



2013 CASEL Forum Summary

Social and Emotional Learning: Momentum!

May 14-15, 2013

Since its founding in 1994, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has worked closely with educators, researchers, philanthropists, state and federal policymakers and children's advocates to foster the widespread implementation of educational approaches focused on children's social and emotional development. Every two years CASEL convenes leaders from these fields to exchange views about the most important steps to ensure that all children will have the opportunity to develop academic, social, and emotional competencies to succeed in school and life.

The 2013 CASEL Forum, held in Chicago on May 14-15, 2013, assembled 120 thought leaders to evaluate the current status of social and emotional learning (SEL) and identify strategic actions to address one key question: "What can we do in the coming year to strengthen our momentum to meet the demand for evidence-based SEL in our schools?"

Among those attending the 2013 CASEL Forum were U.S. Department of Education Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement James Shelton, Illinois State Superintendent of Ed-

ucation Christopher Koch, Stanford University education professor and CASEL board member Linda Darling-Hammond, superintendents from six of the most populous school districts in the U.S., and several of the nation's prominent philanthropic leaders, including Jennifer and Peter Buffett of NoVo Foundation.

This report presents a broad overview of the Forum and key points and insights from the Forum's major sessions and presentations.

Welcome and Celebration

The 2013 CASEL Forum began with a reception on May 14. Special Olympics CEO and CASEL Board Chair Tim Shriver greeted the guests and acted as moderator of the entire Forum.

Shriver began by introducing Jennifer and Peter Buffett, chair and co-chair of NoVo Foundation, whose leadership and support of social and emotional learning has been a key factor in its growing acceptance nationwide. "I hope this Forum will make you even more inspired and dedicated to the work for our teachers, our parents, our schools, our communities and our very future," Jennifer Buffett told the attendees. "If we don't



Tim Shriver, CASEL board chair and Forum moderator.

Below, left, James Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education; center, John Bridgeland, President and CEO, Civic Enterprises; right, Desiree Cintron (l.) and her teacher, Brett Murphy, both from North Grand High School, Chicago.



remember our humanity, if we don't remember what makes a human being come alive and be able to learn, I think we're sunk. What every human being needs and what we need to provide for our kids is to feel safe, to be seen and to be celebrated."

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of awards for outstanding leadership in the field of social and emotional learning established in memory of two CASEL collaborators, Joseph E. Zins and Mary Utne O'Brien. Each of them played a leading role in the development of both CASEL and the field.

The O'Brien awards recognized eight champions of social and emotional learning, each of whom is a key leader for SEL in one of the eight school districts participating in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI). The Zins awardees were Stephanie Jones, an associate professor in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Joseph A. Durlak, the senior author of a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs that provides the strongest scientific evidence to date that SEL makes a significant positive impact not just on young people's social-emotional development but on their academic achievement. See page 7 for a complete listing of the awardees.

The evening concluded with a rousing presentation by Roberto Rivera and a group of young people from inner-city Chicago who read from their own poetry. Rivera is a predoctoral fellow in social and emotional learning at the University of Illinois at Chicago and founder of the Chicago-based Good Life Organization, which builds capacity in local leaders to support the positive development of youth to enhance democratic participation and academic achievement and uses elements of Hip Hop culture to empower young people.



Above, Jennifer and Peter Buffett of NoVo Foundation. Below, CASEL President and CEO Roger Weissberg.



Setting the Stage

With Tim Shriver again as moderator and master of ceremonies, the full day of events on May 15 began with Shriver's presentation of the Forum goals. Primary among them was to engage all the participants in building a strong sense of community focused on ways to advance social and emotional learning in schools across the country.

To create a context for this involvement, CASEL President and CEO Roger Weissberg offered a brief overview of SEL, summarizing advances in SEL research, practice and policy. If the theme of the entire Forum is "Momentum," Weissberg said, the theme of his presentation should be "Connections."

Connections can be made, and need to be made, he said, among all the many different aspects of the education and youth development fields that have common goals but are often isolated from each other by policies, regulations and funding streams. Academic mindsets, bullying prevention, character education, deeper learning, emotional intelligence, health promotion, personalized learning, positive behavior supports, school climate, service-learning, student-centered learning, 21st-century skills, whole child education—all and many more are complementary and interrelated.

Some people are "lumpers" and some are "splitters," Weissberg continued. A "lumper" takes a gestalt view and assigns approaches broadly, assuming differences are not as important as similarities. A "splitter" creates new categories to classify approaches that differ from each other. The education world needs "lumpers" and "splitters," Weissberg concluded, but "I would argue that the most impactful benefits for children will come from successful lumping."

