# Social and Emotional Learning for Illinois Students: Policy, Practice and Progress

How Illinois SEL standards came to be and what the state has learned through putting them into practice

# Social and Emotional Learning for Illinois Students: Policy, Practice and Progress

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Illinois is a leader in integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into education systems as the first state to adopt a comprehensive set of preschool to high school SEL principles as part of the state's learning standards. This chapter summarizes how the Illinois SEL standards came to be and what the state has learned through putting them into practice. We begin by discussing the extant research that supports the need for a state policy that emphasizes social and emotional learning in children's education. We end by discussing what other states are doing to promote SEL in education and offer suggestions on how Illinois could continue to lead the effort to support children's social and emotional learning.

### Evidence in Support of Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning is a process for helping children and adults develop the fundamental skills to effectively handle school and work, relationships, and their own personal development.[2] These skills include recognizing and managing emotions, caring for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. Schools that implement programs that improve students' social and emotional competencies can positively affect a broad array of academic and behavioral outcomes.[3]

Schools are ideal institutions for addressing children's social, emotional, and academic development. Promoting social and emotional competencies within students can encourage their academic engagement, work ethic, and school success.[4] SEL is rooted in the firm belief that social and emotional processes affect how and what students learn, therefore schools and families that effectively integrate these competencies into the educational process will benefit all students.[5] Creating safe, caring, learning environments is critically important for fostering SEL skill development. Such environments enhance children's emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relationship skills so that they are competent to handle academic and social tasks effectively and responsibly.[6]

Several characteristics distinguish school-

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1 The authors are ordered alphabetically to reflect the collaborative writing of this chapter.

2 Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., Shriver, T. P. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

3 Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). "The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions." *Child Development*.

4 Zins, J. E., & Elias, M. E. (2006). Social and emotional learning. In G. G. Bear & K. M. Minke (Eds.), *Children's needs III* (pp. 1–13). National Association of School Psychologists.

5 Merrell, K. W., & Gueldner, B. A. (2010). *Social and emotional learning in the classroom: Promoting mental health and academic success*. New York: The Guilford Press.

6 Osher, D., Sprague, R., Weissberg, R. P., Axelrod, J., Keenan, S., & Kendziora, K.  (2008). "A comprehensive approach to promoting social, emotional, and academic growth in contemporary schools." In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology* V (Volume 4, pp. 1263-1278) Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

*An extensive body of research indicates that students who effectively master social-emotional competencies also have greater well-being and better school performance.*

based programming that best promotes students' SEL from programs that are less effective in promoting SEL skills.[7] The most beneficial school-based SEL programs are ones that provide sequential and developmentally appropriate instruction in SEL skills. Principals and superintendents implement these programs in a coordinated manner from preschool through high school. Teachers receive ongoing professional development in SEL. The lessons are taught in the classroom and reinforced throughout the school day, during out-of-school activities, and at home.

Existing research on school-based mental-health and competence promotion, although continuing to advance, generally finds that school-based SEL programming is beneficial for students and schools. An extensive body of research indicates that students who effectively master social-emotional competencies also have greater well-being and better school performance.[8] Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 controlled studies of school-based SEL programs and found that they had positive effects on social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school.[9] SEL programs

also enhanced students' behavioral adjustment in the form of increased pro-social behaviors, reduced conduct and internalizing problems, and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades.

An important component in the promotion of SEL among children is the role of school and family partnerships.[10] Students typically do not learn alone, but rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the encouragement of their families. Suggested practices that promote school and family partnerships for SEL include informing families of the SEL program's goals and how these are implemented, defining clear roles for parents regarding how they can reinforce socio-emotional competencies at home, and having parents be active participants in planning and implementing SEL activities at school.[11] Families and schools that work together can enhance the children's success, not only academically but also socially and emotionally. Parents who motivate their children to learn, structure the home environment so that it is conducive for learning, and emphasize children's efforts have children who are more likely to succeed academically.[12,13] Students

[7] Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2005). *The Illinois edition of safe and sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based social and emotional learning programs*. Chicago, IL: Author; Devaney, E., O'Brien, M. U., Resnik, H., Keister, S., & Weissberg, R. P. (2006). *Sustainable schoolwide social and emotional learning (SEL): Implementation guide and toolkit*. Chicago, IL: CASEL.

