

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

**S**ocial and emotional competencies such as self-awareness, self-efficacy, emotion regulation, problem solving, collaboration, communication, empathy, and goal setting, have been shown to be as important, and sometimes more important, to success in school, career, and life as cognitive ability and academic knowledge. Learning itself is a holistic process involving a person's emotional state and social interaction as well as intellect. Thus, schools will be more successful in achieving student learning outcomes if they deliberately foster social and emotional competencies.

When students develop these competencies, they are more motivated to learn and committed to school. There are also improvements in student behavior and school climate. Students are less likely to act out in class or have conduct problems and emotional distress; attitudes toward self and others improve, resulting in lower rates of harassment and bullying and other forms of victimization; and there is an overall improvement in positive social behaviors. When teachers adopt pedagogical practices that foster SEL competencies, they develop youth-centered teaching strategies that contribute to positive classroom and school-wide environments.

In this What Works Brief, we summarize the state-of-knowledge on how to teach and cultivate social and emotional competencies, a process generally known as Social Emotional Learning (SEL). One of the lessons learned from both research and practice, particularly the work of the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is that SEL requires intentionality, commit-

ment, and time. It does not happen overnight. It needs to be both directly taught and embedded within a supportive school climate and culture. Indeed, the fostering of SEL and a positive school climate are inextricably linked, reinforcing each other.

### **Young people learn social and emotional competencies best when:**

- » SEL is central to the school's shared vision and mission, and embedded in the school's culture.
- » An evidence-based SEL instructional program is implemented with sufficient dosage, duration, and effectiveness.
- » Young people receive both direct instruction on SEL and timely feedback during real life situations during the natural course of the school day.
- » SEL is implemented in a school with a supportive school climate.
- » Staff are provided sufficient training on teaching, modeling, and coaching SEL skills.
- » School leadership monitors the delivery of SEL instruction and provides encouragement and feedback to teachers who are tasked with implementing it.
- » Students are recognized for successful use of learned SEL strategies.
- » SEL involves partnerships with families and communities.

*What Works Briefs* summarize state-of-the-art practices, strategies, and programs for improving school climate. Based on current scholarship in education, school psychology, and other related disciplines, each *What Works Brief* provides a number of practical recommendations for school staff, parents, and community members. *What Works Briefs* can be used separately to target specific issues, or together to address more complex, system-wide issues.

## QUICK WINS: WHAT TEACHERS & OTHER ADULTS CAN DO RIGHT NOW

Quick Wins are strategies and activities that school adults can implement on their own, without coordinating across other individuals, school departments, or community agencies. Quick Wins are meant to provide school adults with inspiring ideas for immediate action.

### *Instructional Practices*

1. During academic tasks, employ instructional practices that foster and reinforce SEL competencies. Strategies that help foster decision-making, collaboration, relationship-building, self- and social-awareness, and self-management include:

- » Project based learning, a teaching method that allows young people to work on a complex problem over time.
- » Collaborative structures, instructional tools that engage young people in cooperative learning, a process wherein small groups, or teams, of students at different levels of ability work together to solve a problem and to further their understanding of a concept.
- » Peer and self-assessment, a process requiring young people to evaluate their own work and the work of their peers. Typically, peer and self-assessment requires young people to set goals, assess their products against a rubric or checklist, and provide constructive, formative feedback.

### *Opportunities Throughout the Regular School Day*

2. Find opportunities throughout the regular school day to provide modeling and immediate feedback to young people about SEL skills.

- » Integrate SEL language and prompts into daily interactions, practices, and routines.
- » Model SEL competencies, behaviors, and attitudes, especially in fostering caring, respectful relationships with students.
- » Turn social conflicts into teachable SEL moments.
- » Acknowledge a student immediately when she successfully exhibits SEL competencies. Remember to name the competency you've observed (e.g., "I just noticed you made a great choice by taking a deep breath to calm yourself before your presentation") to help ensure that he knows what exactly he did well.

## UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS: SCHOOL-WIDE POLICIES, PRACTICES & PROGRAMS

Universal supports for social and emotional learning target the whole student population, rather than any single at-risk group or individual. Because they generally require more planning across people, programs, or communities, universal supports for social and emotional learning may take longer to implement than Quick Wins. An important lesson from research is

that effective SEL requires both direct instruction and a school climate in which SEL is embedded in the school's mission, developmental supports (e.g., caring adult relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation) are provided that foster these competencies, staff model them, and students are recognized when they exhibit them.

## 1. CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Data from a needs assessment of SEL-related competencies, climate, supports, and services can make the critical difference in raising awareness of the need for, and commitment to, implementing SEL and in guiding programmatic decision-making and monitoring progress in meeting the identified needs. See Toolbox A for information on the California Healthy Kids Survey, one useful tool for collecting needs assessment data.

The assessment should identify:

- » The strengths and needs of students related to specific social emotional competencies, including behaviors that reflect them (or lack thereof, such as bullying).
- » School climate conditions and cultural factors that can help or hinder competency development.
- » Current school resources (supports, services) available to foster these competencies.
- » Institutional barriers that might exist, including staff attitudes (e.g., resistance), as well as the structures, processes, systems, rituals, and routines that must be addressed in order to reduce resistance.

For more information, download *Using CalSCHLS to Assess Social Emotional Learning and Health* at:

[http://cal-schls.wested.org/resources/CalSCHLS\\_AssessSELH.pdf](http://cal-schls.wested.org/resources/CalSCHLS_AssessSELH.pdf)

### Toolbox A.

California Department of Education's California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), and its companion staff survey, the California School Climate Survey (CSCS), are valuable SEL assessment tools.

- » The CHKS Resilience and Youth Development Module measures six internal strengths or assets that align with the CASEL SEL competencies — (1) empathy; (2) self-efficacy; (3) self-awareness; (4) cooperation and communication; (5) aspirations and goals; (6) and problem solving — as well as three developmental supports that are essential for fostering them.
- » The CHKS Social Emotional Health Module assesses academic persistence, emotional regulation, behavioral control, and positive life orientation, as well as the first three RYDM internal strengths.
- » The supplementary CHKS School Climate Module provides student data on positive peer relationships, social awareness, respect for diversity, and on the social-emotional and behavioral supports in the school.
- » The CSCS assesses staff perceptions of the degree to which: (1) students demonstrate and teachers model SEL competencies; (2) the school provides the conditions and supports that foster social-emotional health; and (3) the school supports the creation of a safe and supportive environment.

## 2. SELECT AN EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM AND IMPLEMENT WITH FIDELITY

*Use the following criteria for selecting an SEL program to be used universally in your school:*

Ask yourself if the program meets the following four characteristics of effective SEL programs stressed by CASEL:

- » Sequential — uses a step-by-step training approach that connects and coordinates activities to teach skills,
- » Active — uses active forms of learning,
- » Focused — allots sufficient time on skill development, and
- » Explicit — has explicit learning goals.

## 2. EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM CONT'D

### *Also evaluate the program against the following criteria:*

- » Addresses needs identified by the comprehensive assessment of students.
- » Has evidence of effectiveness for the context of your school (e.g., student demographics, school location).
- » Specifically names and helps young people recognize emotions.
- » Teaches young people to prevent and resolve conflicts with peers, set goals, techniques for problem solving.
- » Provides examples and exercises to apply to specific problems and problem behaviors, such as substance use and bullying.

## 3. PROVIDE SUFFICIENT STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

For staff to be able to effectively teach and model SEL competencies, they need to be provided sufficient professional development. Train teachers and other staff on how to:

- » Implement SEL programs with fidelity.
- » Employ instructional practices that foster SEL competencies.
- » Reinforce SEL lessons during natural interpersonal interactions throughout the day.
- » Build supportive learning environments using positive classroom management strategies.
- » Manage their own stress responses and react effectively to emotional and social challenges and conflicts.
- » Intentionally cultivate positive relationships with students in order to reinforce SEL competencies.
- » Replace punitive discipline with restorative practices that teach conflict resolution.

