EDUCATION POLICY Center
at American Institutes for Research

When Districts Support and Integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Findings From an Ongoing Evaluation of Districtwide Implementation of SEL

By Kimberly Kendziora and Nick Yoder

OCTOBER 2016

AIR®
American Institutes for Research®

The **Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research** (AIR) provides rigorous research- and evidence-based perspectives on education issues spanning prekindergarten to careers, including reports, briefs, legislative guides, and our InformED blog—all written by AIR experts. Visit our site at www.edupolicycenter.org regularly for current information on how research and practice can provide much-needed evidence to inform your policy decisions.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kimberly Kendziora is a principal researcher at AIR whose work focuses on the evaluation of school- and community-based initiatives aimed at promoting better social, emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes for children.

Nick Yoder is a senior consultant and researcher at AIR. He leads the work on social and emotional learning (SEL) and school climate for the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, in addition to conducting research and evaluations on SEL practices, with a specific focus on continuous improvement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the NoVo Foundation, whose funding has made the evaluation of the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) possible, and the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, which supported in part the preparation of this brief. We recognize and honor the significant intellectual contributions of our colleagues in the work, including AIR's David Osher, Larry Friedman, Andrew Swanlund, Paul Bailey, Juliette Berg, Lisa Hoogstra, Mark Garibaldi, Manolya Tanyu, Clare Halloran, Leah Brown, and Andrew Yarrow as well as staff from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): Roger Weissberg, Libi Gil, Paul Goren, Celene Domitrovich, Amy Mart, and Maria Logli Allison. We thank the many committed educators in the eight districts that are part of the CDI for their participation in the evaluation.

When Districts Support and Integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Findings From an Ongoing Evaluation of Districtwide Implementation of SEL

THE ISSUE

Students need more than just academic knowledge to succeed in college, careers, and personal and public life. They need to understand their own skills and abilities, manage their emotions and behavior, communicate effectively, negotiate conflict, care about others, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional skills undergird student success—and build better citizens. When such skills are intentionally taught, practiced, and reinforced in schools, students have better behavioral, social, and academic outcomes. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is increasingly accepted by educators and researchers as a process to cultivate life skills that foster personal development, academic achievement, and a more empathic school climate. SEL has been integrated into classes and taught in many schools, but the challenge for educators and policy makers is to better understand the most effective strategies for districtwide implementation.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2012).

THE RESEARCH

Research on students who participated in some form of SEL instruction has found short- and long-term benefits in student outcomes, with most research focusing on elementary and middle grade programs. For example, a systematic review of 213 school-based SEL programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students showed that, compared to control groups, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills. These effects have been consistent across all grade levels and school demographics, in urban, suburban, and rural areas (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), and have been replicated in other meta-analyses (Beelmann & Lösel, 2006; Conley, Durlak, & Kirsch, 2015; January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011; Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteijn, 2012).

Although most SEL research has focused on the classroom or school, AIR is in the fifth year of evaluating a first-ever initiative to promote districtwide integration of SEL into the core activities of large urban districts. The Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI)—developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and funded by the NoVo Foundation and the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust—focuses on district systems, district strategic vision that includes SEL, SEL standards, professional learning, and continuous improvement to implement and integrate SEL into districts' ongoing efforts. Each of eight districts received annual grants of $250,000 for up to 6 years. This amount represents less than 0.04% of the average CDI district's annual budget for all expenses (this average excludes Chicago's budget, which is larger than the other seven CDI district budgets combined).

Even with this modest investment, the research shows that districts improved each year in implementing key SEL activities. Three of the measured districts showed consistent gains in school climate; four of six measured districts showed improvement in third graders' social and emotional competence; and, across the eight districts, GPA improved in four and discipline improved in six. However, other student outcomes (e.g., middle and high schoolers' social and emotional competence and student attendance) have not shown significant change to date.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Although many preschool through high school teachers—as well as college faculty and administrators, employers, parents, and students themselves—understand the potential benefits of cultivating social and emotional development, few have the time or support to enable students to build social and emotional competencies. State, district, and school leaders should consider making SEL a priority. Doing so would entail implementing policies, standards, and guidance that support teachers and administrators to integrate SEL with academic instruction. Support is also extended to fostering best practices in behavior management, discipline, and school climate that promote healthy, safe, and nurturing environments for all students. Based on findings from this study and others, even modest investments in SEL can pay off for individuals, schools, and society.

