



Data Spotlight:

The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning

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What is Social-Emotional Learning?

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) supports both young people and adults in developing important individual and interpersonal skills, addressing issues associated with trauma and adverse experiences, and promoting physical and mental health. A growing body of evidence suggests that building social, emotional, and behavioral skills is connected strongly to mental health and wellness for children and youth and supports positive outcomes in education, employment, and life.¹

SEL is broadly defined as the processes to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to set and achieve goals; manage emotions; build empathy; establish and maintain positive relationships; and make responsible decisions.² The framework for SEL has existed for decades and has also been called life and career skills, 21st century skills, employability skills, and soft skills.³ The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.⁴

SEL programming in schools has grown in recent years, both to ensure that students are prepared for the workforce with the skills that employers need, as well as to address trauma and mental health issues, particularly among adolescents. Based on national polls, Americans overwhelmingly want schools to educate students in more than just academic subjects, including providing career preparation as well as building interpersonal skills.⁵ A national 2020 teacher survey indicated that 94% of teachers agreed that their students increasingly need more social and emotional support, with social and emotional needs ranked among the top three greatest concerns in education.⁶



Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)



SEL in Indiana

Children and youth in Indiana tend to report higher instances of traumatic and adverse experiences than young people nationally.

- In Indiana, 21% of children under 18 reported having experienced two or more adverse experiences, compared to 18% nationally.⁷
- More than one quarter (26%) of Hoosier children ages 3-17 have one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions, compared to 22% nationally.⁸
- In addition, 23,000 Hoosier teens ages 12-17 (about 4%) reported abusing alcohol or drugs, which was equivalent to the national percentage.⁹
- Indiana also has relatively high rates of children with substantiated cases of maltreatment (14.7 per 1,000 in Indiana compared to 8.9 per 1,000 nationally).¹⁰
- Furthermore, 39% of Hoosier children reported being bullied, compared to 35% nationwide, and 18% of children in Indiana say they have bullied others, compared to 14% nationwide.¹¹

Indicator	Indiana	U.S.
Experienced two or more adverse experiences (under 18)*	21%	18%
Has one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions (ages 3-17)*	26%	22%
Abused alcohol or drugs in the past year (ages 12-17)**	4%	4%
Substantiated cases of maltreatment (per 1,000 children under 18)***	14.7	8.9
% of children reported being bullied*	39%	35%
% of children reported bullying others*	18%	14%

Source: *National Survey of Children's Health; **National Survey on Drug Use and Health; ***National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)

Indiana Code 20-19-5 requires that the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), in collaboration with other agencies, have a plan for social, emotional, and behavioral health.¹² In 2019, the state plan was updated with seven SEL competencies: insight, regulation, connection, collaboration, critical thinking, mindset and sensory-motor integration.¹³

Indiana's SEL competencies share significant overlap with the Indiana Employability Skills Standards, first implemented in 2020. Indiana's SEL competencies also are aligned with what a recent report from America Succeeds called "durable skills," which are in high demand among employers.¹⁴

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines five core social-emotional competency clusters.



Self-Awareness

The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts as well as their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations, having a growth mindset, and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.



Self-Management

The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.



Social Awareness

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to identify family, school, and community resources and supports.



Relationship Skills

The ability to establish and maintain healthy, mutually rewarding relationships with diverse individuals. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.



