



Research Brief

Research has shown a connection between the development of social and emotional skills and lifetime outcomes in education, employment, criminal activity, substance use and mental health (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Increasingly, skills such as communications, relationship building, and stress management are being recognized as important life skills. By modeling and teaching these skills to students, Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Grant Programs can help young people lay the foundation for success in school and beyond.

Defining Social and Emotional Learning

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2018b). Many frameworks, including CASEL’s, represent social and emotional learning through five core competencies (sometimes called skill domains): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2018a).

Short-Term Benefits

Research shows that participating in social and emotional learning programs improves children’s skills, attitudes, behavior and academic performance. In one study, an 11-percentile gain in academic performance was accompanied by improvements in students’ classroom behavior; ability to manage stress and depression; and attitudes about themselves, others and school. Furthermore, the benefits existed across all grade levels (elementary, middle and high) and in urban, suburban and rural schools (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Long-Term Benefits

The benefits of social and emotional learning last over time. A 2017 study found the academic performance of students exposed to social and emotional learning programs averaged 13 percentile points higher than that of their peers, even years after the last intervention. Students had greater social and emotional competencies and prosocial behaviors, and fewer negative outcomes, including emotional distress and drug use. Evidence suggests there may also be a

Core Competency/ Skill Domain	Associated Skills
Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying emotions Accurate self-perception Recognizing strengths Self-confidence Self-efficacy
Self-management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impulse control Stress management Self-discipline Self-motivation Goal setting Organizational skills
Social awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective taking Empathy Appreciating diversity Respect for others
Relationship skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Social engagement Relationship building Teamwork
Responsible decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying problems Analyzing solutions Solving problems Evaluating Reflecting Ethical responsibility

(CASEL, 2018a)





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connection between social and emotional learning and increased high school and college graduation rates (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

Societal Benefits

In addition to benefitting individual students, social and emotional learning impacts social equity and poverty. Social and emotional skills are critical to success in education, employment and family life, and promoting development of these skills will help reduce opportunity gaps (AEI/Brookings, 2015). Benefit-cost analyses suggest that every dollar spent on social and emotional learning programming yields \$11 in long-term benefits, including reduced juvenile crime, higher lifetime earnings, and better mental and physical health (Belfield et al., 2015).

Effective Social and Emotional Learning Practices

Effective programs for social and emotional learning are SAFE: sequenced, active, focused and explicit (Jones, Bailey, Brush, & Kahn, 2018). This means they include the following elements:

- Purposeful design leads to skill development.
- Children have opportunities to practice skills.
- Time is devoted to developing one or more social and emotional skills.
- The program plan defines and targets specific skills.

In addition, effective programs occur within supportive contexts, build adult social and emotional competencies, partner with families and communities, target key behaviors and skills, and set reasonable goals (Jones et al., 2018). Many evidence-based programs have demonstrated positive outcomes (Vega, 2015). When selecting a program, schools and out-of-school time organizations should use data to guide their decision making, include key stakeholders in the process, identify needs and goals, and use selection tools and resources (Jones et al., 2018). Once a program or curriculum is selected, it is critical to plan for effective implementation. The following steps are recommended:

- Use data to inform decision-making to ensure that the program suits your community's context and needs.
- Promote ownership and buy-in by including stakeholders in the process and ensuring that the program aligns with student needs.
- Provide sufficient staff support and training.
- Dedicate sufficient time to implementing the program effectively. Consider integrating social and emotional skills into academic content.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice skills on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in hallways and bathrooms.
- Apply social and emotional skills in real time by incorporating them into daily interactions and routines and teachable moments. (Jones et al., 2018)

Assessing Social and Emotional Competencies

There are quick and easy ways to take a snapshot of how well social and emotional learning programs or activities are being implemented. These include gathering data through school climate surveys and behavior referrals (Jones et al., 2018). However, before selecting an assessment to measure social and emotional skills, you should consider whether you are ready by thinking about the following questions: What is the purpose of the assessment? What is the

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appropriate level of assessment rigor? What are the practical constraints? What will the burden be? Is the assessment ethical? (American Institutes for Research, 2015).

Numerous tools have been developed for assessing social and emotional skills at all grade levels. The [Tools Index](#) from the American Institutes for Research provides information about many, including the developer, ages and/or grades covered, constructs measured, respondents, number of items and response time, cost (if any), and setting. In addition, watch for an [Assessment Guide](#) for educators from a CASEL work group in late 2018.

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