

# The Case for Social-Emotional Learning

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# The Case for Social-Emotional Learning

This overview summarizes the research of an array of studies examining the outcomes and outlook of social and emotional learning in the current education system. The research shows the effect of social-emotional learning on a spectrum of students ranging from preschool to high school, tracking students through multiple grade levels.

# Introduction

Although ideas around social and emotional learning (or SEL) have existed since ancient Greece, the term “social and emotional learning” is a relatively new concept. It has only been made mainstream since the late 1980’s/early 1990’s, and only in the last two decades has research behind SEL, including long-term studies, taken off.

The research thus far has yielded positive outcomes for not just students, but also teachers, school administrators, and employers alike. Importantly, the effects go far beyond academic performance and are reflected in the character, career, and life choices of those exposed to social-emotional learning competencies.

In addition, SEL has been proven to be beneficial for racially and economically diverse students from rural, suburban, and urban places, showing it truly works for all students. Encouragingly, several school districts throughout the United States are paving the way on what high quality interventions and outcomes look like and others are beginning to follow suit.

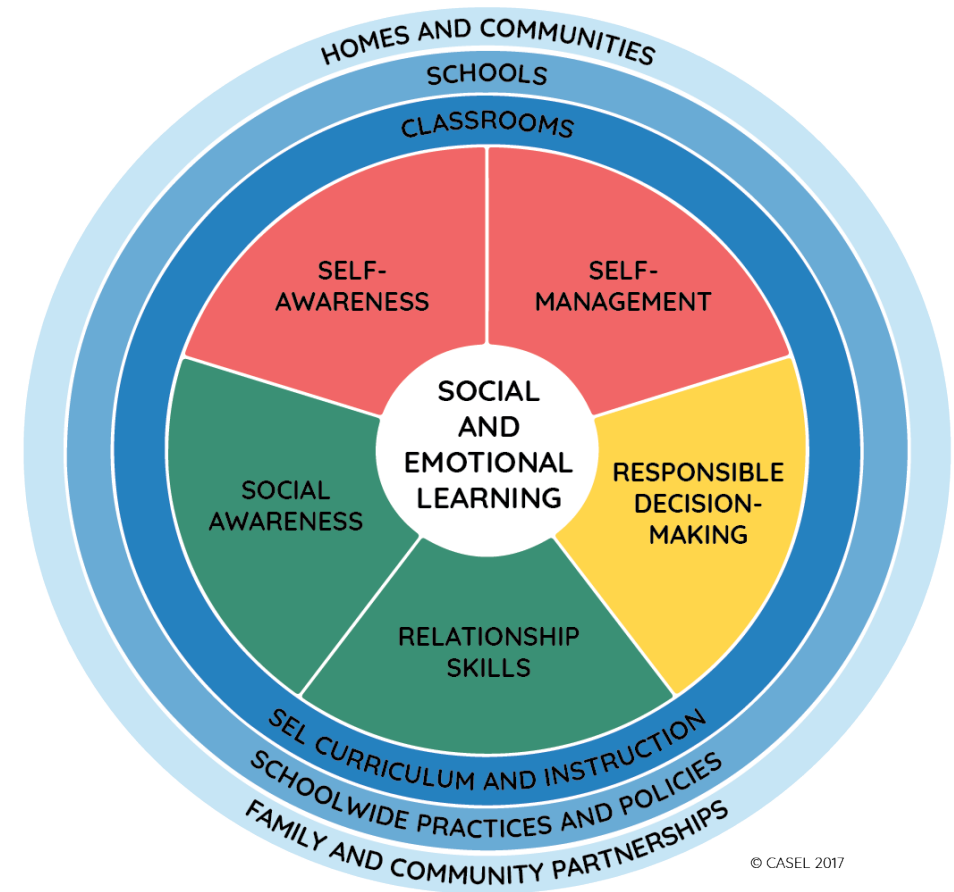
*“Students need to know how to cope with stress, how to diffuse anger, and how to make a good first impression. They need to know how to find their identity and set goals for the future. Having a dedicated SEL program in schools allows us to teach these skills.”*

- **Kristen Kopczynski,**  
**Getting Smart**



# What is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)?

Social and emotional learning refers to 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 towards others, establish and maintain positive emotions, and make positive decisions.



