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# Social Policy Report

## Social and Emotional Learning in Schools
### From Programs to Strategies

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## Abstract

Schools are an important context for children's social and emotional development. In classrooms and other school settings, children and adolescents need to have skills such as managing negative emotions, being calm and focused, following directions, and navigating relationships with peers and adults. To build and support these skills, schools have widely adopted social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. When well-designed and well-implemented, SEL programs are associated with positive outcomes; however, effect sizes are generally modest even for the most promising interventions. This issue of *Social Policy Report* proposes that schools should take a new approach: integrating the teaching and reinforcement of SEL skills into their daily interactions and practices with students. It explains that research warrants a new perspective and highlights a range of new approaches and support strategies that are designed to be time-efficient, low-cost, and integrated with (rather than distracting from) academic curricula. These strategies are grounded in an organizing framework for SEL and a review of current programmatic approaches to SEL. They are introduced with a set of principles for creating better integration of SEL into educational practice and accompanied by recommendations about the role of policy.

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# From the Editors

This issue of *Social Policy Report* focuses on school's role in supporting social and emotional learning (SEL). The tragic shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school underscores the importance of families, schools, and communities in collectively supporting the emotional and social development of children and adults. SEL programs and strategies in schools will not by themselves prevent horrific events but, when coupled with other policies and practices, will serve an important role in supporting children's healthy development. Children need to not only learn academic subjects in school but also develop their ability to get along, regulate their emotions, and successfully manage social dilemmas in order to be successful in life. Yes, schools are increasingly asked to do more—but Jones and Bouffard present a compelling argument and specific ideas for how schools can integrate SEL into the school day so it complements, rather than conflicts with, academics. Jones and Bouffard call for increased research and practice on strategies that can be integrated throughout the school day and across multiple school contexts (e.g., classrooms, playground, cafeteria) to support children's social and emotional learning. They provide a framework and discuss the important role of teachers, the classroom and school context, and the broader community context in supporting developmental outcomes for children.

Four commentaries accompany the Jones and Bouffard article. David Osher focuses on the importance of providing various supports, such as professional learning communities, to ensure that SEL strategies are successfully implemented in classrooms. Kathleen Lane calls for more rigorous research on the effectiveness of SEL strategies before they are implemented widely and the use of a tiered approach in offering a continuum of services to address children's varying needs. Janice Jackson expands on the Jones and Bouffard article by providing a more detailed description of an organization devoted to supporting SEL in schools. Finally, Meria Carstarphen, Superintendent of the Austin Independent School District, shares her school district's efforts to support students' SEL.

This issue of SPR differs from the traditional review of previous research and instead builds on previous research to offer ideas for new directions and research. Jones and Bouffard highlight the importance of a range of efforts to support SEL in schools—and the need to integrate these efforts into the daily school life inside and beyond the classroom. Events like those at Sandy Hook elementary school raise our collective awareness about emotional and social health. Let's work together to strengthen the research on how best to support children's SEL in schools as well as adults' implementation of these research-based efforts.

— Kelly L. Maxwell (Issue Editor)
Samuel L. Odom (Editor)
Iheoma Iruka (Editor)

# Social and Emotional Learning in Schools
## From Programs to Strategies

Too many educators and parents, it's common sense: children who have strong social and emotional skills perform better in school, have more positive relationships with peers and adults, and have more positive emotional adjustment and mental health. Development of these skills begins in the earliest years but continues throughout childhood and adolescence, influenced by relationships and social environments, including informal interactions as well as structured programs. Because children spend a significant portion of their time in schools, schools are a major context for social and emotional development, growing along with and connected to academics. Despite a narrowing of academic curricula following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the adoption of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools and of SEL standards in states has grown over the last decade (e.g., Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011).[1] This trend is driven by multiple factors, including accumulating evidence that many young children are entering school without the social and behavioral skills necessary to succeed (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000) as well as public attention to issues of school violence, bullying, and harassment (e.g., Seeley, Tombari, Bennett, & Dunkle, 2011).

Research reviews and meta-analyses find that well-designed, well-implemented SEL programs are associated with positive social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for children and adolescents (e.g., Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). However, effect sizes are generally modest even for the most promising interventions. For universal populations (i.e., all students in a classroom or school, regardless of risk status), these effects range between approximately one-fifth to one-third of a standard deviation (Durlak et al., 2011). For high-risk students (i.e., those who are identified by teachers as having substantial problems, for example with behavior), effect sizes can range slightly higher to approximately half a standard deviation (Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2011). These effect sizes are likely limited by a range of factors including wide variation in implementation quality and the difficulty of finding large blocks of dedicated time for SEL programming. Perhaps most importantly, and often overlooked, is the fact that SEL programs are rarely integrated into classrooms and schools in ways that are meaningful, sustained, and embedded in the day-to-day interactions of students, educators, and school staff. Indeed, evaluation research on SEL programs rarely includes a careful description of implementation benchmarks or fidelity (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000), but SEL programs typically occupy a half-hour lesson on a weekly or monthly basis (e.g., Jones, Brown, Hoglund, & Aber, 2010). Like academic skills, social and emotional skills develop over time and in a continuously staged fashion so they must be continuously developed. Even more than academic skills, they must develop in the context of daily life as social challenges and other teaching opportunities arise. As a result, schools cannot meaningfully teach and reinforce SEL skills during one half-hour per week any more than parents can build these skills during one weekly conversation.

In this issue of *Social Policy Report,* we propose that schools integrate the teaching and reinforcement of SEL skills into their missions and daily interactions with students. This may sound like a tall order given the many responsibilities and accountability pressures facing educators and schools today. Little things can make a big difference, though, from how adults talk to students to school staff using consistent routines for situations like transitions and social problem solving (Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2008). Frameworks for social innovation, such as disruptive innovations (Rotherham-Borus, Swendeman, &

[1] Social and emotional learning programs tend to refer to those that "foster the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406).

Chorpita, 2012) and evidence-based kernels (Embry & Biglan, 2008), suggest that integrated, everyday approaches could add value to or even be more efficient than full-scale, comprehensive programs that teach SEL skills during structured lesson blocks. To be clear, we are not proposing that schools eschew SEL curricula. Rather, we propose a continuum of approaches matched to the needs and contexts of each school and a commitment by all schools to making SEL part of the business of educating students.

Many of the strategies we describe have not yet been subjected to rigorous scientific study; however, all are grounded in research on how students' SEL skills develop and how program implementation works. We believe that the approaches highlighted have the potential to achieve a more substantial impact on children's social and emotional skills than many current approaches because they have the potential to address schools' needs for strategies that do not require large blocks of time and that threaten to take time away from academic instruction. We propose that these strategies should be tried, tested, and refined in the service of improving schools' efforts and students' outcomes. We focus on the period from kindergarten to high school, although most existing approaches focus at the elementary school level, with fewer programs available for middle schools and very limited attention to high schools. We do not address preschool programs here because many preschools already make the teaching of SEL skills paramount and integrated (e.g., Denham, Brown, & Domitrovich, 2011); in addition, preschools face a different set of challenges, pressures, and contextual factors than those of K–12 schools. We do, however, draw on research about social and emotional development from early childhood because it lays the foundation for many of the processes that are salient during middle childhood and adolescence.

In the pages that follow, we provide an organizing framework for SEL, describe current approaches to SEL including characteristics of effectiveness and limitations, present a set of principles to inform more integrated efforts, describe a continuum of approaches to integrating SEL into educational practice including examples of promising strategies, and identify opportunities and needs for policy.