THE ISSUE

Why Should We Focus on Social and Emotional Competencies and Attitudes?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves many types of learning that enable individuals to develop and use the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to handle themselves, form positive relationships, and work effectively and ethically. These skills include recognizing and managing emotions, developing caring and concern for others, making friends, collaborating and working well with others, interacting comfortably and respectfully with people with diverse perspectives and backgrounds, resolving conflicts peacefully, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). Acquiring these skills and perspectives can be highly beneficial in everyday living and learning, as well as later in life—at work, in relating to others, and as responsible citizens and community members.

Social and emotional competencies align with, but are not the same as, other frameworks, such as positive youth development, emotional intelligence, employability skills, 21st-century skills, and character education. Social and emotional competencies are not a set of static personality characteristics. Rather, they are skills that can be taught to people of all ages, from early childhood on. In school, educators can take four primary approaches to implementing SEL: (1) direct instruction on social and emotional skills, (2) integration of SEL with academic content, (3) development of a positive learning environment, and (4) general teaching practices that support student development and application of social and emotional skills (CASEL, 2013, 2015; Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, & Weissberg, 2015; Yoder, 2014).

Figure 1. Social and emotional competencies

Source: casel.org

CASEL identifies five social and emotional competencies, each composed of multiple skills. These five competencies are one of the most widely used frameworks in the United States:

- Self-awareness—the ability to recognize one's emotions, strengths, and limitations, and their effects on behavior;

- Self-management—skills that enable individuals to regulate their emotions and their behaviors, including setting and achieving goals, perseverance, and managing negative emotions.
- Social awareness—one's ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those with diverse backgrounds, and to understand social and ethical norms of behavior;
- Relationship skills—skills that allow individuals to develop healthy, meaningful relationships with others (listening, cooperating, seeking and offering help, and resolving conflicts peacefully), and
- Responsible decision making—the ability to make ethical choices about behavior based on ethical standards and social norms, and an evaluation of the effects on others.

SEL Matters for Success in Life

The development of social and emotional competence is key to success in school and in life. For example, a recent study found that kindergarten teachers' ratings of children's prosocial skills helped predict adolescent and adult outcomes 13 to 19 years later (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). The researchers found that social and emotional competencies in early childhood were strongly associated with young adult outcomes in education, employment, need for public assistance, mental health, substance abuse, and criminal activity. For example, Jones and colleagues found that a teacher's rating of a kindergartner's social competence was associated with a student's increased likelihood of graduating from college and having a full-time job by the age of 25, and a decreased likelihood of being arrested. This study did not prove that social competence *caused* these outcomes, but combined with other research, it seems to make clear that developing children's skills in these areas increases their chances of success in school, work, and life.

"If you have that kind of instruction, from kindergarten, I think that in 20 years the world will be a very different place."

—Marc Brackett, Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and Professor in the Child Study Center at Yale University (in Kahn, 2013)

SEL Is Important in Schools

Increasingly, school districts are recognizing the value of addressing student social and emotional competencies as an essential part of education for every student. School-based SEL programs (1) enhance students' social and emotional competencies and classroom behavior; (2) improve attachment and attitudes toward school; (3) decrease rates of

violence and aggression, disciplinary referrals, and substance abuse; and (4) improve academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Zins & Elias, 2006).

Social and emotional competencies are particularly important, given the demands and instructional shifts toward more rigorous standards for college and career readiness (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). For example:

- Standards require students to participate in classroom discussions and explain their points of view. Students thus need to learn communication skills and how communication must vary depending on their audience and their objective during the discussion—all of which are social and emotional skills.
- Students are more likely to become frustrated given more rigorous academic content, so they need to learn how to recognize what frustrates them and regulate that frustration to persevere.
- With increased collaborative learning, students must demonstrate more responsibility within the classroom setting—both for their own learning, as well as in learning how to work effectively with others to achieve a common goal.

> "Everybody said, 'Oh, it's how kids achieve academically that will predict their adult employment, and health, and everything else.' And then it turned out that for both employment and health outcomes, academic achievement actually predicted less than these other factors."
>
> —Mark Greenberg, Edna Peterson Bennett Endowed Chair in Prevention Research, Professor of Human Development and Psychology at Penn State University (in Kahn, 2013).

Schools Can Influence Social and Emotional Development

Since research has demonstrated the importance of social and emotional competencies for success in school and in life, educators and researchers have worked together to intervene and develop students' social and emotional competencies. For example, students who participate in a multiyear SEL program are more likely to develop social competence and reduce aggressive behaviors compared to students who do not take part (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2005), demonstrating that classroom teachers can support students in developing social and emotional competencies; specialized instructors are not required.

