing. Make sure to do all five steps with the same person.

Instructions:

1. Grab a bear hat, puppet, or stuffed animal if you have one handy!
2. Breathing Bears! Settle into a comfortable seated position on your bear tails.
3. Bring out your bear paws and let me hear your bear growls!
4. Now, silently place your bear paws on your big bear bellies. Focus your eyes on one point or gently close them.
5. Inhale, feeling your big bear bellies fill up with breath. Exhale, letting your bear air go.
6. Pay attention to your bear paws as they move in and out with each bear belly breath.
7. Let's take one final collective bear belly breath together: inhale, biggest breath of the day! Now, exhale -- let it go!
8. Slowly begin to wiggle your bear paws, open your eyes, and smile at your bear friends across the circle.

For more information and pedagogical pointers, [download the facilitator guide](#).

For a version of this exercise for secondary students, [download this set of instructions](#).

About Breathe For Change. Breathe for Change is on a mission to foster individual and collective well-being for all humankind. The organization offers mind-body & social-emotional wellness trainings that unite, train, and support educators in enhancing their own well-being and building adult capacity for social-emotional learning.



Intervention #14:

Two Word Check-In

Courtesy of BreatheForChange (via Panorama's Playbook)

Take stock of where everyone in your community is at during the start or end of class, or during a community circle.

Introduction:

This simple yet powerful exercise enhances emotional awareness, promotes authenticity & builds community. Before starting this activity, brainstorm a list of feelings with students and draw/label them with facial expressions on the board.

Instructions:

1. Find a comfortable seat and settle into a community circle.
2. Place both hands on your heart and connect to your breathe. Keep a soft gaze or close your eyes.
3. Take a deep breath in, and a deep breath out.
4. As you continue to breathe, notice how you are feeling right now. What emotions are you experiencing inside you? Every emotion is welcome -- give yourself permission to be exactly as you are. Take a few more moments to connect to how you are feeling.
5. Now, **choose two words to describe how you are feeling.**
6. When you have your two words in mind, softly open your eyes.
7. To close this activity, we will take turns sharing our two words around the circle.
8. End with some reflection questions. How did it feel to connect to your feelings? What was it like to hear everyone else sharing their two words?

For differentiation recommendations and pointers, [download the facilitator guide](#).

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Intervention #15:

Home Visits

Increase student success by building trust and authentic relationships between families, educators, and students.

Introduction:

One strategy that is both conducive to distance learning and effective in engaging with caregivers as true parents is to implement a parent-teacher home visit program. [Research](#) points to numerous benefits when teachers visit the homes of their students, including increased connection between teachers and parents, more parental engagement in a child's academics and increased trust and communication.

Best Practices:

- Visits should be voluntary for educators and families, but administrators should seek at least 50 percent participation from a school's staff.
- Home visits should always be arranged in advance. It's helpful for schools to decide if they want educators to visit families once or twice per year and whether that first visit will take place before the school year begins. Some districts also follow up home visits with family dinners at the school to continue deepening school-family ties.
- Educators should visit in teams of two. In some cases, teachers partner with other teachers, social workers or the school nurse to help address a student's well-being in a more comprehensive manner.
- The goal of the first home visit is to build relationships. Educators should talk about families' hopes and aspirations for their students.
- During the pandemic, consider trying virtual or physically distanced home visits.

This intervention was inspired by:

The Parent Teacher Home Visits program and Teaching Tolerance's Home Visits guide.

Learn more at: [the Parent-Teacher Home Visits Project](#) and [Teaching Tolerance](#).

About Panorama Education

Panorama Education partners with K-12 schools and districts across the country to collect and analyze data about social-emotional learning, school climate, family engagement, and more. With research-backed surveys and a leading technology platform, Panorama helps educators act on data and improve student outcomes. Panorama supports more than 10 million students in 17,000 schools across 49 states, including those in the New York City Department of Education, Dallas Independent School District, Seattle Public Schools, and San Francisco Unified School District.

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