

# School-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programming: Current Perspectives

Nicole A. Elbertson, Marc A. Brackett, and Roger P. Weissberg

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

In 1994, the Fetzer Institute hosted a conference to address concerns about the various, disjointed school-based efforts that had surfaced over the years. In attendance were a range of researchers, educators, and advocates with diverse interests related to meeting the developmental, psychological, educational, and general health needs of children. These issues were discussed, and the term *social and emotional learning* (SEL) was introduced. SEL described a framework for providing opportunities for young people to acquire the skills necessary for attaining and maintaining personal well-being and positive relationships across the lifespan. Out of this 1994 meeting, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed with the goal of “establishing high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education” (Elias et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003; Kress & Elias, 2006).

Since its conception, CASEL has defined SEL more specifically and has served as a guide to school-based SEL programming (CASEL, 2003). According to CASEL, SEL describes the acquisition of skills including self- and social awareness and regulation, responsible decision making and problem solving, and relationship management. The first of CASEL’s 39 Guidelines for Educators delineates four primary domains of SEL: “(1) life skills and social competencies, (2) health promotion and problem-prevention skills, (3) coping skills and social support for transitions and crises, and (4) positive, contributory service” (Elias et al., 1997; Kress & Elias, 2006). These skills are critical at all levels of development but vary in their application over the life course. Underlying SEL programming is a theoretical foundation based on the ideas that essential learning takes place in the context of relationships and that similar risk factors are responsible for various maladaptive outcomes

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M.A. Brackett (✉)  
Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA  
e-mail: marc.brackett@yale.edu

(Payton et al., 2000). Research on various school-based interventions confirms that SEL is central to development in terms of physical and mental health, moral judgment, citizenship, academics, and achievement motivation (Durlak, Weissberg, Taylor, Dymnicki, & Schellinger, 2008).

Until recently, the traditional emphasis in schools has not been on SEL but on academic instruction alone. Nevertheless, the last few decades have seen growing efforts toward a more holistic approach. The competencies associated with SEL have been identified as factors that impact significantly academic performance and lifelong effectiveness (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Over time, it has become more and more apparent that children who engage in positive social interactions with their teachers, peers, and families and who participate actively and cooperatively in the learning process are more successful in and out of school. Accordingly, research has shown that emotional skills are prerequisite to the thinking and learning skills that comprise the time-honored academic focus of education (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Elias et al., 1997). For instance, “we know emotion is very important to the educative process because it drives attention, which drives learning and memory” (Elias et al., 1997). Moreover, emotions impact perception, motivation, critical thinking, and behavior (Izard, 2002; Lazarus, 1991; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

The social aspects of the learning environment also contribute significantly to learning. As the level of attachment, communication, and respect shared between a child and teacher is enhanced, the child’s attention, learning, and brain development follow (Kusché & Greenberg, 2006). Students who report warm, supportive, positive, and respectful interactions with their teachers also tend to display academic motivation and engagement (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). When students feel connected emotionally to peers and teachers with high values of learning and expectations of academic success, they adopt these positive values and achievement orientations (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Blum & Rinehart, 2004). Similarly, students perform better academically when they experience a sense of belonging at school and learn in environments characterized by positive relationships (Osterman, 2000). In one study investigating the impact on learning of 30 categories of educational, psychological, and social influences, social and emotional variables had the most profound effect on academic performance (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997).

More than ever, educators and parents alike are recognizing the social and emotional influences on academics and are holding schools responsible for preparing students for life, not just for standardized tests or high school graduation. In 1999, the US Department of Labor issued two reports to identify various skills and traits necessary for a successful workforce. In these reports, many of the skills identified related to SEL, including interpersonal and communication skills; decision making and problem solving skills; the abilities to influence and negotiate; personal responsibility; self-esteem; listening; self-management; and integrity (Devaney, O’Brien, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006; Stuart & Dahm, 1999, US Department of Education, 1999).