Summary

Given the importance of developing social and emotional competencies and of students learning in a safe, supportive school environment, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes new requirements for states that allow them to broaden their definition of student success. State accountability systems are now required to include an indicator of student success that goes beyond traditional achievement test scores. ESSA suggests measures,

such as student engagement or school climate, that are closely related to SEL, but the critical shift is that all states must now consider how to "establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success"—the conditions for learning.

Given the demands on teachers and students in the past decade related to mandates for testing and accountability, and given the new focus of ESSA on how states will "improve school conditions for student learning," now is the time to provide teachers and students with the resources and support needed to focus on the whole child. True, many evidence-based and promising SEL programs and strategies are available for educators, but classroom-based approaches alone may not suffice. Policies that support the alignment and integration of SEL across the classroom, school, and district levels are vital to social and emotional learning.

The Research

Research has demonstrated the importance of focusing on social and emotional skill development at the classroom level. There are powerful, comprehensive SEL programs that are able to produce improvements in students' social and emotional competence even with imperfect implementation (Faria, Kendziora, Brown, O'Brien, & Osher, 2013). However, classroom efforts on their own, without broader district support, can show lackluster effects (Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010). Implementation problems, such as limited professional development or lack of administrative support, can lessen the positive impact of evidence-based SEL programming on student behavior and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Currently, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is conducting research on SEL implementation in selected school districts across the country through CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), which shows the successes and challenges of introducing districtwide implementation of SEL (Kendziora & Osher, 2016).

The Collaborating Districts Initiative

In 2011, CASEL launched an initiative aimed at supporting school districts' capacities to promote SEL for all students, called the CDI. The CDI effort recognizes that positive student outcomes depend on improving districtwide capacities and conditions. Three large urban districts (Anchorage, Austin, and Cleveland) joined the initiative in the 2010–11 school year. In 2011–12, five more districts joined (Chicago, Nashville, Oakland, Sacramento, and Washoe County, Nevada). District leaders collaborate with

CASEL staff to create systemic changes in district-level activities and procedures related to SEL implementation (e.g., overarching policy guidance, staff development, action research framework, and planning and implementation tools).

SEL IMPLEMENTATION IN AUSTIN

Austin's rollout of the Collaborating Districts Initiative—a major component of its Whole Child, Every Child initiative—involves "vertical teams" that consist of a high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools. Austin's 11 vertical teams, which support 129 schools, have all begun implementing CDI activities in each school. Each school has a SEL facilitator supported by a coach in the district's SEL department. During 2015–16, SEL began reaching all of the district's 86,000 students through multiple avenues.

For example, weekly lessons are taught and reinforced in all areas of the school. Social and emotional competencies are highlighted in academic instruction, and teachers in all content areas lead students in practicing social and emotional competencies. Afterschool providers and parents also reinforce SEL. Elementary and middle schools use the Second Step SEL curriculum, together with Peace Paths and No Place for Hate. High schools use School-Connect, a 60-lesson multimedia curriculum, as their principal-instruction resource. In six high schools, a class for freshmen develops social and emotional and study skills, and supports students as they transition to high school.

AIR's evaluation of the first 4 years of the CDI—described below—assessed, among other factors, (1) district activities related to the implementation of systemic SEL; (2) district-level outcomes based on this implementation (e.g., positive climate, stakeholder commitment, and clear roles and responsibilities for SEL); and (3) student outcomes, including social and emotional competence, academic performance, attendance, and suspensions. Collaborating each year with the districts, AIR administered such measures as staff surveys of what SEL-related activities they engaged in, teacher ratings of young students' social and emotional competence, and older students' self-reports of social and emotional competence.

To support systematic implementation of SEL efforts across districts, CASEL worked with districts on many activities to embed SEL within teaching and learning, including:

- Developing a clear SEL vision and long-term plan;
- Conducting a needs and resources assessment so that financial and human resources can be aligned to support SEL;

- Providing professional learning opportunities to all staff at school and district levels, especially those in central offices;
- Developing SEL learning standards;
- Adopting and implementing evidence-based SEL programs;
- Intentionally integrating or aligning SEL into or with other district activities, such as academic instruction, student support, and discipline; and
- Monitoring SEL implementation process and outcomes.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

AIR has been evaluating the CDI for 5 years to answer these questions:

1. How well are districts implementing the activities specified in the CDI theory of action?
2. To what extent have the district outcomes identified in the theory of action been achieved?
3. What have been the early effects on student outcomes, including social and emotional competence, achievement, attendance, and disciplinary actions?

