

Policy Brief from Research to Real World: Linking Policy, Practice, and Philanthropy Advances in Social Emotional Learning and Its Application in Policy and Practice in K-12 Education

A third grade boy had been repeatedly sent to the principal's office for misbehaving, and his problem behaviors were escalating. Then his school began implementation of a social emotional learning curriculum. During a classroom discussion about feelings, the boy shares that his parents were going through a divorce. The teacher recognizes that this child's behavior was communicating the challenges he was dealing with at home, and fellow students showed more compassion and viewed the student as someone other than a bully.

In almost every classroom there are students dealing with experiences such as social challenges, bullying, or learning struggles. Also, there is likely to be a child experiencing a crisis - a family upheaval such as divorce, death, separation, parental mental health or legal problems, or other circumstance beyond the child's control. Schools can provide a safe haven for students who benefit from the stability and emotional support that result from social and emotional programs and learning. Teachers, students, and communities benefit.

Why SEL Matters

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to curricula and classroom contexts that promote social-emotional skills, including self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, social skills and responsible decision making. These are tools children need to meet academic standards and achievement goals.

SEL in K-12 education can build well-being and resilience in the face of stress and adversity, reduce bullying, and mental health concerns; and culturally responsive SEL standards can reduce disproportionate discipline directed at children of color and in minority groups (i.e. special needs, English language learners, etc.). SEL programs often address the early warning indicators of school drop-out, including problems with attendance, behavior and course performance.

SEL is not just for kids. Adults working with children are more effective if they have self-awareness of their reactions and judgments, effective stress management skills, and practical strategies for cultivating positive classroom environments.

SEL is Effective

An analysis of SEL programs demonstrates that SEL programs result in:

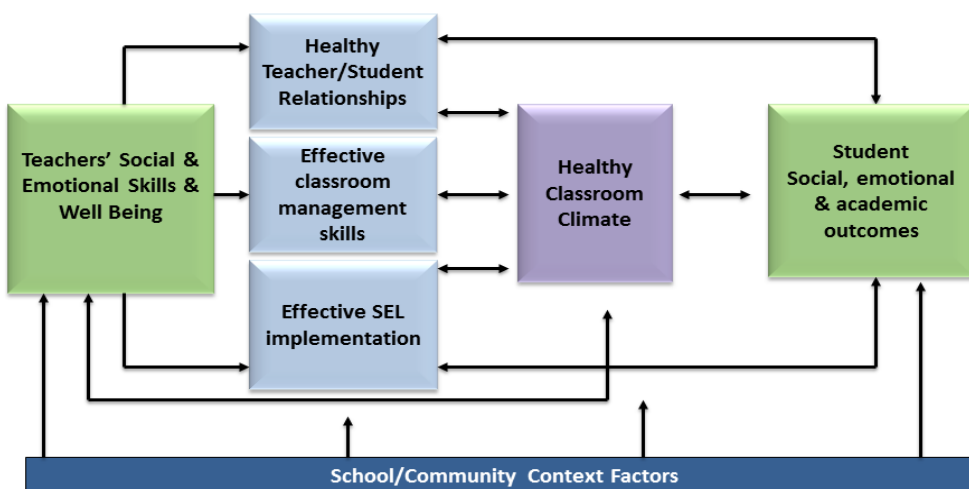
- 22% increase in social-emotional skills
- 11% increase in academic achievement
- 9% increases in positive attitudes toward learning and pro-social behavior
- 9% reductions in behavioral and emotional problems

SEL is successfully implemented with:

- Coordinated school, family, and community programming that supports SEL in all of children's environments
- Professional training and on-going support for teachers and those working with youth
- Teacher, school, and community commitment
- Continuity from early childhood standards to build on skills as children transition to grade school.

The Prosocial Classroom:

A Model of Teacher Social and Emotional Competence and Classroom and Child Outcomes — Jennings & Greenberg, 2009



Beyond Childhood

- Research shows that childhood self-control and social connectedness predict adult well-being and success.
- Business leaders rank "21st century skills," that is, teamwork, problem solving, interpersonal and communication skills, at the top of their list of needed workplace skills. In the 1970s writing, computation and reading skills made the top of the list.

What you can do to promote Social-Emotional Learning:

“The laser focus on academic standards has resulted in important gains in achievement. But those gains are at a plateau, and now we have to address barriers to student learning and focus on the skills that will move children to the next level.” Greg Williamson, OSPI

Policy/Advocacy Professionals

Policy makers should work to include K-12 social and emotional learning standards in their definition of basic education. College and Career ready standards place an emphasis on self-control, goal setting and collaboration, in addition to academic standards. Instruction in social and emotional learning can develop the capacity of students for this work. In addition, social and emotional learning focuses on developing skills that prepare children to be ready to learn and succeed in school and in life, potentially helping to close the achievement gap.

To accomplish this, there is a need to expand the availability of evidence-based SEL program and professional development. School districts are interested in teaching students social and emotional competencies such as self-control, goal setting, collaboration, conflict resolution, and problems solving, and would benefit from guidance and access to resources for this work. Highlighting schools and districts successfully teaching and implementing SEL can facilitate decision making in other districts.

Policy makers should remember that good SEL begins with good relationships. Relationships matter in education. Teachers and those working with students need to have the time and space to develop relationships with their students. They also need the tools and training to learn how to work with *all* students.

“It needs to start as a public-will campaign.” Lynne Tucker, School’s Out Washington

Administrators

Professional training and support are fundamental to successful SEL implementation and effective classrooms. There should be increased attention to educator training in SEL, child mental health and effective classroom management, and support for everyone—principals, teachers, and other support personnel -- coming into contact with children in schools. When adults recognize and experience the benefits to the effectiveness of their classrooms and children’s learning and achievement, they are more likely to em-

brace the incorporation of SEL in their ways of working with students.

Practice

Educators and out-of-school program providers can advocate for training by a certified provider to ensure quality implementation of programs. With quality implementation, educators can experience first-hand the benefits to the classroom climate, teaching effectiveness, and student achievement, and can serve as advocates for “buy in” for other teachers, schools or systems.

“SEL is a ‘Two-for-One’: it promotes social-emotional skills and academic achievement.” Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, University of British Columbia

Parents

Parents and primary caregivers are children's first and most important teachers. They lay the foundation that supports growth in SEL skills and academics. Parents and primary caregivers can support their children's SEL development by cultivating and maintaining warm, consistent and responsive relationships, by advocating for their children’s educational needs, and by cultivating strong home-school partnerships.

They can also actively seek out information about what their children's school is doing to promote SEL and what teachers, coaches, and other out-of-school time providers are doing to infuse their classrooms and activities with SEL across learning areas, such as math, science, art, music, and technology. Ask your child to tell you what he or she is learning and find opportunities to help your child practice the skills in real situations that they encounter. Reinforce your child for using these skills by noticing, validating, and acknowledging them.

Philanthropy

Encourage and support whole-child approaches that attend to the roots of inequity, including poverty and family adversity, and approaches that coordinate family, school and community level programming to promote child well-being and resilience, including professional development, adoption of research-supported curricula and programs, parenting support, assessment, afterschool and out-of-school programs.

References: *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century.* http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13398. Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). Enhancing students' social and emotional development promotes success in school: Results of a meta-analysis. *Child Development, 82*, 474–501.