## Defining and Understanding SEL

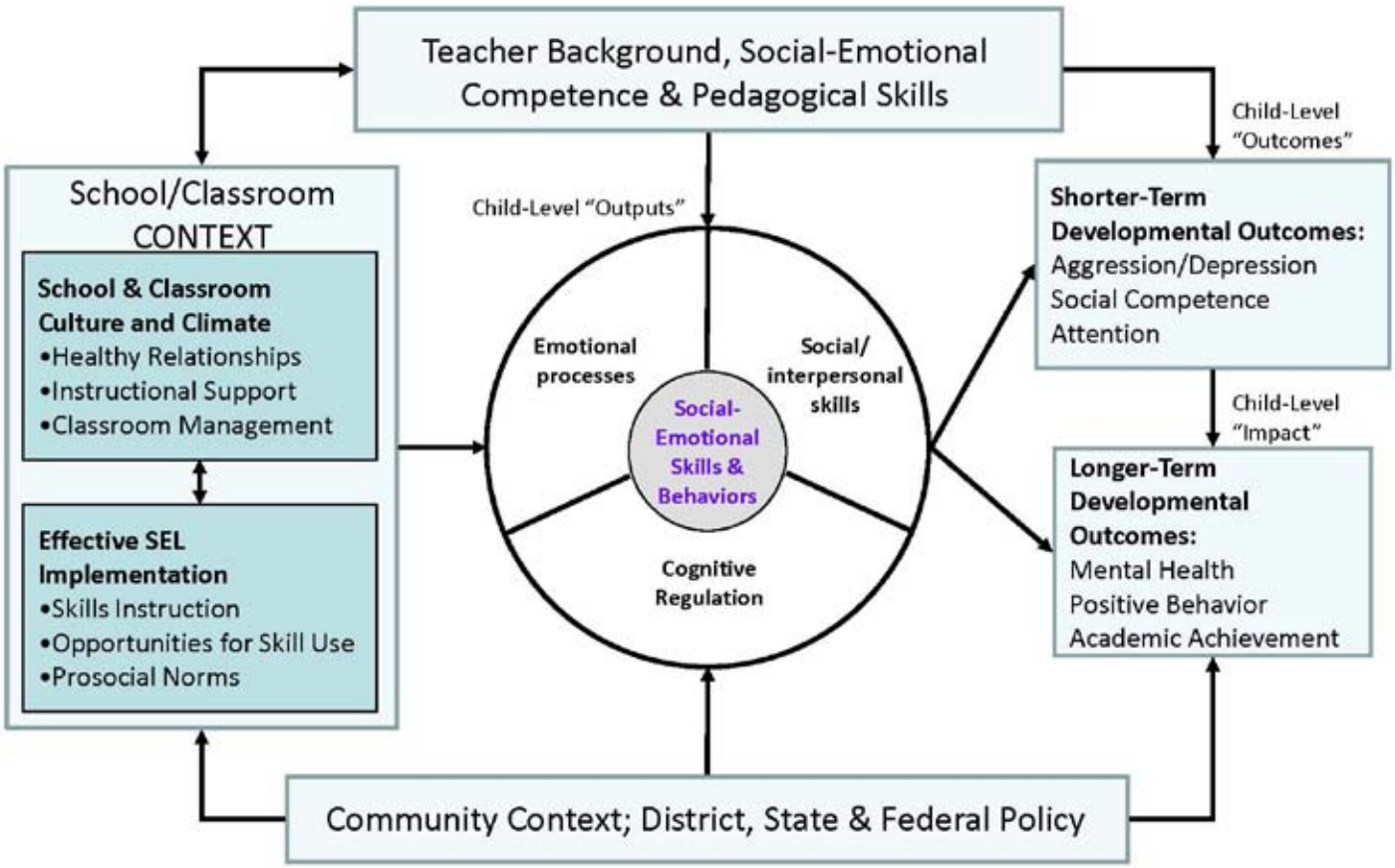
As with the teaching of academic skills, effective teaching of social and emotional learning must begin with a clear definition and scope of the skills students need to learn. Broadly speaking, SEL refers to a set of skills that individuals need to succeed in schooling, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship. SEL has been defined or characterized in a variety of ways (Humphrey et al., 2011). The term has served as an umbrella for many subfields of psychology and neuroscience, each with a particular focus (e.g., effortful control, emotion regulation, prosocial skills, aggressive behavior problems) and many types of educational interventions (e.g., bullying prevention, character education, conflict resolution, social skills training; Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010). The scope and focus of SEL frameworks and interventions also vary: some focus on one set of skills (e.g., recognizing and expressing emotions) while others are broader, and some include executive functioning or cognitive regulation (e.g., attention skills, working memory) while others do not.

Given these differences in terminology and framing, there is a need for a clear organizing framework for SEL. We present an initial framework here (see Figure 1) that is based on research and developmental theory. In particular, we draw on "developmental-contextual models," which view development as taking place in a nested and interactive set of contexts ranging from immediate (e.g., family, peer system, classroom, school) to more distal (e.g., cultural and political) contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

At the center of the framework is a circle representing the core domains of SEL skills. Based on our review of research, we group these skills into three conceptual categories: emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation. Emotional processes include emotional knowledge and expression, emotional and behavioral regulation, and empathy and perspective-taking. Social/interpersonal skills include understanding social cues, interpreting others' behaviors, navigating social situations, interacting positively with peers and adults, and other prosocial behavior. Cognitive regulation includes attention control, inhibiting inappropriate responses, working memory, and cognitive flexibility or set shifting.

These three domains of SEL skills are related to short- and long-term outcomes presented on the right side of the figure. These include academic achievement (e.g., grades, standardized tests of academic skills), behavioral adjustment (e.g., taking others' perspectives, getting along well with other children, solving conflicts, and exhibiting less aggression and conduct problems)

## Figure 1. Organizing Framework for SEL




Adapted from collaborative work conducted with Celene Domitrovich as part of the Preschool to Elementary School SEL Assessment Workgroup, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

and emotional health and well-being (e.g., lower levels of depression and social isolation). The links between the SEL skills and these outcomes do not operate in a vacuum. Quite the contrary, they are influenced by several environmental factors and systems. We focus primarily on school contexts, but it is important to note that SEL skills are also related to community, family, peer, and other interactions and influences. Represented in the box at the left of the figure, school context includes two areas that will be addressed later in this paper: school culture and climate as well as effective SEL implementation. (It also includes structural features of schools, such as schedule and staffing patterns, which are beyond the scope of this paper and are not represented in the figure.) Students' SEL skills and the school context factors are both influenced by teachers' social and emotional competence and pedagogical knowledge and skills (represented at the top of the figure) as well as community contexts and policy (represented at the bottom of the figure). As this framework makes clear, SEL skills develop in a complex system of contexts, interactions, and relationships. As we describe below, this suggests both that schools must take a systems approach to promoting SEL and that such approaches must be designed to match the needs and contexts of individual schools and communities.

### Current Approaches to SEL in Education

Based in part on the research that has informed the framework above, the last decade has witnessed rapid expansion in research and programming focused on enhancing school students' SEL skills to reduce behavior problems and promote positive social interactions (Clayton, Ballif-Spanvill, & Hunsaker, 2001; Thornton, Craft, Dahlberg, Lynch, & Baer, 2000; Wilson, Lipsey, & Derzon, 2003). This period has also witnessed a growing convergence of developmental science and prevention science in guiding the design and evaluation of SEL and related interventions (e.g., programs designed to prevent aggressive and violent behavior; Institute of Medicine, 1994; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; National Research Council

& Institute of Medicine, 2009; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). In general, these programs target students' emotional processes (e.g., Aber, Brown & Jones, 2003; Greenberg, 2006; Riggs, Greenberg, Kusché, & Pentz, 2006), their interpersonal skills and social problem-solving abilities (e.g., Jones et al., 2011; Tingstrom, Sterling-Turner, & Wilczynski, 2006), and their behavioral and cognitive regulatory skills (e.g., Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, & Hornbeck, 2006; Raver et al., 2011).

Evaluations of programs targeting SEL skills have shown promising results for students. Most of the evaluations conducted to date have utilized quasi-experimental methods, but a smaller number have demonstrated their effectiveness via rigorous experimental evaluations (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010; Jones et al., 2011; Washburn et al., 2011). A meta-analysis of both quasi-experimental and experimental evaluations found significant positive effects (Durlak et al., 2011). It included evaluations from 213 school-based, universal primary prevention programs that used a range of reliable and valid measures (including children's self-report, adult report, and standardized assessments) across six outcome categories. In all six categories—social and emotional skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance—results were positive, with effect sizes ranging from 0.22 for conduct problems to 0.57 for social and emotional skills. Furthermore, there were few differences in effectiveness according to students' age, ethnicity, or income.

While there is clear evidence that high-quality SEL programming can make a difference, as indicated directly above, effect sizes from the most rigorous evaluations are small to moderate, typically in the range of one-fifth to one-half of a standard deviation (e.g., Jones et al., 2010, 2011). Effects are usually larger for high-risk students than for universal populations or low- to moderate-risk students (e.g., Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2007; Jones et al., 2011; Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2009). However, even small effects can have meaningful implications (e.g., McCartney & Rosenthal, 2000). This may be especially true for the most at-risk students, who appear to need and benefit from such programs the most. Furthermore, short-term effects for these students may translate into long-term effects for themselves and their classmates because research on classroom composition and spillover effects suggest that one or a few disruptive students can impact the whole class (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998; Thomas, Bierman, & Powers, 2011; Yudron, Jones, & Raver, under review).[2] Nonetheless, when it comes to targeting behavioral and academic outcomes, bigger effect sizes are clearly better than small ones, and reports in both research and the media about students' behavioral and academic outcomes highlight the need for greater impact.

## Characteristics of Effective SEL Programs

Intervention programs are not all created equal; some programs are more effective than others. Research linking specific SEL program components to outcomes has been rare, but meta-analyses and reviews have begun to identify a set of important issues. Durlak and colleagues (2011) found that the most effective programs were those that incorporated four elements represented by the acronym SAFE: (1) sequenced activities that led in a coordinated and connected way to skills, (2) active forms of learning, (3) focused on developing one or more social skills, and (4) explicit about targeting specific skills.