Responsible Decision-Making

The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

Source: CASEL



Indiana SEL Competencies	Indiana Employability Skills	America Succeeds Durable Skills
Sensory-Motor Integration: Managing transitions, changing routines, increasing alertness for learning, and improving regulation.	Social and emotional skills: Regulation	Meta-cognition: Self-understanding and personal management Mindfulness: Interpersonal and self-awareness
Insight: Self-confidence, self-esteem, and empathy for others; recognizing own strengths and areas of growth.	Mindsets: Self-confidence Learning strategies: Aptitude awareness	Creativity: New ideas and novel solutions Meta-cognition: Self-understanding and personal management
Regulation: Recognizing and managing one's emotions; positive self-control, positive self-discipline, and impulse control.	Work ethic: Self-discipline Social and emotional skills: Regulation	Character: Personal and professional conduct Meta-cognition: Self-understanding and personal management
Collaboration: Working well with others, including in the group and teamwork environment; building positive communication and conflict management skills.	Learning strategies: Effective communication Social and emotional skills: Collaboration	Character: Personal and professional conduct Collaboration: Teamwork and connection
Connection: Strong social awareness, ability to take the perspectives of others and empathize with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures.	Social and emotional skills: Connection	Collaboration: Teamwork and connection Mindfulness: Interpersonal and self-awareness
Critical Thinking: Making constructive choices; understanding metacognitive strategies; responsible decision-making, analytical, and critical inquiry skills; approaching learning from an innovative, creative, multicultural, and ethical lens.	Learning strategies: Decision-making, Problem solving	Leadership: Directing efforts and delivering results Character: Personal and professional conduct Creativity: New ideas and novel solutions Meta-cognition: Self-understanding and personal management
Mindset: Demonstrating cognitive flexibility and a willingness to learn; building perseverance, adaptability, self-discovery, resilience, and the ability to receive and give constructive feedback.	Mindsets: Lifelong learning Work ethic: Perseverance, Adaptability Learning strategies: Initiative	Meta-cognition: Self-understanding and personal management Growth mindset: Improvement and aspiration Fortitude: Constitution and inspiration

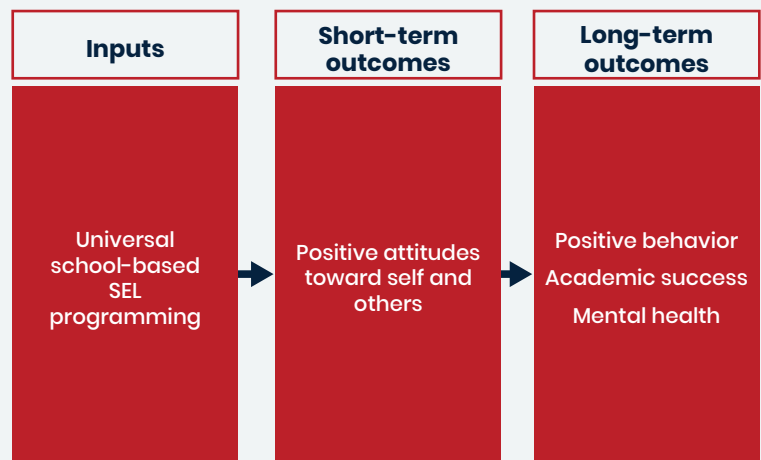
Source: Indiana Department of Education; America Succeeds

Outcomes Related to SEL

- SEL and Student Academic and Behavioral Outcomes:**

An analysis of over 350 research studies on the short- and long-term effects of SEL (conducted both in the United States and internationally) found positive benefits for students in a wide range of areas, including behavioral, attitudinal, emotional, and academic. In various studies, compared to control (non-participating) groups of students, those who participated in SEL programming showed significantly more positive outcomes related to SEL skills, positive social behavior, and academic performance. Additionally, participating students showed significantly lower levels of conduct problems and emotional distress. Moreover, several studies have found that gains from SEL participation appear both in the short-term (immediately after participation), as well as at various follow-up periods, suggesting that academic, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes for students may be longer-term.¹⁵