To live and learn in a social world . . . we need a social decision-making and problem-solving strategy that includes . . . understanding signs of one's own and others' feelings, accurately labeling and expressing feelings, identifying one's goals, thinking of alternative ways to solve a problem, especially when planning a solution and making a final check for possible obstacles, thinking about long- and short-term consequences for oneself and others, reflecting on what happens when carrying out one's strategies, and learning for the future. (Elias et al., 1997, p. 27)

Children from a variety of gene pools and upbringings enter school with a range of these crucial social and emotional competencies, and until recently, there has been no systematic approach for developing these life skills.

## How Has SEL Emerged Over Time?

As schools have begun to acknowledge students' social and emotional needs, they have found that these skills can be taught and learned in a similar fashion to conventional academic subjects. In response to this idea, educators' questions have progressed from "What is SEL?" and "Is SEL important?" to "What is the best way to incorporate SEL into our schools?" Initial attempts to address the latter have been met with mixed results. While some strong and effective SEL programming emerged during this time, more scattered attempts to address single components of SEL also arose. Miscellaneous school-based programs focusing on a single aspect of SEL, such as preventing bullying, substance abuse, unhealthy sexual practices, delinquency, and violence or promoting character development, career preparation, family life, community service, and physical and mental health have been popping up in school districts nationwide. Even with the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that channeled funds and energy away from these programs and toward an emphasis on test scores, new school-based programs aimed at prevention, promotion, and SEL continued to surface (Kress & Elias, 2006).

Many school-based prevention and promotion efforts made in the last decade are compatible with and could be coordinated with school-wide SEL programming (Devaney et al., 2006). Unfortunately, they are often introduced in schools in a piecemeal fashion focusing on a limited breadth of outcomes, and the potential for integration and synergy with SEL is lost. For example, character education programming – which is introduced to build respect, responsibility, integrity, and other values into the student body through teacher modeling and the emphasis of these attributes in the school's curriculum and culture – can be coordinated with SEL (Elias, Parker, Kash, Weissberg, & O'Brien, 2008). Similar integration is possible with servicelearning, which incorporates community service into the classroom (Fredericks, 2003), and Positive Behavior Supports, a program that highlights the maintenance of consistent expectations and reinforcement from teachers (Osher et al., 2008). Cooperative learning and differentiated instruction are two other approaches that focus on the use of small groups and diverse teaching strategies to enhance children's social, emotional, and academic growth (CASEL, 2003).

These and other prevention and promotion programs share many commonalities with SEL and could be integrated as part of school-wide programming since SEL programming offers a framework for unifying and coordinating narrowly focused efforts to target a broader spectrum of positive youth outcomes that extend into lifelong success (Devaney et al., 2006).

A number of effective SEL programs have become available in the recent years (CASEL, 2003; Durlak et al., in press). These programs incorporate efforts between the classroom, the student's home, the school, and sometimes the entire district to provide students with ample structured and unstructured opportunities to learn and apply skills to promote their social, emotional, and academic success. Moreover, they offer professional development for educators and work to establish safer and more productive learning environments. Several of these SEL programs exist and have demonstrated success in promoting mental health, self-efficacy, sense of community, academic performance, attitude toward school, coping, and overall positive youth development as well as in preventing substance abuse, absenteeism, and aggression (e.g., Catalano et al., 2002; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Durlak et al., in press; Gottfredson & Wilson, 2003; Tobler et al., 2006; Zins et al., 2004).

A few examples of model SEL programs are Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (Greenberg, Kusché, & Mihalic, 1998), the Developmental Studies Center's Child Development Project (CDP) (Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Schaps, & Solomon, 1991), and Emotional Literacy in the Classroom (ELC) (Brackett et al., 2008). These programs, among others, are evidence-based SEL curricula that meet CASEL guidelines and have been effective in various school systems. For example, PATHS is an elementary-school program that emphasizes conflict resolution, stopping to think before acting, and managing and expressing emotions effectively. It is designed to promote social and emotional competence in students and teachers and to reduce aggression and behavior problems while enhancing classroom productivity and the overall quality of the learning environment. PATHS has been shown to decrease aggression and enhance emotion-related vocabulary and cognitive test scores in students and to increase self-control in teachers (Greenberg et al., 1998; Greenberg et al., 2003).