[8] Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M. J. (2003). "Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning." *American Psychologist, 58*, 466-474.

[9] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). "The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions." *Child Development*.

[10] Patrikakou, E. N., Weissberg, R. P., Redding, S., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2005). *School-family partnerships for children's success*. New York: Teachers College Press.

[11] Christenson, S. L., & Havsy, L. H. (2004). "Family-school-peer relationships: Significance for social-emotional and academic learning." In J. E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, M. C. Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* (pp. 59–75). New York: Teachers College Press.

[12] Henderson, A. T. & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on students' achievement*. Austin, TX: National Center of Family & Community Connections with Schools.

[13] Christenson, S. L., & Reschly, A. L. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook on school-family partnerships*. New York: Routledge.

who perceive greater parental support during the transition to high school are more likely to express that they belong in school.[14] Research has also found that families can partner with schools to enhance children's positive social skills, attitudes toward school work, self-esteem, and perseverance.[15,16] The quality of the school and family partnership must be emphasized because it relates to student achievement and behavior, and it is instrumental in promoting trust between home and school.[17]

**How Illinois' SEL Standards Came to Be**

Based on this evidence, in 2002 a group of Illinois' education, mental health, child advocacy, and violence prevention leaders began promoting legislation that would require Illinois to establish Social Emotional Learning Standards as part of the Illinois Learning Standards. The group was comprised of leaders of a statewide Children's Mental Health Task Force, a volunteer effort involving more than 100 organizations created to promote a comprehensive approach to children's mental health and social emotional well-being.

In April 2003, the task force issued its report, *Children's Mental Health: An Urgent Priority in Illinois,*[18] which called for the development and implementation of short-term and long-term recommendations to

provide comprehensive, coordinated mental health prevention, early intervention, and treatment services for children from birth through 18 years of age in Illinois. One of the key findings in the report was that children's social and emotional development is an essential underpinning to school readiness and school success. The group recommended that legislation was needed to create a mandate for addressing children's mental health in this manner and to codify a number of key task force recommendations.

These findings and recommendations helped lead to passage of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act of 2003 (Public Act 93-0495).[19] Among its key provisions, the Act called for:

- Development of a Children's Mental Health Plan for Illinois that provides substantive and strategic direction for building an effective children's mental health system that addresses the prevention, early intervention and treatment needs of children ages 0-18.
- Establishment of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP), which was charged with developing and monitoring the implementation of the Children's Mental Health Plan.
- Development and implementation of a plan by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) that incorporates social and

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[14] Elias, M. J., Bryan, K., Patrikakou, E. N., & Weissberg, R. P. (2003). "Challenges in creating effective home-school partnerships in adolescence: Promising pathways for collaboration." *The School-Community Journal,* 133–153.

[15] Albright, M. I., & Weissberg, R. P. (2010). "School-family partnerships to promote social and emotional learning." In S. L. Christenson & A. L. Reschley (Eds.), *The handbook of school-family partnerships for promoting student competence.* New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group.

[16] Christenson, S. L., & Havsy, L. H. (2004). "Family-school-peer relationships: Significance for social-emotional and academic learning." In J. E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, M. C. Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* (pp. 59–75). New York: Teachers College Press.

[17] Patrikakou, E. N., & Weissberg, R. P. (1999). "Seven P's to promote school–family partnership efforts." *Education Week, 18*(21), 34–36.

[18] http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/pdfs/cmh_priority.pdf

[19] http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/pdfs/cmh_act.pdf

[20] Finn, Julian & Petrilli, 2006

[21] CASEL, 2003

emotional development standards into the Illinois Learning Standards for the purpose of enhancing and measuring children's school readiness and ability to achieve academic success.