# Why is SEL important?



Students are going to need far more than just core academic skills to be successful in the 21st century education system and workplace - we refer to this as the Age of Agility.



Everyday there are new articles about employers challenged by a lack of qualified workers who possess competencies that are proving to be more desired than the technical, hard skills typically thought of as attractive to employers.



While traditional skills are still important, the rise of soft skills such as critical thinking, communication, cooperation, and creativity are taking center stage as the most important things an employee can offer; technical expertise can be developed on the job.

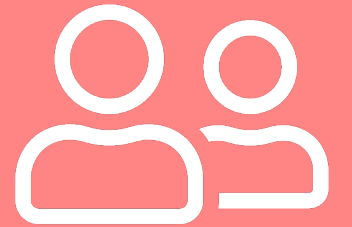


# SEL Focuses on Soft Skills

A recent study found talent shortage has emerged as the top risk for organizations, and employers increasingly look for workers with soft skills as they struggle to fill the talent gap ([HR Dive](#)).

**There is a disconnect between employer needs and what workers bring to the job, which stems from an education system failing to adequately teach students the soft skills, which are highly coveted by employers.**

SEL specifically targets the development of “soft skills,” the exact skills many young people are missing when they enter the workforce.



# SEL Competencies

The most comprehensive list and explanation of social-emotional competencies has been developed by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) and includes:



## **Self-awareness**

*Assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a sense of self-confidence*



## **Self-management**

*Regulating one's emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, and addressing challenges; expressing emotions appropriately; and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals*



## **Social awareness**

*Being able to have perspective and empathize with others*



## **Relationship skills**

*Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social behavior; and managing and resolving interpersonal conflicts*



## **Responsible decision-making**

*Making decisions based on considerations of ethical standards, respect for others, and safety concerns; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to one's school and community*



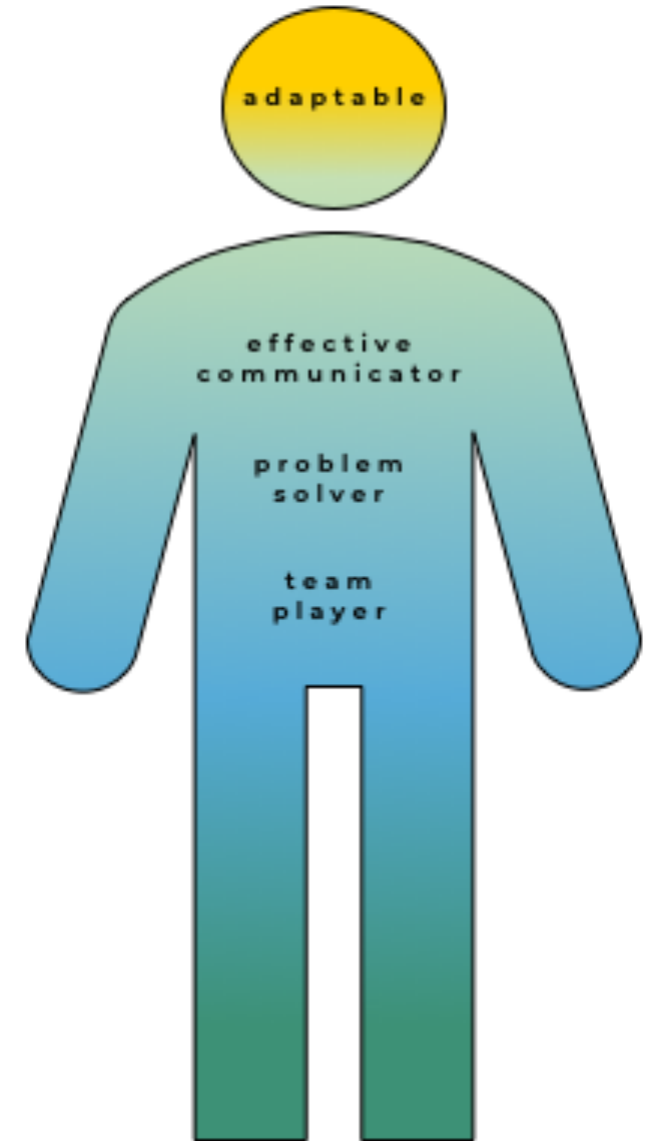
# Effects of SEL

There are several routes to embedding social emotional learning competencies into what students are already learning in schools.

