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The Effects of Social-Emotional Learning at the Secondary Level

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The Effects of Social-Emotional Learning at the Secondary Level

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A Literature Review Presented

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

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Abstract

This literature review aims to examine social-emotional learning in schools, and more specifically, at the secondary level. The review explains the importance of SEL at the secondary level and its continuation from preschool through high school. Evidence-based secondary SEL programs are presented, and research, including several meta-analyses, are shared that outline the benefits and disadvantages of social-emotional learning programs. Mandated SEL standards at the federal and state levels are covered, as well as policies and laws that enforce and support SEL. An analysis of the published literature on SEL programs at the secondary level suggests they lead to improved academics, negative behavior, saved tax-payer dollars, and graduation rates.

The Effects of Social-Emotional Learning at the Secondary Level

In the education field, there is continuous reform. Educators are consistently trying to improve best practices for content mastery with their students. In many cases, improvement can be with curriculum, instruction, and standards, yet the research reveals that a necessary part of the learning process is regulating one's emotions (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011). When students understand their feelings and try to control them, academics, engagement, and overall school climate progress (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007).

Many schools have taken on the responsibility of teaching and developing emotional intelligence in their students; this identifies as social-emotional learning (SEL). Social-emotional learning includes the five competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). Although preventative programs using social-emotional learning are prevalent in primary schools, they are less common in secondary schools.

The development of the human brain is not complete until someone reaches 25 years-old, resulting in a difference between the adolescent brain and the adult brain (Stanford Children's Health, 2020). Stanford Children's Health (2020) reports that adults think with the rational part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, while teens use the emotional part, also known as the amygdala. While adults can reason and make ethical judgments, it is difficult for the adolescent brain to consider the long-term consequences of their actions. Secondary schools can shape adolescents' social and emotional skills, providing them with skills that can carry into adulthood.

This literature review focuses on the synthesis of published research on the impact of social-emotional learning at the secondary level. Social-emotional programs targeted for

secondary students will be identified, including the benefits and disadvantages of SEL programs. An explanation of government policies and standards in schools will be shared. Finally, the literature review examines whether the impact of social-emotional learning programs on secondary students is significant enough to justify them in secondary schools.

Social and Emotional Learning

Salovey and Grewal (2005) describe emotional intelligence as the ability to understand surroundings while navigating through one's social environment. The capabilities possessed with emotional intelligence are the skills of perception; to use, understand, and manage one's emotions (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). Broken into four branches, the emotional intelligence skills one should pursue are (a) the ability to recognize emotions; (b) the ability to think and reason while using one's feelings; (c) the capability to understand emotions and the represented language concerning emotions; and finally, (d) the ability to manipulate one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Grewal & Salovey, 2005).

Emotional intelligence begins to form at the earliest stages of recognizing facial expressions. As people develop, emotions evolve. Without the exploration and teaching of emotions, it can be difficult for individuals to distinguish the difference between feelings, directly associating all negative emotions interchangeably and positive-valence emotions as one (Feldman Barrett, Gross, Connor Christensen, & Benvenuto, 2001). Research shows emotions control many aspects of the subconscious. Feelings motivate decisions, and without emotions, individuals would not make decisions to benefit them (Grewal & Salovey, 2005).

These abilities of emotional intelligence cannot exist separately from social circumstances, and to effectively use the skills, one has to understand appropriate behavior

(Salovey & Grewal, 2005). The development of real emotional and social intelligence leads to greater well-being (Evans, Martin, & Ivcevic, 2018). Since social-emotional skills develop from adaptations of the environment, families, schools, and communities must work together as positive influences. In schools, SEL begins in the classroom but quickly moves outward to the playground, streets, and activities, influencing students' health, ethics, academia, and determination to learn (Devaney, O'Brien, Tavegia, & Resnik, 2005).

The purpose of social and emotional learning is for students to develop the skills to recognize their emotions (Zins & Elias, 2007). Social-emotional learning promotes a framework of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence (CASEL, 2020). Included in the structure are five core competencies that are part of prevention programs in schools. According to Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zinns, Fredericks, Resnik, and Elias (2003), learning emotional skills is similar to learning academic qualifications in the respect that the skills are improved over time and used in situations children encounter.

The Importance of SEL

Graduation rates have increased over the years. The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported the increase of high school graduation jumped from 78% in 2013 to 85% in 2018. Through the years, it has become imperative to graduate from high school and have a higher level of personal development to earn a better wage; this is another incentive to graduate (Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, & Zander, 2015; Heckman & Lafontaine, 2010). A meta-analysis conducted by Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017) indicated students with a high school diploma receive more than \$367,000 more than those who do not graduate.