• Development by local school districts of policies for incorporating social and emotional development into their educational program; these policies would include the teaching and assessment of students' social and emotional competencies and protocols for responding to children with social, emotional, or mental health problems, or a combination of such problems, that affect learning ability.

The passage of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act made Illinois the first state to establish social and emotional learning standards. The legislation was supported by more than 60 major Illinois organizations, associations and agencies, including educational groups such as the Chicago Public Schools, the Large Unit School District Association, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), and the Illinois Associations of School Social Workers, School Counselors, and School Psychologists.

In the months following the passage of the law, the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP) was formed and a number of committees were created, including the School Policy and Standards Committee. This committee worked collaboratively with the ISBE and CASEL to develop the Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards. The SEL goals, standards and benchmarks were developed by a broad group of teachers, school administrators, student support staff, human services professionals, and parents with expertise in child development and learning, curriculum design, and instruction. The School Policies and Standards Committee also worked with the Illinois Association of School Boards to develop a model policy that districts could adapt to

comply with the law's requirement for school district policies.

**The SEL Standards Framework**

Learning standards describe what students are expected to know and be able to do at various ages or grade levels. In addition, they communicate educational priorities and provide a framework for building and organizing curricula, as well as aligning instruction with assessment.[20] Rigorous, well-articulated standards are necessary for effective and consistent instruction in core academic subjects. A major innovation in Illinois was to extend these standards to the social and emotional skills essential to success in college and the workplace.[21]

Figure 1 illustrates the SEL standards framework, a pyramid with a few broad goals at the top, several learning standards and benchmarks in the middle, and numerous performance descriptions at the bottom.

*Goals*
The three goals of the Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards are broad statements that organize the knowledge and skills that comprise SEL content:
• Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.



Figure 1
**The Social Emotional Learning Standards Framework**

- 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. [22]

### *Learning Standards*

The 10 SEL learning standards are broader learning targets used to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment within the three broad goals (see Table 1).[23] They are specific statements of the knowledge and skills that students should know and be able to do within a goal. The standards define the learning needed to achieve the goals, but are designed to be general enough to apply to learning across the entire age range from school entry through high school graduation.

### *Benchmarks*

The benchmarks are learning targets that are more specific than standards (see Table 2). They specify developmentally appropriate SEL knowledge and skills for each standard at one of five grade-level clusters: early elementary (grades K-3), late elemen-

tary (grades 4-5), middle/junior high (grades 6-8), early high school (grades 9-10), and late high school (grades 11-12). The benchmarks are not designed to be all-inclusive; instead they highlight important, representative features of each standard that instruction should emphasize at each

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**Table 1**

**Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Goals and Standards**

**Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.**
- Standard 1A. Identify and manage one's emotions and behavior.
- Standard 1B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- Standard 1C. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.

**Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.**
- Standard 2A. Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- Standard 2B. Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- Standard 2C. Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- Standard 2D. Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

**Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.**
- Standard 3A. Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.
- Standard 3B. Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.
- Standard 3C. Contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.

Source: http://isbe.net/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm

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[22] http://isbe.net/ils/ social_emotional/ standards.htm

[23] http://isbe.net/ils /social_emotional/ standards.htm

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**Table 2**

**Benchmarks Associated with Learning Standard 1A: "Identify and Manage One's Emotions and Behavior," within Grade Level**

| Early Elementary | Late Elementary | Middle/Junior High School | Early High School | Late High School |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1A.1a. Recognize and accurately label emotions and how they are linked to behavior. | 1A.2a. Describe a range of emotions and the situations that cause them. | 1A.3a. Analyze factors that create stress or motivate successful performance. | 1A.4a. Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision making and responsible behavior. | 1A.5a. Evaluate how expressing one's emotions in different situations affects others. |
| 1A.1b. Demonstrate control of impulsive behavior. | 1A.2b. Describe and demonstrate ways to express emotions in a socially acceptable manner. | 1A.3b. Apply strategies to manage stress and to motivate successful performance. | 1A.4b. Generate ways to develop more positive attitudes. | 1A.5b. Evaluate how expressing more positive attitudes influences others. |

Source: http://isbe.net/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm

[24] http://isbe.net/ils/
social_emotional/
descriptors.htm

*In December 2004, the ISBE adopted the SEL Standards as well as a plan for professional development and technical assistance to support their implementation.*

grade cluster. Benchmarks increase in developmental sophistication and become more rigorous from one grade-level cluster to the next. In addition, the SEL benchmarks lend themselves to being taught in integrated ways across the 10 standards within each grade-level cluster.