Beyond program characteristics, implementation fidelity and quality are also key factors in the effectiveness of SEL programs. Measuring implementation and evaluating its impact on outcomes has been a missing link in the literature on SEL programs and other related prevention programs, due in part to measurement challenges and varying definitions of implementation quality (Domitrovich et al., 2008; Lane, Menzies, Kalberg, & Oakes, 2012; Lane, Oakes, & Menzies, 2010; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). In their meta-analysis, Durlak and colleagues (2011) found that only 57% of studies reported any implementation data. In a review of 34 prevention programs with demonstrated positive effects, Domitrovich and Greenberg (2000) found that most included some measure of implementation, but the measures were usually limited and only about one-third of the programs examined the association between implementation and outcomes.

Using the limited range of studies that have measured and reported on implementation, Durlak and colleagues (2011) found that implementation quality was positively associated with student outcomes, supporting findings from an earlier review by Domitrovich and Greenberg (2000) that students appeared more likely to benefit from programs in which their schools monitored implementation, provided training to staff, and fully implemented the curriculum. Reyes and colleagues (2012) examined a

[2] Given these findings, in the model depicted in Figure 1, the arrow between classroom context and student SEL skills could be represented as bidirectional. It is presented as unidirectional here in the interest of maximizing the simplicity of the heuristic model.

range of implementation and teacher training variables. There were no main effects for any of the variables, but there was an interaction effect such that teachers who were high- or moderate-quality implementers and attended more trainings or implemented more units had students with better social and emotional competence (Reyes et al., 2012). In contrast, teachers who attended more trainings or implemented more units but were low-quality implementers had students with poorer outcomes, a finding which may have been explained by low levels of teaching efficacy among those teachers. These findings echo those of Aber, Jones, and Brown (2003) in their quasi-experimental evaluation of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). Participating students whose teachers had a moderate amount of training and coaching and who taught many RCCP lessons had more positive behavioral outcomes compared to students whose teachers taught few or no lessons. On the other hand, students whose teachers received more training and coaching but taught few lessons showed more negative outcomes.

In other words, in the studies and meta-analyses cited above, teachers who effectively integrated the programs into their practice had students with more positive outcomes. Other meta-analyses and reviews of SEL and related interventions (such as bullying prevention, school violence prevention, and positive behavioral interventions and supports) have demonstrated the importance of other factors related to integration into daily school life: students were more likely to benefit when programs were intense, embedded in everyday interactions and school culture, reflected collaborative efforts among all staff and stakeholders, were attentive to places outside classrooms such as hallways and playgrounds, and were intentional about continuously monitoring student behavior, inclusive of parental involvement (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Wilson et al., 2003). Together these characteristics point to the importance of integrating SEL into daily interactions, relationships, and school practices.

Our experience with and review of the last two decades of relevant research suggest that such characteristics of integration into daily practice are relatively rare in school-based SEL programs and approaches. The result is that many schools have not integrated SEL in meaningful ways. Building from our experience developing, implementing, and evaluating school-based SEL programs, we describe some of the most common barriers to such school-based efforts.

## Limitations of Existing Programmatic Approaches

- **Insufficient dosage, duration, and effectiveness:** SEL programs often take the form of short lessons, implemented during one weekly half- or hour-long section of a language arts, social studies, or other class (Jones et al., 2010). In our experience, these lessons are often abridged or skipped due to tight schedules and teachers' and school leaders' needs to spend class time on academic content. For example, sometimes schools adopt programs without setting aside time in the daily schedule, leaving it to teachers to find extra time or adapt the curricula. Programs are often not sustained, so that students experience little continuity from one year to the next. Furthermore, despite recommendations for schools to adopt evidence-based programs (CASEL, 2006), many schools utilize programs that have not been well tested.
- **Fragmentation and marginalization:** In many schools, SEL skills are not seen as a core part of the educational mission. As a result, there is little effort to apply the skills learned during SEL programming to daily life in the school. Despite the efforts of a growing, but still small, number of programs to integrate SEL skills with academic content (e.g., Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution, Jones et al., 2011), such integration in schools is rare (Becker & Domitrovich, 2011; Cappella, Jackson, Bilal, Hamre, & Soule´, 2011). Furthermore, activities that apply content from SEL lessons to the academic curriculum or social interactions are rarely available and even more rarely implemented.
- **Sole focus on classrooms:** Most SEL programs focus solely or primarily on what goes on in the classroom, but SEL skills are also needed on playgrounds, in lunchrooms, in hallways and bathrooms—in short, everywhere. Student surveys and "hot-spot mapping," in which students draw maps of the areas in school where they feel unsafe, show that students feel most unsafe in these un-monitored zones (LaRusso, Brown, Jones, & Aber, 2009; Astor, Meyer, & Pitnor, 2001). Students need support to navigate such spaces and make the entire school an environment that is safe, positive, and conducive to learning. Even when students do not consider them to be dangerous, these non-classroom con-

texts provide vital opportunities for students to practice their SEL skills. Across ages, issues like sharing, entering into social situations, and social inclusion and exclusion occur frequently in parts of the school campus outside of classrooms.

- **Limited staff training:** Teachers typically receive little training in how to promote SEL skills, deal with peer conflict, or address other SEL-related issues (Lopes, Mestre, Guil, Kremenitzer & Salovey, 2012; Kremenitzer, 2005). Pre-service teacher training includes little attention to these issues beyond basic behavior management strategies, and little in-service support is available on these topics, particularly through effective approaches like coaching and mentoring. Staff members other than teachers receive even less training and support, despite the fact that cafeteria monitors, bus drivers, sports coaches, and other non-teaching staff are with children during many of the interactions that most demand effective SEL strategies and skills.

These limitations often arise despite the best intentions of school leaders and staff, and even in the context of structured intervention efforts. Given the context of schools today, especially concerns about maximizing instructional time and meeting accountability requirements, the predominant approach to school-based SEL programming—structured curricula implemented during lesson blocks—may be a less than ideal match for schools' needs and therefore for students' needs. Our experience in schools suggests that new approaches are needed to make the development of SEL skills more meaningful, sustainable, feasible, and effective.

## Building Integrated Approaches to SEL in Schools

A new approach to promoting SEL should be both sensitive to the needs and challenges of schools described above and informed by research describing how SEL skills develop in children and adolescents.

Our review of recent developmental research and theory suggests four principles of SEL development that can drive more effective school-based approaches: (1) continuity and consistency are essential for SEL skill development; (2) social, emotional, and academic skills are interdependent; (3) SEL skills develop in social contexts; and (4) classrooms and schools operate as systems. Together, these principles make the case that SEL skills cannot be optimally developed in fragmented, short-term ways, and as we describe later in this paper, suggest promising strategies for embedding SEL into schools' missions, practices, and daily interactions.

### Continuity and Consistency Are Essential for SEL Skill Development

SEL skills develop in an ongoing and cumulative (if not always continuous) way from birth through adolescence. Earlier skills lay the foundation for later skills, or in other words, "skill begets skill" (Cichetti & Rogosh, 2002; Cunha & Heckman, 2006). Like reading and math, some SEL skills are sequential. Just as children must learn to read before they can read to learn, they must be able to effectively read social cues in order to make sound judgments about how to react to challenging social situations. Even more than in math and reading, SEL skills develop in ongoing relational contexts (Jones et al., 2008). This is why efforts to build SEL should span age ranges; while early childhood interventions are clearly essential for establishing the foundation for social and academic skills, they must be followed with ongoing supports in order to be most effective (Heckman, 2008; Reynolds, Ou, & Topitzes, 2004; Zhai, Raver, & Jones, 2012; Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). They should be vertically aligned: early childhood and elementary strategies should intentionally lay the groundwork for later interventions, and middle and high school efforts should intentionally build on earlier strategies and skills.

Because social and emotional skills develop across contexts, SEL efforts should also be horizontally aligned—that is, intentionally connected and consistent across micro-contexts within schools (e.g., classrooms, playgrounds, lunchrooms). With alignment and collaboration, school staff are more likely to adopt, implement, and continuously improve reforms (Hemmelgarn, Glisson, & James, 2006), and student outcomes, including academics, tend to be more positive (Louis & Marks, 1998).

A few studies have examined the effects of interventions targeting school micro-contexts other than classrooms. Johnson and colleagues (1992) found that 4 months after a peer-mediation training program, students in third through sixth grade were observed using the negotiation procedures in the hallways, the lunchroom, the playground, and the gymnasium. Lewis, Sugai, and Colvin (1998) found that a schoolwide intervention that promoted the use of pre-correction and active supervision strategies was associated with substantial reductions in student problem behavior in transition settings. This study tested

the effect of setting-specific interventions to reduce problem behaviors (e.g., hitting, pushing, cutting in line, and throwing food) among elementary school students in specific school contexts (e.g., cafeteria, recess areas, and hallway transition) and found that overall problem behavior observed in these settings was modestly reduced for up to three months. The researchers did not find a change in the rate of active supervision displayed by playground monitors; however, they tracked proximity and amount of interaction between playground monitors and students rather than examining the quality of interactions.