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes through which children, adolescents 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 has identified five interrelated clusters of competencies:

- Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- Self-management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school and community resources and supports.
- Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- Responsible decision-making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

A Groundbreaking Report

Shriver then introduced John Bridgeland, president and CEO of Civic Enterprises and the co-author of a major new report, *The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools*. The report draws on a new survey of a nationally representative sample of teachers across the country by Hart Research Associates. It emphasizes three major themes: (1) teachers understand, value and endorse SEL for all students; (2) teachers believe SEL helps students achieve in school and life; and (3) teachers identify key accelerators for SEL. Both an executive summary and the entire report can be downloaded from the CASEL website (CASEL.org) and the Civic Enterprises website (civicerprises.net).

Throughout this groundbreaking document, Bridgeland and colleagues share the perspectives of teachers and what research tells us about SEL, including the importance of teaching social-emotional competencies explicitly, embedding SEL in classroom instruction, and integrating classroom and schoolwide SEL programming. Following a summary of highlights from the report, Bridgeland moderated a panel discussion that involved James

Shelton from the U.S. Department of Education, three educators, and one Chicago high school student who have had direct experience with SEL. From the federal, state and local perspectives, each described the importance of SEL to their work, their lives and the well-being of children.

Key findings in the report include:

- ◆ Nearly all teachers (93 percent) believe SEL is very or fairly important for the in-school student experience.
- ◆ Nearly all teachers (95 percent) believe social and emotional skills are teachable and report that SEL will benefit students from all backgrounds, rich or poor (97 percent).
- ◆ More than three-quarters of the teachers believe a larger focus on SEL will be a major benefit to students because of the positive effect on workforce readiness (87 percent), school attendance and graduation (80 percent), life success (87 percent), college preparation (78 percent) and academic success (75 percent).
- ◆ Eight in ten teachers think SEL will have a major benefit on students' ability to stay on track and graduate and will increase standardized test scores and overall academic performance (77 percent).
- ◆ Of the teachers who view negative school cli-

mate as a problem, 80 percent view SEL as a solution.

The report draws on these findings to make several policy recommendations:

- ◆ *Promote SEL in classrooms, schools and communities* by linking SEL to schoolwide activities and other school services, conducting resources and needs assessments in schools, and ensuring effective coordination with out-of-school partners.
- ◆ *Strengthen SEL by investing in educators*, e.g., by funding integrated professional development for educators and tying SEL to classroom, school and district goals.
- ◆ *Sustain SEL through high-impact levers*, e.g., by creating student learning standards and connecting SEL with the Common Core State Standards, ensuring sustainable funding, supporting federal policies that promote SEL and advancing a robust research agenda.

A Focus on Districtwide Implementation

Large school districts are a primary focus of CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), which is designed to make SEL an integrated part of every child's educational experience. Only districts can decide to implement and sustain SEL in a way that is truly systemic. In addition, only districts have the ability to bridge elementary, middle and high schools to ensure that SEL is integrated into a student's entire educational experience

from prekindergarten through twelfth grade.

The second Forum session of the day, moderated by CASEL board member Carl Cohn, a nationally respected educational leader and a former school superintendent, featured a panel com-



Above, Eric Gordon (l.), CEO, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and Tony Smith, superintendent, Oakland Unified School District. Below, Christopher Koch, Illinois State Superintendent of Education.



prised of superintendents from three large urban districts participating in the CDI—Cleveland, Nashville and Oakland. The three superintendents shared their views on the accomplishments and challenges of systemic district SEL implementation, and the session underscored the many ways in which SEL implementation can vary from one district to another. Each superintendent responded to three questions:

- ◆ Why is SEL essential for all students and why am I committed to systemic SEL implementation for all students in my district?
- ◆ How are we making progress with systemic SEL implementation in my district?
- ◆ What are we learning from implementing the CASEL Theory of Action in the

Collaborating Districts Initiative?

As part of this session, David Osher of the American Institutes for Research, the lead investigator of the CDI evaluation, commented on the project findings to date. Despite the predictable obstacles to systemic change, Osher said, the collaborating districts are beginning to manifest positive changes at all levels. "In every one of the collaborating districts they have sustained social and emotional learning in spite of budget pressures," Osher said. "They keep on investing their own resources because they understand it's important. In seven of the eight districts there has been a major leadership change, but SEL keeps going on."

Invited Remarks from the Illinois State Superintendent of Education

Christopher Koch, the Illinois State Superintendent of Education since 2006, was the featured speaker during the luncheon. He described the high level of activism and collaboration that led to the state's adoption of the Children's Mental Health Act in 2003, which in turn paved the way for the Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards in 2004. Koch emphasized that because of these standards and the strong collaborative leadership of many different partners, including CASEL, Illinois is at the forefront of systemic implementation of SEL.

