Navigate360

The Leader in Holistic Safety

The Complete Guide to Social-Emotional Learning

Moving Beyond Physical Safety to Support
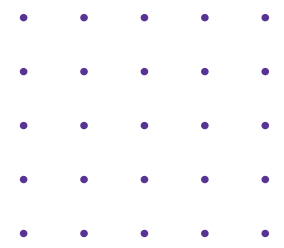Students' Social-Emotional Well-Being

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The Foundations of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

What is Social-Emotional Learning?

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a framework that encourages students to develop positive self-identities, manage complex emotions, navigate a variety of social situations, build strong relationships with others, and develop empathetic worldviews. It fosters a healthy and trusting learning environment that can improve student behavior, address inequities in the classroom, and set students up for success both academically and personally. **In short, SEL is a crucial aspect of childhood development that should be a part of every district and school curriculum.**

The truth is that nobody is born understanding how to perfectly manage their emotions and handle complex challenges. Instead, those skills must be taught and taught from a place of openness and positivity. Students must feel free to express themselves, make mistakes, and ask questions to develop their social-emotional skills. In turn, they will be able to better handle challenges as they arise, understand and empathize with those who are different from them, and achieve the goals they set. This behavioral growth allows them a better chance to succeed in school and then later in college, their careers, and beyond.

The Necessity of SEL

Recent neuroscience research has delivered startling results about the ways in which SEL impacts cognitive learning. Johns Hopkins University, a leader in neuroeducation, is the birthplace of Dr. Mariale Hardiman's Brain-Targeted Teaching® (BTT) model that has uncovered the links between cognitive processes and SEL. BTT is an instructional framework that consists of six stages crucial to the learning process. And the very first stage? Setting up a positive emotional climate.

At the base of the brain, just above the brainstem, is the limbic system, which is responsible for emotional responses. All information a student receives is first processed through the limbic system before moving on to the frontal lobe, or the cognitive area of the brain. This means that a student who is stressed, depressed, anxious, or otherwise emotionally distressed cannot appropriately process information, which impacts their learning. Developing educational environments that emphasize positive emotions, providing a space of belonging and community, and allowing students to connect emotionally with their studies are crucial to optimal academic performance.

What are the Benefits of SEL Curriculum?

Students are dealing with complex external factors, and kids without the social-emotional skills to handle all the stressors can fall behind in school, exhibit challenging behaviors, and withdraw from relationships. **But when social-emotional learning is a priority, students learn crucial skills to better manage all situations. According to more than two decades of research, SEL can:**

- Improve academic performance and classroom behavior
- Help students better manage anxiety, depression, and stress levels
- Encourage students to have positive attitudes about themselves and the people around them

A high-quality SEL curriculum creates an avenue for students to explore their emotions and deepen their understanding of others. While it can be easy to push SEL aside for core academic requirements, the benefits are clear. Developing a child's inner sense of self and encouraging positive social-emotional learning improves academics in the long run.

> According to the Journal of Cost-Benefit Analysis, for every $1 invested in SEL programs, there is a return of $11.

Why is SEL Important for Students Now?

Students today have more external pressures than ever before. The unique challenges they face can be difficult to navigate without strong social-emotional skills. Consider some of the many stressors they are dealing with:

- Cyberbullying
- Peer pressure and social stress
- Body image issues
- Academic performance
- Anxiety and depression
- Concerns about physical safety

"Maslow before Bloom" has become a popular phrase in academic circles. It's the idea that educators must meet the basic needs of students (like health and safety) to develop an effective educational learning environment. While Bloom's taxonomy focuses primarily on learning, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a five-tier model focused on the basic needs of humans. Once each basic need is met, individuals can move on to higher-level thinking and meeting more advanced needs. If a student is hungry, worried about bullying in the classroom, or dealing with trauma, then their mind is not biologically ready to handle advanced, higher-order learning.

That's why students need SEL now more than ever. It gives students tools to better understand themselves, respond to stressful situations, and develop strategies to handle external and internal challenges. In turn, they will be able to focus on academics as their social/emotional needs are met.

Why is SEL Important for Students' Futures?

Emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, stress tolerance, and resilience are some of the leading job skills that employers will be looking for in the future. What's more, the job market is changing so rapidly that, according to a report by Dell Technologies, 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet. What awaits students in the future is uncertain, but it's clear that having strong social-emotional skills will be necessary. Being able to work well with others, see opposing viewpoints, think critically, problem-solve effectively, and achieve goals are all skills that students learn from SEL, which will equip them well for the future.

What are Expected Outcomes of Well-Executed SEL Programs?

While helping kids become well-rounded individuals who understand their social-emotional needs is a worthwhile goal, so is teaching traditional academic curriculum to impart essential knowledge and ensure students become productive members of society. It's natural for educators to be concerned that implementing a social-emotional curriculum will be just one more thing on their already overcrowded plate. The good news is that high-quality SEL instruction can be integrated into existing programs and SEL helps students become more engaged and excited about learning. **Look at some of the ways well-executed SEL programs have a positive academic impact:**

- Improved student engagement
- Enhanced academic performance
- Increased knowledge retention on a long-term basis
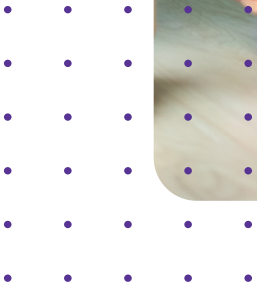
As a result, these positive outcomes in the classroom allow students to thrive and cultivate a curious, growth mindset that serves them well in the future. A social-emotional foundation can influence students' college and career readiness, ensuring they develop the self-management skills, social skills, and self-confidence that are required in post-secondary life.

Introducing CASEL

What Is CASEL?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides trusted, evidence-based resources for PK-12 educators and policy leaders. Over two decades ago, CASEL developed its SEL framework and has been dedicated to implementing SEL in schools and districts nationwide ever since. In the fall of 2020, CASEL updated its framework and SEL definition to better affirm the experiences and identities of all children—notably, those who have traditionally been marginalized in academic spaces. These updates came after decades of research and changes to SEL practices, and they aim to create more caring and just schools for all students. Providing equitable learning environments that allow all students to thrive is the goal of CASEL's SEL framework.

Why is it Important for an SEL Curriculum to Align with the 5 CASEL Core competencies?

The five CASEL competencies are at the core of the SEL framework and provide the foundation for high-quality SEL curricula. They are based on an immense amount of research from the pioneers of SEL education. These competencies pinpoint five interrelated areas that advance a student's learning and development which can be applied from preschool to high school and beyond. They help educators understand what is needed from their students to encourage academic success, civic engagement, health and wellness, and more.

The five CASEL core competencies are:

Self-Awareness
Students understand their own culture, language, beliefs, and values. They recognize their emotions, understand their needs, and are aware of their strengths and limitations.

Self-Management
Students know how their thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by their belief and value systems. They can monitor their behavior and understand how to effectively respond in different situations.

Social Awareness
Students have empathy for others. They understand that everyone has a different worldview, and they can appreciate the perspectives of others.

Relationship Skills
Students form positive, healthy relationships with others, including those who may look, act, or behave differently than they do. They can effectively deal with conflict and work with others toward a common goal.

Responsible Decision-Making
Students recognize that they have an impact on the people around them and act accordingly. They also understand the differences between good and bad decisions.

What Other Factors are Important in an SEL Curriculum?

S.A.F.E. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

The acronym S.A.F.E. is the cornerstone of a well-executed SEL program. It stands for:

Sequenced

Activities should be coordinated, connected, and build on one another to develop the social-emotional skills students need.

Active

Educators should develop active forms of learning, such as roleplaying, to help students master new skills.

Focused

There should be time set aside to develop the personal and social skills of students.

Explicit

The program should clearly state which social-emotional skills are being learned.

FAQs: Important Factors When Launching a Successful SEL Curriculum

Are there standards/guidelines at the state level for SEL programs?

Currently, 30 states have established specific SEL standards or requirements. These standards allow educators to understand exactly what students should be learning from an SEL curriculum and how to apply it in the classroom. However, it should be noted that just because a state doesn't have specific SEL guidelines, that doesn't mean they don't promote SEL. It simply means they haven't codified definitive standards for students. You can find a list of the standards by state here.