The standards and benchmarks were developed to be clear and meaningful to educators, students, parents and the community; to include an appropriate combination of knowledge and skills; to be specific enough to convey what students should learn, but broad enough to allow for a variety of approaches to teaching and aligning curriculum; and to be specific enough to allow for classroom assessments to measure student progress.

### Performance Descriptors

The Performance Descriptors offer a representative (as opposed to exhaustive) list of learning targets that provide greater detail of the specific SEL knowledge, reasoning, and skills highlighted in the standards.[24] They are designed to help educators select and design curricula, classroom activities and instruction, and performance-based and other assessments aligned with the standards. Descriptors are also helpful in mapping curriculum or validating what a school or district has already developed and implemented. They are organized within stages of development.

### Putting Illinois' SEL Standards into Practice

In December 2004, the ISBE adopted the SEL Standards as well as a plan for professional development and technical assistance to support their implementation. Meanwhile, ICMHP was developing the overall state plan and conducting public hearings. In June 2005, the *Strategic Plan for Building a Comprehensive Children's Mental Health System in Illinois* was accepted by the governor. The partnership then made recommendations to the General Assembly for appropriations to support implementation of central aspects of the plan. Voices for Illinois Children led the statewide effort to secure the appropriation of $3 million to the ISBE in FY 07 to implement various school-based strategies outlined in the strategic plan. Of the $3 million, $1 million was allocated for professional development of the Social Emotional Learning Standards.

ISBE and the ICMHP worked collaboratively to establish the SEL Professional Development Project, which began in FY 07 through agreements between ISBE and the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, with Voices for Illinois Children acting as the fiscal agent for the ICMHP. Over the past four years, nearly $4 million has been allocated to the SEL Development Project, enabling the development of a regional infrastructure for providing training and coaching for Illinois schools.

The project used a request for proposals (RFP) to identify and fund a lead Regional Office of Education (ROE) for each of the six ROE regions of the state, one Intermediate Service Center for Cook County, and one Technical Assistance (TA) provider for Chicago Public Schools. These entities support schools, families, community agencies and other ROEs in the region to increase their knowledge about and capacity for implementation of the SEL Standards. Another RFP process identified a cohort of 75 schools, reaching 46,000

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**Example of Performance Descriptors for Learning Standard 1A, Organized from Earliest to Latest Stage of Development**

- Identify emotions (e.g., happy, surprised, sad, angry, proud, afraid) expressed in feeling
- Describe how various situations make you feel
- Faces or photographs
- Identify a range of emotions you have experienced
- Explain why characters in stories felt as they did
- Describe the physical responses common to a range of emotions
- Identify factors that cause stress both positive and negative

Source: http://isbe.net/ils/social_emotional/descriptors.htm

students, who were provided with small grants over a three-year period to engage in a SEL Standards planning and implementation process. CASEL and other organizations provided extensive training to a cadre of coaches hired in each region. Each regional team also includes a family advocate who works to engage and educate parents on the school SEL Standards and the importance of reinforcing them in the home.

The next phase of the SEL Professional Development Project prepared master trainers to work with the coaches to provide training and assistance to additional schools, beyond those in the pilot and outreach to new schools to take advantage of these opportunities. The project is also cross-walking the SEL training curricula with other related ISBE training curricula to ensure consistency and initiating collection of outcome data from the schools funded in the pilot phase.