When students are taught to recognize and manage their emotions, make responsible decisions, establish and maintain relationships, and handle interpersonal situations effectively, among other things, they are learning how to navigate situations while demonstrating soft skills such as being adaptable, communicating effectively, problem solving, and teamwork ([Aspen Institute](#)).

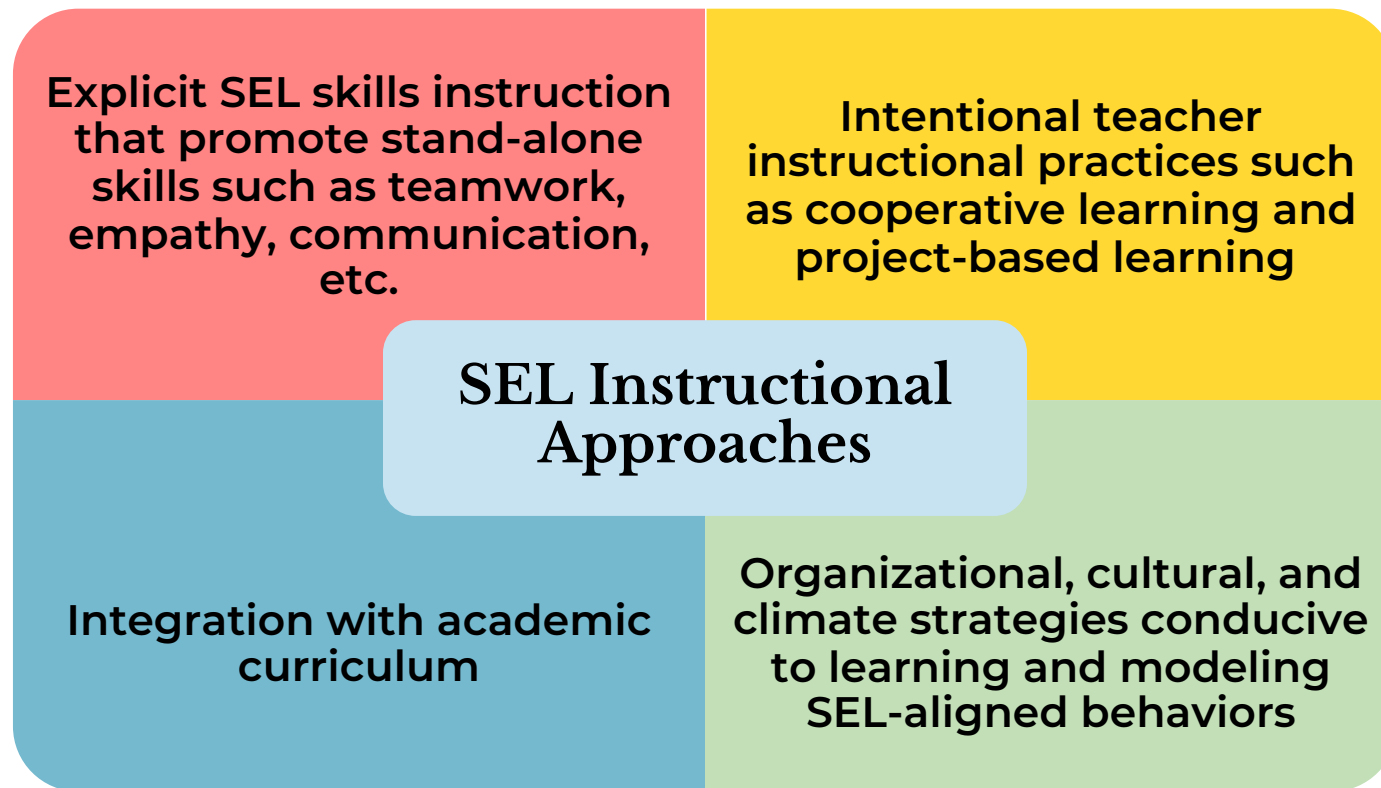
**These are commonly accepted as important life skills to know, yet are often left out of what is actually being taught in schools.**

There are a variety of ways to incorporate SEL and soft skills into the education system –whether through stand-alone lessons being taught in classrooms, after school programs, or embedded into the curriculum.