SEL Short- and Long-term Outcomes



Source: Phi Delta Kappan



- **SEL and College and Career Readiness:** Schools that value and support SEL programming, particularly those that include a combination of social well-being and work habits, are more likely to have students that graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education.¹⁶ Students from schools with stronger SEL programming reported increased preparation for success after high school, including being prepared for a job or career.¹⁷ Moreover, employers continually identify competencies included in SEL, such as communication and interpersonal skills, the ability to collaborate and work on teams, problem-solving skills, and self-management skills as the most sought-after skills in the workplace.¹⁸ A recent America Succeeds study found that 7 out of 10 most requested skills in job postings are durable skills like communication, critical thinking, and collaboration, and that these skills are sought nearly four times more frequently than the top five technical or hard skills.¹⁹
- **SEL, Schools, and Communities:** Large bodies of research have demonstrated clear connections between SEL and positive short- and longer-term outcomes for students, but SEL also has value for educators, schools, and communities.
 - o A longitudinal study in Chicago found that schools with higher levels of SEL programming (both social and workforce skills) were more likely to have improved standardized test scores.²⁰
 - o SEL also can have a positive impact on teachers, by increasing emotional regulation and mindfulness, as well as assisting teachers in identifying and addressing their own stressors.²¹
 - o Additionally, SEL has been found to have a bidirectional impact on school climate (in other words, they affect each other) – SEL can reduce incidents of bullying and violence in a school, which in turn improves student-student and student-staff interactions. This results in fewer suspensions and expulsions, less disruption of learning, and a safer school environment.²²
 - o Improving social and emotional competency also can positively impact communities. Strong social-emotional skills in young children have been shown to be predictive of positive outcomes later in life, including better educational attainment and stable employment, as well as reductions in justice system involvement, substance abuse, and participation in public assistance.²³
 - o Further, strong SEL in K-12 settings has been linked to increases in civic and community engagement.²⁴
- **SEL and COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic caused changes in routines, a break in the continuity of learning and health care, missed significant life events, and lost security and safety for children, all of which can contribute to additional fear, stress, and behavior changes that can have adverse effects on mental and physical health.²⁵ Moreover, a high prevalence of COVID-19 related fear was reported among children and adolescents, in addition to rates of depressive and anxious symptoms that were higher than pre-pandemic estimates.²⁶ Key aspects of SEL, including improving coping mechanisms and developing stress-reduction techniques, building resilience, and improving social connections, are seen as potentially effective mechanisms for addressing pandemic-related challenges.²⁷



SEL is defined as the processes to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to set and achieve goals; manage emotions; build empathy; establish and maintain positive relationships; and make responsible decisions.

– *Phi Delta Kappan*





Characteristics of High-Quality SEL Programs & Policies

A spring 2020 review by CASEL identified Indiana as one of 18 states with SEL standards or competencies. As a best practice, CASEL recommends that states align SEL standards and competencies with other strategic priorities and approaches, so that SEL is not disconnected. Indiana does this through integration with academics (including providing instructional approaches for SEL); college and career readiness (connections to employability skills standards); and connections to Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Moreover, the CASEL report recognized Indiana as one of seven states that include four key types of support for implementation – guidance for implementing SEL; recommended instructional practices; professional development and learning; and assessment and measurement of outcomes.²⁸

At the local level, schools that report more effective implementation of SEL tend to have high levels of buy-in among administrators at the district level, as well as having built buy-in with other stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and community members.²⁹

Research suggests that the most effective SEL initiatives are focused on both students and adults. This includes building adult competencies, such as promoting educators' own social and emotional competence and integrating those skills with pedagogy and practice, which may help build buy-in to the value of SEL as well as ensuring that educators are able to appropriately model behaviors. Strong SEL programs incorporate SAFE elements (**S**equenced activities; **A**ctive forms of learning; **F**ocused time developing skills; and **E**xplicit targeting of skills). As such, to maximize effectiveness, educators should receive professional development and support, and administrators should ensure that enough time has been allotted to implement SEL-related programs sufficiently and with fidelity.³²

Effective Implementation of SEL in Schools

- SEL programming is likely to be most beneficial when it is part of an overall district- and school-wide strategy, which is implemented in ongoing and systemic ways from pre-K through high school and integrated into curricular and daily practices as much as possible (as opposed to “one-off” SEL classes).³⁰
- Building relationships with out-of-school time (OST) programs, or working with existing OST partners, to implement SEL as an extension of in-school SEL practices also can be an effective strategy. These partnerships should ensure that OST staff have a clear understanding of the school's (or district's) SEL strategy and an understanding of the various approaches to SEL.
- In addition, school staff can work with OST partners to ensure that SEL practices in the OST setting are aligned with and support the work within the school.³¹

Additional Resources on SEL

- [What Are Social and Emotional Learning and Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education — and What Do They Have to Do with Critical Race Theory? A Primer](#) (WestEd)
- [School Counselors' Perspectives on Students' Social/Emotional Development: Highlights and Recommendations](#) (ACT)
- [Making Social-Emotional Learning Work for Teens](#) (Education Week)
- [Social-Emotional Learning, Explained](#) (Education Week video)
- [A Parent's Resource Guide to Social Emotional Learning](#) (Edutopia)

Did you know...