### Rubric Assessment of the Pilot Schools

A rubric developed by CASEL was used to assess the quality of SEL implementation in the cohort of schools that participated in a three-year state funded pilot project from the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2010.[25]

The rubric was based on an implementation model found in CASEL's *Sustainable School wide Social and Emotional Learning: Implementation Guide and Toolkit*.[26] The rubric is a 16-item assessment and each item aligns with the implementation steps and sustainability factors that are dictated by the model.[27] The 10 implementation steps are divided into a Readiness Phase, a Planning Phase, and an Implementation Phase. The Readiness Phase involves engaging school leaders and stakeholders in committing to school-wide SEL programming. The Planning Phase includes articulating a shared vision for SEL, conducting a school-wide needs and resources assessment of current SEL programming, developing an action plan for SEL implementation, and reviewing and select-

ing evidence-based programming to build on current efforts. The Implementation Phase focuses on conducting professional development to support SEL implementation, launching SEL classroom instruction, integrating classroom-based instruction with school-wide programming, and ongoing review of program implementation and impact to guide planning for continuous improvement. The rubric also examined six factors that help schools sustain their SEL programming such as ongoing professional development and evaluation, developing an infrastructure to support school-wide SEL programming, and nurturing partnership with families and community members. Each item was rated on a 1 to 4 scale with a 4 indicating that the step or factor was fully implemented. SEL teams use the rubric to rate the implementation quality of their steps and factors. Based on the ratings, schools can create plans and activities to further their implementation of SEL.

Rubric data were collected twice during each year of the three-year (fall 2007-spring 2010) project for a total of six waves. In year one, data were collected in the fall of 2007 (wave one) and in the spring of 2008 (wave two). In year two, data were collected in the spring of 2009 (wave three) and in the late spring of 2009 (wave four). In year three, data were collected in the fall of 2009 (wave five) and in the spring of 2010 (wave six).

In year one, the schools started with moderately high ratings in the Readiness Phase. Principals in almost 75 percent of the schools had high support for SEL; slightly less than 50 percent reported having already formed an SEL steering committee. During the three-year period, the number of school teams with high ratings for the implementation steps and sustainability factors increased considerably. At the end of year three, principals and the SEL steering committees in almost all the schools received high ratings for their support of SEL. More than 90 percent of schools also had high ratings in the latter

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phases of the implementation process and the sustainability factors. Most schools had selected and implemented evidenced-based SEL programs and provided ongoing professional development for SEL. These findings indicated that the schools made great strides in their SEL implementation and after three years, they were ready to expand their SEL programming school-wide and sustain them after the conclusion of the project.

One notable challenge was that even at wave six, there were a small number of schools that continued to report low ratings for their implementation progress. At wave six, 5 percent of schools had ratings of a "2" (Partial implementation) for the steps in the readiness phase and 20 percent had ratings of a "1" (No implementation) or "2" (Partial implementation) for the steps in the planning phase. Although these percentages were low, this finding was still somewhat surprising due to the amount of training, technical assistance, and coaching that was provided to all schools in support of their implementation efforts. For these schools, support can be offered to determine why their progress has been impeded and what steps can be taken to strengthen their implementation. It would be worthwhile for ISBE to review the activities and plans of schools with high implementation ratings so that their suggestions could help other schools that are striving to improve their SEL implementation.

Throughout the project, the rubric data has been instrumental in providing feedback to schools regarding their SEL implementation progress. This experience has demonstrated to schools that collecting data, receiving reports, and discussing the results, can assist them as they make decisions regarding next steps for implementing and sustaining SEL.

It appears that schools in the pilot project have made great strides in their SEL implementation process over three years. The

implementation of SEL programming school-wide can take several years and it is to be expected that the schools will continue to make progress even after the conclusion of the project. Schools have benefited from coaching and training and they should continue to seek consultation throughout their implementation efforts. By conducting their own self-assessment using the rubric, school teams can reflect on their own progress and have data that can guide their next steps of implementation. Careful planning and execution of implementation based on data are preferable to engaging in implementation activities without any framework or rationale for doing so. The rubric data is useful for school planning teams to make strategic decisions that will lead to the successful implementation of SEL.