The United States faces the most difficulty today since the era of civil rights resulting from preemptive wars, injustices in civil liberties, continuous change in policies, and political unrest (Zins & Elias, 2007, pg. 236). Furthermore, children's academic achievement in the United States has fallen behind compared to other countries, and in 2002 the No Child Left Behind Act pressured educators to focus on improving academics, leaving out the necessary soft skills (Devaney et al., 2005). After establishing the No Child Left Behind Act, the Search Institute gave a survey to youth in 2003. The study resulted with 71% of participants reporting they do not think about the outcomes of their choices; 65% do not respect the values of other cultures and races; and 76% do not believe their teachers care about them (Devaney et al., 2005, pg. 108).

The research indicates learning social and emotional skills in school is essential for student success, not only for current academics but after school and into their careers. Multiple meta-analyses have indicated the connection between SEL and academic performance. Dusenbury, Newman, Weissberg, Goren, and Domitrovich (2015) reported that 213 studies show academic success is more significant when schools support social-emotional learning. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) provided evidence involving over 270,000 K-12 students who were part of 213 universal SEL programs. Fifteen percent, 33, of the studies allowed for a follow-up after the SEL interventions, and the evidence indicated an effect size of .32 (Durlak et al., 2011, pg. 413). A more recent meta-analysis conducted by Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017), including 82 samples from over 95,000 students, indicated a 33 percentile gain in academic achievement after the implementation of an SEL program (pg. 1163).

SEL's Importance at the Secondary Level

Adolescents experience physiological, cognitive, and emotional changes influenced by biology and their environment (Barr & Sandor, 2010). For adolescents, their developing personalities will take them into the early stages of adulthood (Marston, Hare, & Allen, 2010). This stage can influence adverse patterns of interpersonal skills within individuals; however, the shift can only occur when one's setting transpires for the better (Marston et al., 2010). Research has suggested a connection "between lack of social support and poor mental health outcomes," which can cause an issue with the internalization of problems due to the absence of social skills (Martson et al., 2010, pg. 961).

The stage of adolescence is a malleable time for children's identity (Erikson & Erikson, 1957); this includes sensitivities, encompassing rejection sensitivity, and the development of their personality (Marston et al., 2010). Rejection sensitivity is a method of internalizing different contextual scenarios with "if-then situation-dependent behaviors" (pg. 959). Those suffering from rejection sensitivity are more susceptible to reacting defensively. High school level students were part of a study to understand the relationship between rejection sensitivity with depression and anxiety. Ranging in age from 16 to 18 years old, 184 teens participated in the study. The evidence revealed that students who endure rejection sensitivity are highly receptive to depression and anxiety. The results indicated 15% of the 16 year-olds scored as mildly depressed, and 25% of them scored as having anxiety. In the 17-year-old group, 10% scored as mildly depressed, while 14% had anxiety. In the 18-year-old age group, 15% scored as mildly depressed, and 25% scored as having anxiety (Martson et al., 2010, pg. 967).

Many social-emotional skills are necessary to master, especially at the high school level. Acquiring these skills leads to both academic success and preparation for college and/or their career. The skills to master are (a) the ability to reason clearly and respectfully challenge others; (b) the application of strategic thinking and the development of metacognition; (c) the development of grit and perseverance in stressful situations; (d) taking responsibility for their learning with integrity and maintaining the belief that they are responsible for learning outcomes; (e) occupy social and emotional skills (Elias, 2014, pg. 58). The meta-analysis of SEL programs in schools, conducted by Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017), indicated the advantages of soft skills are long-lasting and can be beneficial for up to 18 years (Durlak & Mahoney, 2019).

The age of adulthood begins at 18; however, there is a significant emotional change when young adults leave for college. Fears may include “family identity and acceptance, loss of peer groups, concerns about fitting in, concerns about managing the workload, implications of choices of courses and majors, how to establish a range of new relationships with peers and adults, and lifestyle choices about the use of leisure time, studying, eating, and sleeping” (Elias, 2014, pg. 58). The difficulty of college life can cause significant anxiety for young adults who fall short with social and emotional intelligence, causing them to drop out (Elias, 2014).