## Social, Emotional, and Academic Skills Are Interdependent

Although there has been much debate about the relative importance of academic versus social and emotional skills (Zigler et al., 2006), this is actually a false dichotomy; decades of research show that social, emotional, and academic skills are interconnected. Social and emotional skills are associated with academic outcomes through multiple pathways that vary according to types of skills. Some researchers have distinguished between "work-related" and "interpersonal" skills (Cooper & Farran, 1988; McClelland, Morrison, & Holmes, 2000; McClelland, Acock, & Morrison, 2006). Work-related skills include those that help students participate in and engage in school, such as listening and following directions, participating cooperatively in groups, working independently, and engaging in mastery behaviors such as the ability to plan, organize and complete tasks (Center on the Developing Child, 2011; Cooper & Farran, 1988; McClelland et al., 2006; McClelland et al., 2000; Yen, Konold, & McDermott, 2004). Interpersonal skills include aspects of self-regulation and social competence that are needed for compliance, cooperation, and positive, effective relationships. Students who struggle to understand their emotions and those of others, who have social skills deficits, or who have other interpersonal skill challenges may have more difficulty navigating the classroom environment and may perceive the classroom setting more negatively (Raver, Garner, & Smith-Donald, 2007). These students may also frustrate peers (therefore losing opportunities to learn from them) and teachers (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Because teachers provide disruptive students with less positive feedback and instruction (Arnold, McWilliams, & Arnold, 1998; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Shores & Wehby, 1999), this creates a feedback loop in which dysregulated students receive less support and in turn grow to like school less and avoid school more often (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Murray & Greenberg, 2000). Both work-related and interpersonal skills can hinder a teacher's efforts to manage the classroom effectively, thereby affecting learning opportunities and outcomes (Raver et al., 2007).

Because academic and SEL skills develop and operate together, efforts to promote them should be designed to promote both at the same time. Programs are beginning to emerge that embed the teaching of SEL skills into literacy, for example grounding SEL lessons in high-quality children's literature, civics and social studies lessons, and current events (e.g., Bailey, Jones, & the Harvard SECURe Development Team, 2012; Barr & Facing History and Ourselves, 2010; Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, 2001). As we describe later in this paper, these approaches encourage students to use both sets of skills simultaneously, and they also help to address tensions about devoting class time to SEL skills.

Because academic and SEL skills develop and operate together, efforts to promote them should be designed to promote both at the same time.

## SEL Skills Develop in Social Contexts

Relationships are the soil in which children's SEL skills grow. Parent-child relationships are the first and arguably most important context for the development of these skills, but relationships in schools—with both teachers and peers—are also important because they help develop self-regulation, a basic skill that is fundamental to multiple SEL domains (Eisenberg, Valiente, & Eggum, 2010; Sameroff, 2010; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Self-regulation, the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in the service of goals (Karoly, 1993; Smith-Donald, Raver, Hayes, & Richardson, 2007), is developed in relationships, initially through a process of "other-regulation." In other-regulation, adults and peers help children learn appropriate social rules and

self-management strategies and gradually enable them to engage in self-regulation. Other-regulation is particularly salient in infancy and early childhood and becomes less salient over time (Sameroff, 2010), but can also be seen during the preschool and adolescent years when children and teenagers learn about acceptable behavior from their peers.

Because of the importance of relationships to the development of SEL skills, intervention efforts must be attuned to the importance of relationships between students and staff and among students. Peer interactions have long been a focus in SEL efforts, but the quality of student-teacher relationships also have a large impact and should also be a focus of intervention. Positive teacher-child relationships characterized by warmth, trust, and low degrees of conflict have been associated with social competence and positive school adjustment (Baker, 2006; Baker, Clark, Maier, & Viger, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Rimm-Kaufman & Hamre, 2010). Teachers who interact with students in these positive ways validate their students' emotional experiences and foster a sense of security that supports active engagement in the classroom (NICHD ECCRN, 1999; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). Conversely, negative or conflict-filled relationships between teachers and students predict poor academic outcomes and social behavior, including school avoidance, disliking school, lower classroom participation and cooperation, declines in prosocial behavior, more peer-directed aggression, and other problem behaviors (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd et al., 1999; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). In fact, for students at risk of behavioral and academic problems, students who experience high levels of conflict with or dependency on teachers have poorer long-term adjustment than their peers (Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995).

Of course, the association between teacher-student relationships and children's SEL skills is bidirectional, and students influence teachers as well as the reverse. Teachers report closer relationships with prosocial students who are able to work independently and exhibit high levels of self-regulation (Birch & Ladd, 1998), and students who are close to their teachers receive more support from them (Hughes, Cavell, & Willson, 2001). As a result, these students likely have more opportunities for positive social processes and skill development and may also have more incentives to behave in socially and emotionally appropriate ways. For example, students who experience positive relationships with their teachers may be more motivated to comply with adult requests in order to maintain the quality of that relationship (Thompson & Raikes, 2007).

Given their importance, teacher-student relationships are an important area for intervention. Furthermore, because teachers' own SEL skills influence their relationships with and teaching of students, they are an important focus in their own right—and are discussed later in this paper (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

## Classrooms and Schools Operate As Systems

Classrooms and schools are dynamic, interconnected systems comprising characteristics of teachers, administrators, school staff, students, and the relationships among them. The systems nature of classrooms and schools has become a focus of intense study and a target of intervention and prevention efforts, many of which focus directly on universal social and emotional skills and processes (Jones et al., 2008; LaRusso et al., 2009). Although there are many ways that SEL efforts can influence the broad, systemic school context, one of the most visible and potentially most meaningful ways is by influencing school culture and climate.

Culture and climate are the regular and consistent patterns that characterize how actors in an organization think, feel, interact, and behave. They influence everything about a school, including how adults and students treat one another and whether adults and students understand and implement interventions effectively (Hemmelgarn et al., 2006). While clearly related, culture and climate are separable. School culture refers to a school's set of norms, beliefs, and practices or "the way things are done around here" (Hemmelgarn et al., 2006, p. 75). Culture is driven by the school's values and expectations, which are embedded in structures and practices and transmitted both explicitly and implicitly. Climate, on the other hand, is the aggregate of individual actors' perceptions of the environment's impact on well-being and is influenced by individuals' perceptions of the psychological environment (Hemmelgarn et al., 2006; Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro, & Guffey, 2012). School climate is associated with a range of positive student outcomes, from academic achievement to mental health and well-being (Thapa et al., 2012).

Together, culture and climate set the tone and focus of relationships and interactions between leaders, staff, and students and of their approaches to teaching and learning (e.g., Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, &

Gottfredson, 2004). They are characterized by a set of "regularities" or specific routines and norms that are often unexamined and unquestioned by school staff as simply part of how things have always been done (Sarason, 1996). But these regularities can be modified—and often should be—in order to shift adults' and students' social and emotional habits and skills. Intentional SEL efforts can affect both culture and climate. For example, schoolwide expectations for behaviors (e.g., using respectful language at all times and expressing kindness toward strangers) can powerfully alter school culture, and consistent attention to building caring relationships among students and between adults and students can shift school climate in a positive direction (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008; Thapa et al., 2012).

School culture and climate are shaped by numerous social processes, one of which is social norms. Norms are created and reinforced by social networks; they operate via feedback systems in which individuals convey information to one another about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Henry, 2008; Tseng & Seidman, 2007) and thereby establish expectations for all members of the social group. All actors in the educational setting engage in these feedback systems, usually subconsciously, but norms can be modified through intentional, deliberate, frequent actions. Teachers are more likely to be agents of change in norms, whereas students are more likely to reinforce existing norms (Henry, 2008). This suggests that educators, leaders, and other school staff can gradually but meaningfully shift SEL-related social norms, with students playing an increasingly powerful role in maintaining and strengthening them.

Culture and climate are also influenced by the current and past experiences of individual students and groups of students (as well as those of adults). One mechanism is via compositional effects, in which the nature of the group itself makes a powerful difference for individual children's experiences and for the teacher's capacity to maintain a positive, effective learning environment. For example, one student's disruptive behavior can affect the teacher's interactions with the whole group and can distract both students and teachers. Moreover, children's classroom experience and their developmental outcomes vary dramatically depending on whether they are in a classroom in which there are one or two aggressive children or a class in which there are five or six, even if their own behavior is the same in each context (e.g., Thomas et al., 2011). There is growing attention to the impact of classroom composition or peer effects on children's social-emotional and academic adjustment. For example, Neidell & Waldfogel (2008) found that the saturation of children in kindergarten classes who had attended preschool was positively associated with individual children's reading and math achievement through third grade, for both children who did and did not go to preschool.