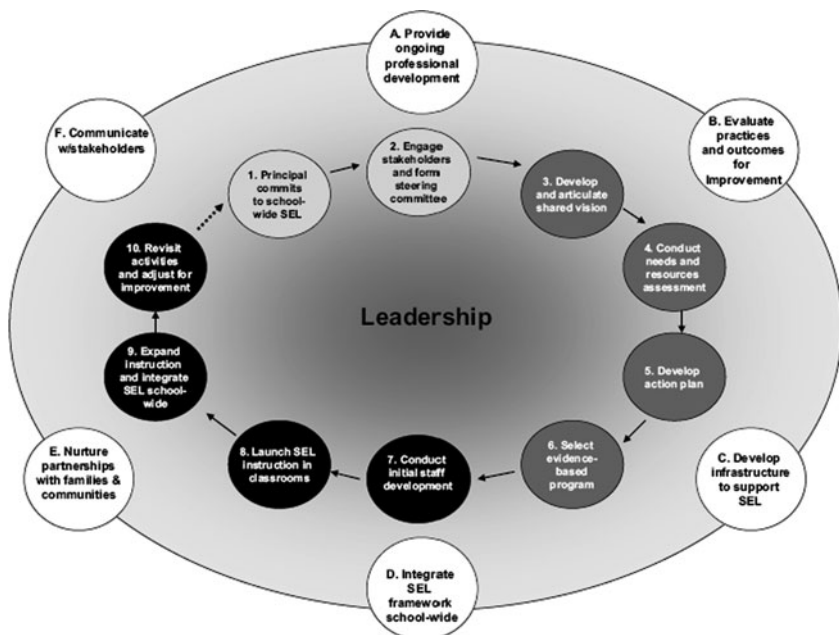
CDP represents another model SEL program. In its focus on creating "communities of learners," CDP provides training to the entire school on social, ethical, and academic development for enhancing relationships among students, teachers, and administrative staff while simultaneously improving student reading skills through guided, group, and individual instruction with literary materials that emphasize prosocial values (Battistich et al., 1991). CDP's approach holds children accountable for setting and upholding class rules and pairs older and younger children in a buddy program. "CDP rests on the assumption that children will engage better in, and profit more from the school experience if it is intrinsically interesting and if they have genuine shaping inputs in what they do" (Cowen, 1997, p. 110). Data collected from school records and student and teacher reports indicate that CDP increases school-related attitudes and motivation, reduces problem behaviors, and enhances school connectedness, test scores, grades, and school conduct (Battistich, 2001).

A third SEL program (with which the first two authors of this chapter are most familiar, as coauthors of program) that has been met with success in various districts in the United States and the United Kingdom is the ELC program. ELC is rooted in emotional literacy (Brackett & Rivers, 2008), which is derived from work on emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and includes five skills identified by researchers as important for successful functioning and adaptation: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion. ELC includes continuous training to provide teachers and administrators with tools and techniques to enhance their own professional relationships, and the educational, social, and personal lives of their students. The classroom program involves a series of lessons or “steps” that focuses on an emotion-related concept or “feeling” word. The steps ask students to recall personal associations with each feeling word, use the word in writing assignments pertaining to academic lessons and current events, teach and discuss the word with their families, engage in creative tasks such as artistic representations of the word, and with participate in strategy-building sessions to learn techniques for problem solving and regulating emotions. Students in classrooms integrating ELC have demonstrated higher social and emotional competence (e.g., leadership, social skills, and study skills) and better academic performance compared to students who do not receive the program (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2007).

## What Makes an SEL Program Effective?

According to CASEL, effective SEL programs are those that lead indirectly and directly to improved academic performance and other positive outcomes. By establishing safe, nurturing, and productive learning environments, they promote greater student attachment to school, which is associated with a reduction in risky behavior and an increase in academic success (CASEL, 2003). These improvements of the school and classroom climate transform the way students experience and perceive their school lives, which enhances their academic, psychological, and social development as well as their school adjustment and performance. Through education of social and emotional competencies, effective SEL programs support academic achievement and positive development directly (CASEL, 2003). Moreover, children develop intrinsic motivation when classroom topics relate to their own needs, emotions, and lives (Ormrod, 1999), a strategy generally employed in SEL interventions (Zins, Payton, Weissberg, & Utne-O’Brien, 2007).