SEL Programs

Research-based prevention programs are mandated at both the state and federal levels (Weissberg et al., 2003). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is an organization developed to support evidence-based SEL for PreK-12th grade students (CASEL, 2020). The most effective programs improve social and emotional skills to advance learning capacities. Applications that include social and emotional learning are effective

at all grade levels (Durlak et al., 2011), especially when they continue from kindergarten through high school (Taylor & Dymnicki, 2007). An impactful SEL program includes teaching content-specific SEL curricula, intertwining SEL skills with academics, forming supportive and caring environments, changing instructional approaches, and connecting with parents (Taylor & Dymnicki, 2007).

Weissberg, Resnik, Payton, and O'Brien (2003) suggest the most robust programs include (1) theory and research to influence student behavior; (2) instruction to help students learn how to implement SEL and moral teachings in everyday life; (3) strengthens school culture; (4) the instruction is both developmentally and culturally sound; (5) the unification of SEL to their citizenship; (6) dimension to improve academics; (7) building a partnership with parents and the community; (8) the establishment of policies and implementation; (9) opportunities for staff to learn and grow; (10) continuously gathering data and evidence (pg. 47-48). Given the characteristics of a valuable SEL program, the most impact can come when schools, parents, and communities stay connected (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2007; Weissberg et al., 2003).

There are many social-emotional curriculums available for schools. For various reasons, schools may not follow a particular curriculum but choose to use the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach. Positive Youth Development emphasizes strengthening adolescents' skills to further their success and achieve their goals to overcome adversities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019), such as physical and emotional abuse (Zaff, Jones, Aasland, and McDermott, 2013). The skills combined with self-management allow youth to commit to their long-term and short-term goals (Zaff et al., 2013). A meta-analysis conducted

by Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, and Gillings (2017) analyzed 11 studies on the efficacy of the PYD approach and found they significantly improved academics. Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017) shared emotional distress was alleviated from a meta-analysis of 82 studies, including over 97,000 students.

To find an effective SEL program, CASEL (2015) created a guide that includes 31 evidence-based programs for secondary schools. It contains various programs for a diverse range of audiences, but it further breaks them down to present the program design, implementation support, and evidence of effectiveness. Some are centered around leadership, while others focus on health. Found in the guide are notably The Leadership Program's Violence Prevention Program, School-Connect, SPARK, and Building Assets, Reducing Risks (CASEL, 2015).

The Leadership Program's Violence Prevention Program supports SEL in middle and high schools, offering two different curriculums to accommodate both school levels. When schools implement the program, teachers are provided with training and guidance to combine academics with the SEL curriculum. The program has teachers select twelve 45-minute lessons that are most relevant to their students and classroom. Included in the lessons are a statement, warm-up, main activity, and closing activities. The Leadership Program's Violence Prevention Program has been tested for efficacy. A 2012 study of 2,597 6th-8th graders and a 2014 study of 793 9th-10th graders revealed a decrease in both verbal and physical aggression, less avoidance of conflict resolution, and an increase in conflict resolutions (CASEL, 2015).

School-Connect promotes the development of social and emotional learning. It is precisely for high school students in 9th-12th grade; however, it can be used at the middle school level to prepare students for high school. There are 20 lessons within four modules, and it is

recommended they are done in advisory groups. School-Connect engages students in student-led discussions and is student-centered throughout the experience. The lessons included an opener, fundamental questions, and chances to reflect (CASEL, 2015). In 2014-2015 an evaluation of 947 diverse, high school students found that students who participated in the program had fewer disciplinary referrals and increased academic achievements (CASEL, 2015). In 2012 the program was implemented for the freshmen at Austin High School in Austin, Texas. Concluding four years of implementation, discipline referrals decreased by 71%, and freshmen failing courses fell by 41% (School-Connect: Optimizing the High School Experience, 2020).

SPARK (Speaking to the Potential, Ability & Resilience Inside Every Kid) is a combination of lessons, small group activities, and individual mentoring that further supports social and emotional learning (CASEL, 2015). The design of the program equips students to be better societal members. Included in the program is a core curriculum consisting of 13 weeks of lessons, 50 minutes each, covering topics such as decision making and reflection of identity. Not only are the teachers provided with the curriculum, but students can access online content to assist in the lessons. Parents have access to an online program to carry out the learned skills from SPARK at home. Research analyzing the efficacy of SPARK during the 2018 academic year, on 201 high school students, including 27% Black students, 12% White students, and 58% Hispanic students, revealed improved communication, problem-solving skills, and resilience (CASEL, 2015).

Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) was created for middle school students to students in the 10th grade. The program divides each grade level into teams, and then the units are led by teachers who teach core subjects, math, English, science, and social sciences. Each

teacher is responsible for monitoring student academics and behavior (CASEL, 2015). The BARR model requires teachers to meet and reflect on their students' achievements and then make plans for at-risk students (Corsello & Sharma, 2015). Corsello and Sharma (2015) researched the effects of BARR in 2011-2012 by implementing the program in a larger school in southern California. The school had 2,514 students in grades 9-12 with a diverse population. Each year with the application of BARR, the rate of students who failed their courses decreased. Before the implementation of BARR, 31.9% of students failed at least one core class, but each year that BARR was utilized, the failing of core courses decreased. One year after the implementation, failed core courses dropped to 21%, and two years after implementation, failed core courses dropped to 17.2% (Corsello & Sharma, 2015).

Benefits of SEL Programs

Many evidence-based social-emotional programs have been created and, once implemented, have resulted in positive outcomes, including opposition to substance abuse, decreased violent behavior, and improved academic accomplishments (Zins et al., 2007). Further benefits include improved graduation rates, a reduction in crime, an improvement in mental health, and school culture (Zins et al., 2007). Students also develop positive attitudes within the school, improving attendance and performance (Barr & Sandor, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). A CASEL report (2019) provided a meta-analysis of the improvement in the following areas after the implementation of SEL programs: academic performance improved by 27%; social behaviors by 24%, attitudes at 23%, and conduct problems decreased by 22% (Durlak & Mahoney, 2019).

Smith and Low (2013) noted students' attitudes improve with the use of social-emotional preventative programs that follow a social-ecological framework. The purpose of the

social-ecological structure is to prevent violence before it occurs. The four factors of the context include individual, relationship, community, and societal; each factor influences the risk of violence (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Understanding the framework, especially in school, can allow for improved implementation of preventative SEL programs and decrease behaviors like bullying and violence in and out of school.

Another benefit of using SEL programs, shared by the Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP), was the cost savings on taxes due to fewer costs in the criminal justice system and property damages (Hahn, Fuqua-Whitley, Wethington, Lowy, Liberman, Crosby, & Dahlberg 2007). Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, and Zander (2015) explain the benefit-cost analysis (BCA) as an approach to identify the cost of necessary resources in SEL program interventions with the outcome in monetary terms (pg. 511). The cost-benefit uses a four-part framework, including temporal, the immediate results of an SEL program; general, the impact it has on students who are not part of the program; post-intervention, the economic impact after leaving school, as students enter the workforce; and the spillover effect, the impact the program has on the school and others who are not part of the plan (Belfield et al., 2015, pg. 512)

After implementing the Seattle Social Development Project in a high-crime urban elementary school in 2003, crime decreased by 13% (Hahn et al., 2007). Taxpayer savings equated to \$14,426 in the criminal justice system and personal property damages, and property loss declined, following the implementation of SSDP in 2003 (Hahn et al., 2007). The cost-benefit ratio of implementing the program was \$3.14 for each dollar spent on SSDP in 2003 (Hahn et al., 2007). Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, and Zander (2015) indicated the

cost-benefit of SSDP was \$5,800 per student, while other programs, such as Life Skills Training had a cost-benefit of \$5,670.

Bullying

A program centered around the social-ecological framework is Steps to Respect, a program with lessons focused on bullying, encouraging positivity, empathy, and friendship (Smith & Low, 2013). An evaluation of 33 elementary schools in California using the Steps to Respect program reported students' social competence decreased violent behavior and bullying was reduced in school (Brown, Low, Smith, & Haggerty, 2011). To decrease bullying, whole-school programs focused on social-ecology is critical. The results will increase if there are school-wide changes in policies, professional teacher learning, and SEL curricula (Smith & Low, 2013).

When adequate SEL programs are implemented into schools effectively, they can prevent bullying and build empathy. It is proposed that a community with more compassion can decrease bullying. In a national survey, only 29% to 45% of 148,189 middle and high school students reported having soft skills, such as decision-making and empathy (Durlak et al., 2011, pg. 405). Smith and Low (2013) also indicated empathy has a role with bystanders and their response to bullying. Bystanders are more likely to intervene when a bullying situation occurs due to empathetic care.

Social-Emotional Skills Improve Academic Achievements

Many emotional burdens weigh heavy on the shoulders of youth today, which then prevents them from learning to their highest ability and using their knowledge appropriately outside the school day (Elias, DeFini, & Bergmann, 2010). Learning cannot effectively take place without understanding one's emotions. Research conducted by Dr. Becky A. Bailey on Conscious Discipline (2020) indicated the highest level of learning could only occur when the

brain is in the executive state; the state the mind is in as emotions are regulated. The regulation of emotions can be effectively learned with SEL programs.

