

- **What skills can be developed through SEL?**

Social-emotional learning is designed for students to gain skills and competencies related to problem-solving, goal setting, recognizing and managing emotions, self-control, perspective taking, developing and maintaining positive relationships, and reducing negative outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Current findings suggest that SEL yields significant positive effects on the targeted social-emotional competencies, in addition to the students' attitudes about the self, others, and school (Durlak et al., 2011). Over time, mastery of these skills can produce a developmental progression which begins to shift behaviors from being primarily controlled by external factors to acting according to internalized beliefs (Bear & Watkins, 2006; Durlak, et al., 2011).

Youth benefit from strategies designed to reach all students in three ways: "they display significantly more positive behaviors, significantly fewer negative behaviors and, in some programs, show significantly improved school performance" (Durlak, et al, 2007, p. 276). Four highlighted areas which are positively influenced by the implementation of SEL programs include:

Problem Solving

One of the core competencies that the curricula for SEL programs focus on is developing problem-solving skills. These problem-solving skills include developing and achieving goals, positive decision making, and the ability to handle interpersonal scenarios constructively (Durlak et al., 2011).

Self-Control or Self-Regulation

Self-control or self-regulation is being able to direct attention, thoughts, impulses, and emotional control. Self-control helps individuals engage in actions in order to achieve long-term goals (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). It includes changing or stopping unwanted social behaviors (Palmer, 2010). Self-control helps students develop skills for coping, especially when times are tough (Ronen et al., 2016). Learning self-control also helps with being able to wait for gratifying experiences, specifically related to the student's awareness of the consequences of their actions and being mindful of them (Ng-Night, 2016). Overall, developing self-control skills can be an important part of a student's well-being, evidenced by studies that have shown self-control can play into one's future health and wealth (Israel et al., 2014; Moffitt, 2015).

Trust & Help-Seeking

SEL programming have been associated with positive interpersonal outcomes, including improved attitudes about the self and others.

Additionally, this programming has yielded increased prosocial behaviors among students, such as help-seeking behaviors (Durlak, et al., 2011; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Decreased Self-Destructive Behaviors

The SEL approach integrates development and promotion of competence in order to reduce potential risk factors. (Durlak et al., 2011). Skills gained through SEL programming can lead to decreased self-destructive behaviors. SEL skills can be applied to prevent problem behaviors like bullying, substance use, and interpersonal violence (Durlak, et al., 2011; Zins & Elias, 2006).

- **Why is SEL important in mental health promotion and suicide prevention?**

Two SEL programs have measured the short term or long term effects on suicidal behaviors among their students. Each found profound reduction in suicidal ideation and attempts. A study of the “Skills for Life Programme for Adolescents”, a Dutch program, showed “that the intervention was a significant predictor of decreased suicidality” in the short term (Gravensteijn C. et al., 2011, p. 10). The “Good Behavior Game”, which is implemented in the first and second grades, has been studied for decades. This program reduced by one half rates of suicidal ideation and attempts occurring by age 19-21 (Good Behavior Game (GBG), 2017) & (NREPP, SAMHSA, Good Behavior Game)

Students contend “with significant social, emotional, and mental barriers that prevent them from succeeding in both school and life” (Dymnicki, A. et al., 2013, p. 4). The CDC’s 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, SAMHSA’s 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, and the 2012 National College Health Assessment show “that many high school and college students are engaged in health-risk behaviors” which are “major contributors to the leading causes of death among persons aged 10-24 years” (Dymnicki, A. et al., 2013, p. 4). Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the United States for this age group (CDC 2014). SEL addresses some of the barriers to learning and to health.

- **How does SEL influence development?**

One way to approach the best fit for SEL programming is to identify how SEL can positively influence expected developmental tasks according to the age of the students. In the table below, competences are listed in order of introduction by school level. In the preschool years, the competencies listed (e.g., beginning to learn how to self-manage and behave in groups) are foundational for further growth in elementary school. SEL programming needs to continue to address these foundational competencies in elementary school, in addition to others (e.g., showing and sharing emotions, as well as having more complex relationships). This structure continues to build in middle and high schools.

Developmental Tasks of Social and Emotional Competence Pre K - 12

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|---------------|---|
| Preschool | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become and be socially and academically engaged • Manage emotions (appropriately for a young child), especially with adult support • Stay connected to adults, while beginning to develop peer relationships • In play and learning, pay attention and follow directions, wait, sit still, and effectively join and leave groups |
| Elementary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become increasingly successful at navigating peer relationships and friendships independent of adult support • Show and share emotions appropriately, and with appropriate people |
| Middle School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form closer relationships with peers of both genders • Manage increasingly complex academic content and tasks, with increasing independence from adults • Effectively manage transitions to middle and high school • Increase independence from adults |
| High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin preparing for adult roles (e.g., become more nurturing to younger children, begin preparing and practicing for work roles) • Develop an ethical value system that allows for responsible decision-making and responsible behavior toward self and others |

Table #1. Adapted from *Developmental Tasks of Social and Emotional Competence Across the Grade Spans* from Denham (2015), cited in Dusenbury et al. (2015)

- **How can SEL be integrated into schools and districts?**

SEL is itself a widely-defined concept but at its core, it is a process of developing student and adult social and emotional competencies. Therefore, there are multiple ways to develop and nurture social and emotional skills and competencies, ranging from general pedagogical practices, to specific classroom interventions, to a whole school approach. For the most successful implementation, SEL requires the support of everyone at all levels in a school community.

