

Evidence-based Considerations for COVID-19 Reopening and Recovery Planning: The Importance of Adult Skills in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and emotional learning experiences can play meaningful and important roles in helping young people recover from the damaging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and in promoting educational equity. In this document, we share evidence-based guidance focused on the importance of adult skills in delivering social and emotional learning. It is important to note that a robust research base exists for other approaches; these recommendations are not the only pathway to achieve outcomes. Some of these findings may need to be adapted to hybrid and post-COVID contexts. *An annotated bibliography of research on this topic funded by The Wallace Foundation is included at the end of this document.* All of the resources mentioned can be downloaded for free at www.wallacefoundation.org.

“Compelling research demonstrates what parents have always known – the success of young people in school and beyond is inextricably linked to healthy social and emotional development.”

- National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development, 2017¹

In the wake of the pandemic’s impact on the well-being of young people, creating opportunities for social and emotional learning – which research links to success in school and career – has emerged as a top priority for districts. The Wallace Foundation’s ongoing [Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative](#) pairs schools and out-of-school time programs in six communities. Early insights compiled by RAND researchers in 2020 suggest the following key considerations for effective implementation of programs to support social and emotional learning.

Attend to the well-being of the adults

A 2019 nationwide survey of more than 1,200 teachers found that teachers’ sense of well-being was positively associated with their reported emphasis on social and emotional practices, with teachers in lower-poverty schools reporting slightly higher levels of well-being compared with their counterparts in higher-poverty schools.² In RAND’s 2020 study, interviewees viewed the development of adults’ abilities to establish and maintain their own healthy relationships as the fundamental precursor for being able to teach their students how to do the same.³

Implementation Options

- Recognize the link between teacher well-being and (staff and student) social and emotional skills
- Consider starting social and emotional skill-building by focusing first on the adults to ensure they can model positive social and emotional skills and competencies for students

Provide professional development

In the 2019 survey, teachers expressed confidence in their ability to improve students' social and emotional competencies, but indicated a need for additional professional development in areas such as integrating SEL into academics, adapting SEL to different cultures and to students with different learning needs, and reviewing and using SEL data.⁴ Eighty percent of teachers said they wanted more SEL lesson plans and curriculum support.⁵ Researchers involved in the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative found staff can benefit from professional development that is ongoing, customized, and provided by coaches with prior expertise in the relevant setting (school or out-of-school time program).⁶

Implementation Option

- Focus professional development on helping staff differentiate instruction
- Provide professional development on adapting SEL to meet the needs of students with disabilities or with cultural or linguistic differences

Create a positive climate

A positive climate is a crucial foundation for promoting social and emotional skills; as RAND noted, “conditions that promote students’ feeling of safety and their engagement in learning are fundamental to ensuring that students are able to benefit from instruction and other supports... a positive climate is associated with the development of academic skills and SEL competencies.”⁷

Implementation Options

- Rituals and routines are a good starting point – and can include welcoming activities such as greeting each student by name; engagement strategies, such as students working together; and optimistic closures to reflect on the day’s activities⁸
- Create clear guidance documents that define SEL rituals and routines and provide explicit direction regarding how, when, and with what frequency to implement SEL practices
- Include all staff who have contact with students, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers; these staff have relationships with students and can help build a positive climate

Deliver SEL instruction

Supporting SEL requires attention to both ongoing pedagogical practices and to SEL-explicit curricula. Unlike curricula that are geared primarily toward developing another outcome, such as achievement in mathematics or in music, an SEL curriculum facilitates structured, sequenced, explicit SEL instruction designed to promote one or more social and emotional competencies.⁹ Developing SEL content sequences for OST settings that track with the school-day SEL curriculum can help to mutually reinforce SEL instruction.¹⁰

Implementation Options

- Include protected time for SEL in the master schedule, making a realistic allocation that reflects necessary transition times and arrivals, and student energy levels during the day
- Provide explicit guidance to staff on how to integrate SEL instruction into school-day academics and out-of-school time (OST) activities, including specific pedagogical strategies and lesson content (such as how to collaborate effectively) that instructors can easily implement across subject areas and types of activities; SEL standards in schools and OST programs’ continuous quality improvement processes can help frame guidance

About The Wallace Foundation

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is a non-partisan independent endowed philanthropy working nationally to answer important questions that, if solved, could help strengthen practices and policies within a field. Our mission is to foster equity and improvements in learning and enrichment for young people, and in the arts for everyone.