### Case Studies of SEL Adoption and Early Implementation

A team from the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois' Institute of Government and Public Affairs was invited to conduct in-depth case studies of the SEL program to supplement the rubric process of monitoring implementation. The case studies were conducted with a subset of 21 schools from the overall pilot cohort from fall 2008 through summer 2010. Schools were selected based on geographical representation, percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch, ethnic and racial diversity, academic status, and levels of experience with SEL programming. Case study methods included structured interviews with coaches, focus groups of SEL team members, review of original proposals, training materials, and online surveys of school staff. This section provides a brief summary of these two years of case study results.

In general, the case study revealed that Illinois schools began adopting the SEL benchmarks from various starting points

and progressed at various rates but continue to press ahead toward full implementation. The process of implementation varied across schools, with many adopting evidence-based curriculum, some creating their own SEL program, others incorporating school-wide practices and some making organizational changes. Most school staffs acknowledge they have a long way to go before full SEL implementation, and that the three years of the SEL project has only laid the groundwork. Also, the realities of working with schools are exemplified by the fact that several SEL schools withdrew, one closed, one consolidated, several principals retired or left and numerous other challenges. These dynamics reflect a complex array of contextual, leadership, staff and resource factors that greatly influence the adoption of an innovative program like SEL.

### Perceptions of Professional Development and Coaching

As discussed above, the regional system and pilot funding offered schools access to a range of professional development and coaching opportunities. The case study found that typical experiences with such opportunities were positive. One participant said: *"We cannot say enough about CASEL, the tools, the trainings, we can call them anytime, we have a great relationship with them."* Another participant acknowledged: *"They have held our hand every step of the way."*

Comments about monthly meetings with external coaches were also positive. Overall, the school staff and administrators rated the coaching highly favorable. Sixty-eight percent of the school staff participating in SEL teams reported the quality of coaching was good or excellent, and satisfaction with the coach was highly correlated with the amount of contact they had with their coach. Comments regarding the coaches acknowledged: *"She (coach) is very supportive, and keeps us focused on what we need to do, gave us a feeling*

*of ownership by letting us make decisions."* Participants in the case study did offer some suggestions for improving professional development and coaching, including better matching of the training and technical assistance offered with the school's level of readiness for implementing SEL and ensuring coaches have a background understanding of their assigned schools.

### Perceptions from SEL Team Members

Each school's SEL team was comprised of staff critical to adopting SEL practices. This included administrators, teachers, school counselors, and school support staff. Efforts were also made, with varying levels of success, to engage parents and community members. Focus groups and survey results show that SEL team members were well aware of SEL standards, highly supportive of SEL, and believed they had strong support from school administrators.

Almost all SEL team members saw SEL as a critical component of a child's education; however, two major themes emerged as to why SEL was important. The first theme was the belief that addressing SEL at school would address problems related to poverty, family dysfunction, and student behavior. The second theme, reported by a smaller number of schools, was that SEL is essential for preparing and developing a 21st Century work force and leadership skills. In fact, one elementary school believed that every student should have "at least one leadership experience" before leaving their school. Most school administrators reported both in surveys and focus groups they were strongly committed to SEL, believing that it could improve academics, behaviors, and school climate.
A major challenge was engaging parents and community even though it was viewed as a high priority for SEL. ICMHP has already responded to this finding by identifying parent involvement as a key area that schools needed additional support and

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hiring eight SEL family advocates to work on engaging parents and families.

### Perceptions from the Broader School Community

Based on first-year case study results, it was clear that SEL teams viewed the SEL programs at their schools very positively. In the second year of the case study, CPRD conducted a survey of all school staff (including administrators, teachers and others) to understand the factors that may influence SEL adoption. The survey was based on a diffusion of innovation model and sought to understand the degree to which SEL programs and practices were being shared, understood and embraced by other school staff members (beyond SEL team members).

Over the course of the three years of the projects, each school and SEL team was involved in a variety of activities to adopt and implement SEL programs and practices. An analysis of school staff who served on the SEL team compared to non-SEL staff members reported a deeper knowledge of SEL activities and commitment to SEL. Table 3 shows that SEL team members had greater awareness of the written plan, changes being made to school policy, the adoption of specific SEL curriculum and professional development opportunities for SEL.