Social-emotional programs directly link with the improvement of academic achievement at all levels of schooling. Findings from 262 studies that implemented SEL programs from kindergarten through high school revealed academic increases with an effect size of .22 to .61 (Taylor & Dymnicki, 2007). Rutledge, Cohen-Vogel, Osborne-Lampkin, and Roberts (2015) explored the academic difference between four high schools- two lower-performing and two higher-performing. Considering the populations were similar, yet the performance was remarkably opposite, the goal was to determine the difference. The evidence indicated the higher-performing schools had strong programs and practices for both academics and SEL. The lower-performing schools were lacking in both a strong academic program and an SEL program. According to CASEL's 2015 Guide of Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs, the implementation of SEL programs can increase an individual student's achievement scores by 11% compared to those who did not participate in an SEL program (pg. 9).

Dr. James P. Comer (2005) conducted a similar experiment. In 1999 his team began working with students at a North Carolina school in Asheville, serving students at the lowest socioeconomic level. Based on the North Carolina State Test, 42% of students attending the Hall Fletcher Elementary School were reading at or above grade level. After the implementation of a district-wide SEL program called Social Development Program, students continuously improved each year. After year four, Fletcher students leaped to 78.6% proficiency, and at the end of year five, they were 98% proficient in reading (Comer, 2005, pg.760). The success came after district-wide implementation, buy-in with policymakers and classroom teachers (Comer, 2005).

According to CASEL's 2015 Guide, school improvement practices, such as curriculum development, must be combined with SEL. With the combination of SEL and effective teaching practices, improved outcomes consist of a supportive environment, better attitudes about self and peers, and a changed attitude towards school. The combination leads to enhanced student outcomes of positive behavior, reduced problem behavior, reduced emotional issues, and improved academic performance (Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs, 2015).

Policy and Legislation

The passing of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) occurred in 2015 by federal legislation, giving more federal funding to Title I and Title 2 programs. Numerous states have been using funding to strengthen SEL programs and policies (CASEL, 2020). Several representatives in Congress have introduced different Acts in the past five years to support SEL, though they have failed to accumulate enough support to be passed into legislation. In 2018, the introduction of the Aim Higher Act came to the table, an amendment of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Scott, 2018). The Act would focus on teacher SEL preparation programs and training (Education & Labor Committee, 2020). In 2018, Tim Ryan introduced the Social and Emotional Learning for Families Act to combine the teaching and demonstration of SEL to youth by both parents and teachers (Ryan, 2018).

The following year, two other bills were introduced. The bipartisan Chronic Absenteeism Reduction for Every School (CARES) Act intended to assist with chronically absent students. In contrast, the bipartisan Teacher Health and Wellness Act proposed to reduce teacher stress and strengthen student success (United States Representative Tim Ryan Representing Ohio's 13th District, 2019). According to the U.S. Congress (2020), the four Acts did not make it past the

introduction phase. However, there is a current 2020 appropriations bill moving through the House. The law would allow \$260 million in support of social and emotional learning. The funds would address students' SEL needs, professional training for instructors, assistance in districts to hire mental health professionals, and finally, support for community schools (Social Emotional Learning Alliance for The United States, 2019).

While federal legislation to fund SEL programs may be stalled, states have successfully passed legislation to fund SEL programs. In 2019 Oregon, Washington, Texas, and Connecticut successfully passed different bills to support social and emotional learning (Social Emotional Learning Alliance for the United States, 2019). The Fund for Success (FSS) was passed by Oregon's Governor Kate Brown to improve SEL in schools, student mental health and wellness, and teacher training. Each year \$1 billion will be allocated to FSS. In Washington, the Social Emotional Learning and Children's Mental Health Act passed. Washington's Governor created a committee to support and adopt standards for K-12 students (Burke, 2019). In Texas, the School Safety bill passed to improve the mental health guidelines in schools and promote a safe school environment (Texas Association of School Boards, 2019). Last, Connecticut passed the School Climate and Culturally Responsive Teaching bill to improve laws concerning bullying and school climate, which would enhance SEL (Social Emotional Learning Alliance for the United States, 2019).

In 2018 the CASEL organization did a scan of all 50 states to review the SEL policies and guidelines that were in place. According to the scan, all 50 states had preschool SEL competencies or standards, and 11 states have extended past preschool and into early elementary school. Just 18 states had K-12 SEL competencies or standards in place in 2018, which is only

one more than the 2011 scan. Only 21 states had SEL-related resources available to students and parents online (CASEL, 2020).

