

Research Brief for Schools

Social and Emotional Learning The Foundation of Student Success in School, Work, and Life

Imagine a school where students...

- Show up eager and ready to learn
- Feel a sense of connectedness to their school and teachers
- Feel safe from bullies
- Perform to their fullest potential

A growing body of research suggests that addressing the social and emotional needs of students may help us accomplish these goals.¹

Why is Social and Emotional Learning Important?

Ten years of research clearly shows that social and emotional learning (SEL) is foundational to children's success in school, work, and life.² According to a growing body of research, addressing the social and emotional needs of youth not only prepares students to learn, but also increases their capacity to learn.³ And a new meta-analysis reveals that SEL can improve academic performance by at least 11%!⁴

A growing concern about the mental health of children and adolescents along with a strong base of research has led to legislation that requires schools to address the social and emotional needs of students. In 2003, the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act was passed. This legislation required the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to create SEL standards and school districts to develop a policy stating how they will address students' social and emotional needs.



What is Social and Emotional Learning?

SEL refers to both a set of core competencies and a process of learning. The five core competencies that have been integrated into the Illinois State Learning Standards include: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making skills. Within each of these competencies are numerous other skills. **For example, youth who are socially and emotionally competent are able to:**

- **Recognize and manage emotions**
- **Express care and concern for others**
- **Make responsible decisions**
- **Behave ethically and responsibly**
- **Develop positive relationships**
- **Avoid risky behaviors**
- **Communicate effectively**
- **Set and reach goals**
- **Be self-motivated and self-directed**

The process of SEL refers to the creation of a safe, caring, and highly participatory learning environment where SEL competencies are modeled, taught, and reinforced. SEL is based on an understanding that learning is a social process; therefore, relationships and emotions are central to the learning process. SEL is also based on the realization that feelings, thoughts, and actions are interrelated. For learning to be effective, the needs of the whole child must be addressed.



SEL leads to **11%** increase in academic performance

Self-Awareness

Self-Management

Social-Awareness

Interpersonal Skills

Responsible Decision-Making

What are the Illinois State Social and Emotional Learning Standards?

The five core competencies are expressed in three goals and ten learning standards. The standards are expressed in five benchmark levels with a total of 618 performance descriptors. Details about the standards can be found at http://www.isbe.net/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm.

Goal 31: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.

Learning Standard A: Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.

Learning Standard B: Recognize personal qualities and external supports.

Learning Standard C: Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.

Importance of goal: Learning how to recognize, manage, and express emotions appropriately are skills that are key to impulse control, stress management, and the pursuit of goals. Just as important are the abilities to assess strengths, monitor progress toward goals, utilize resources, and know when and where to turn for help.

Goal 32: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.

Learning Standard A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.

Learning Standard B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.

Learning Standard C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

Learning Standard D: Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

Importance of goal: Recognizing and accepting differences, communicating effectively, working cooperatively with others, and knowing how to manage interpersonal conflicts are central skills to building and maintaining positive relationships.

Goal 33: Demonstrate decision-making and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

Learning Standard A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.

Learning Standard B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.

Learning Standard C: Contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.

Importance of goal: Throughout life, students will make decisions that impact themselves and others. Knowing how to solve problems and make good decisions requires the abilities to: understand the problem, explore alternatives, evaluate possible consequences, and learn from the decisions. These are skills that are essential to citizenship in the classroom and in society.

What is the Most Effective Way to Address Students' Social and Emotional Needs?

SEL is the most effective when it becomes an organizing framework for all school activities including academics, health education, prevention programming, after-school programming, etc.⁵ A well-coordinated schoolwide SEL process involves several key components including:

- An evidence-based SEL curriculum
- The creation of a caring learning environment
- Caring relationships between students and teachers and among adults in the school community
- Engaging instructional practices
- High expectations and support for academic performance
- Parental involvement⁶

When SEL is integrated into the total school experience, the outcomes are the greatest.⁷ Evaluations show improvements in **attitudes** (e.g. greater attachment and engagement to school), **behaviors** (e.g. better study habits and less risky behaviors), and **performance** (e.g. improved subject matter mastery and achievement test scores).⁸



core competencies + positive learning environment = social and emotional learning

What are SEL Instructional Approaches?

Schools can implement SEL in a variety of ways. For those interested in a schoolwide approach, CASEL has developed an implementation guide and toolkit (see www.casel.org). For those who want to start on a smaller scale, there are a number of ways to integrate SEL into specific classrooms or programs.⁹

Select an evidence-based curriculum

Safe and Sound is a reliable and handy reference of the top-rated SEL curricula. For more information, check out www.casel.org.

Infuse SEL into existing lessons

Classroom teachers can incorporate SEL into their existing lesson plans without adding on a separate lesson (see inset).

