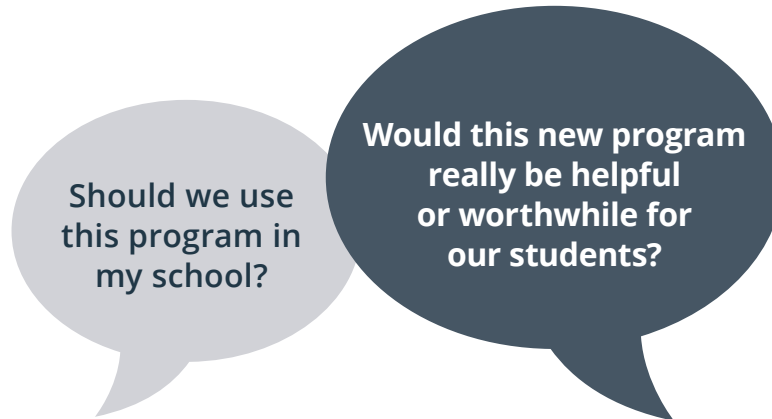




Educators frequently hear about successful SEL programs and are then faced with answering the following questions:



Considering a program's practical effects on student functioning helps administrators make these important decisions.

This brief presents information on one way to answer these questions. We use the information from our two large-scale reviews that have focused either on the findings obtained at the end of SEL programs (213 studies at post) (Durlak, et al., 2011) or during follow-up (82 studies) (Taylor et al., 2017). Typically, program evaluations present information about student benefits using effect sizes. Although this approach is useful to researchers, it is less informative to educators and policy makers who seek information from findings that focus on issues like the percentages of participating students who improve from an educational intervention.

This brief translates the research findings by using a **value-added benefits** approach to examine potential practical effects. The chart below calculates how many more students would benefit as a result of their participation in a SEL program compared to not doing a SEL program but instead continuing with a school's current curricula and programming (c.f., Rosenthal & Rubin, 2003).

In other words, how much better off would a student body be over time if we offered a SEL program compared to not offering such a program?



THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF AN



PROGRAM

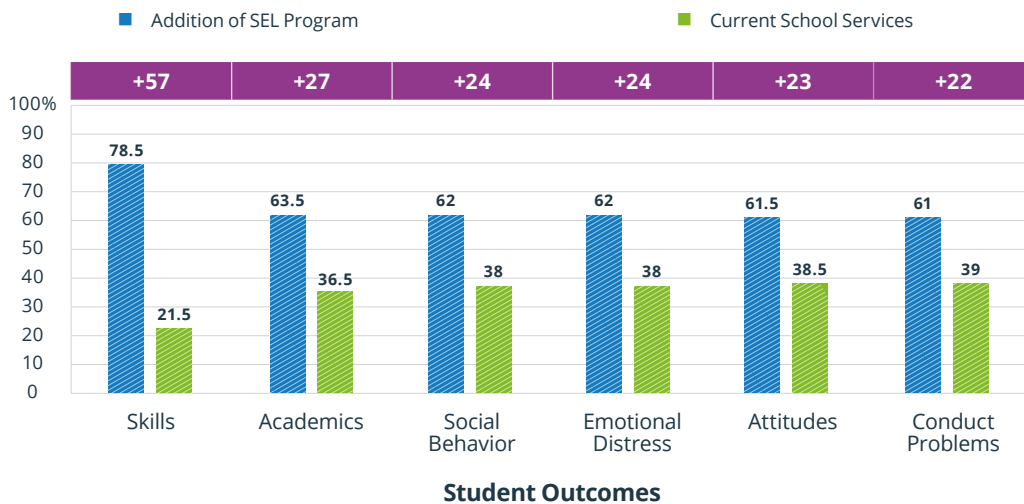
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Percentage of Students Who Improve with the Addition of an SEL Program



Benefits in Every Category

Adding an SEL program is likely to be a wise choice, academically and otherwise, compared to students receiving current school services. For example:

- **27% more students** would improve their academic performance at the end of the program;
- **57% more** would gain in their skills levels;
- **24% more** would have improved social behaviors and lower levels of distress;
- **23% more** would have improved attitudes; and
- **22% more** would show fewer conduct problems.

Even gains of 22% in terms of fewer conduct programs is a worthwhile benefit because it reflects what an SEL program can add to school services compared to what each school is currently doing. In sum, current data collected from many studies indicates that adding a SEL program to the school curriculum can lead to several real-life benefits for students.

Gains Extend Over the Long Term

The 2017 meta-analysis shows that **benefits in these areas are long lasting, up to 18 years**. For example, gains ranged from 13 percentage points on attitudes and social behaviors to 33 points on academics.





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Other Considerations

There are some qualifications. First, the public is accustomed to hearing commercials that note “results may vary,” and that is also true of SEL programs.

Because all factors that may affect a program’s success are not known, one cannot say exactly which students will benefit, or how much each student will improve. With larger numbers of studies that provide demographic and behavioral data about students, it will be possible to share subgroup analyses about which groups benefit.

Second, when interpreting the benefits, it is important to think about how many students could show change on a given outcome. For instance, most students will not develop conduct problems so the percentage of students that could improve on this outcome will be restricted. In contrast, outcomes where all students could conceivably change (e.g., skills) allows for a higher percentage of students to show improvement as a result of SEL programs.

The value-added approach is not the only method to consider for practical benefits of SEL programs. For example, percentiles are often used to describe students’ academic performance and Durlak et al. (2011) showed that SEL programs lead to an 11 percentile gain in achievement. However, the meaning of percentile change is not necessarily clear for other SEL-related outcomes (e.g., skills, attitudes, etc.).

Finally, practical benefits can also be measured in terms of cost effectiveness (Belfield et al., 2015). This method leads to an overall conclusion that the return on investment for SEL programs is 11 to 1. This means that, on average, for every dollar invested in SEL programs, there is a return of 11 dollars.

Overall, the findings show that positive results have been obtained from SEL programs operating in grades K-12 across the United States and in several other countries. To have the greatest chance of success for the most students, schools must make a genuine commitment to a SEL program and provide the necessary resources to develop, evaluate, and continuously improve the program.

[CASEL’s District Resource Center](#) and [Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#) offer detailed advice and field-test resources for implementing such systemic changes.

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