Standards

The creation of state K-12 academic standards was to ensure consistent education across states to provide similar learning for all students (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Although well-intentioned, learning standards can be ambiguous and focus on knowledge rather than skills. Especially at the high school level, standards are overflowing with different competencies (Miller-Lieber, Tissiere, & Bialek, 2017). Pressure from the government to improve test scores has ultimately pushed academic standards rather than social and emotional learning standards. Still, 42 states incorporated social-emotional standards, including responsible decision-making, while only 37 states focused on self-management skills, and 26 states focused on social awareness (Schonert-Reichl & Hanson-Peterson, 2017).

Preschool and elementary school SEL programs are frequent, and it is a rarity to find a preschool or elementary school without one. However, it is scarce to find K-12 “freestanding standards in SEL” (Dusenbury et al., 2015, pg. 536). In 2004, Illinois was the first to create K-12 indicators, followed by Pennsylvania and then Kansas. Dusenbury, Newman, Weissberg, Goren, Domitrovich, and Mart (2015) claimed aligning early childhood standards with K-12 education would be beneficial to support yearly growth in academics and SEL. Depending on the state, there has been the adoption of free-standing SEL standards. However, many states use national standards and refer to 21st Century Learning Skills instead.

Caution for SEL Program Adoption

School districts have an abundant number of preventative programs and social-emotional programs to choose from; however, applications are not one-size-fits-all. Accessing effective SEL programs for a student population is critical, considering each school's culture and makeup. It is suggested that many SEL programs were written without the consideration of minorities and different emotional needs (Desai et al., pg. 15). Hoffman (2009) suggests that social-emotional learning programs follow a specific framework of emotions that identify with Western culture (pg. 540). A further explanation suggests different cultures regulate, interpret, and express sentiments differently than the Western expression of behavioral control and talking about emotions (Hoffman, 2009, pg. 540). When schools choose an SEL program, they face selecting one for their specific population, making this an intricate part of the process.

Although many SEL programs are accessible, choosing an effective one for the school's population is necessary, and the financial investment of effective evidence-based programs remains costly. Desai et al. (2014) reveal the applications with high effectiveness ratings can range from free to \$3,000 per student (pg. 13). The potentially steep price of SEL programs limits accessibility to schools that need them the most (Desai et al., 2014); therefore, Shriberg (2014) declared the lack of effective SEL programs in low socioeconomic areas is an injustice.

Another caution to understand is that teacher training of SEL is required for student success. Upon certification, not all states require teachers to have mastery of the five SEL dimensions-- responsible decision-making, social awareness, relationship skills, self-awareness, and self-management. In 2017 a scan conducted by the University of British Columbia found only ten states addressed four of the five SEL teaching competency areas, and 36 states delivered

one or more (Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017, pg. 6). Since many new teachers enter the classroom without mastery of SEL competencies, they must receive training in whichever SEL program their school administers. Without this discipline, there is a high possibility that their teaching of SEL will be inadequate. Furthermore, the school's culture thrives on all teachers effectively participating and executing social-emotional learning in their classrooms. Cushman (2014) declared that an influential culture is received when all teachers receive adequate training in the chosen SEL program.

Conclusion

As education reform continues and schools respond, it is imperative to look at why districts, schools, and individual students do not achieve to their highest abilities. It is necessary for students to feel safe, properly regulate their emotions, and believe their school cares about them. Even with improved lessons, standards-based grading, common curriculum, and assessments, students benefit more with SEL implementation. Many social-emotional programs lead to an increase in academic achievement and empathy and a decrease in negative behaviors and bullying. Each school population is different, and many include a diverse community of students. There are a variety of SEL programs to choose from to best-fit a school's composition, but schools must have an understanding of the students and their adversities before program selection.

Social-emotional learning programs are mandated at both the state and federal levels; nevertheless, only 18 states have K-12 SEL competencies (CASEL, 2020). Many states only require the implementation of SEL at the preschool level. School officials and policymakers have to consider student achievement are significant when SEL programs are continuous from

kindergarten through high school. After years of focus on academic achievement and testing as a result of the No Child Left Behind legislation, the American education system and federal education policymakers has increasingly returned to a curriculum that teaches the whole child, including social-emotional development. Providing America's children with a sound, well-rounded education that includes academic and social development can only further benefit students' mental health when continued from preschool through high school.

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