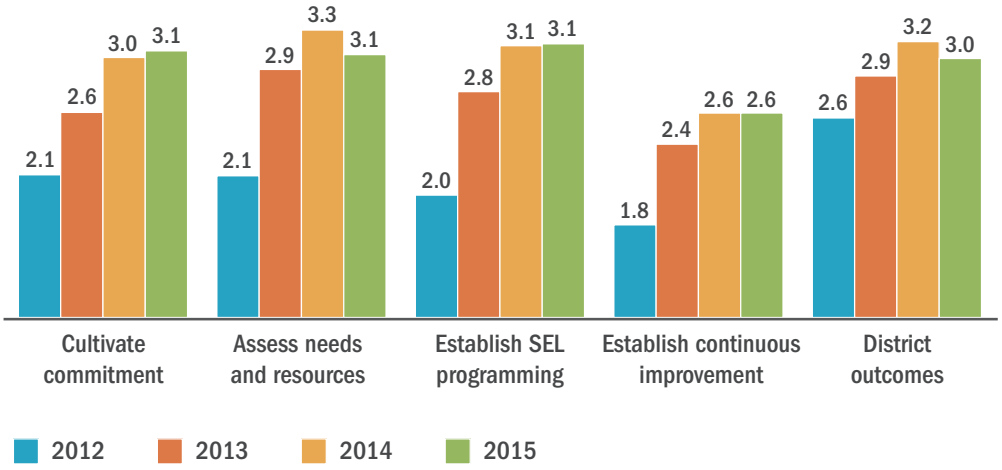
Since the multifaceted CDI begins with work at the district level (e.g., establishing a vision, assessing resources and needs, building expertise) and it is up to the districts to recruit schools, train staff, and support the implementation of SEL-focused activities in schools and classrooms, it can take many years for student outcomes to become clear.

Findings across all eight districts from 2012 to 2015 demonstrate that the 10 district-level activities and three outcomes that are part of the theory of change for the CDI have largely been realized. These district-level activities were organized into four categories: (1) cultivate commitment (create SEL vision, build central office expertise, align resources, establish communications); (2) assess needs and resources, identify district SEL needs, and determine resources to support SEL implementation; (3) support SEL programming (provide professional development, establish SEL standards, integrate SEL with instruction); and (4) establish and implement continuous improvement systems. AIR also assessed district outcomes, including positive school climate, stakeholder commitment, and roles and responsibilities for SEL implementation.

Figure 2 shows district implementation and outcome ratings using a rubric that measures, on a 1–4 scale, the extent to which the activities and outcomes noted in the CDI theory of change have been realized. Findings across all eight districts for 2012–15 for four broad areas of district-level SEL implementation (cultivate commitment, assess needs and resources, establish SEL programming, and establish continuous improvement) are shown

along with district outcomes. Growth (i.e., the progression of bars from blue to green) has been notable in every area measured across districts from 2012 to 2015. Levels of district implementation remained high in 2015, but the growth rate slowed between 2014 and 2015.

Figure 2. Initiativewide growth on four activity categories and district outcomes, 2012–15



Social and Emotional Outcomes. AIR assessed student social and emotional outcomes through teacher reports of students' social and emotional competencies (in grade 3) or through student self-reports (in grades 7 and 10). So far, changes in students' social and emotional outcomes are not consistently positive. For most districts, five social and emotional competencies were rated: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

Overall, results for change in students' social and emotional competence across the years of the CDI (in analyses that controlled for student and school demographics) showed the most consistent improvements in grade 3 students' social and emotional competence. Of 59 statistical tests of change in social and emotional competence over time, 26 were significantly positive (44%) and two were negative (3%). Thirty-one (53%) of the tests showed no significant change.

Academic and Behavioral Outcomes. AIR analyzed the effect of the CDI on student academic and behavioral outcomes in 2014–15 at the school level in all eight districts. Academic outcomes include reading and mathematics standardized test scores and grade point average (GPA). Behavioral outcomes include attendance, suspensions, graduation, and dropout. The available

A SUPERINTENDENT REFLECTS

To hear some of our chiefs and some of our principals talk about the . . . impact that social emotional learning has had directly in the classroom . . . you know something good is happening. And that the impact is much stronger than I probably would have anticipated.

—A district superintendent, 2014

outcomes vary by district, and several districts were missing data elements. Analysts used time series analyses to discern patterns of change within each district, comparing data during CDI years to the period before the initiative began.