The effectiveness of an SEL program also depends on its continuity from an early age through high school and its coordination of teacher, administrator, parent, and student participation and support in the planning, implementation, and evaluation (Devaney et al., 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003). For effective programming to take place and to last, a school-wide commitment, across all classrooms, teachers, and administration, should be embraced (Bencivenga & Elias, 2003). The following model shown in Fig. 1, developed by CASEL (Devaney et al., 2006), classifies this



**Fig. 1** SEL implementation and sustainability process (©, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL))

commitment from principals and other stakeholders as the first two in a sequence of ten steps necessary for programmatic success.

According to this model, SEL implementation should occur in three phases. After phase 1 or the readiness phase, during which a commitment from the principal and other stakeholders is secured, begins a planning phase, including a shared vision, an assessment of school needs and resources, an action plan for program implementation, and the selection of a program. Finally, in the implementation phase, training and professional development activities are conducted, SEL instruction is introduced in classrooms and expanded school-wide, and programming is evaluated and fine-tuned. CASEL suggests that throughout these three phases of implementation, several ongoing activities can serve to enrich and sustain SEL programming: professional development of school staff, evaluation and modification of the program, development of an infrastructure to support the program over time, integration of SEL practices school-wide, involvement of family and community, and widespread communication about the program.

As shown in Fig. 2 below, ELC (Brackett et al., 2008) follows an implementation plan that relates closely to CASEL’s model.

In accordance with CASEL, the ELC model begins with a vision and a plan for program execution, continues with ongoing professional development, and

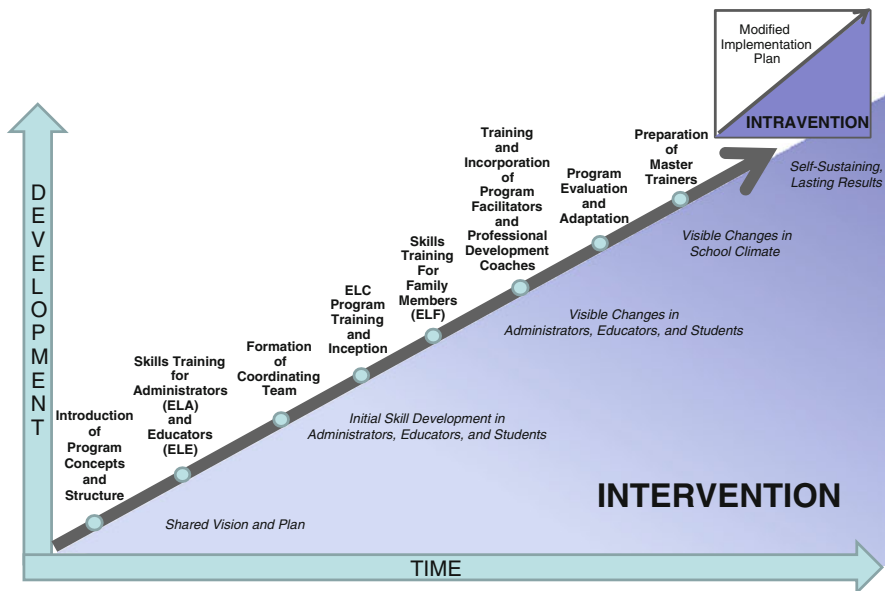


Fig. 2 Creating emotionally literate schools: Implementation plan

is sustained through adapting the program over time to fit with school culture. Specifically, ELC includes continuous training of teachers that focuses expressly on developing their social and emotional skills separate from training on the instruction of the classroom program for students. Additionally, ELC encourages the formation of a coordinating team of school staff to lead in the integration of the program into the school and community. One aspect of this integration is training on emotional literacy for family members of students. Teacher skills and command of the program are further enhanced through periodic coaching sessions during which teachers meet one-on-one with program facilitators and coaches who observe lessons, provide critical feedback, address questions or concerns, and work to enhance the social and emotional competencies of the teacher. Over time, ELC program developers work with the coordinating team of the school or district to train selected staff to be “master trainers.” These master trainers, usually teachers or counselors in the school system, become the experts who keep the program alive so the role of the program developers can be phased out. Gradually, the *intervention* transitions into an *intravention*, such that the school or district can sustain the program independent of the program developer team. As the school or district goes through this process, positive changes are expected to occur in administrators, teachers, students, and eventually school climate.