School leaders and staff can take advantage of the power of compositional effects (e.g., Yudron et al., under review) by magnifying and spreading the influence of students and adults with strong SEL skills and of effective SEL practices from one classroom to the school as a whole. Growing research on the role of such social processes highlights the need for schoolwide approaches to SEL that intentionally leverage the processes of group influence and social context. Isolated, classroom-focused approaches do not tend to utilize these mechanisms. In contrast, schoolwide approaches can facilitate spillover and changes in culture and climate, so that the whole of the school's SEL approach is greater than the sum of its parts.

## Shifting the Approach: Moving From Programs to Integrated Strategies

The principles of social and emotional development and learning described above—continuity over time, interconnectedness with academics, salience of relationships, importance of culture and climate—highlight the need for SEL approaches to be integrated and embedded in ways that are both deep and wide. Even the best-structured curricula tend to be too limited to leverage and reinforce these principles: they tend to miss opportunities

The principles of social and emotional development and learning described above–continuity over time, interconnectedness with academics, salience of relationships, importance of culture and climate–highlight the need for SEL approaches to be integrated and embedded in ways that are both deep and wide.

like teachable moments, the explicit application and extension of lesson content to other contexts, and modification of relationships and social norms. Making changes in students' daily behaviors and skills requires changes in daily educational practice, from staff-student interactions to norms for acceptable behavior, to routines that adults and children use for regulating emotions and behaviors.

Changes in daily practice do not need to be costly or time intensive. In fact, they have the potential to be more efficient and easily implementable for schools. In our anecdotal experience, teachers and principals most frequently cite time pressure as the reason for low implementation. Many educators report seeing SEL skill development as important and worthwhile but not feasible given competing demands on time, attention, and resources. If school staff receive training and support in how to use specific SEL strategies and structures during daily interactions, these strategies can become habits of mind and ways of "doing business" rather than an additional curricular burden. Even when there is an up-front financial or time cost (e.g., in training and establishing structures), efficiency and sustainability are longer-term benefits.

To make this shift, schools need specific strategies that they can use in addition to, as part of, or instead of full-scale, comprehensive SEL programs. To be clear, we are not suggesting that SEL programs should be eliminated from schools; quite the contrary, we think that they play a very important role. We believe that schools need a continuum of approaches that range from routines and structures school staff and students use on a daily basis, to schoolwide efforts to promote respectful and supportive cultures and positive climates, to universal SEL programming for all students, to intensive services for students in need of the most support. Some schools' needs will demand, and their contexts will allow, that they utilize approaches from across the continuum, from everyday strategies to intensive interventions. Other schools may begin with the everyday strategies and add other components as the need and opportunities arise. Many schools may benefit from a multi-tiered approach that provides different levels of support according to students' needs (Lane et al., 2012; Lane et al., 2010).

A continuum approach can give all schools a place to begin and, most importantly, provide an integrated, everyday foundation for SEL skills regardless of the scope of additional programs and supports. Today, the continuum of SEL approaches, to the extent that one exists, leans heavily toward the intensive end, represented by universal programs and targeted counseling support for students with significant needs. At the other end of the continuum, representing integrated daily practices, approaches tend to be ad-hoc, lacking a research base, or even largely subconscious for many of the adults involved. By designing, implementing, testing, and refining more strategies on this end of the continuum, developmental science can strengthen these approaches, support schools to focus more on their daily practices, and improve the efficiency and continuity of SEL instruction and development.

One way of thinking about this shift is moving "from brands to essential ingredients" (Aber, Brown, Jones, Berg, & Torrente, 2011, p. 218). To use a food metaphor, this means shifting from a focus on packaged, branded products (curricula) to essential ingredients like vitamins and minerals (essential and beneficial strategies). To date, little research has examined individual ingredients, so this shift will require developing, applying, and testing essential ingredients to determine which ingredients and/or combinations of ingredients are most linked with positive outcomes for children.

In moving toward this approach, we find useful the framework of evidence-based kernels, "fundamental units of behavioral influence that underlie effective prevention and treatment" (Embry & Biglan, 2008, p. 75). Kernels are relatively small units (such as specific activities) that would no longer be effective if broken down into smaller components. Because they impact behavior on their own, kernels can be used as stand-alone strategies or within programs. Embry and his colleagues propose that kernels can address many challenges in prevention and intervention, including the costs and logistical challenges of implementing intensive programs and the fact that some desired outcomes fall outside the scope of typical programs. Like us, they suggest that kernels should not replace programs but rather "supplement or strengthen" them and widen the dissemination of effective strategies when full-scale programs are impractical.

This emphasis on efficiency and wide-scale distribution is also evident in the framework of disruptive innovations, which Rotherham-Borus and colleagues (2012) have applied from the business literature (Bower & Christensen, 1995) to behavioral interventions in public health and other fields. Disruptive innovations "simplify existing services or products that typically 'over-serve' the majority of customers," meeting most of the needs of most customers instead of targeting the "full range of needs of

the most demanding customers" (Rotherham-Borus et al., 2012, p. 5). In public health, finance, and other sectors, Rotherham-Borus notes that disruptive innovations have rarely replaced the more intensive options but instead reached a wider population, especially those who would not traditionally have been served. With school-based SEL interventions, a disruptive innovation might mean a simpler version of strategies derived from structured SEL programs, such as routines for managing emotions and resolving conflicts.

In the section that follows, we describe strategies that represent promising avenues for integrating SEL development into daily educational practice. There are some notable differences between the strategies we suggest here and the frameworks of kernels and disruptive innovations. First, some of the strategies that we present below utilize but do not constitute kernels because they are larger strategies that can be broken down into component parts. Second, Embry and Biglan's framework specifies that kernels should be evidence-based, using experimental evaluations. Although we agree about the ultimate need for evidence, there is simply not enough current rigorous research on specific SEL-promoting practices. We note below which strategies have already been tested in rigorous research, but most of the promising strategies we describe must be tried in order to be tested. Third, while some of the ideas represent disruptive innovations because they distill more intensive efforts into simpler ones, others are the opposite—broadening specific practices into larger or more intentional efforts. Nonetheless, many of these strategies can be thought of as "disruptive" in a positive sense because they break the current mold of educational practice.

## Promising Approaches to Integrating SEL into Daily Practice

### Routines

Classrooms and schools use many kinds of routines to keep things running smoothly, communicate expectations, and provide guidance about how to conduct the daily work of education. Routines that promote SEL skills can be used by educators and students alike for these purposes. Routines include emotional regulation and conflict resolution strategies, games that hone attention skills, and class council meetings for resolving classroom issues.

Routines are an important part of SECURe (Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Understanding and Regulation; Bailey et al., 2012), a program currently being implemented and evaluated in a small-scale randomized trial across grades pre-k through 3, as well as in a new charter school in New York City. Teachers and other staff support students to use SECURe routines throughout the school day, year, and building. Reminders and tips about using the routines are posted throughout the school. Routines include "Stop and Stay Cool," a three-step process for staying in control of emotions, and a "Decision Tree" that students use to guide choices. Particularly popular with teachers and students are a set of "Brain Games." These short, easy-to-play games build on traditional games like Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light by making explicit links to skills such as memory and impulse control. They are described with instructions and implications for skill building so that teachers and other school staff can use them during transitions or other times to help students get focused.

Implementation and outcome data are not yet available for SECURe, but research team members have observed students independently using "I messages" (statements to express their feelings about social situations in non-combative ways) and "the Peace Path" (a process for resolving conflicts in which both parties state their feelings and come to a mutually agreeable solution). Teachers report that the routines are effective tools for classroom management as well as being fun and promoting specific skills among students. One of the factors that appear to make the routines effective is the consistent use throughout the school day and building; both staff and students use them in the same way that they use strategies like raising hands or forming lines. This is consistent with research cited previously in this paper demonstrating that SEL skills develop across contexts and do so more effectively when those contexts are characterized by alignment and by consistent, predictable experiences.

### Training and Support for All Teachers, Staff, and Leaders

As noted previously, adult training and support for developing students' SEL skills is very limited in most schools today. Typically, teachers receive little training in SEL curricula, and other staff members receive none. Training in supporting SEL in ongoing ways (e.g., responding to student outbursts or conflicts) is virtually unheard of. In order for SEL to become integrated into daily practice, teachers and other staff need support that will help them learn how to interact positively with students, react effectively to emotional and social challenges and

conflicts (including when students make sexist, homophobic, or racist remarks), communicate clear expectations for students' behavior, and set up the conditions for supportive school cultures and climates (such as treating everyone with respect, seeking opportunities to help others, and acknowledging and improving on mistakes as part of learning).

