

## INTEGRATING SEL INTO INSTRUCTION

Schools serving high concentrations of poor students often view socioemotional learning (SEL), which is instruction that teaches self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as an “extra” that can be considered once academic competencies have improved. However, research clearly shows that students with low socioemotional skills are limited in their ability to benefit from academic instruction.

SEL can help students from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome the cognitive and psychological traumas associated with growing up in stressful, unstable, and unsafe environments. SEL improves concentration, responding to directions, stress management, and many other factors that enables school success.

Because many teachers and schools have limited time and must navigate instruction first accountability climates, these research-to-practice briefs are dedicated to fostering the integration of SEL into academic instruction.

### The Impact of Social-Emotional Learning

#### What is social and emotional learning?

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a process of development that aims to foster five sets of competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. More specifically, it aims to develop students’ abilities to acknowledge and manage emotions, define and achieve goals, understand the perspective of others, build and maintain positive relationships, act responsibly, and handle situations constructively. SEL can be incorporated into routine educational practices and do not require outside personnel for effective delivery. Current research indicates that it is appropriate for all educational levels and school types.

The development of such competencies help students engage in academic learning more easily and meaningfully. In addition to increases in test scores and grades, the successful implementation of SEL often produces more positive social behaviors, fewer instances of misconduct, and less emotional distress in schools.

In fact, extensive research has shown that increased mastery of social-emotional competencies improves student and teacher well-being as well as academic performance and engagement in schools, whereas the absence of these skills have been associated with personal, social and academic challenges.

## Positive effects of SEL on teachers and students

Research indicates that integrating SEL into the classroom not only benefits students but also the adults who work with them.

### *Transforms the perspectives of teachers*

Educators who use SEL in the classroom are more likely to reflect on their own social-emotional competencies--both inside and outside of the classroom. They report improvements in their focus, patience, kindness, and ability to let go of grudges.

The shift in paradigm for educators is a critical component of successful SEL implementation. In fact, one study found that teachers who did not believe in what they were teaching worsened students' social-emotional skills, while another study found that teachers who did cultivate these competencies themselves saw gains in both their mental health and their instructional effectiveness in the classroom.

### *Promotes teacher well-being*

Given the high rates of teacher turnover and attrition in recent years, teacher self-care becomes of increasing importance in the profession as well as in the work of schools in supporting students. Teachers who do not actively care for their own well-being will struggle to do so for their students. Furthermore, negative social-emotional attitudes and habits may reinforce or worsen an already cynical school culture.

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) recognizes the vital link between a teacher's social-emotional health and that of a student's. The district has taken proactive measures to foster teacher self-care while also developing staff to implement SEL practices in the classroom. As

the OUSD Associate Superintendent Brigitte Marshall notes, the district's prioritization of teachers' well-being is of vital importance because it is institutionally recognized and supports the connection between teacher health and their effectiveness in the classroom.

### *Improves attitudes towards the profession*

According to research, people who find meaning in their work have higher levels of job satisfaction, motivation and performance. Even though many of those who enter the teaching profession do it because they find it to be meaningful, related stress, and demands often challenge educators' sense of optimism and belief in their work. This can lead to both burnout and attrition.

SEL, however, can help educators renew their love of teaching. The competencies that it builds within teachers helps them deal with the work-related stresses, foster purpose in their work, and develop stronger relationships with their students.

*Enriches teacher-student and student-student relationships*  
Foundational to learning is the relationship that forms between a teacher and student. A student who feels that their teacher cares for them is more likely to do well in school and enjoy

learning. SEL practices can help teachers cultivate such meaningful relationships with students. Teachers, for example, become better attuned to the causes of misbehaviors and better equipped to respond with compassion and understanding rather than with shame and punishment.

Students' relationships with their peers are also transformed through SEL, which has positive impacts on academic achievement and school engagement. One study found that students'

“SEL completely changed the way I taught and it made me more excited to go back this year.” -Katherine Shea, middle school teacher

sense of acceptance among their peers made a huge difference in their ability to learn math. One OUSD teacher reported that SEL helped to cultivate an openness in his 6th grade classroom in which students felt comfortable in sharing and supporting one another.

### **A tip for educators surrounded by nay-sayers**

For teachers who come across resistance in their schools around the implementation of SEL, it is

recommended that they focus on what they can do in the classroom for their students and to partner with other teachers who can support them. It is possible that small, on-going actions of a teacher or group of school staff can open the minds of others towards the importance of SEL and teaching the whole child.

*To integrate SEL in your classroom, continue reading this series to develop your knowledge of the practices and capacity for implementation.*

### **Adapted from:**

Durlak, Joseph A., Roger P. Weissberg, Allison B. Dymnicki, Rebecca D. Taylor, and Kriston B. Schellinger. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions: Social and Emotional Learning. *Child Development* 82 (1), 405–432.

Zakrzewski, V. (September, 2014) How Social-Emotional Learning Transforms Classrooms. Greater Good.

[http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_social\\_emotional\\_learning\\_transforms\\_classrooms](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_social_emotional_learning_transforms_classrooms).