As both the CASEL and ELC models suggest, the key players in a school’s or district’s commitment to change through SEL are school leaders. The selection, implementation, and sustainability of SEL programming depend largely on the support of school administrators (Nataraj Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 2001). In fact,



reductions in aggression and increases in social and emotional competencies have been over twice as likely in students from inner-city schools with higher levels of principal support, irrespective of high implementation quality (Kam, Greenburg, & Walls, 2003). Likewise, the presence of supportive administration predicted most consistently the ability of 40% of schools to sustain SEL programming successfully (Elias & Kamarinos Galiotos, 2004). In addition to their support, the social and emotional competence of school leaders is important (Lambert, 2003; Patti & Tobin, 2003). Leaders who are effective in these areas can build and maintain positive and trusting relationships among their administrative and teaching staff, and these relationships are essential to school reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). It is not surprising that school administrators play such a vital role in the success of SEL programming, as school leadership may be one of the top two factors affecting student learning. This factor is preceded only by teacher instruction (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Inarguably, teachers are instrumental in the execution and impact of SEL programming. Due to the nature of the teacher role, teachers impact student academic, social, and emotional learning. The strategies teachers use to reinforce positive behavior and manage inappropriate behavior predict student conduct and academic performance (Hawkins, 1997), and student-teacher relationships predict student achievement and attachment to school (Baker, 1999). Furthermore, skilled teachers naturally tend to foster social and emotional development and cultivate positive attitudes and values in their students (Elias et al., 1997). Aside from their inherent influence as the head of the classroom, teachers contribute significantly to the success of SEL programming because they are the primary implementers. Not only do teachers need a firm understanding of how to run the program in their classroom, they also should know what competencies it promotes and how it can help them achieve their learning objectives, make their interactions with students more productive, and improve the classroom environment.

Also central to effective SEL program adoption and continuation are the attitudes and beliefs teachers have about SEL in general and their ability to implement the program and model the behavior it intends to change in children. For instance, “teachers who believe that social and emotional skills are part of a student’s immutable genetic makeup will be unlikely to show support for a program based on a social learning model of social and emotional skill development” (Kress & Elias, 2006, p. 600). In the same way, teachers who do not feel SEL is important or that they should be responsible for addressing these skills may lack sufficient motivation to implement the program properly (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). Even among teachers who believe in the premise and goals of SEL, other attitudes can hinder effective implementation. For instance, a teacher with low confidence in her ability to carry out the program protocol, find time to incorporate it into the classroom, or manage the classroom during the program sessions may be less likely to adhere to the program process and use it regularly (Kress & Elias, 2006). To implement SEL programming well, teachers must understand clearly the program’s goals and structure as well as believe in the program’s ability to achieve these goals through their own execution of the program.



Effective SEL programming provides a continuous flow of information and support to teachers throughout the life of the program. This information and support should take the form of user-friendly teacher manuals with clearly presented lesson plans, pre-implementation training of teachers, ongoing contact between teachers and program personnel (Graczyk et al., 2000), and annual trainings to address turnover of teaching staff and administrators (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 2000). For instance PATHS provides training workshops and a manual, and CDP includes a 1-day workshop for teachers on program implementation in addition to classroom visits for lesson planning, modeling, and co-teaching. Similarly, ELC provides a preliminary 1-day professional development workshop that focuses on the social and emotional skills of the teacher and the importance of these skills. Then, teachers attend a second full-day workshop on how the ELC program is implemented in the classroom. Throughout the ELC program, teachers attend onsite modeling of program lessons by program staff, “booster” trainings to review key elements of the pre-program training, and one-on-one meetings with coaches who observe lessons, provide feedback, and address any questions teachers may have.