Develop a caring, supportive learning environment

The learning environment plays a key role in the development of SEL skills. Youth learn these skills best in the context of caring relationships and safe environments where these skills are valued, demonstrated, and practiced on a regular basis.

Incorporate cooperative learning strategies

Cooperative learning strategies provide students with opportunities to practice all three state SEL learning goals. Cooperative learning is most effective when students have already received SEL skills instruction.¹⁰

Use experiential learning such as service learning

Experiential learning can be an effective strategy for supporting SEL skills, especially when students are asked to reflect upon their experience. Reflective questions enhance self-awareness and inform future oppor-

tunities for self-management and decision-making. And when the experience involves others, it has the potential to build social-awareness and relationship skills.

Teach to multiple intelligences and learning styles

Use a variety of instructional strategies and help students learn how they learn best. When students are aware of their learning style, they can take on greater responsibility for their learning and be more confident learners.

Create informal learning opportunities

Significant learning opportunities exist during after-school hours, advisory, or homeroom periods for fun, interactive SEL skill building and practice.

How do You Teach SEL Skills?

New skills need to be learned and practiced before they will become second-nature. Use the following five-step skill development process to help your students be able to transfer what they learn to everyday situations. Students need repeated opportunities to practice and use SEL skills in the classroom, throughout the school day, and at home.

- 1. Introduce:** Define the skill and discuss its importance.
- 2. Model:** Break down the skill into its behavioral steps and model each step.
- 3. Rehearse:** Practice the new skill in a safe environment. Provide feedback and positive reinforcement. Cooperative small group activities, guided rehearsal/role play, written reflections, peer teaching, and storyboards are helpful rehearsal strategies.
- 4. Generalize and apply:** Provide a guided discussion on when and how the skill would be helpful to aid in the transfer to real life situations.
- 5. Reinforce and reward:** Recognize proper and effective use of the skills and point out the benefits of using that skill.

Infusing SEL into Subject Matter Lessons

Social Studies

Ask students to explore historical events from the various perspectives of those involved. How did their attitudes, feelings, and decisions affect history? What might have happened if someone with different values, beliefs, and/or goals had been in their place?

Math

Help students who find math stressful recognize the source of their anxiety and then help them explore ways to deal with it. Most forms of stress manifest in a physical sensation. Help students learn how to recognize early signs of anxiety so that they can better manage it.

Reading or Literature

Ask students to consider the feelings of the characters in a story and reflect on how those feelings may or may not have influenced the character's actions. Ask students what they would have done if they were in the same situation.

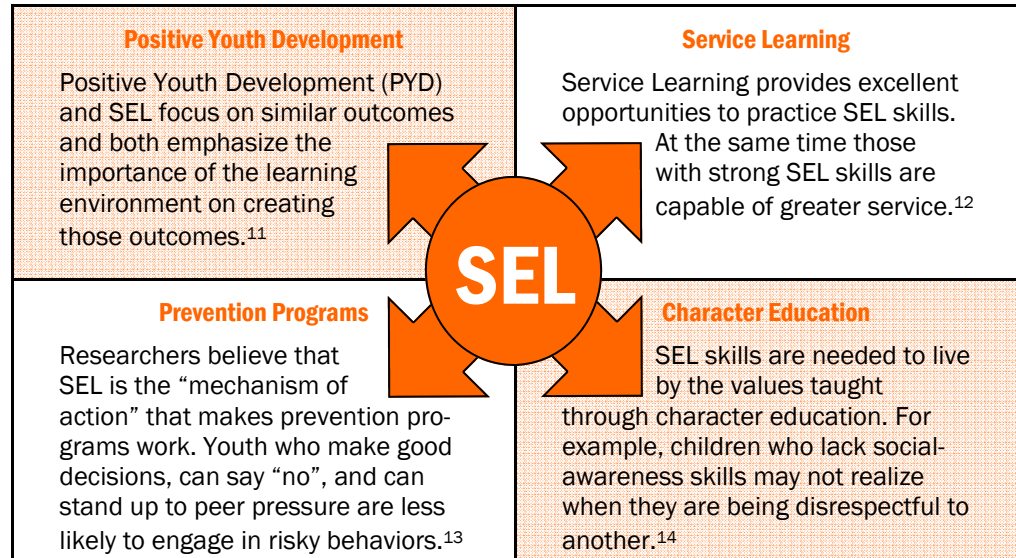


SEL core competencies

Self-Awareness Social-Awareness
Self-Management Interpersonal Skills Responsible Decision-Making

How Does SEL Relate to Other Youth Programs?

The chart to the right highlights the relationship between SEL and other types of youth programs. If these types of programs are already offered in your school, consider how well they help youth develop the core SEL competencies and contribute to a caring, safe, and participatory learning environment. SEL can be incorporated into existing efforts.



How Can You Get Started Right Now?

Model skills

Be a good role model of SEL skills. Students are always learning as they watch your actions and reactions.