Adoption of the SEL standards, Koch said, was a "great relief to schools that were feeling a lot of pressure to focus on academics while the whole child was not being recognized." Today, Koch said, "We're thinking constantly about what are the existing systems and structures and how SEL can be integrated." Especially important, Koch said, are ways to use data to document the effects of SEL and a growing emphasis on integrating SEL into the professional preparation of both teachers and administrators.

Steps for Strategic Action

CASEL Board member and Stanford University professor of education Linda Darling-Hammond introduced the afternoon session by describing her own experiences with social and emotional learning and the impact of SEL she has observed in her

work with schools across the country. She then elaborated on the implications of the four key areas of policy and practice that would be the focus of the afternoon's concurrent group sessions. The sessions were designed to address questions



Above, CASEL board member and Stanford University professor of education Linda Darling-Hammond. Below, a breakout session, l. to r., Jason Cascarino, CASEL; Darlene Ruscitti, DuPage County, Ill.; CASEL board member Carl Cohn.



that must be answered effectively if evidence-based SEL is to become an essential part of pre-K-12 education. Each group's work directly related to the four components of the CASEL Action Agenda (see page 8).

Prepared and stimulated by Darling-Hammond's background presentation, the participants divided to work in one of the four groups. Each group developed specific recommendations that were then presented to the large group in the concluding general session of the afternoon.

Following are the four strategic areas and the groups' recommendations. We also share the CASEL action agenda across these four domains (page 8).

1. Developing Capacity among District and School

Leadership Teams. What strategies are effective in building staff capacity at the district and school levels to implement systemic SEL for all students? What strategic actions can be taken to expand and support quality implementation of SEL in the CASEL CDI districts and other districts throughout the United States?

Recommendations:

- ◆ Demonstrate what SEL is and what it means by encouraging school visits and developing consistent messages about SEL implementation.
- ◆ Develop tools that emphasize a deep under-

standing of how to implement SEL and make appropriate decisions about implementation, including throughout an emphasis on understanding and celebrating diversity.

- ◆ Engage parents and the broader community, including ways everyone can develop SEL skills in order to support social and emotional learning in children.

2. Embedding SEL into the Common Core of Instruction.

What opportunities and challenges exist to integrate SEL into instructional practices, especially as the Common Core State Standards are implemented? What strategic actions can be taken to support teachers as they promote the social, emotional, and academic learning of all students through their instructional practices?

Recommendations:

- ◆ Focus on training and practice by developing exemplars through videos and materials, creating professional learning communities, creating tools and resources to help with integration, and encouraging pre-service programs that integrate SEL.
- ◆ Improve communication and advocacy related to SEL by developing a simplified common language that unites parallel activities, programs and initiatives and working at the local, state and national levels to involve community leaders and decision-makers in SEL advocacy.
- ◆ Create tools that enable school leaders to incorporate SEL assessment easily and seamlessly



Working in the breakout groups. Above, Roger Weissberg, I., and Sheldon Berman, superintendent of schools, Eugene, Ore. Below, I. to r., Duncan Meyers, CASEL; Erin Kahn, Raikes Foundation; Olga Acosta-Price, Center for Health Care in Schools; Linda Lantieri, CASEL; Steve Arnold, Polaris Partners, CASEL board member.



ly and also work with textbook publishers to include SEL.

3. Elevating SEL in National Education Policy.

What do districts and schools need from federal and state governments to adopt, implement and sustain evidence-based SEL programming? What strategic actions can advocates of SEL take to galvanize federal and state support for SEL?

Recommendations:

- ◆ Develop the vision and the big picture by thinking big and bringing in various perspectives and movements.
- ◆ Organize policymaking efforts the way a political campaign would be organized, i.e., know what the goal is and what we want, then organize a campaign to

accomplish that; this includes finding prominent people not usually involved in this kind of advocacy who will champion our cause.

- ◆ Work at all levels of the educational system—local, state and national—keeping in mind that federal policy sometimes originates in local and state policies.

4. Coordinating Kindred Strategies for Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning.

How can different child development approaches fit together and align in districts and schools to ensure that we successfully educate knowledgeable, responsible, caring and contributing students? What strategic actions can be taken to create synergy among various evidence-based strategies and initiatives to foster students' social, emotional, and academic learning?

Recommendations:

- ◆ Convene a working group of leaders from various kindred fields to create a unifying framework for SEL, safe and healthy students, character education, college and career readiness, deeper learning and related areas.
- ◆ Develop SEL-related student learning standards that integrate with the Common Core State Standards.
- ◆ Review school-based youth-development and prevention programs to identify core components of effective programs that promote students' social, emotional, and academic competence.
- ◆ Convene a group to work on measuring common constructs and assessments related to SEL.