Overall, students' academic performance improved in CDI implementation years relative to the 3 to 4 years before the CDI in four districts. In one district, however, high school GPA was lower in all 3 years. Attendance improved in four districts and declined in one. Suspensions decreased significantly in all six districts for which we had data. Figures 3–5 show examples of this change. Figure 3 shows high school GPA in a district where GPA was dropping before the CDI began, but the change was not statistically significant. In the first CDI year, the drop was significant. However, across the four CDI implementation years, GPA has trended significantly upward. The change from the period before the CDI is statistically significant.

Figure 3. Sample change in academic performance: GPA in one CDI district

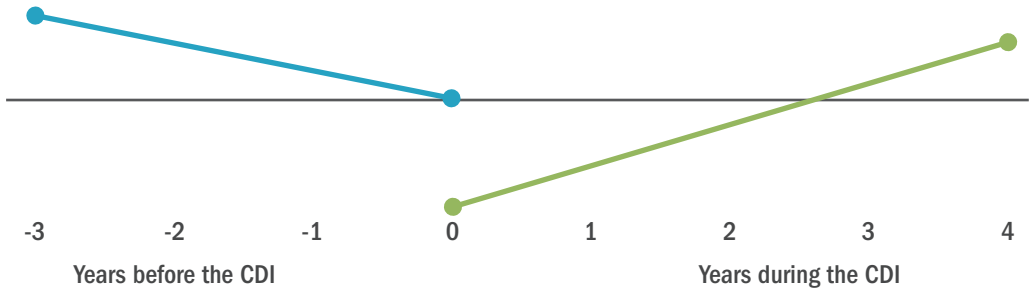


Figure 4 shows another example: change in one district's elementary school attendance. In this district, attendance was not changing significantly in the years before the CDI and did not change significantly in the year the CDI started. However, across the four CDI implementation years, attendance has trended significantly upward. The change from the period before the CDI is statistically significant.

Figure 4. Sample change in attendance

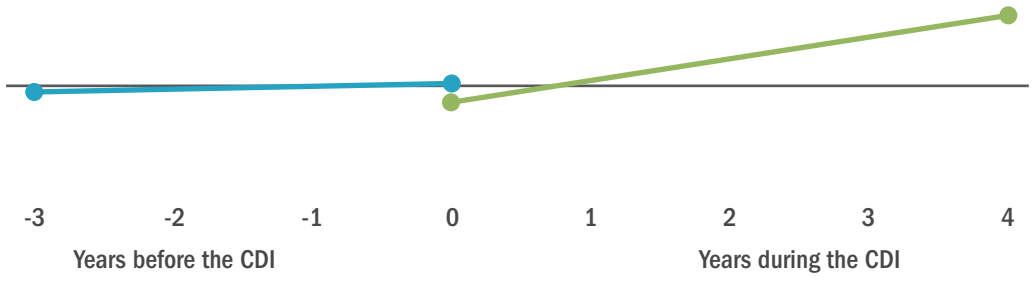
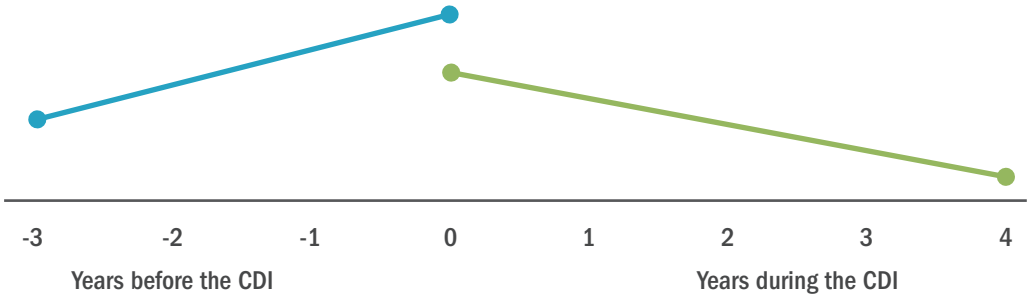


Figure 5 shows suspensions for middle and high school students in one CDI district. Suspensions were not changing significantly before the CDI began. In the first CDI year, the drop was significant. Across the four CDI implementation years, suspensions have trended significantly downward, and the change from the period before the CDI is statistically significant.