Additionally, a handful of states have enacted SEL legislation to establish advisory boards, commissions, committees, and task forces to promote, expand, and set up SEL programs in PK-12 schools. For a list of the specific state legislation that has been enacted, click here.

How is SEL being evaluated at a district level?

Currently, there is no gold-standard measuring tool for evaluating SEL at the school district level. District leaders can create their own SEL evaluation programs that use the CASEL core competency framework as a guide. School districts can also work with SEL researchers to evaluate their programs. For example, Navigate360 regularly partners with school districts to engage in SEL research. What's more, in our SEL curriculum – Compass Curriculum – there is a CASEL-developed, pre–and post-measurement tool that was established in association with the University of Illinois and the Washoe County School District, a helpful addition for evaluating the effectiveness of an SEL program in a school.

What is the Best Way to Deliver SEL Curriculum?

Students these days have always existed in a world filled with smartphones, boundless Wi-Fi, and social media. They are the first true digital natives. That's why an effective SEL program for Gen Z and Alpha students' needs to meet the learning preferences and attention spans of these highly connected, digital-savvy generations.

Digital SEL platforms that create visually engaging, interactive lessons spanning videos, games, articles, and other multimedia are exactly what students these days are looking for. These programs deliver important lessons about character development, social-emotional learning, cyberbullying, mental health, college and career prep, and communication skills—and do it in a way that keeps students engaged while teaching them crucial life skills. Plus, with students able to access their lessons via a web-based platform or a mobile app, digital SEL programs are flexible with their busy, connected lifestyles.

What are Common Challenges & Best Practices for Implementing SEL Curriculum?

COMMON CHALLENGES

There are many common challenges that districts and schools may come across in the process of developing SEL curricula, such as:

- An abundance of SEL frameworks from many different disciplines that complicate the process of choosing the right framework for your school

- Teachers who may not feel they have the luxury of integrating social-emotional lesson plans in between teaching core academic curricula and getting students ready for standardized testing

- Inconsistent language between SEL frameworks that can make it difficult to understand what skills are being taught to students and how to measure success rates

- Lack of support for teachers and administrators who may need more guidance and mentorship during the early stages of SEL program implementation

BEST PRACTICES

Administrators and educators can work through these challenges by understanding the best practices of planning, developing, and implementing an SEL program:

Build the Foundational Elements

Create a committee that will develop the vision for your SEL program and collaboratively plan the implementation.

Strengthen Adult SEL

In schools where adult SEL is prioritized, the implementation of student-centric SEL is more effective. Schools should lead professional development courses for adult SEL. Additionally, educators should reflect on their own social-emotional competencies and put together strategies to model them in the classroom.

Implement an SEL Strategy for the Students

Put SEL into action. School curricula and programs should promote students' social-emotional learning by fostering supportive learning environments, elevating student voices, and establishing equitable discipline policies. The SEL program should be delivered via technology, rather than using an analog, paper-and-pencil method, for easier on-demand access.

Create Ongoing SEL Processes

The SEL program is a dynamic one that will need to be refined and evaluated regularly. Districts and schools should have a structured plan for collecting data, analyzing outcomes, and adjusting.

Create a Shared SEL Culture Across Stakeholders

Students, parents, caregivers, teachers, and other school staff should have a shared vocabulary and structure for talking about and reinforcing SEL skills.

Getting Started with SEL Curriculum

It's clear that an SEL curriculum positively impacts the future of students academically, emotionally, and socially. After all, if the goal of education is to help children become productive members of society, then ensuring they are well-rounded and emotionally intelligent is crucial.

A LAYERED, HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SAFETY & WELL-BEING

As part of Navigate360's full platform of safety and well-being solutions, Navigate360 Compass Curriculum enables schools to support the social and emotional well-being of their entire school community. We help schools set a course toward zero incidents by equipping them with a solid foundation of positive behavior, social-emotional learning, behavior intervention, and mental health & prevention programs.

Visit **www.Navigate360.com**
to connect with our experts today.

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