### *Resources for Selecting an Evidence-Based Program:*

There are many government and non-profit agencies that use stringent criteria for determining the effectiveness of SEL programs. All of the below clearinghouses will provide information on evidence-based programs that match your district or school's context:

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) [nrepp.samhsa.gov](http://nrepp.samhsa.gov)
2. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Model Programs Guide [ojjdp.gov/mpg/](http://ojjdp.gov/mpg/)
3. Institute of Educational (IES) Sciences What Works Clearinghouse [ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/)
4. Best Evidence Encyclopedia, Johns Hopkins University [bestevidence.org](http://bestevidence.org)

### *What Can School District Leadership Do To Support SEL?*

Schools can accomplish so much more — and sustain their efforts better — when SEL and school climate are district-wide priorities.

- » Make SEL part of the district's vision, mission, and long-term plans.
- » Develop district SEL learning standards.
- » Integrate restorative practices, including SEL, into district behavior policies.
- » Require assessment of SEL-related needs and resources.
- » Align budgets and staffing to support SEL.
- » Select and implement evidence-based SEL programs at all grade levels, so that SEL competencies grow as young people progress through school.
- » Implement district-wide professional development for SEL.
- » Monitor SEL implementation with both process and outcomes metrics.
- » Create an SEL learning community within the district.

## 4. FOSTER PARENT-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

While there is much that schools can do on their own to promote SEL, parent and community collaboration is needed to reinforce the lessons learned at school and provide the developmental supports and opportunities youth need to fully acquire these competencies.

- » Provide opportunities for parents to learn about the value of SEL competencies and, most importantly, tips for how to model and foster them at home.
- » Coordinate with after- and out-of-school programs and activities to ensure they employ SEL-informed instructional practices and developmental supports.
- » Build community partnerships to provide coordinated services that augment SEL competencies learned at school and home.

## TARGETED SUPPORTS: INTENSIVE SUPPORTS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Targeted supports include those resources that are provided to meet the specific needs of high-risk students and their families. Those in need of targeted SEL supports may include those with trauma experiences and mental health needs that require more intensive treatment supports in order to benefit from the universal SEL curriculum.

### TRAUMA-INFORMED INTERVENTION

The Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) is a school-based, group and individual intervention. According to its developers, CBITS “is designed to reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and behavior problems, and to improve functioning, grades and attendance, peer and parent support, and coping skills.” All CBITS materials can be downloaded free. [cbitsprogram.org](http://cbitsprogram.org)

### YOUTH COURTS

Youth Courts used in school settings build social and emotional competencies by empowering youth to solve problems occurring within their school communities by holding their peers accountable for behavior that interferes with learning and safety. Youth Courts may be used as natural extensions of the school discipline continuum, wherein youth are entrusted with all or most elements of the discipline process, typically for more minor offenses

made by first time offenders. Several models for Youth Courts exist; some give all roles to students (e.g., judge, lawyer, jury) while others provide final ‘sentencing’ responsibilities to school adults. ‘Sentences’ are generally restorative in nature, and may involve community service, oral or written apologies, or specific skill-building education requirements.

National Youth Court Guidelines  
<http://www.youthcourt.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/guidelines.pdf>

National Association of Youth Courts  
<http://www.youthcourt.net/>

### ADDITIONAL HIGH-QUALITY RESOURCES

**Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):** CASEL provides a well-developed framework for SEL, as well as several high-quality resources for educators wishing to implement SEL in their schools and classrooms. [CASEL.org](http://CASEL.org)

**Buck Institute for Education (BIE) model for project-based learning:** BEI provides several resources for educators looking to integrate collaborative structures in general and project based learning, specifically, into their classrooms. [BIE.org](http://BIE.org)

**SUGGESTED CITATION:** Austin, G., Wolf-Prusan, L., & O’Malley, M.D. (2015). What Works Brief #12: Social and Emotional Learning. Los Alamitos: WestEd.

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This What Works Brief was developed by WestEd for the California Department of Education for the Safe and Supportive Schools initiative.