Integral to the trainings and other contact between teachers and program staff is their capacity to influence teacher attitudes and beliefs about SEL in general and about the specific program selected by the school or district. Teachers should be made aware of the social and emotional needs of their students and themselves and confident in the effectiveness of the program in meeting these needs. Further, they should feel secure in their own knowledge and skills related to the program (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins, 2005). The degree to which teachers possess information, confidence, and skills related to the program impacts how the program is implemented and also how social and emotional competencies are modeled to students. Accordingly, teacher confidence and animation during delivery have been associated with more adherence to program protocol (Sobol et al., 1989). Moreover, when students notice teachers are not “practicing” what they “preach,” they are more likely to mimic what they see (Mize & Ladd, 1990).

In view of this, effective SEL programming should include specific efforts focusing on the social and emotional skills in teachers in conjunction with training on the details of program presented in a way that builds teacher confidence. These efforts maximize not only the positive impact of the program on students but also on the teachers themselves. Teachers who are part of school- or district-wide SEL efforts and who utilize SEL practices and programs in their classrooms are more satisfied overall and more likely to remain in the teaching profession (CASEL, 2003). This makes sense, given that schools that strive for collaboration, connectedness, collegiality, and support among their employees are better at retaining new teachers (Murray, 2005).

Another key component in the success of SEL programming is the involvement of students’ families (Christenson & Havsy, 2004; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007). Research has shown consistently that collaborations between the home and school increase both the number and the length of positive outcomes related to school (for meta-analytic reviews, see Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003). In fact, decades

of research have linked parental/caregiver involvement in schooling to improvements in mental health and academic performance in their children (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 1999). In spite of the clear benefits of their involvement, caregivers become less involved in their children's lives as they reach adolescence (Milgram & Toubiana, 1999). One possible explanation for this is that the number of opportunities that schools offer for caregivers to participate in school-related activities declines in middle school (US Department of Education, 1998). Thus, the need for schools to incorporate caregivers explicitly into their children's school life may be even higher during these adolescent years (Elias, Weissberg, & Patrikakou, 2007). According to a review of 66 studies, the extent to which the family is involved in a child's education from early childhood through high school is the most accurate predictor of student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Thus, effective SEL programming should include efforts to foster the development of school-family partnerships to support and extend classroom learning and positive impact on students.

## The Future of SEL: Strides and Stumbling Blocks

Since its conception in 1994, SEL has come a long way. Programs to address SEL needs have been developed, tweaked, and disseminated, and their effects have been researched and documented (e.g., Greenberg et al., 2003). In some schools, comprehensive and evidence-based SEL programs have been adopted and demonstrated success in benefiting students. In most schools, however, SEL programming has not been adopted effectively (Kress & Elias, 2006). Some districts have ignored SEL needs altogether, and most have made only half-hearted attempts to address these needs. On average, today's schools average 14 simultaneous activities in place to combat problem behavior and enhance the learning environment (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). In general, it is not that educators are *not attempting* to enhance social and emotional learning; rather, they are not employing well-designed, systematic approaches (Shriver & Weissberg, 1996). With this in mind, we may ask ourselves, "Where is the SEL wagon headed?"

One consistent challenge to the proliferation of SEL is concern from administrators, teachers, and even parents who do not believe in taking any time or energy away from instruction of traditional academic subjects (Elias et al., 2000). With the NCLB legislation, academic demands have become more stringent, and time constraints have tightened further. Educators have become even more preoccupied with devoting adequate attention to core, content areas that are tested in accordance with NCLB standards. Similarly, parents may assume that focusing solely on academic topics is the best way to raise grades and test scores. However, ignoring SEL in order to spend more time on academics has not proven an effective approach to boosting achievement or complying with NCLB. SEL has been shown to play a critical role not only in academic performance but also in attendance records, classroom behavior, and academic engagement (Elias, 1997; Elias et al., 2000). It cannot be expected by any stretch of the imagination that students who live in a world of

myriad influences from the television, the computer, and their own homes and relationships will arrive at school each day with a clear head ready to digest several hours' worth of academic material. Schools can provide a guiding and protective influence by promoting the social and emotional skills necessary to function well in and outside of school (Elias et al., 2000). Efforts are needed to increase these feelings of accountability among educators in schools ignoring SEL needs.