Schools that value and support SEL programming are more likely to have students that graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education.





Locally:

- **Implement SEL as a school- or district-wide initiative, as opposed to classroom-based only:** This may include implementing SEL-related components (such as self-regulation, goal setting, and interpersonal skills) within academic curriculum and programming that already exists in the school, as well as implementing a continuum of SEL approaches ranging from daily routines to strategies and structures that can be used regularly throughout the school.³³
- **Use SEL practices that are designed not only for students, but also for educators:** This includes training opportunities for school administrators, counselors, and teachers that allow adults to model effective behavior, as well as assisting them in better identifying potential mental health and wellness issues among themselves, and the children and youth they serve.³⁴
- **Engage stakeholders both inside and outside of the school in developing and implementing SEL practices:** Lack of buy-in for SEL initiatives, as well as misunderstanding about what SEL is (and is not) may create barriers for effective implementation.³⁵ However, schools that report high levels of effective SEL implementation are more likely to involve diverse groups of in- and out-of-school stakeholders in SEL planning and implementation.³⁶ As such, schools can work to engage stakeholders both inside and outside of the school (including parents, community organizations, and businesses) in developing, supporting, and building buy-in for SEL initiatives that are tailored to the needs of the community. This may include collaboratively reviewing data to identify critical mental health and wellness issues in the community; developing a clearly defined SEL strategic or implementation plan that is widely shared; bringing in local businesses or employers to talk about the importance of durable skills such as those taught in SEL curriculum; sharing the evidence base associated with implementation of SEL; and allowing parents to share ways in which SEL initiatives have supported their children.

Statewide:

- **Align current SEL and employability standards with durable skills in high demand:** State policymakers, education leaders, and the business community can review and ensure alignment between the highest demand durable skills for employers and Indiana's SEL, employability, and academic standards and competencies, as well as developing learner-centered frameworks for ensuring that these skills are embedded into graduation pathways.³⁷
- **Engage in collaborative efforts across state agencies:** Various state agencies (e.g., Department of Education, Department of Workforce Development, Department of Health, Commission for Higher Education, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, etc.) can communicate the connections between SEL competencies and student outcomes (academic, behavioral, career, and health-related), including linkages between SEL competencies and sought-after skills necessary for success in higher education and employment. Further, identify opportunities to fund or support a statewide research agenda or evaluation related to SEL and student and school outcomes.³⁸
- **Scale evidence-based professional development:** Support professional development for educators (including administrators, teachers, and counselors) that is focused on evidence-based practices, is aligned with Indiana SEL and employability skills competencies, and includes a focus around fidelity of model implementation, as well as opportunities for encouraging educators to build their own SEL skills, addressing teacher burnout, and improving the ability to model SEL behaviors for students.³⁹
- **Embed equity into the SEL competencies:** Systemic implementation of SEL can create an equitable learning environment where all students feel respected, valued, and affirmed in their individual interests, talents, social identities, cultural values, and backgrounds. SEL can help school districts promote understanding, examine biases, reflect on, and address the impact of discrimination, build cross-cultural relationships, and cultivate practices that close opportunity gaps and create more inclusive school communities.⁴⁰ There are two potential ways for the State to embed equity into the current SEL competencies:
 - For any SEL data the State reports, disaggregate those data by subgroup (gender, race/ethnicity, disability, income, and language status), suppressing data when needed.
 - Revisit the current competencies and review them with an equity lens and ensure there are trauma-informed system interventions.

Nationally:

- **Include SEL in federal funding and programs:** Encourage opportunities for federally- and state-funded out-of-school time (OST) programming (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers) to include SEL components that are developed collaboratively with schools being served and reflect SEL competencies. This may also include support for professional development for OST program staff related to SEL. When students have more opportunities to practice SEL skills across multiple settings (home, school, and afterschool programming), SEL-related outcomes are more likely to improve.⁴¹



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