# SEL Instructional Approaches

[CASEL](#) identified four approaches proven to be the most effective methods for schools:





# SEL Research Findings

There have been numerous studies on social and emotional learning. Overall, research on SEL programming has shown both short- and long-term benefits for student achievement and other outcomes. Five trends emerging from two decades worth of research prove students exposed to SEL programming show:

- **Increased academic achievement**
- **Improved behavior**
- **Strong return on investment**
- **Improved economic mobility with a reduction of poverty**
- **Improved life outcomes**

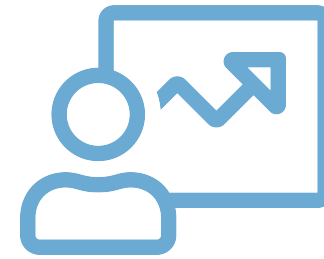


# SEL Research Findings



## Increased Academic Achievement

A [2011 meta-analysis](#) of 213 studies involving 270,000 students shows those who participated in SEL programs demonstrated an 11 percentage point gain in academic achievement compared to students who did not.

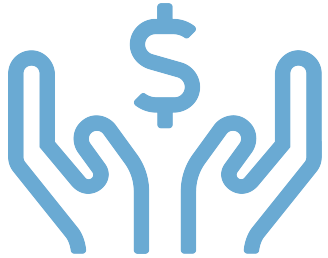


## Improved Behavior

The same [2011 meta-analysis](#) revealed decreases in drop-out rates, school and classroom behavior issues, drug use, teen pregnancy, mental health problems, and criminal behavior.



# SEL Research Findings



## Strong Return on Investment

A Columbia University [study](#) of SEL interventions through evidence-based programs found for every dollar invested, there was an economic return of \$11.



## Improved Economic Mobility

A bipartisan [report](#) by The Brookings Institution and The American Enterprise Institute determined that social-emotional skills are critically important for the long-term success of all students in today's economy.



## Improved Life Outcomes

[Statistical evidence](#) shows kindergarteners who have strong SEL competencies are more likely to graduate high school, complete a college degree, and obtain stable employment in adulthood.

# Additional Research Findings

This data is further backed by the 28-member [Council](#) of Distinguished Scientists of the National Commission of Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, who released a report in 2017 on the significance of integrating social-emotional learning with [academic learning](#).