As emphasized previously, active support and involvement of teachers and other educators in leadership roles are crucial to successful implementation. Accordingly, lack of support for SEL can prevent programming from ever entering a school and lack of involvement can pose a problem to the success of SEL programming, if it is adopted. Unfortunately, few teachers or administrators receive sufficient pre-service or in-service training on SEL (Elias et al., 2000). The past few decades have seen tremendous advances in scientific knowledge related to the skills that predict academic and lifelong success and the best ways for developing these skills to yield positive changes. Education in these areas should be incorporated as a central component in teacher preparation and professional development. For SEL programming to succeed, the underlying theory and the implementation strategies must be understood and practiced well by educators.

Even in some schools that choose to employ strong SEL programs, the impact on students may be limited. Insufficient understanding of factors in the school that affect implementation or poor coordination of SEL efforts with other school activities are just two potential causes. Different educators select different methods for adopting, combining, and adapting SEL programming, and these decisions do not always lead to positive outcomes (Greenberg et al., 2003). To further complicate things, few comprehensive SEL curricula exist that extend from preschool through high school. In an attempt to offer a continuum of SEL instruction from one grade level to the next, educators sometimes string together several programs of various content and techniques that may not align well with one another (Zins et al., 2007). Fortunately, many SEL programs are designed to coordinate well with other school activities, by serving as a vehicle for teaching other school subjects, by their ability to link to other content areas, and through their flexibility in being rotated through different parts of traditional academic curricula (CASEL, 2003). Also, some schools are able to coordinate SEL successfully by identifying a committee or team which fits the programs together systematically to optimize implementation and the program impact (Elias et al., 1997). Nevertheless, schools could benefit from a set of standard recommendations or strategies to follow in order to coordinate SEL with other efforts within the school and across grade levels (Zins et al., 2007).

Several factors have been identified as vital to effective implementation and continuation of SEL programming (Elias et al., 2008). This body of research suggests that before a program is selected, schools should assess the needs, resources, policies, and practices of the school and its surrounding community. "SEL interventions are more likely to succeed when they are congruent with the values, beliefs, norms, and histories of the children and families served. Schools select SEL programs that they believe are appropriate culturally, socially, and economically for their students and families" (Zins et al., 2007). These issues are not always easily identified, but

program selection should depend largely on these factors. After the program is selected but before it is adopted, schools should think about what activities and programs are already in place; identify what will have to happen in order for the school to accommodate the program and for the program to accommodate the school; and consult with school personnel about SEL and the selected program. During and after implementation, the program should be monitored to ensure it is being executed properly and the intended outcomes are being achieved (Zins & Elias, 2006). This information should be used to determine the effectiveness of the program and to develop strategies for ensuring positive results as the program is sustained over time (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000).

Another factor that determines the fate of SEL in schools is legislation. Although a few state governments (e.g., Illinois, Hawaii, and New York) have incorporated a social and emotional learning component to their standards or laws, the majority of states have not. For instance, in 2003, Illinois State Learning Standards first mandated school districts to integrate SEL into their curricula. The state's Children's Mental Health Act (Public Act 93-0495) maintains that social and emotional development is essential to academic readiness and success. The act calls on all schools in Illinois to incorporate SEL as a central component to their mission, take concrete steps to enhance students' development in these areas, include SEL in school plans, and develop policies for integrating SEL into the district's educational program and for responding to children's social or psychological needs that may impact learning (Zins & Elias, 2006). Ideally, in due time, other state or even federal legislative bodies will follow the lead of Illinois and other SEL-promoting states so that their schools will give greater priority to addressing SEL in their curricula.

Enhancing the social and emotional skills of our society is a major challenge facing our world today. The integration of SEL programming into schools provides a promising means for targeting these skills effectively from an early age through young adulthood. However, widespread and sustained implementation of beneficial programs will require an ongoing commitment from many. Researchers must continue to provide comprehensive, evidence-based SEL programming and assist schools more in adopting, executing, and monitoring these programs effectively. Legislators must commit to establishing educational policies that hold schools accountable for the social and emotional development of students. Above all, educators must champion the SEL cause and the efforts toward enduring SEL programming in their schools.

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