



CASEL *briefs*

December 2007

Background on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): A Key to Children's Success in School and Life

Our national commitment to public education means we as a nation believe every child deserves the opportunity to learn to his or her fullest capacity. To succeed in school, students need to be engaged, interested, and excited to be there. They need to know how to focus their attention on their work, keep trying even when they get discouraged or face setbacks, work effectively with other students and adults, and be good communicators and problem-solvers. These skills form a foundation for young people's success not just in school, but in their adult lives as members of the community, as productive workers, and as parents.

Reliable research now tells us that not only can these skills be taught; they can be taught by regular classroom teachers in schools of every type to students of every background. Programs that teach these skills are increasingly referred to as “**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)**” programs.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a not-for-profit organization based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has recently completed studies that clearly show that students who receive SEL programming academically outperform their peers, compared to those who do not receive SEL. Those students also get better grades and graduate at higher rates. Effective SEL programming drives academic learning, and it also drives social outcomes such as positive peer relationships, caring and empathy, and social engagement. Social and emotional instruction also leads to reductions in problem behavior such as drug use, violence, and delinquency.

The research is clear: attending to the social and emotional learning of children is a hugely profitable investment in their success in school and their future success as adults. It is also an investment in the well-being of our schools. The research

on effective schools makes clear that schools where faculty are guided by a Big Idea—where they share a vision of what they are trying to accomplish for their students, how they will get there, and how everything they do contributes to that end—are the most successful. SEL is exactly this kind of Big Idea.

What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)?

- SEL is a process for helping children and even adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. SEL teaches the skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work, effectively and ethically.
- These skills include recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. They are the skills that allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices.
- Many of the programs that teach SEL skills have now been rigorously evaluated and found to have positive impacts. According to reliable research, schools are a highly effective setting for teaching SEL skills.
- SEL is also a framework for school improvement. Teaching SEL skills helps create and maintain safe, caring learning environments. The most beneficial programs provide sequential and developmentally appropriate instruction in SEL skills. They are implemented in a coordinated manner, schoolwide, from preschool through high school. Lessons are reinforced in the classroom, during out-of-school activities, and at home. Educators receive ongoing professional development in SEL. And families and schools work together to promote children's social, emotional, and academic success.



Why Is Social and Emotional Learning Important? What the Research Says

SEL is based on rigorous research in multiple fields clearly indicating that our emotions and relationships affect how and what we learn. A growing body of research findings has demonstrated that:

- SEL promotes positive development among children and youth, reduces problem behaviors, and improves academic performance, citizenship, and health-related behaviors.
- Academic outcomes promoted by SEL include greater motivation to learn and commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork and mastery of subject matter, improved attendance and graduation rates, and improved grades and test scores.
- Students in schools that use an evidence-based SEL curriculum (one that has been scientifically evaluated and found effective) significantly improve in their attitudes toward school, their behaviors, and their academic performance. A recent review of 30 studies found that SEL results in improvements in students' achievement test scores—by an average of 11 percentile points over students who are not involved in SEL programming.¹
- Early investments in SEL yield long-term dividends. One major multi-year study found that by the time they were adults, students who received SEL in grades 1-6 had an 11 percent higher grade-point average and significantly greater levels of school commitment and attachment to school at age 18.
- The same research showed that even as SEL programs produce positive effects in students, they also prevent negative outcomes. The retention (hold-back) rate of students who received SEL in grades 1-6 was 14 percent, versus 23 percent of students in a control group. The same students at age 18 showed a 30 percent lower incidence of school behavior problems, a 20 percent lower rate of violent delinquency, and a 40 percent lower rate of heavy alcohol use.²
- The effectiveness of SEL is broad-based. Several hundred studies have documented the positive effects of SEL programming on children of diverse backgrounds from preschool through high school in a wide variety of settings.³

¹ From a forthcoming report by Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Taylor, R.D., Dymnicki, A.B., & Schellinger, K. (2008).

² Source: Hawkins, J.D., Catalano, R.F., Kosterman, R., Abbott, R., & Hill, K.G. (1999) Preventing adolescent health-risk behaviors by strengthening protection during childhood. *Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med.*, 153, 226-234.

³ Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., and Elias, M.J. (2003). *School-*

- SEL programming is supported by a growing body of rigorous social science research. Joseph A. Durlak of Loyola University Chicago and Roger P. Weissberg of the University of Illinois at Chicago recently analyzed 207 studies of SEL programs. Their findings confirm the positive effects of SEL programming on students participating in school-based SEL programs and provide the best overview of the positive effects of SEL available to date. In previous studies they also found that SEL programs with the best outcomes are multi-year in duration, use interactive rather than purely knowledge-based instructional methods, and are integrated into the life of the school rather than being implemented as marginal add-ons.⁴
- SEL is related to other national youth development and prevention initiatives, such as character education and school-based health promotion programs. But SEL is significantly different because it systematically addresses the numerous social and emotional variables that place youth at risk for school failure, such as a lack of attachment to a significant adult or the inability to manage emotions. SEL provides educators with a common language and framework to organize their activities. Many programs related to children's social and emotional development focus on a single problem or issue such as preventing substance use. SEL, however, is an inclusive approach that covers the entire spectrum of social and emotional competencies that help children to be resilient and successful learners.

As educators debate the best ways to promote student success, they have tended to distinguish between the emotional and the academic aspects of children's learning. Growing evidence now suggests, however, that these two kinds of learning are intimately connected.

Promoting students' social and emotional skills is critical to improving their academic performance and their success in life.

based prevention: Promoting positive social development through social and emotional learning. *American Psychologist*, 58(6/7), 466-474.

⁴ Durlak, J.A., et al., *op.cit.* Also: Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.) (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* NY: Teachers College Press.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): At the Forefront of a New Movement

Founded in 1994 by a group that included Daniel Goleman, author of *Social Intelligence* and *Emotional Intelligence*, and educator-philanthropist Eileen Rockefeller Growald, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been a pioneer in the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). With the mission of establishing SEL as an essential part of every child's education, CASEL, a not-for-profit organization based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, provides national and international leadership to enhance scientific research on SEL and to expand the effective practice of SEL in schools.

CASEL's early years focused on gathering scientific evidence to demonstrate the contributions of Social and Emotional Learning to school success, health, well-being, peer and family relationships, and student citizenship. CASEL still conducts scientific research and reviews the best available evidence of the effectiveness of SEL programming. In addition, CASEL provides SEL practitioners and school administrators with the guidelines, tools, informational resources, policies, training, and supports they need to improve and expand SEL programming in schools.

CASEL's accomplishments include:

Landmark Research, Publications, and Studies

- The first major book on school-based SEL programming, which identified a research-based framework for implementing effective programs (*Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*, ASCD, 1997).
- A comprehensive review of 80 scientifically evaluated SEL programs that provides a road map for schools and districts interested in launching, adding, or integrating social, emotional, and academic learning programs (*Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*, CASEL, 2003).
- An in-depth review of the scientific research linking SEL programming and academic success (*Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?*, Teachers College Press at Columbia University, 2004).
- Publication of a detailed "meta-analysis" of research on 73 after-school programs for young people. The study found that these programs had a positive impact in three major areas: feelings and attitudes, indicators of behavioral adjustment, and school performance (*The Impact of After-School Programs that Promote Personal and Social Skills*, CASEL, 2007).

Support for Effective SEL Program Implementation

- Active involvement as advisers to the State of Illinois in developing the first statewide learning standards in the country for Social and Emotional Learning for grades K-12. These standards were adopted by the state legislature in 2004. CASEL continues to work closely with the Illinois State Board of Education to assist schools throughout the state in effective SEL program implementation.
- Publication of *Implementing Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning: Implementation Guide and Toolkit* (2006), a comprehensive guide and framework for effective school-based SEL programming. The guide serves as the State of Illinois' framework for state-funded SEL implementation and has been distributed to schools worldwide.
- Training and technical support for implementing effective SEL programs through a series of CASEL workshops and direct onsite consultation with participating schools. CASEL currently provides professional development training to nearly 100 schools in Illinois and provides training and technical assistance to national centers that work with schools throughout the country.

Organizational Partnerships

- One of four organizations constituting the National Training and Technical Assistance Center for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, serving schools and school-based substance abuse prevention coordinators nationwide.
- A partner in the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, providing expertise to grantees of the federally funded Safe Schools/Healthy Students program in how to implement and evaluate Social and Emotional Learning programs.

CASEL'S funding has come from a variety of sources. These include the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the following foundations: the Fetzer Institute, the Ford Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, the Surdna Foundation, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Randi and David Zussman Family Foundation, and the William T. Grant Foundation. Donors include: Eileen Rockefeller Growald, Irving B. Harris, the CASEL Board of Directors and staff, and others.

CASEL is unique in education today. It is an organization devoted to improving education by bridging theory, research, and practice—and to pursuing the goals of school improvement and student success through continuing dialog and collaboration with educators. ■





**Collaborative for Academic, Social, and
Emotional Learning (CASEL)**

**Promoting Children's Success
in School and Life**

**For more information about CASEL and Social and Emotional
Learning, please visit our website:
www.CASEL.org**