Addressing Social-Emotional Learning

Center on Innovation & Improvement

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a powerful strategy for helping all students achieve well-being and school success (Payton et al., 2008; Zins et al., 2004). SEL refers to the acquisition of skills that allow students to calm themselves when angry or anxious, focus their attention, persist toward goals, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. SEL is based on research demonstrating that our emotions and relationships affect how and what we learn. SEL focuses on five core groups of social and emotional competencies:

- Self-awareness—accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.

- Self-management—regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; achieving personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately.

- Social awareness—being able to empathize with others; appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; effectively using family, school, and community resources.

- Relationship skills—interacting cooperatively with others; resisting inappropriate social pressure; dealing effectively with interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed.

- Responsible decision-making—making decisions based on factors such as ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences; applying decision-making skills to daily situations.

In collaboration with university-based research teams, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has conducted a rigorous quantitative review (meta-analysis) of more than 200 school-based studies on SEL involving approximately 270,000 children and youth in the general classroom (Durlak et al., in press). The study found that SEL programs demonstrated the following positive outcomes:

- Academic performance, including substantial increases in achievement test scores.

- SEL skills, including empathy, self-awareness, and self-management skills.

- Attitudes about self, others, and school—students showed greater motivation to learn and deeper commitment to school.

- Pro-social behavior—examples include increased time devoted to schoolwork, better classroom behavior, and improved attendance and graduation rates.

- Decreased problem behavior—studies found reductions in disruptive class behavior, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals.

The same research showed that SEL skills can be taught, and they can be taught by regular classroom teachers in schools of every type (rural, urban, and suburban) and to students of every background.

Action Principles

For State

1. Create a statewide SEL leadership team involving key stakeholders.

2. Develop policies, plans, and guidelines promoting integration of SEL into school improvement plans.

3. Disseminate information to educators and the public about advances in research, practices, and policies that foster the social, emotional, and academic growth of students.

4. Establish demonstration sites for SEL implementation.

5. Provide resources to support SEL in schools (training, coaching, funding for evidence-based curricula, assessment).

For District

1. Develop an implementation and phase-in plan for SEL based on an assessment of district resources and needs.

2. Pick high-quality, evidence-based SEL programs that have effective implementation support systems.

3. Provide professional development that fosters a deep understanding of SEL at both the district and school level.

4. Provide coaching to support the quality of teachers' SEL practice.

5. Utilize assessment tools developed specifically to monitor and improve SEL processes and outcomes for ongoing improvement.

6. Integrate SEL strategies and practices with academic areas and student support.

7. Identify principals who will make a commitment to school-wide SEL implementation and integration.

For School

1. Develop a cadre of leaders within the school who understand and support SEL and who will function as the school's SEL leadership team.

2. Provide time and resources for intensive professional development and coaching, including peer coaching, so that SEL is integrated at every grade and across the curriculum.

3. Communicate regularly with families and the school-community about SEL progress and successes.

References and Resources

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning website: www.CASEL.org. See in particular the section on program and implementation guides: http://www.casel.org/pub/sel.php

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (In press). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*.

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Payton, J., Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Schellinger, K. B., & Pachan, M. (2008). *The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews*. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

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?* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.