Figure 5. Sample change in suspensions



Summary

Our findings suggest that districts participating in the CDI have sustained, deepened, and broadened their commitment to SEL and developed capacities to support its implementation. Participation in the CDI and in district-initiated activities has enhanced the readiness of the districts and their schools to implement and sustain SEL. More staff and stakeholders know about it and want it, and SEL has been embedded as a pillar in strategic plans. Furthermore, districts are increasingly aligning SEL with other districtwide activities. The research demonstrates positive trends in the academic and behavioral growth of students in schools within districts with systematic SEL approaches, though these improvements are not yet seen consistently for all students.

The Recommendations

SEL has shown significant academic, behavioral, and attitudinal benefits for students in the districts where it has been implemented. Although more research is needed to determine which SEL approaches work best at different grade levels and have the strongest long-term benefits, the benefits in the districts where it has been implemented far outweigh the costs. State and district leaders have multiple options for bringing SEL into the center of a student's educational experience, now to be enhanced by ESSA.

1. **Make SEL a priority in school districts and states**

   Although teachers say that supporting the development of social and emotional competencies is important, few think they have the time to incorporate SEL,

given other demands that appear to assume a higher priority. To make SEL a priority within the state or district, state and district leaders can develop policies, guidance, and/or standards that specifically address student social and emotional competencies (Dusenbury, Newman, et al., 2015; Yoder, 2015).

By developing policies and guidance documents, state and district leaders build a vision—with the input of educators and families—about the social and emotional skills and competencies that the state or districts want students to develop in school and benefit from for a lifetime.

Policies and guidance can include ways to connect SEL to other behavioral and academic supports (e.g., disciplinary policies or restorative practices), processes for integrating SEL into other important district efforts (Yoder, 2015), or the development of SEL standards.

Through developing SEL standards, educators receive information about the developmental progression of social and emotional skills and competencies across grade levels. Good SEL standards are freestanding and comprehensive, yet demonstrate a connection to other academic subjects. They should be developed in conjunction with other policies and guidance documents that focus on SEL and should include provisions for additional resources and supports (e.g., implementation guides and professional learning experiences) to enact the standards (Dusenbury, Newman, et al., 2015).

2. **Integrate SEL into academic instruction**

As with academic skills, students need opportunities to learn, develop, and apply their social and emotional competencies. Students can develop social and emotional competencies through multiple avenues (Dusenbury, Calin, et al., 2015), including:

- **Explicit skill instruction**, in which educators take instructional time to teach social and emotional competencies. For example, a lesson might focus on how to take the perspective of others and on the importance of students understanding viewpoints besides their own.
- **Incorporating SEL through general teaching practices.** For example, a teacher might incorporate group work to solve a math problem, reinforcing individual and collective responsibility during the lesson so students understand the positive and negative consequences of the way they participate in the group activity.
- **Integrating social and emotional competencies into academic instruction.** For example, a social studies teacher might take 15 minutes at the beginning of a lesson to teach problem-solving skills. This new skill could be applied later during a lesson on Lewis and Clark, allowing students to use their problem-solving skills while analyzing the exploration of Lewis and Clark.

SEL IMPLEMENTATION IN TENNESSEE

As part of its Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant, the Tennessee State Department of Education (TDOE) partnered with the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center) to develop a toolkit that connects instructional practices that support SEL with the Tennessee Educator Accelerator Model (TEAM), Tennessee's evaluation system.

The toolkit helps educators implement teaching practices that support SEL and improve their practices found within the TEAM observation rubric, not practices that would modify TEAM or include SEL as part of it.

Through the toolkit and other supports, TDOE connected practices that support SEL with the practices already supported through the TEAM evaluation system.

Supports for teachers include example classroom videos, example activities, and classroom look-fors, while administrators get guidance on how to discuss SEL with their staffs.

The toolkit has been positively received by educators across Tennessee, and TDOE is currently developing online modules to help teachers learn more about the practices.

3. Create environments that promote SEL

Another approach to integrating SEL is by developing a positive learning environment and creating the conditions for learning (Osher & Kendziora, 2010). Students in a healthy, safe, supportive, and challenging environment have greater capacity to focus on academic content and are more likely to engage in school. Environments that support SEL:

- Develop a discipline policy that supports inclusionary practices (e.g., restorative practices) and encourages students to regulate their own behavior;
- Ensure that each student has an adult to whom he or she can turn for assistance and guidance;
- Engage students to be active members of the school community with a voice of their own;
- Set high behavioral and academic expectations for all students, taking into account student differences and baseline social and emotional and academic competencies;
- Support adult social and emotional competencies, as well as relationship building among staff members; and

- Engage parents and the school community to support student social and emotional competencies.