David Esquith, director, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, U.S. Department of Education.

recommendations from the four breakout groups. Each group was represented by a previously designated representative, each of whom added a personal note of reflection on the day's proceedings in addition to summarizing the group's recommendations.

Janice Jackson, executive director of the Center for Opportunity Policy in Education at Stanford University, addressed developing capacity among district and school leadership teams. A leading proponent of

diversity education and awareness in schools, Jackson commented that "We need to teach people skills for what it means to live in a diverse world. That's a skill set that needs to be deeply embedded in social and emotional learning."

Ellen Moir, founder and CEO of the New Teacher Center, presented the findings of the group focused on embedding SEL into instruction and the Common Core standards. "We have to make teaching a much more enriching and enticing opportunity in order to get young people to join the profession," Moir said. "I think that by giving teachers the right kind of support, they'll be more resilient, they'll persevere, and they'll stay in the profession. It's all about building community."

Reflections, Recommendations and Commitments

As a conclusion to the Forum, the large group reconvened for a session that focused on key ideas and accomplishments from the day and next steps for both CASEL and the forum participants.

The session began with a summary of the main

2013 CASEL Award Winners

Joseph E. Zins Awards for Excellence in Action Research in Social and Emotional Learning

Distinguished Scholar: **Joseph A. Durlak**, Emeritus Professor of Psychology, Loyola University Chicago
Early-Career Researcher: **Stephanie Jones**, Associate Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Mary Utne O'Brien Awards for Excellence in Expanding the Evidence-Based Practice of Social and Emotional Learning

Jillian Ahrens, Teacher and Union Leader, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Linda DePriest, Executive Officer for Instructional Support, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Koua Jacklyn Franz, Chief of Staff to the Superintendent, Sacramento City Unified School District

Ed Graff, Superintendent of Schools, Anchorage School District

Sherrie Raven, Director, Social and Emotional Learning, Austin Independent School District

Trish Shaffer, Coordinator, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Washoe County School District

Kristina Tank-Crestetto, Director, Family, School, and Community Partnerships, Oakland Unified School District

Karen Van Ausdal, Manager, Youth Development and Positive Behavior Supports, Chicago Public Schools

The more our district superintendents and our schools support teachers, the better our teachers will be at supporting all students, regardless of their ZIP code.”

Sam Redding, director of the Center on Innovation & Improvement, represented the national policy group. Redding pointed out that although education leaders at the federal level had made progress in defining national goals for education, “We’re not very good at supporting those who are striving to reach the goals.” One example of a move in the right direction, he said, was the recent flexibility within the U.S. Department of Education to grant state waivers from the requirements of the federal education law and to expand innovation in the latest round of major grants.

David Esquith, director of the Office of Safe and Healthy Students in the U.S. Department of Education, represented the “kindred strategies” group. Referring to his department’s efforts to provide schools with tools to respond to crises in the wake of the Newtown shootings, Esquith emphasized that it’s increasingly important to focus on ways to develop a positive school climate. Working closely with the White House, his office is creating a new initiative that includes school cli-



Erin Gruwell, celebrated teacher and author of The Freedom Writers.

mate and an emphasis on children’s mental health. The initiative, he said, is designed to “scale up a multi-tiered behavioral framework so a variety of evidence-based programs can be implemented.”

Erin Gruwell, widely known for her unique approach to teaching underprivileged teenagers, which led to the publication of *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change*

Themselves and the World Around Them, provided an inspiring conclusion to the day’s proceedings by describing her own experience with social and emotional learning. “I realized that I could teach my students to use their own stories to right the wrongs in their lives,” she said. “Through social and emotional learning I wanted to give my kids an opportunity to be aware of themselves and others. I wanted them to be able to manage their feelings when they wanted to push people away rather than pull them closer. I wanted them to realize they were much more similar than different—to each other and to the figures in history we were reading about. I allowed my kids to feel safe, to be seen and to be celebrated. And I know that all of you will stop at nothing to make the lives of our kids better.”

The CASEL Action Agenda

During the next year, CASEL has committed to carrying out several key action steps to advance work across four critical areas:

District and School Capacity: We will continue our CDI implementation and evaluation efforts and complete district and school guides and toolkits for systemic SEL implementation.

Embedding SEL in Instruction: We will complete a major review of evidence-based preschool through high school SEL programs and evaluate how well they provide instruction and integrate with academic curriculum areas.

National Education Policy: We will work with Congress to support the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013 and influence the language of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to include SEL for teacher and administrator professional development.

Coordinating Kindred Strategies: We will develop model SEL-related student learning standards that integrate with the Common Core State Standards.