

## What is social and emotional learning?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), an organization dedicated to advancing the evidence base, practical strategies, and implementation of SEL, defines SEL as “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’s framework classifies SEL competencies into five areas: **self-awareness**, **social awareness**, **responsible decision-making**, **self-management**, and **relationship skills**.<sup>1</sup>




Education leaders broadly agree that student development is strongest when academics and social and emotional learning work are integrated.<sup>2,3</sup> There are multiple points of view on the skills and competencies that fit underneath social and emotional learning, but significant overlap can be found across the different frameworks that exist. Many frameworks, including “21<sup>st</sup> century skills,” “mindsets,” and “non-cognitive factors,” have equivalent or overlapping competencies, and overall there is broad agreement on what social and emotional skills and competencies encompass.






## Why is it important?

Available evidence suggests that academic learning is inextricably connected to social and emotional development. In the words of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development’s Council of Distinguished Scientists, “Learning is social and emotional.”<sup>4</sup> The cognitive and academic content of any given lesson cannot be separated from the social and emotional context in which the youth experience it.

As such, it is critical that both in-school and out-of-school educators ensure that youth are developing the social and emotional skills that they need to succeed in school and in life. Evidence shows that youth in high-quality, evidence-based afterschool programs targeting SEL outcomes see a wide range of positive effects in the short term:

-  Improved self-confidence and grades
-  Increased positive attitudes toward school, positive social behavior, standardized test scores, and attendance rates
-  Reduced aggression and drug use rates<sup>5</sup>

And even more positive effects in the long term:

-  Increased rates of high school graduation, college enrollment, college completion, and employment
-  Higher average wages
-  Decreased rates of teen pregnancy and criminal behavior<sup>6</sup>

Research even indicates that quality, SEL-focused afterschool programs can have an even larger impact on standardized test scores than programs that have a heavy academic focus!<sup>5</sup>

## How do afterschool programs support social and emotional skill development?

Afterschool and summer learning programs are already doing a lot to help students develop social and emotional skills. Many afterschool and summer learning programs have broad learning objectives for youth that include social, emotional, and character development. Afterschool and summer learning programs are a unique setting where youth can connect to positive adult mentors, feel safe to try new things, and have the opportunity to acquire new skills and develop mastery in an area.

Many programs also have more flexibility than schools to focus on the development of these critical skills, and there is plenty of evidence that they are already doing a lot to develop social and emotional skills in youth. Research shows that developing the kind of productive, healthy relationships with caring adults that are a mainstay of many programs is critical to the social and emotional development of youth. These relationships give youth the confidence to explore the world around them, discover their passions, and continue forming positive relationships with their peers and other adults.

Afterschool and summer programs are key partners in young people's learning. They help young people develop the social and emotional skills to become resilient, engaged, and productive adults.

Together with families and schools, afterschool and summer learning programs can work to ensure that all children and youth are given the supports they need to build their social and emotional skills and competencies, paving a clear pathway to a healthy and fulfilling future.



**For more information on social and emotional learning, visit [afterschoolliaance.org](http://afterschoolliaance.org)**

### Sources

<sup>1</sup> CASEL. (2017). Core SEL Competencies. Retrieved from <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>

<sup>2</sup> 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. Civic Enterprises with Peter D. Hart Research Associates. Retrieved from <http://www.civicenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/CASEL-Report-low-res-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> DePaoli, J.L., Atwell, M.N., & Bridgeland, J. (2017). Ready to Lead: A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools. Civic Enterprises with Peter D. Hart Research Associates. Retrieved from [http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2017). The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. The Aspen Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/evidence-base-learn/>

<sup>5</sup> Princeton University & Brookings Institution. (2017). Social and Emotional Learning. The Future of Children. Vol. 27, No. 1, Spring 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/FOC-Spring-Vol27-No1-Compiled-Future-of-Children-spring-2017.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Kautz, T., Heckman, J.J., Diris, R., Weel, B., & Borghans, L. (2014). Fostering and Measuring Skills: Improving Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills to Promote Lifetime Success. Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/education/cei/Fostering-and-Measuring-Skills-Improving-Cognitive-and-Non-Cognitive-Skills-to-Promote-Lifetime-Success.pdf>