# Who wants SEL?



***96% of Administrators***



***93% of Teachers***



***92% of Business Leaders***



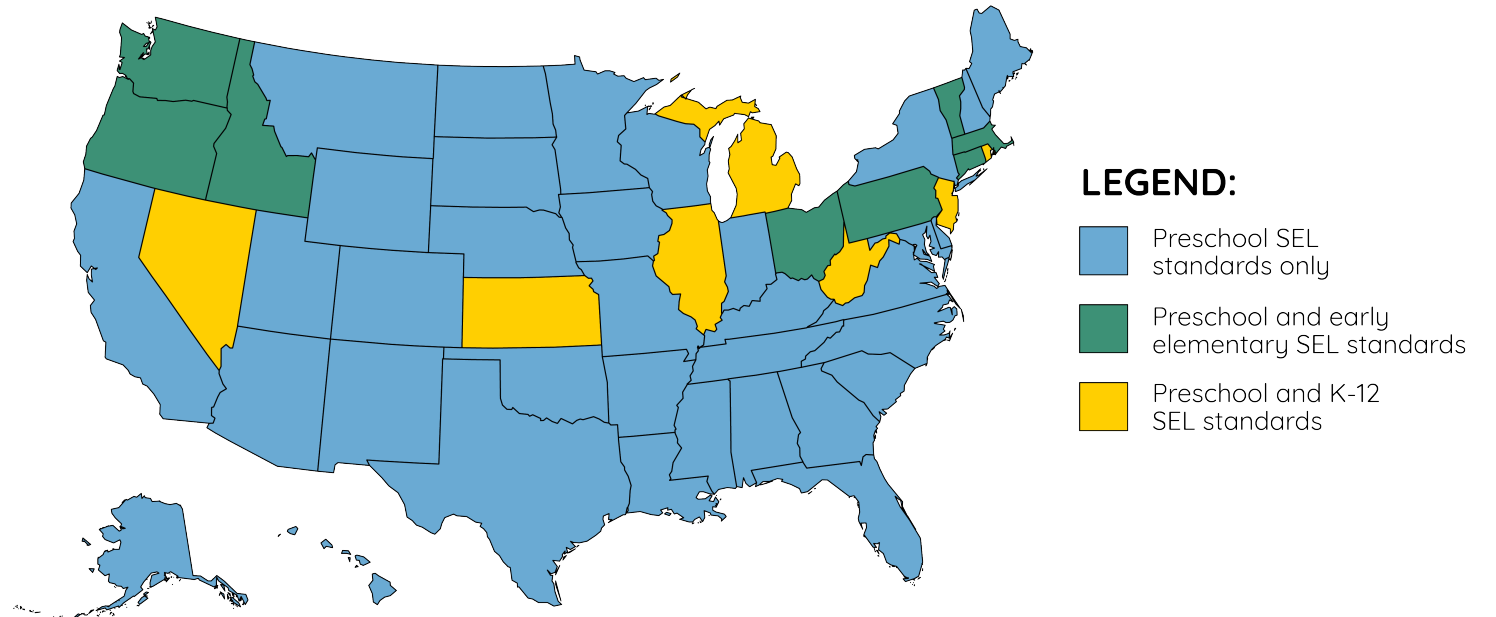
***81% of Parents***

Administrators, teachers, parents, and business leaders all place a high value on a 'whole student' approach to development. They recognize that success in life, college, and career specifically relies on a student's cognitive, social, emotional, and academic development.

# What are states doing?

All 50 states currently have SEL competencies woven into their preschool curriculum, but only 8 states have standards for elementary students and only 8 more states have them for all K-12 students.