With multiple ways to integrate SEL in schools and school districts, there is not one way or a “right” way. SEL is also not merely a curriculum or program that is delivered to a select group of students by specific teachers or other providers. SEL is an approach that addresses the needs of all students and all staff since everyone has social and emotional needs, concerns, and skills. Because of the nature of SEL, deciding how to implement a curriculum or program can be confusing to teachers, administrators, and even for parents.

For most schools, the best first step is to assess what the school community - teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and students - know about SEL, what the school is already doing well, and where the school wants to grow. It is important to know how SEL aligns with the school goals and core values as the school team determines the core competencies and skills the students and staff already possesses and which they will further develop and refine. Having an understanding that SEL is essential to cognitive processes and positively impacts academic outcomes supports its adoption, especially for educators.

SEL validates what most teachers are already doing in their roles; it is *not* another add-on to the existing endless list of responsibilities for teachers and administrators. Social emotional skills can be implicitly embedded in the practices of teaching and learning. SEL is about reframing the incidental teaching of SEL skills into an intentional practice.

Teacher social and emotional competencies set the tone for effective student social and emotional competencies. The more of these skills and strategies teachers use, both through their own approach and their social and instruction teaching practices, the more skills and strategies students will be exposed to and have opportunities to practice. This is why it is fundamental for teachers to be part of any SEL implementation.



How Do Teachers Support Social and Emotional Learning? from American Institutes of Research’s Center on Great Teachers and Leaders <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sel-school>

The educational process can also dispel common myths about SEL, for example, that it is only for younger students, it is not necessary for academic achievers, and it is for students who don't learn to behave at home. At the same time, it's important to know that SEL is not a panacea that will solve problems of achievement, equity, and behavioral issues at school.

- **Approaches to Promoting SEL**

Schools can help students develop social and emotional competence through several types of approaches. These include:

- Direct and explicit teaching of SEL skills in free-standing lessons
- Integrating SEL in teaching practices to create a learning environment supportive of SEL
- Integrating SEL instruction into an academic curriculum
- Creating policies, organizational structures, and a positive culture and climate that supports students' social and emotional development

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. At the middle and high school level, SEL programming can happen in the context of regular curriculum and instruction activities, but it can also take place through activities such as health promotion and character education, or through prevention efforts such as those that target suicide prevention, violence, substance use, or dropout.

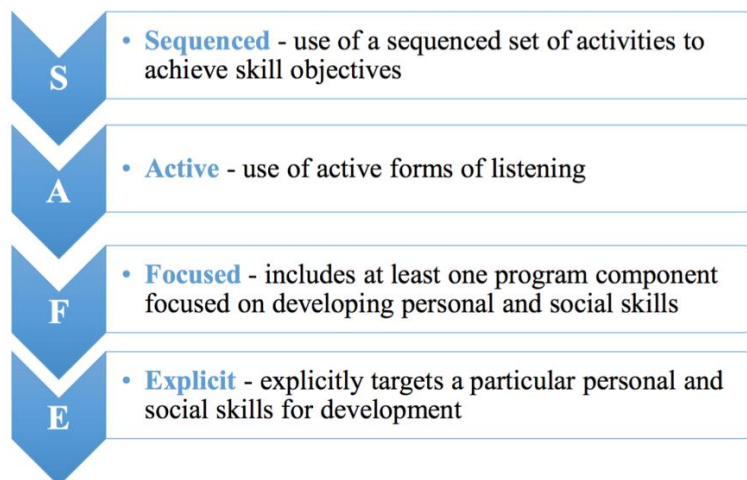
All approaches contribute to the short-term outcomes of skill acquisition, improved attitudes, and an enhanced learning environment, which in turn lead to behavioral and academic outcomes such as positive social behavior, fewer conduct problems, lower emotional distress, and improved academic performance, as listed below.



SEL Approaches from: <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/approaches/>

The development of effective SEL programs incorporates four elements referred to as “Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit (SAFE) practices” (Dymnicki, A., et al 2013)

CASEL SAFE Practices



<http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/approaches>

Students participating in SEL programming which apply the “SAFE” practices demonstrated (on average) “a 12 percentile increase in achievement” (Durlak, J. A., et al., 2010, p. 302). Implementation influences outcomes and requires the support of school leaders (Durlak J.A., et al, 2007). Effective SEL programming can enhance both the promotion of youth wellness and the prevention of suicide.

States and school districts are beginning to identify and define SEL standards for students and educators (found at: <http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/WhataretheKeyFeaturesofHigh-QualityStandards11816.pdf>) Illinois, Kansas, and Alaska have all taken steps toward this end. California is currently in this process, collaborating with several other states to develop statewide standards that are comprehensive across the above four approaches.