School administrators also need opportunities to learn how to infuse attention to SEL skills into the mission and daily work of schools. Topics that need to be addressed include: how to connect the teaching of SEL skills with the academic mission of the school, how to create time and space in the curriculum, how to select programs and other approaches like routines, how to support teachers and staff, and how to lead by example.

One tool to help leaders and staff implement schoolwide SEL efforts is the *CASEL Practice Rubric for Schoolwide SEL Implementation* (CASEL, 2006). Described as a "roadmap for SEL implementation," the tool helps principals and school leadership teams assess how SEL fits into schoolwide goals, make plans for implementing SEL efforts, and monitor progress. It includes a series of 10 implementation steps and 6 ongoing sustainability factors (such as ongoing professional development). Even beyond the specific section on integrating SEL schoolwide, meaningful and sustainable integration is at the heart of the rubric.

Coaching also holds potential for improving the way educators build students' SEL skills. Coaching is an increasingly popular approach to professional development, in which professionals from within or outside of the school staff observe educators' practices (either in person or on video), provide feedback including both reinforcement and suggestions for improvement, and follow up on a regular basis to assess progress and continue the development work. While coaching is typically used with teachers, it also could be used with other school staff (including guidance counselors, classroom aides, afterschool program staff, and lunchroom or study hall monitors) in order to facilitate continuity across microcontexts within schools.

A new and promising approach to SEL-focused coaching is being developed and piloted in the 4Rs + MTP project. This project is designed to enhance an evidence-based SEL curriculum, the 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, & Resolution; Jones et al., 2008; Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, 2001), with an evidence-based professional development and support system, My Teaching Partner (MTP; Allen et al., 2011; Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008). The goals of the project are to enhance 4Rs' implementation; teachers' knowledge and beliefs; and students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes. MTP provides a website with videos and other resources that teachers can access at any time as well as biweekly one-on-one consultation provided via the Internet. Teachers regularly videotape their own teaching of lessons in literacy, language, and self-regulation from the 4Rs curriculum and receive specific written feedback from consultants. The observations and feedback are guided by the empirically-validated *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS; La Paro, Pianta, & Hamre, 2008) framework and assessment instrument, which focuses on teacher-student interactions.

## Support for Adults' Own SEL Skills

It is difficult, if not impossible, for adults to help students build skills that they themselves do not possess. It is vital, then, for adults working in educational settings to have strong SEL skills themselves. Research suggests several pathways through which adults' SEL skills positively influence students' skills, including modeling the use of these skills, managing stress and modulating emotional responses in order to respond to situations effectively, remaining aware in the present moment and intentional in working with students, creating positive interactions with students, using executive functioning skills like focusing and planning, and implementing SEL programs with fidelity and quality (Carlock, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones, Bouffard, & Lesaux, in review; Maurer & Brackett, 2004; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). According to a theoretical model proposed by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), teachers' SEL skills establish a cyclical process or feedback loop that, when positive, results in better outcomes for all but, when negative, results in a teacher "burnout cascade." Jennings and Greenberg propose that teachers with stronger SEL skills (which they refer to as social and emotional competence) have more positive relationships with students, engage in more skillful and effective classroom management, and implement SEL curricula more effectively. These three factors contribute to a positive and healthy classroom climate, which contributes to positive student outcomes, which then feed back into teachers' social and emotional competence and relationships with students. In contrast, when teacher SEL skills are low, all phases of the cycle are more negative, resulting in teacher burnout and less effectiveness.

Like students, adults come into educational settings with varying degrees of SEL skills and need ongoing support in order to develop and effectively deploy those skills. Approaches to such support range from SEL program training that includes similar content for educators and students to stress management and self-regulation programs specifically designed for educators. Examples of the latter include CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education; Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011) and SMART (Stress Management and Resiliency Training; Benn, Akiva, Arel, & Roeser, 2012), both of which include mindfulness training and support to alleviate burnout. A randomized field trial of SMART found increases in teachers' mindfulness (including awareness and responding intentionally instead of on "autopilot"), more positive feelings about their jobs and students, more forgiving attitudes, and increased efficacy for regulating emotions (Benn et al., 2012).

In addition to such programs, educators need ways to build their SEL skills in daily practice. This can be facilitated by organizational cultures that encourage ongoing discussion and reflection (e.g., about issues such as burnout and how to react calmly to student behavioral challenges), emphasize teacher growth, and acknowledge mistakes as part of the learning process. Providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing these skills is important because collaboration and networking among teachers are associated with greater self-efficacy, implementation of reforms, and improvements in classroom practice and quality (Louis & Marks, 1998; Penuel & Riel, 2007).

### SEL Standards

We are in the era of standards-based reform, when state-based student learning standards and now the Common Core Standards are driving many educational policy and practice decisions. Standards codify what students should be able to know and do at various stages of the educational pipeline. They provide a set of benchmarks and can be linked with assessments that help schools measure their progress. While standards have traditionally focused on academic content, SEL standards are gaining traction, primarily at the state level but also in some cities such as Anchorage, Alaska and Austin, Texas (Dusenbury et al., 2011). These standards provide guidance for schools in the kinds of SEL skills students should have, how to align academic and SEL goals, and how to make SEL a core part of their mission.

According to a scan conducted by CASEL, one state (Illinois) currently has free-standing, comprehensive SEL standards for grades K–12, which are accompanied by a set of five benchmark levels for specific age groups (Dusenbury et al., 2011).[3] (In contrast, the vast majority of states have SEL standards at the pre-kindergarten level, a fact which is not surprising given the relatively larger emphasis traditionally placed on SEL skills in early childhood education.) A handful of other states are considering dedicated SEL standards, and several more states have free-standing standards addressing specific SEL skills such as communication (Dusenbury et al., 2011). In some cities, such as Austin, SEL standards are intentionally aligned with the state academic standards (Austin Independent School District, 2011). In addition, some SEL skills are embedded in most states' academic standards and in national frameworks like the Common Core Standards, the National Health Education Standards, and the National Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Standards. There are pros and cons to free-standing versus embedded SEL standards: free-standing standards may draw more attention to SEL, but embedded standards send the important message that SEL skills are a core part of the academic mission of schools.

Of course, standards alone are not enough to integrate SEL into schools, but they can encourage schools to make SEL part of their missions and provide guidance about the skills that need to be fostered in everyday practice. They also play an important role in guiding assessment and the use of data to improve practice. With information about students' SEL skills and progress, schools will be better able to evaluate their efforts and make progress. Establishing data collection methods and instruments that are realistic, responsible, and easily interpreted and applied is an important task for researchers and education leaders to undertake in collaboration with one another and in coordination with the establishment of standards.

## Opportunities and Needs for Policy

Addressing these barriers and realizing a vision of integrated approaches to SEL cannot happen at the school level alone. Educational and public policies need to provide supports that enable these changes to occur. The commitment of policymakers and educational systems managers (e.g.,

[3] Illinois' SEL standards are: develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success; use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

state commissioners of education, district school boards) are essential. Building a shared commitment and vision among all of these stakeholders and structures will require finding common ground among competing values, priorities, and politics (Aber et al., 2011).

Policy supports should include:

- **Establish adequate and flexible funding:** Allocate funding for SEL efforts. Incorporate enough flexibility to accommodate schools' individual needs and contexts. Some will need funds for teacher and staff training, others will benefit from coaching resources, while others may require funds for materials that describe and reinforce routines.
- **Strengthen standards:** Establish state and local standards for teachers and schools that go beyond implementing programs to specify clear expectations like those described in this paper, for example, for teacher-student interactions and use of consistent routines.
- **Integrate SEL into administrator, teacher, and staff training:** Provide clear guidance and expectations for SEL knowledge in educator competency frameworks and licensing requirements. Explicitly describe attention to SEL in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's Title II, which is dedicated to teacher training, as well as other federal and local funding streams. Require coursework addressing SEL, school culture and climate, behavior management, and adult-student interactions in pre-service training.
- **Support assessment of SEL practices and skills.** Once clear expectations and benchmarks are in place, work with the research and education communities to identify reliable and valid measures of administrators', teachers', staff members', and students' SEL skills as well as of schools' implementation of practices and programs.
- **Create opportunities for networking, learning, and continuous improvement.** Work with professional associations, non-profit organizations, and university partners to create opportunities for schools to learn from one another's new and promising approaches to integrating SEL, such as: online learning communities, summits, meetings of educator professional associations, and efforts to publicly showcase promising efforts.
- **Incentivize connections between SEL and academics:** Embed SEL into larger education reform efforts and connect it to academic achievement. Incorporate SEL into educational goals and benchmarks, require attention to SEL in policies targeting schools in need of improvement, and establish competitive priorities for addressing SEL in other funding streams and initiatives such as Title I and Promise Neighborhoods. Draw connections between specific SEL skills and elements of Common Core Standards and assessments. Also embed SEL into other initiatives such as the Supportive School Discipline Initiative that is jointly led by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice.
- **Support research on strategies for integrating SEL into the school day:** Create federal research funding streams that focus on daily practice approaches to SEL, outside of or in addition to full scale intervention programs. Support pilot programs that fund the testing of small-scale practices and approaches as well as those that allow for planned variation studies of larger interventions in order to investigate the relative impact of specific strategies within programs. To make these efforts most effective, fund technical assistance centers or providers to provide training and consultation.