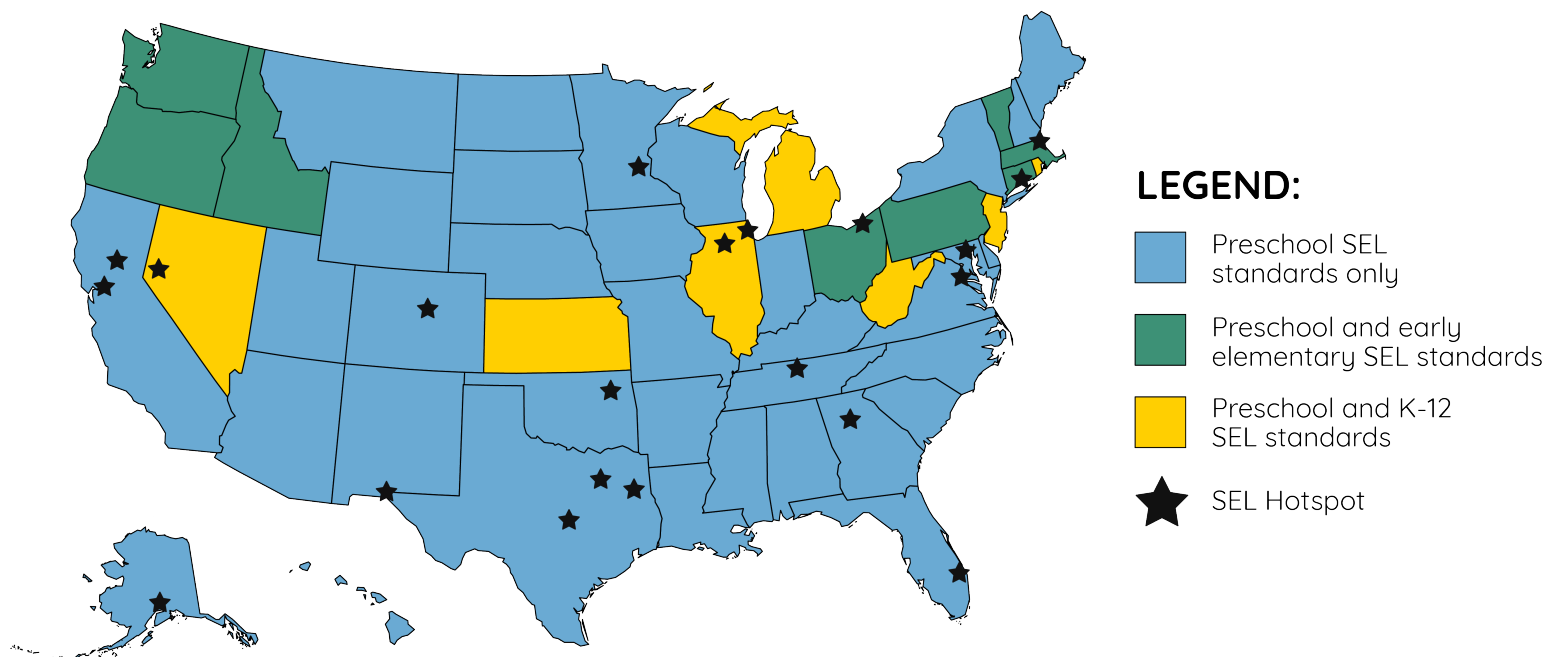
In 2011, [CASEL and The Wallace Foundation](#) embarked on an ongoing project to partner with 21 large school districts throughout the United States to support their efforts to systematically implement high quality SEL programming and share their data.



For the last 8 years, CASEL has been working with 21 school districts, serving 1.8 million students, to help them strategically embed SEL into all aspects of their work.

**Although data varies by district, a general trend emerges throughout the 21 school districts that students exposed to SEL competencies demonstrate consistently improved academic achievement in reading and math, increased attendance and graduation rates, and improved behavioral outcomes.**

Students also report feeling safer and more connected to school. The new data coming out of these districts further reinforces the positive correlations between student outcomes and growth in social-emotional abilities.



# What are districts doing?



# Conclusions

It is difficult to argue against social emotional learning when there are many large-scale, quality studies validating positive outcomes.

More widespread implementation of SEL holds the potential to not only produce more competent students and citizens, but also to yield more specialized data which can be used to further refine instruction and programs, and advance outcomes.

CASEL previews several [exciting aspects](#) of advanced SEL that is yet to come, such as exploring which combinations of SEL skills will most effectively influence the outcomes of sub-groups, how to prolong program impacts, and how to best support school staff as they implement programs.

# Call to Action

With changing workforce needs and expectations, soft skills learned through SEL programming will continue to be critically beneficial to all students.

Research shows students, teachers, administrators, parents, business leaders, and society as a whole benefiting from social-emotional learning competencies taught in school – it is time to leverage the research to push education leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders toward positive policy change.

Business leaders have the unique opportunity to be champions of promoting SEL competencies in the education system. They stand to benefit directly from students who are truly ready to enter and succeed in a modern workforce, leading to more efficient organizations/companies and a more effective economy overall.

***“The pipeline to a successful workforce depends on children of all backgrounds having academic and social-emotional skills that are vital to the economy.”***

***- Jack Brennan, Former CEO and Advisor, Vanguard***

# Additional Resources



[American Institute for Research](#)



[Aspen Institute](#)



[Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#)



[Committee for Children](#)



[Learning Policy Institute](#)



[NFTE Entrepreneurial Mindset](#)



[RAND Center for Social and Emotional Learning](#)



[State Scan Scorecard Project](#)



For additional information, please visit  
[AmericaSucceeds.org/Resources](http://AmericaSucceeds.org/Resources).

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