Build positive relationships with students

Get to know your students and let them know you care about them and their future. Research shows that outcomes improve with more positive relationships.¹⁵

Look for teachable moments

We are always using SEL skills so any moment can be an opportunity to teach the core competencies.

Create an effective learning environment

Create a caring, safe, and highly participatory environment where youth feel safe to practice new skills.

Talk to colleagues and parents about SEL

Form a schoolwide committee and discuss the importance of SEL and how your school can create a comprehensive approach that will lead to the greatest outcomes.

How Can University of Illinois Extension Help You and Your School?

Extension educators can help you and your school in a variety of ways.

- Provide CPDU trainings on SEL related topics.
- Help you translate relevant research into action.
- Serve as a member of a schoolwide committee to address SEL needs.
- Provide facilitation support to your SEL committee.
- Collaborate to provide SEL after-school programs.
- Assist with parent education on SEL.
- Provide supplemental SEL resources and curricula.
- Help connect you with community resources.

Go to <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/sel/> to learn additional ways Extension can help you address youth’s SEL development.

Was this brief helpful? We’d like to know. Please go to: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/sel/> and tell us what you think and/or request additional information on SEL topics.



When SEL is integrated into the total school experience, outcomes are the greatest including changes in attitudes, behaviors, and performance.

References

1. 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: Teachers College Press.
2. Cohen, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Educating minds and hearts: Social and emotional learning and the passage into adolescence*. New York: Teachers College Press, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, co-publishers.
3. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2003). *Safe and sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs*. Chicago: Author.
4. Weissberg, R.P. (2007, December). *Social and emotional learning for student success*. Presentation at the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Forum, New York.
5. Zins et al., (2004).
6. Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., et al. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
7. Zins et al., (2004).
8. Zins et al., (2004).
9. Hawkins, J. D., Smith, B. H., & Catalano, R. F. (2004). Social development and social and emotional learning. In Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* (pp. 135-150). New York: Teachers College Press.
11. Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & et al. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional and academic learning [Electronic version]. *American Psychologist*, 58, 466-474.
12. Fredericks, L. (2003). *Making the case for social and emotional learning and service-learning*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2003.
13. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003.
14. Personal communication with Mary Utne O'Brien, CASEL.
15. Hawkins et. al., (2004).

Authors

Christina Foster, Extension Specialist, Social and Emotional Learning, DuPage County
Jeff Franklin, Youth Prevention Educator, Jackson County
April Littig, Youth Development Educator, Morgan/Scott Unit
Brenda Eyler, Youth Development Educator, Cass/Schuyler Unit
Tessa Hobbs-Curley, Youth Development Educator, McDonough County
Sheri Merry, Youth Development Educator, Hancock County

University of Illinois Extension: Putting Knowledge to Work

University of Illinois Extension

University of Illinois Extension serves an outreach mission for the University, offering educational programs to residents throughout Illinois. Programs and information are offered in areas such as:

- 4-H & Youth Development
- Community and Economic Development
- Nutrition, Family, and Consumer Life
- Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Horticulture

As part of the nationwide Cooperative Extension System, U of I Extension draws on research-based

expertise from the University and other land-grant universities from across the country. Through learning partnerships that put knowledge to work, **U of I Extension's programs are aimed at making life better, healthier, safer, and more profitable for individuals and their communities.**

Communities are directly served by Extension staff in 77 unit offices and 12 centers located throughout Illinois with support from state and campus-based specialists. Illinois residents access Extension programs through a variety of formats.

4-H & Youth Development

The 4-H youth development program of University of Illinois Extension is focused on facilitating the development of youth in positive ways. By assisting youth in acquiring knowledge, forming attitudes, and developing essential life skills, U of I Extension enables youth to become caring, confident, competent, and contributing members of their communities and the world.

Research suggests that one of the best ways to support young people in developing to their fullest potential is by providing them with opportunities to meet the four basic human needs of belonging, independence, mastery, and generosity.

Extension youth development programs provide opportunities for youth to meet these needs by incorporating eight critical elements of positive youth development (PYD). Research indicates that when these elements are present in youth pro-

grams, outcomes for youth improve:

- Positive relationships with a caring adult
- An environment that is welcoming and inclusive
- A learning environment that is physically and psychologically safe
- Opportunities to achieve competency
- Opportunities for engaged learning
- Opportunities for self-determination
- Opportunities to provide service for others
- Active participation in the future

Youth Development staff bring PYD expertise to their communities through a variety of educational programs and services:

- 4-H community, school, after-school, and summer programs
- Trainings for teachers and others working with youth
- Learning enrichment curricula and resources
- Assistance in addressing local youth issues
- Volunteer development

4-H is a community of young people across America learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills.

**For more information, contact your local Extension office.
Go to www.extension.uiuc.edu and click on Find an Office.**

Last revised: January 8, 2008