## Next Steps for Innovating in Practice and Policy

Moving toward integrated approaches to SEL development will require that all stakeholders be open to innovation and committed to evaluation and refinement. New approaches should be identified from multiple sectors—including the early childhood field, which has traditionally emphasized SEL skills and their integration with academics more than K-12 education—and rigorously tested. This shift in approach will require addressing challenges that include competing demands, limited professional development structures in schools, and need for data. Key to meeting these challenges is collaboration among policymakers, educators, families, and community practitioners like afterschool programs and social service agencies who can bring to bear existing expertise and supports. In order for students to integrate SEL skills into their daily lives, schools and the adults in and around them need to do so as well. ■

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## Commentary

# Implementation in Busy Kitchens and Swampy Lowlands

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This is a timely and important article, which raises many issues. I will focus on one—implementation of research-based social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies in classrooms, which are (to quote Huberman, 1983) "busy kitchens." Teachers must balance simultaneously many factors involving multiple students, sometimes in very stressful contexts, sometimes while trying to master new programs. Often they look at another new program—particularly one that does not directly focus on what they feel accountable for—like deer in headlights. Given these contingencies, it is likely that the efficacy-effectiveness gap identified for psychotherapy (Weisz & Jensen, 2001) will be at least as great for SEL in schools. The training and support educators will need so that SEL research-based strategies, according to Jones and Bouffard, "become habits of mind and ways of doing business" must address multiple challenges because teachers will not be implementing a script or turnkey program. To be clear, this is a problem that SEL programs will also encounter because it is likely that the effect sizes reported in the meta-analysis by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) of what were functionally efficacy studies will shrink in practice without effective training and support. However, although it remains an empirical question, the challenges may be greater for SEL (or other) strategies, which may be even easier to dilute.

If the effect sizes seen in studies are to be realized in practice, educators must want to implement SEL, have the capacity to do so, have tools to support this work, and do so with both fidelity and self-reflection. This is particularly important given two sets of challenges that Jones and Bouffard identified in their article. The first challenge is insufficient dosage, duration, and effectiveness, which will not be eliminated by SEL infusion approaches, if teachers lack the capacity to implement SEL strategies effectively. The second is fragmentation and marginalization, which can lead teachers to do the new work in a siloed manner that still marginalizes it. Educator capacity to do unscripted work with sufficient dosage and in a non-siloed way will be a product of their own social-emotional skills; their understanding of SEL and research-based SEL strategies and how the proposed approach to SEL enhances desired outcomes; their technical mastery of SEL and other pedagogies; and perhaps, most importantly, support for doing this work.

Change is hard; it often involves unlearning as well as learning. Most teachers change when new approaches meet their needs and are reinforced by people around them. It helps when the change demanded is manageable, consistent with their sense of what can work, user-friendly, and supported. Most teachers do not commit to a new approach until they master it and see it produce outcomes (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Without understanding and feedback connected to practice, teachers may misuse the new approaches, as was found in studies of attempts at implementing new approaches to teaching mathematics (e.g., Ball, 1993). Mastery is not easy when teachers lack the time, support, or fluency to make a new approach routine.

Support includes leadership commitment and addressing factors that interfere with change (for example, accountability metrics that disincentivize the desired change); timely access to reliable and effective training and coaching; quality improvement and assurance protocols to provide feedback for course correction as well as reinforcement for successes; and reinforcement from their colleagues, ideally through informal networks as well through formal professional learning communities (PLCs). Given the many demands that teachers must balance in their busy kitchens, leadership must also demonstrate that SEL is a priority. Leaders can do so in the

talks, tweets, visits, and in what they say and count to monitor progress and measure success.

Organizational support for implementation also includes eliciting and addressing the logistical concerns of teachers during the change process. Support involves providing teachers with the resources and time to collaborate and learn to learn and unlearn together. Teacher PLCs can foster SEL-academic integration and help teachers work though the conceptual shifts required by the new learning. Team teaching between regular and special educators provides a model. SEL is a new technology for many educators, and the logic of the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 1987) may be useful. Support can help teachers move from *personal* concerns (how do I deal with change?) to *task* concerns involving getting better at implementing the new strategies to *impact* concerns that involve collaborating with their colleagues to realize SEL schoolwide and infuse it into instruction.

Although requiring top-down support, resources, prompting and permission, doing this work must still have a strong bottom-up dimension. The teacher's busy kitchen is in what Schon (1987) characterized as the "swampy lowlands," where practitioners confront messy, confusing problems that defy technical solutions. The role of Cleveland's Teacher's Union in the adoption of Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) provides an example of bottom-up leadership. So do coaching and PLCs that respond to teacher concerns and can enable teachers to create solutions and get ready to embrace change. This is not inexpensive work, but as Jones and Bouffard stated, "[e]ven when there is an up-front financial or time cost … efficiency and sustainability are longer-term benefits."

The time is right for acting on Jones and Boufford's recommendations. The Common Core State Standards, as well as calls for deeper learning, twenty-first century skills, and addressing the whole child, provide a platform for this work, and this is happening in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (http://casel.org/collaborating-districts-initiative/). The approaches they recommend should be assessed and refined by research delineating how to provide training and support in different contexts in the most cost-beneficial manner as well as by policy that both mandates and provides resources for research and effective implementation. Research should address how the use of research-based SEL strategies alone as well as in combination with SEL programs impacts on achievement and social emotional competence. Research should also examine how teachers master this new work, as well as effects on instructional time, teacher efficacy, and the ability of different students to apply their social and emotional skills in their academic work. ■

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**Commentary**

# A Commentary on Jones and Bouffard's Paper, Social and Emotional Learning in Schools

## From Programs to Strategies

**Kathleen Lynne Lane**
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In Jones and Bouffard's paper, they provide a rich discussion of social and emotional learning (SEL) describing the various approaches to SEL, guiding principles to support an integrated approach to SEL, offering a continuum of methods for incorporating SEL into regular school practices, and discussing policy implications. In considering the main points raised in their paper, one key proposed consideration was for school-site personnel to integrate the teaching and reinforcement of SEL skills into the school-site mission as well as daily interactions with students, focusing on strategies and practices integrated with academic curricula rather than SEL programs, per se. They go on to clarify they are not suggesting SEL curricula be eliminated, but instead recommending "a continuum of approaches matched to the needs and contexts of each school and a commitment by all schools to make SEL part of the business of educating students." Furthermore, they also note while many of the strategies described are "grounded in research on how students' SEL skills develop and how program implementation works," these strategies have not yet been tested experimentally.

Few school-based researchers will disagree with the notion that social, emotional, and academic skills are interdependent in nature, collectively important as students negotiate the multiple demands of educational settings (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Masten et al., 2005). For example, students need to develop the skills necessary to meet academic task demands, negotiate relationships with teachers and peers, and be self-determined in their learning. Because instructional time is at such a premium—a precious commodity for teachers and student alike—I agree with the call for rigorous scientific testing before we, as a research community, recommend the proposed strategies and practices be fully integrated in regular school practices on a large-scale basis (see Tankersley & Cook, 2013). In other words, we need evidence to suggest this approach is efficacious before we seek to scale up these practices using implementation science.

As such, I would like to respectfully offer complementary suggestions for next steps. Specifically, as the research and teaching communities consider how to best address SEL objectives in practice whether it be via SEL programs; strategies and practices to integrate the teaching, practice, and reinforcement of SEL skills; or a combination of these approaches, it may be wise to begin by (a) testing these approaches according to scientifically-rigorous standards and (b) preparing for continuum of supports according to student need.

First, as we explore this shift in how we address the formidable task for teaching SEL skills through integrated approaches, it will be important to test the efficacy of these strategies and practices using scientifically rigorous methodology. This may include single-subject methodology to determine if a functional relation exists between the introduction of individual or combined sets of strategies and practices and changes in student performance (Horner et al., 2005). Or it may involve group-design methodology such as randomized-controlled trials (Gersten et al., 2005). In both cases, we will require high quality experimental designs with attention to core quality indicators needed to establish a body of collective evidence to support—or refute—this new approach for addressing SEL. Admittedly this will be a complex area of inquiry in which we will need to attend carefully to

keystone variables (e.g., level of fidelity, students characteristics, teacher professional development) that may mediate or moderate intervention outcomes.