4. **Provide training and support for SEL programs and practices**

   To implement SEL practices effectively, and support the development of the whole child, educators need training and support in all aspects of implementing SEL. Ways to support and train teachers include techniques to:

   - Provide professional development on what SEL is, why it is important, and how it connects to academic skills;
   - Collaborate with evidence-based SEL programs to give teachers the training, resources, and tools to teach social and emotional skills (see the CASEL Guides for a list of evidence-based SEL programs for preschool and elementary schools [2013], and for middle and high schools [2015]);
   - Incorporate SEL practices into classroom observations, walkthroughs, and peer observations, providing feedback to educators on SEL practices; and
   - Implement professional learning communities that allow educators to discuss SEL practices.

5. **Coordinate efforts to support all systems**

   Efforts to promote SEL work best when they are coordinated and aligned with other district programs and initiatives. District leaders play a critical role in creating supportive policies and providing funding and time to integrate SEL into the district's core functions. Specific areas for SEL integration include:

   - Existing programs that support students' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, character, or self-discipline;
   - Instructional programs that promote student engagement, persistence, and collaboration;
   - Academic curriculum across subjects;
   - School improvement plans that target school-level efforts;
   - School-based or school-linked counseling or mental health services;
   - Afterschool programs and out-of-school-time efforts;
   - Programs for college and career readiness, particularly those on employability or 21st-century skills;
   - Tiered intervention systems, such as Positive Behaviorial Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which promote positive, prosocial behavior among all students, as well as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), which support the needs of all students; and

- Behavior management and disciplinary practices, such as restorative practices, which support student inclusion (rather than exclusionary disciplinary practices).

Focusing on SEL may actually be an antidote to fragmentation. Some districts have used SEL as a framework to organize and consolidate many related, but previously disconnected efforts, such as student engagement, discipline, and service learning. When adults bring an SEL "lens" to all school activities—modeling SEL to establish a learning culture and climate of connection and safety—they enable students to experience the relevance of SEL lessons in many aspects of their lives.

6. **Use data to assess progress**

Assessing students' social and emotional competencies is a complex yet important area to consider when providing support and resources to districts and schools on implementing SEL. Although SEL assessment is still an emerging area, recent guidance has been published on when and how to assess student social and emotional competencies (AIR, 2015). In AIR's Ready to Assess suite of tools, there are five major factors to consider when deciding whether to collect and analyze data on student social and emotional competencies:

- **Purpose.** Determine reasons to collect data on student social and emotional competencies—for accountability reasons, to communicate about SEL, or to provide information to the district, school, or classroom teacher about students' needs or ways to improve practice?
- **Rigor.** Identify how rigorous the assessment is. Is it comprehensive enough and well established enough to be a valid and reliable measure of social and emotional competencies? The level of rigor needed depends on the assessment's purpose—a formative purpose may not require as high a degree of rigor as an assessment for accountability.
- **Practicality.** Consider the feasibility of implementing the chosen assessment. To determine the practicality, consider the age of the program or initiative in question and the number of youth being served.
- **Burden.** Review the potential implementation burden. Take staff capacity, infrastructure requirements, data use, budget, and risks to teachers, staff, students, and families into account. For example, many SEL assessments are teacher reports of student competencies, which could take a considerable amount of time.
- **Ethics.** Consider the potential risks and benefits based on the stated purpose, rigor of the assessment, and the practicality and burden of implementing the assessment.

Conclusion

Research shows that SEL is a proven strategy to support the social, emotional, and academic enrichment of students. Teachers across the country have endorsed it (Bridgeland et al., 2013). However, educators indicate that they will be able to implement programming most effectively when they have quality professional learning experiences and administrative support from their schools and districts. The CDI demonstrates that it is possible for large urban school districts to adopt and maintain SEL as an essential element of education, even amid budgetary stress and leadership turnover. AIR's work, alongside that of our partners at CASEL, has begun to document how districts are beginning to embed and integrate SEL into their policies and practices. As more states and districts focus on "whole child" concepts and metrics under ESSA, the promise of using SEL to help students be successful in school and life may begin to take hold.

References

American Institutes for Research. (2015). *Are you ready to assess social and emotional development?* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.air.org/resource/are-you-ready-assess-social-and-emotional-development

Beelmann, A., & Lösel, F. (2006). Child social skills training in developmental crime prevention: Effects on antisocial behavior and social competence. *Psicothema, 18,* 603–610.

Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M., & Hariharan, A. (2013). *The missing piece: A national teacher survey on how social and emotional learning can empower children and transform schools.* Chicago, IL: Collaborative on Social Emotional Learning. Retrieved from http://www.casel.org/the-missing-piece-a-national-teacher-survey-on-how-social-and-emotional-learning-can-empower-children-and-transform-schools/

Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning. (2012). *2013 CASEL guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs—preschool and elementary school edition.* Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved from http://www.casel.org/preschool-and-elementary-edition-casel-guide

Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning. (2015). *2015 CASEL guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs—middle and high school edition.* Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved from http://www.casel.org/middle-and-high-school-edition-casel-guide

Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group. (2010). The effects of a multiyear universal social-emotional learning program: The role of student and school characteristics. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 78,* 156–168.

Conley, C. S., Durlak, J. A., & Kirsch, A. C. (2015). A meta-analysis of universal mental health prevention programs for higher education students. *Prevention Science, 16,* 487–507. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0543-1

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82,* 405–432.

Dusenbury, L., Calin, S., Domitrovich, C., & Weissberg, R. (2015). *What does evidence-based instruction in social and emotional learning actually look like in practice?* Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Retrieved from http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CASELBrief-WhatDoesSELLookLikeinPractice-11-1-15.pdf

Dusenbury, L., Newman, J., Weissberg, R., Goren, P., Domitrovich, C., & Mart, A. (2015). The case for preschool through high school state learning standards for SEL. In J. A. Durlak, C. Domitrovich, R. Weissberg, and T. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook on social and emotional learning* (pp. 532–548). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Elias, M. (2014). Social-emotional skills can boost Common Core implementation. *Phi Delta Kappan, 96,* 58–62. Retrieved from http://www.kappancommoncore.org/social-emotional-skills-can-boost-common-core-implementation/

Faria, A. M., Kendziora, K., Brown, L., O'Brien, B., & Osher, D. (2013). *PATHS implementation and outcome study in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District: Final report.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Hawkins, J. D., Kosterman, R., Catalano, R., Hill, K. G., & Abbott, R. D. (2005). Promoting positive adult functioning through social development intervention in childhood. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine, 159*, 25–31.

January, A. M., Casey, R. J., & Paulson, D. (2011). A meta-analysis of classroom-wide interventions to build social skills: Do they work? *School Psychology Review, 40,* 242–256.

Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health, 105,* 2283–2290.

Kahn, J. (2013, September 11). Reading, writing and . . . emotional intelligence. *New York Times Magazine.*

Kendziora, K., & Osher, D. (2016). Promoting children's and adolescents' social and emotional development: District adaptations of a theory of action. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology. Special Section:* From Adoption to Adaptation.

Osher, D., & Kendziora, K. (2010). Building conditions for learning and healthy adolescent development: Strategic approaches. In B. Doll, W. Pfohl, & J. Koon (Eds.), *Handbook of youth prevention science* (pp. 121–140). New York, NY: Routledge.

Sklad, M., Diekstra, R., De Ritter, M., Ben, J., & Gravesteijn, C. (2012). Effectiveness of school-based universal social, emotional, and behavioral programs: Do they enhance students' development in the area of skill, behavior, and adjustment? *Psychology in the Schools, 49,* 892–909.

Social and Character Development Research Consortium. (2010). *Efficacy of schoolwide programs to promote social and character development and reduce problem behavior in elementary school children.* Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncer/pubs/20112001/pdf/20112001.pdf

Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook for social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 3–19). New York, NY: Guilford.

Yoder, N. (2014). *Teaching the whole child: Instructional practices that promote social and emotional learning in three teacher evaluation frameworks.* Washington, DC: Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. Retrieved from http://www.gtlcenter.org/products-resources/teaching-whole-child-instructional-practices-support-social-emotional-learning

Yoder, N. (2015). *Social and emotional skills for life and career: Policy levers that focus on the whole child.* Washington, DC: Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. Retrieved from http://www.gtlcenter.org/products-resources/social-and-emotional-skills-life-and-career-policy-levers-focus-whole-child

Zins, J. E., Bloodworth, M. R., Weissberg, R. P., & Walberg, H. J. (2004). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. In J. E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, M. C. Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* (pp. 3–22). New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Zins, J. E., & Elias, M. J. (2006). Social and emotional learning. In G. G. Bear & K. M. Minke (Eds.), *Children's needs III: Development prevention and intervention* (pp. 1–14). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW
Washington, DC 20007-3835
800.356.2735 | 202.403.5000

www.air.org
http://educationpolicy.air.org

7278_10/16