We hope this document will be helpful to states, districts, schools, out-of-school time programs, community leaders and others as they reopen and recover from the pandemic. We believe this to be a critical moment for evidence-based guidance in order to support students, teachers, principals, out-of-school-time providers, education systems, and youth development organizations in creating and supporting high-quality learning and development opportunities for young people, and particularly for those who are most marginalized and face the greatest adversity.

More information can be found at www.wallacefoundation.org.

¹ [The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional and Academic Development, Consensus Statements of Evidence From the Council of Distinguished Scientists](#), National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development, 2017.

² Laura S. Hamilton and Christopher Joseph Doss, [Supports for Social and Emotional Learning in American Schools and Classrooms: Findings from the American Teacher Panel](#), 2020.

³ Heather L. Schwartz, Laura S. Hamilton, Susannah Faxon-Mills, Celia J. Gomez, Alice Huguette, Lisa H. Jaycox, Jennifer T. Leschitz, Andrea Prado Tuma, Katie Tosh, Anamarie A. Whitaker, Stephani L. Wrabel, [Early Lessons from Schools and Out-of-School Time Programs Implementing Social and Emotional Learning](#), RAND Corporation, 2020.

⁴ Hamilton and Doss, 2020.

⁵ Hamilton and Doss, 2020.

⁶ Schwartz, Hamilton, *et al.*, 2020.

⁷ Schwartz, Hamilton, *et al.*, 2020.

⁸ Schwartz, Hamilton, *et al.*, 2020.

⁹ Schwartz, Hamilton, *et al.*, 2020.

¹⁰ Schwartz, Hamilton, *et al.*, 2020.

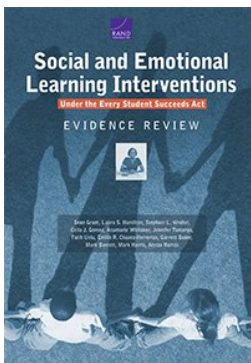
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**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):
Annotated Bibliography of Selected Knowledge Products**

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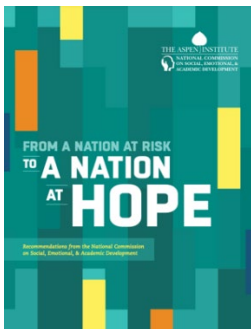
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Evidence of Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning



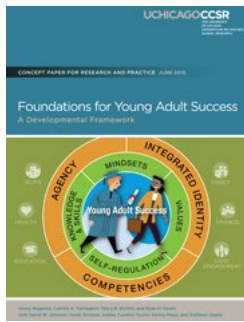
[Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review](#), by Sean Grant, Laura S. Hamilton, *et al.*, RAND Corporation, 2017

RAND conducted a review of U.S.-based social and emotional learning programs for K-12 students to better inform practitioners and policymakers on how they could be used under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The report finds that ESSA’s Title I section, the largest single source of federal funding for public schools (some \$15 billion to \$16 billion annually) and the part of the law including the School Improvement Funds program, can be used for some SEL interventions. ESSA’s Title II, Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders, and Title IV, 21st Century Schools, can also be applied, depending on the type of intervention and outcome sought.



[From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope: Recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development](#), The Aspen Institute, 2019

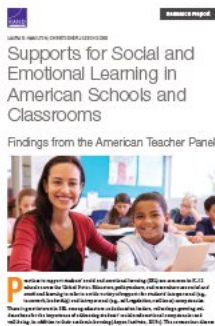
The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development was created to “engage and energize communities in re-envisioning learning to encompass its social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions so that all children can succeed in school, careers, and life.” The culminating report draws on two years of conversations, meetings and site visits across the country and finds that providing young people more opportunities for acquiring social and emotional skills could improve both academic and labor market outcomes.



[Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework](#), by Jenny Nagaoka, Camille A. Farrington, *et al.*, The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2015

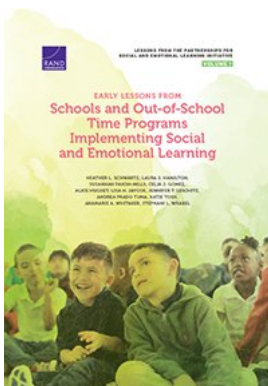
Drawing on decades of theory and research as well as insights from those who work with young people, this report describes what children need to grow and learn, and how adults can foster their development in ways that lead to college and career success, healthy relationships and engaged citizenship. It also identifies the obstacles that children in poverty and children of color may face in achieving their potential and suggests how policy and practice can help overcome those challenges.