Second, as we consider how best to integrate SEL into regular school practices, it will also be necessary to plan for a continuum of supports according to students' needs consistent with multi-tiered systems of support (Lane, Kalberg, & Menzies, 2009). For example, we will need to explore strategies for all students (Tier 1) as well as supplementary supports for students who do not respond to primary prevention efforts despite high quality implementation. School-site and district-level teams need to develop explicit plans to support students requiring low-intensity, secondary supports (Tier 2), as well as the few students who may require more intensive, tertiary (Tier 3) tactics for developing SEL skills. Given the importance of SEL, we need to prepare for the full continuum of strategies and practices necessary for *all* students to acquire these skills.

I applaud Jones and Bouffard's efforts with SEL and look forward to seeing how researchers and educators collaborate to develop this body of evidence in the coming years. Given the talent and commitment of those individuals dedicated to SEL, I am hopeful we will soon have sufficient evidence to offer teachers more explicit direction on how to address SEL within multi-tiered systems of support using integrated approaches. ■

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## Commentary

# Partnering to Bring Social and Emotional Learning to School

**Janice Jackson**
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Jones and Bouffard capture an important conundrum that has plagued public schools in the United States throughout their existence. Their article bumps up against the question, "What is the purpose of public schools?" Schooling's initial purpose was to prepare citizens to participate in a newly formed democracy. Over time, schools have been charged with serving as the great equalizer, feeding and clothing children, providing physical and mental health care, and preparing students to enter the economy. With the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the major policy focus has been on academic achievement as demonstrated on standardized tests. Although students' psychosocial needs have largely been shoved to the background with this laser-like focus on academic achievement, many educators recognize the need to nurture the whole child. Developing the mind absent a concern for students' social and emotional learning (SEL) leaves many children ill-equipped to deal with the uncertainty and tensions that arise in everyday living. Slowly, energy has been devoted to looking at the knowledge, competencies, and habits of mind that students will need to fully participate in civic life and a globalized economy.

Building on the groundwork laid out by Jones and Bouffard, I would like to draw attention to a key organization—Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)—that helped me understand the need for building the field of SEL. During my professional career in which I served in central office positions in three large urban school districts, I have seen the importance of SEL for both students and adults and have drawn on the work of Daniel Goleman and CASEL. In 1994, Daniel Goleman, Eileen Rockefeller Growald, and others founded CASEL, a non-profit organization led by psychologist Roger Weissberg, that works to advance the science and evidence-based practice behind social and emotional learning (CASEL, 2004). I served on a CASEL leadership team for several years.

Three elements in the CASEL portfolio have contributed to the advancement of the SEL field. The first is their explication of the *Social & Emotional Learning Core Competencies,* using research as a basis for giving specific meaning to the components of SEL (*Skills & Competencies,* n.d.). The five core groups of social and emotional competencies that CASEL has identified are: self-awareness, self-management (e.g., regulating one's emotions), social awareness (e.g., taking another's perspective, appreciating similarities and differences), relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

In addition to these competencies and skills, CASEL's researchers are clear that climate and connectedness are necessary factors to support the teaching and nurturing of the core competencies (*Climate & Connectedness,* n.d.). Jones and Bouffard's notion that the classroom and school as a whole must be places where the skills of SEL are practiced and nurtured is consistent with CASEL's perspective. The framework is accompanied by the *CASEL Practice Rubric for Schoolwide SEL Implementation* (CASEL, 2006) that can be used by schools to develop SEL standards, determine how well they are implementing SEL, and to make appropriate shifts when needed.

The second element is the *Collaborating District Initiative* (n.d.). Having developed the research base for SEL and its relationship to academic success, CASEL recognized that the spread of SEL would require deep engagement with districts. Supported by the NoVo Foundation, CASEL is partnering with school districts[1] to weave SEL into the goals of

[1] The districts are Anchorage, AL; Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Nashville, TN; Oakland, CA; Sacramento, CA; Warren and Youngstown, OH; Washoe County, NV; and DuPage Roe Consortium

a district and into the everyday life of schools. The Collaborating District Initiative provides each district with financial support and consultants with expertise in organizational change and SEL and employs action research to engage in a data-driven iterative process to examine and implement needed changes in district- and school-level policies and practices that support SEL. Participating districts share their learning with each other, without pretending that implementation moves forward exactly as planned. A powerful aspect of the initiative is that it does not privilege knowledge learned from research over knowledge learned from practice, as both are used to shape the implementation of SEL in the schools and the district.

The third element of the CASEL portfolio that invites schools to bridge academics and social emotional learning is the *2013 CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs—Preschool and Elementary School Edition* (CASEL, 2012). While Jones and Bouffard caution us against a commitment to programs because "effect sizes are modest, even for the most promising interventions," this guide takes a different approach. The guide describes 23 preschool and elementary school-based programs that promote SEL through explicit instruction and opportunities for practicing SEL competencies, provides an overview of the current state of the field, and establishes standards for SEL programs. CASEL and the NoVo Foundation are working to gather data about middle and high schools and are also looking to explore ways to use SEL as a link to developing students' understanding of and commitment to social justice. Engagement in civic life should connect students to an understanding of power within society and how to strike a more equitable balance. How do we help students become agents of change in their schools and communities? That is the next phase of developing students' psychosocial competencies. I look forward to learning more about the lessons learned as CASEL and the districts continue to bring greater understanding of schools' role in supporting students' psychosocial development. ■

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## Commentary

# SEL in Action
## The Austin Story

**Meria Joel Carstarphen**
**Superintendent, Austin Independent School District**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is emerging as a critical element in the education of the whole child, focusing on cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Austin Independent School District (ISD) has embraced the philosophy, similar to that expressed by Jones and Bouffard, that SEL must include four components: explicit skills instruction, integration in content lessons, integration in instructional methods, and modeling of skills and competencies by adults in a supportive, positive climate and culture. District, state, and national standards and policy are also necessary for SEL to be sustained in a systemic manner.

### District Implementation

Austin ISD has been a part of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Collaborating Districts Initiative since late Fall 2010. CASEL chose to work with Austin following a site visit to determine district commitment and readiness to implement a district-wide plan for SEL.

Austin ISD schools are organized into vertical teams, in which a high school and the middle and elementary schools that feed into the high school form a professional learning community. Principals are accustomed to working together in vertical teams on initiatives and plans for improvement.

As Austin began working on SEL, vertical teams were invited to apply to be part of the initiative. Two vertical teams, 24 campuses, were selected to participate during the first year of implementation, and the program expanded to include five vertical teams, 57 campuses, in the second year. Two or three teams will be added each year until all 12 in the district are included.

In the first year, implementation focused on having classroom teachers use a CASEL Select program for explicit instruction, as well as improving climate and culture by training adults on their own SEL skills. For the second year of implementation for a vertical team, emphasis has been on integration of SEL into instructional methods and content, while maintaining explicit skill instruction. Classroom teachers provide explicit lessons to enhance the integration of skills throughout the school day.

### Professional Learning

The Austin initiative differs from other districts in that each vertical team has an assigned SEL coach from the district's SEL department to train and support teachers and other school personnel. In Year 1 of implementation, this support focused on classroom teachers; in Year 2 the focus has expanded to include cafeteria monitors and other support personnel. The plan is for vertical teams to have a dedicated coach for at least three years of intensive support. The Austin ISD SEL Department also has provided information and training on SEL for members of the AISD Board of Trustees. As implementation continues, it is clear that the district must continue training for all support staff in the district as well as parents. The goal, and something that parents have requested, is to provide parent training that is aligned with student learning.

While evidence is primarily anecdotal at this time, there is some information suggesting that implementation of SEL positively affects students' attitudes and skills. The American Institute of Research (AIR) is assisting the district with the development of measurement tools, which will be used to gather data for CASEL and for the district-level analysis of the program's effectiveness.

### Climate and Culture

District staff also supports schools as they implement programs and strategies for improving the climate and culture of the school. While the explicit instruction resource used in classrooms is standard across school levels, the work that is being done with climate and culture varies

across campuses. District coaches must have the capacity and flexibility to work within various systems to demonstrate to schools how the adult actions and attitudes impact student attitudes and achievement.

## SEL Curriculum

Texas has developed standards for SEL only in Pre-K, so the Austin ISD team has written standards for K-12 based on the standards of Illinois and Anchorage, Alaska. These standards are being implemented while integrating SEL into the written curriculum for all academic areas. The Austin ISD Board of Trustees has approved a resolution of support for the district work with CASEL, and SEL is promoted as a Board Priority. While written standards and the Board resolution demonstrate support for SEL in Austin, having standards adopted at the state level would reinforce this support. Austin will work with CASEL to support national policy and standards as well.

## Conclusion

Austin ISD concurs with the conclusions of Jones and Bouffard. AISD's SEL Department is honored to be a leader in the area of SEL and would be happy to collaborate and share with others at any time. The implementation of SEL programs that are explicit as well as integrated into academics and pedagogy within positive school settings is critical for the success of students in any path they pursue beyond high school graduation. ■

# About the Authors

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