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**Testimony before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, delivered by Linda Lantieri on behalf of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**

**10:00 a.m. March 18, 2009 [www.CASEL.org](http://www.CASEL.org)**

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today from the perspective and experience of someone who has been in the field of education in a variety of roles for four decades – as a classroom teacher and administrator in East Harlem and education faculty member at Hunter College, NYC. More recently, I have been deeply involved in the healing and recovery efforts in twelve schools in lower Manhattan in which over 8,000 children along with their 200 teachers fled for their lives on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of school on September 11, 2001.

Today I am representing the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the world's leading organization advancing research, school practice, and public policy focused on the development of children's social and emotional competence. Our mission is to establish Social and Emotional Learning as an essential part of education, from preschool through high school.

Often called the "missing piece" in school improvement efforts, the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) reflects the growing recognition that healthy social and emotional development advances children's success in school and life. SEL is informed by scholarly research demonstrating that all children can have a school experience that helps them be not only academically competent but one that supports them in being engaged life-long learners who are self-aware, caring, and connected to others, and who contribute actively to building a more just, peaceful, productive, and sustainable world.

SEL programming addresses five essential areas of social and emotional development:

1. **Self-awareness** (recognizing one's capacities, strengths, emotions, and values)
2. **Self-management** (managing emotions and behaviors, persevering in overcoming obstacles)
3. **Social awareness** (showing understanding and empathy for others)
4. **Relationship skills** (forming positive relationships, teamwork, conflict resolution)
5. **Responsible decision-making** (making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior)

Such skills provide students the essential tools they need to be effective learners - including such skills as: focusing attention, setting and persisting toward goals, working effectively with others, making good decisions, creative problem-solving, and negotiating.

In classrooms from Anchorage, Alaska to NYC, SEL skills are being taught to students of diverse backgrounds in pre-kindergarten to grade 12, by regular classroom teachers, as a regular part of their school experience. Rigorous research has clearly established that students who are exposed to SEL programming exhibit: greater motivation to learn and commitment to school; decreased misbehavior and aggression; and improved attendance, graduation rates, grades and test scores.

A recent review of 31 studies found that **Social and Emotional Learning results in improvements in students' achievement test scores - by an average of 11 percentile points over students who did not receive Social and Emotional Learning programming.** The magnitude of this impact and the strength of the research base behind it are significant. As a point of comparison, studies of the impacts of reducing class size show smaller academic gains as a result than does SEL instruction. In challenging economic times, when cost cuts may require painful teacher layoffs, the payoff for investing in children's social and emotional development are real and sizable. For example, one major multi-year study found that by the time they were adults, students who received Social and Emotional Learning in grades 1-6 had an 11 percent higher grade-point average and significantly greater levels of school commitment, attachment, and completion at age 18.

The same research showed that the rate of students required to repeat a grade who received Social and Emotional Learning in grades 1-6 was 14 percent, versus 23 percent of students in a control group. At age 18, students in the same study showed a 30 percent lower incidence of school behavior problems, a 20 percent lower rate of violent delinquency, and a 40 percent lower rate of heavy alcohol use. Clearly, the decision-making and self-mastery skills these students learned early in life paid off greatly as they grew older and encountered life's increasingly complex and challenging choices. The academic and life-success returns on investment in SEL are substantial.

Many of the skills that our nation's business and government leaders have defined as essential for effectiveness in the modern workplace - the ability to function as part of a team, work with diverse colleagues and customers, analyze and generate solutions to problems, persist in the face of challenging setbacks - are social and emotional skills. I have seen first hand how these skills can form a foundation for young people's success not just in school, but also as productive workers, as parents, and as citizens.

There are many examples of school districts across this country that have made Social and Emotional Learning integral to their vision of what it means to be an educated person. Both the states of Illinois and New York have already passed legislation and released guidelines to move this agenda forward. Outstanding examples abound of SEL practice in schools throughout this country. However, model schools and school districts are still the exception not the norm. Far too few children have access to this critical programming that provides them with sequenced Social and Emotional Learning instruction using active learning strategies that focus on developing specific social-emotional skills.

Because SEL requires serious and committed federal, state, district, and principal leadership, long-term professional development of teaching staff and school mental health personnel, parent engagement, and classroom instruction, CASEL is assisting in the development of authorizing legislation to support SEL programming from the federal level. The proposed legislation would establish both a National Training and Technical Assistance Center and a state and local grant program to promote SEL nationwide. This Center would support the development of Social and Emotional Learning standards, programs, and practices for states and local educational agencies, including technical assistance on how to engage families and communities in Social and Emotional Learning efforts. It would also provide ongoing professional development, conduct research, and disseminate reliable assessment tools to measure student progress in social and emotional development and evaluate Social and Emotional Learning programs to document the impact of such programs on student achievement and behavior. We look forward to sharing this proposed legislation with you when we have finished that process.

*Testimony of Linda Lantieri on behalf of CASEL*

The good news, however, is that there is also much that can be done using existing federal funding to further the SEL agenda. I ask your support for report language to the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill that will encourage states and local educational agencies to use federal funds for SEL programming, particularly as part of their Title I school improvement programs, as part of their Title II teacher quality enhancement and as an effective use of Safe and Drug Free Schools funding under Title IV. We at CASEL believe that SEL can be the umbrella under which school systems can bring to the table functions that traditionally are fragmented in school systems - health, youth development, counseling, service learning, specialized services, and postsecondary initiatives. In the current harsh economic environment, solutions that coordinate and thus extend the reach of separate resource pools are more needed than ever before.

Over the past several years, many of our young people throughout this country would unfortunately describe their school experience as one that prepares them for “a life of tests” rather than one which is preparing them for “the tests of life.” I hope you agree with me that we can do better. I would like to conclude by telling you about a young man who I met over 20 years ago who was one of the best SEL teachers I ever had. Eugene went to a struggling high school in the South Bronx that became very committed to providing young people with skills in Social and Emotional Learning as a regular part of their curriculum. One day however Eugene was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was on a corner in his neighborhood with his girlfriend and realized out of the corner of his eye that the car turning the corner was going to be a drive by shooting. He quickly pushed his girlfriend to the ground and took the bullet.

When I went to Metropolitan Hospital to visit Eugene three days after that, I walked into a hospital ward where I saw more than 30 young men who looked like Eugene who were in wheelchairs, paralyzed for life from the killing fields of NYC. When I got a chance to finally be alone with Eugene, I asked him how he was doing. He said that he was feeling terrible until this morning. So naturally I asked him what had happened to change that around for him. He proceeded to say that this morning he woke up and decided to forgive the guy who pulled the trigger that paralyzed him because he realized that he could have been the kid who pulled that trigger if I hadn't taught him that there was another way.

I look forward to the day when we can assure our young people that they will receive *all* of what they need to be the caring, loving and committed citizens we want and need them to be. Our job is to make sure we teach them that there is another way. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.