

Social and Emotional Learning: The Foundation for Success in School and Life

Social and Emotional Learning Defined

Lions Quest programs are built upon the foundation of an educational approach known as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL is a process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.⁵

These five competency clusters are interrelated and often operate simultaneously. As **Figure 1** illustrates, two of the clusters (in dark orange) focus on skills related to the self, two (in blue) focus on skills related to others, and the third (in green) focuses on decision making. The ability of adults to enhance these competencies is critically important for student success.

Research has shown that school staff are more effective at fostering and supporting student SEL when they themselves are socially and emotionally competent. Principals and school administrators set the tone for SEL by the way they conduct themselves and treat staff, students, families, and community members. School leaders with strong social-emotional competencies also set an important example as they build and maintain positive and trusting relationships among members of the school community.^{7,8}

The Five SEL Core Competencies are comprised of skill sets that support the development of the competency.



Figure 1: Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies (CASEL, 2015)

Self-Awareness

- Labeling one's feelings accurately
- Recognizing the connection between feelings, thoughts, and behavior
- Accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations
- Motivating oneself
- Working toward and achieving goals
- Setting realistic goals
- Having a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism
- Having a positive mindset

Self-Management

- Regulating one's emotions
- Managing stress
- Controlling one's impulses
- Motivating oneself
- Working toward and achieving goals

Social Awareness

- Perspective taking
- Empathy
- Respecting diversity
- Understanding social and ethical norms of behavior
- Recognizing family, school, and community supports

Relationship Skills

- Building healthy relationships, including those with diverse individuals and groups
- Communicating clearly
- Working cooperatively
- Resisting negative social pressure
- Resolving conflicts
- Seeking help when needed

Responsible Decision Making

- Making constructive, safe choices about self, relationships, and school
- Considering the well-being of self and others
- Recognizing one's responsibility to behave ethically
- Basing decisions on safety, social, and ethical considerations
- Evaluating realistic consequences of various actions⁹

Outcomes Associated with the Five SEL Core Competencies

A growing body of research indicates that social and emotional skills, knowledge, and attitudes are critical both to academic learning and to the competencies students will need to be successful in the 21st century. The short-term goals of SEL programs are to: 1) promote students' self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills; and 2) improve student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school.

These, in turn, provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores.¹⁰

Research has identified the following five interrelated clusters of social and emotional competencies shown in Figure 1: Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies.

Self-awareness refers to the ability to recognize one's own feelings and thoughts and how they influence one's behaviors. This includes accurately assessing personal strengths (as well as one's challenges or limitations), setting realistic goals, and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

Self-management is the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. This includes skills and strategies for delaying gratification, managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and achieving personal and academic goals.

Social awareness is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Social awareness also includes understanding social and ethical norms for behavior and recognizing family, school, and community resources.

Relationship skills refers to the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, including those with diverse individuals and groups. Relationship skills include knowing how to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist negative social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and effectively seek help when needed.

Responsible decision making is the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions, including school and life expectations, based on a consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, and realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions. Responsible decisions reflect concern for one's well-being as well as the well-being of others.⁶



Figure 2: Logic Model for SEL Approaches and Outcomes

Providing students with explicit evidenced-based SEL skills instruction throughout the curriculum within safe, caring, and well-managed learning environments addresses many of these learning barriers through enhancing school attachment, reducing risky behaviors, and promoting positive development, and thereby positively influencing academic achievement.

Research confirms that SEL can have a positive impact on school climate and promotes a host of academic, social, and emotional benefits for students. Durlak, Weissberg et al's recent meta-analysis of 213 rigorous studies of SEL in schools indicates that students receiving quality SEL instruction demonstrated:

- **Better academic performance**—achievement scores an average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction.
- **Improved attitudes and behaviors**—greater motivation to learn, deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and better classroom behavior.
- **Fewer negative behaviors**—decreased disruptive class behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals.
- **Reduced emotional distress**—fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal.¹¹

These studies also found that the outcomes described above were the result of high-quality implementation in which SEL programs were offered through S.A.F.E. practices: Skill development is Sequenced, instructional methods are Active, time in the curriculum is Focused on skill development, and skills are Explicitly taught in the curriculum.

When these four practices were present in the implementation plan, students' school-related attitudes, behavior, health, and academic performance improved.¹¹

In addition to offering curriculum, support materials, and professional development in SEL, Lions Quest programs also align with the S.A.F.E. description of high-quality implementation practices that led to the improvement in academic achievement and the decreases in problem behaviors previously cited. The Lions Quest programs explicitly teach SEL skills through sequentially taught lessons that are offered during a focused time in the curriculum and employ a highly participatory and interactive instructional approach that models and reinforces social and emotional development in the classroom.