Guidance on Starting and Running a Social and Emotional Learning Program



[Supports for Social and Emotional Learning in American Schools and Classrooms: Findings from the American Teacher Panel](#), by Laura S. Hamilton and Christopher Joseph Doss, RAND Corporation, 2020

To help leaders and policymakers better support teachers carrying out SEL efforts, the RAND Corporation conducted a survey in spring 2019 via the American Teacher Panel, a nationally representative sample of K-12 teachers. RAND received responses from more than 1,200 teachers working in schools across the country. Based on the findings, the report offers ways state, district and school leaders can help support the take-up and effective use of SEL practices. These include addressing teacher well-being and burnout, developing the right SEL-related professional development opportunities, and providing guidance on new and emerging SEL online instruction programs and tools.



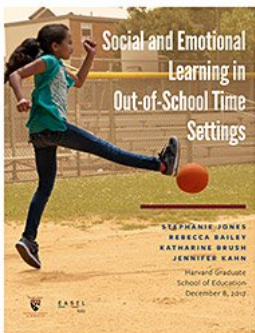
[Early Lessons from Schools and Out-of-School Time Programs Implementing Social and Emotional Learning](#), by Heather L. Schwartz, Laura S. Hamilton, *et al.*, RAND Corporation, 2020

This report presents findings from the first two years of the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative, a Wallace-supported effort exploring whether and how children can benefit from partnerships between schools and out-of-school-time (OST) programs focused on building social and emotional skills – and what it takes to do the work. Coming at a time when interest in social-emotional learning is outstripping empirical guidance about how to carry out programs and practices, the report covers the early work of six communities that have gone about incorporating SEL programs and practices into the school and OST parts of the day: Boston, Dallas, Denver, Palm Beach County in Florida, Tacoma and Tulsa. Findings are based on a trove of data—approximately 5,000 completed surveys of school and OST staff members, 850 interviews, and observations of more than 3,000 instructional and non-instructional activities in schools and OST programs—making this one of the most comprehensive study of SEL implementation to date.



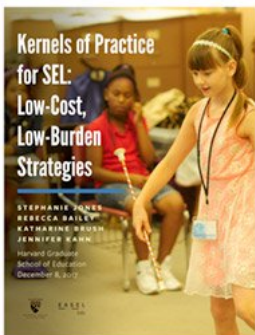
[Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out](#), by Stephanie Jones, Katharine Brush, *et al.*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2017

This in-depth guide to 25 evidence-based programs—aimed at elementary schools and out-of-school providers—offers information about curricular content and programmatic features that practitioners can use to make informed choices about SEL programs. The first of its kind, the guide allows practitioners to compare curricula and methods across top SEL programs. It also explains how programs can be adapted from schools to out-of-school-time settings, such as afterschool and summer programs.



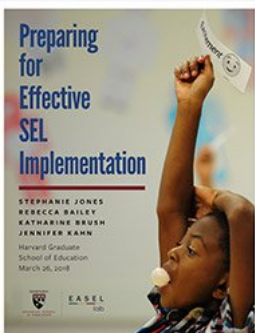
[Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time Settings](#), by Stephanie Jones, Rebecca Bailey, *et al.*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2017*

This brief draws upon the analysis to bring a sharper focus to programs that can be applied to an Out-of-School Time (OST) setting. While the analysis identified only three programs that explicitly target OST settings, they reviewed a number of others than can be adapted by OST programs. The adaptable programs focus on a variety of skills, employ different teaching strategies, provide varying levels of implementation support and have different levels of effectiveness.



[Kernels of Practice for SEL: Low-Cost, Low-Burden Strategies](#), Stephanie Jones, Rebecca Bailey, *et al.*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2017*

As schools and out-of-school-time (OST) programs embrace social and emotional learning, several barriers have arisen to implementing programming at scale, including time and funding. Challenges are likely exacerbated in low-income contexts and raise the need for more flexible and affordable supports. This brief suggests one possible approach to lowering barriers: identifying and using low-cost, targeted strategies called “evidence-based prevention kernels.” These strategies, which address a specific behavior, could be taught quickly and be more feasible to implement than comprehensive programs.



[Preparing for Effective SEL Implementation](#), by Stephanie Jones, Rebecca Bailey, *et al.*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2018*

This brief outlines common components of SEL programs —climate and culture supports, adaptability to local context, family engagement, etc.— and maps them to SEL best practices and to six recommendations for effective implementation. These include extending SEL beyond the classroom, applying SEL strategies and skills in real-time, and ensuring sufficient staff support and training.

*From a three-part, commissioned series that draws on *Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out*.