A second analysis using the staff surveys, examined the relationships between six key adoption factors associated with diffusion of innovations in the research literature: 1) supportive school environment, 2) teacher buy-in, 3) readiness for implementation, 4) teacher capacity to implement SEL, 5) perceived benefits of SEL, and 6) school and community knowledge of SEL.

The results show that elementary school staff report significantly higher scores on the adoption characteristics compared to high school and a mix of differences between the elementary, middle grades and high school (see Table 4). The challenges and pattern of differences among school types was evident to the evaluation team as part of the qualitative work as well.

Table 3
**Staff Reports of Characteristics of SEL, by Level of Involvement in SEL**

| | | % of Respondents Who Identify Characteristic | |
| | | Level of Involvement in SEL | |
| **Characteristics of SEL** | **Overall (n=592)** | **High Involvement (n=102)** | **Low Involvement (n=157)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| We have a written plan for SEL implementation at our school. | 73% | 93% | 59% |
| Changes to our school procedures and/or policies have been made as part of our SEL implementation efforts. | 59% | 74% | 45% |
| Our SEL program and practices were developed by our school. | 52% | 66% | 45% |
| A particular SEL curriculum has been adopted by our school. | 62% | 80% | 35% |
| We are implementing a student assistance or guidance program to address SEL at our school. | 28% | 35% | 23% |
| Teacher professional development is a component of our SEL efforts. | 60% | 80% | 46% |

Source: Center for Prevention Research and Development, IGPA

## SEL Outcomes

Pilot schools in the case study were implementing SEL programs and practices in years two and three of their grant, which likely offers too little time for most schools to know how SEL influenced school, staff and student outcomes. Even so, school staff talked about the benefits of SEL to themselves and their own work. For example, staff found that SEL provided them with a common language to address student issues. One team member reflected: *"We use the SEL framework and language in school for everything we do."*

Teachers and administrators also described changes in student attitudes and behaviors captured by these statements: "S*tudents are calmer about things. They talk things out instead of fighting them out; and it has molded … our school environment to be positive and welcoming."* Although the evaluation has yet to examine the student academic or behavioral changes, one staff member reported; *"behavior referrals steadily declined since the start of SEL, and Office Discipline Referrals declined from over 100 to about 25 across the same time period."*

A final comparison was made using the six SEL adoption characteristics to learn whether a school made their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), which measures a school's achievement of state standards under the No Child Left Behind law (see Table 5). The results show schools making AYP were sig-

nificantly higher on five of the six adoption characteristics compared to schools that did not make AYP, with the exception of teacher buy in. Although these differences are subject to the limitations of the study, these findings suggest that schools making AYP may have a more knowledge, greater support, readiness and commitment to SEL.

### Summary

The two-year case study results indicate that schools participating in the SEL project were becoming increasingly aware of SEL and its importance to student success, and had begun adopting SEL programs and practices at their school. The training and technical assistance provided through the pilot project increased educators' understanding of the link between SEL and

academic success, increased their knowledge and use of best-practice resources for teaching and building social emotional skills, and contributed to teacher reports of improved work and school climate. Schools participating in the SEL project were at various levels of understanding and implementing SEL, which requires more developmentally appropriate, and targeted training and technical assistance. Without question, the greatest challenge is related to implementing SEL in high-school settings given the complexity and priorities at this level. Administrative and staff turnover, fiscal stress, and federal and state mandates also continue to make it difficult for schools to find a place for SEL, particularly those schools that are not making AYP. Making the connection between SEL and academic outcomes for schools and communities, and supporting teachers and staff to help integrate SEL into the school curriculum and climate is imperative for sustaining efforts in the current schools and continued expansion to every Illinois school.

### The Next Stage of SEL in Illinois

Since Illinois led the way, other states have begun to establish SEL standards, including pre-K as well as K-12 standards. Looking to innovations in other states may be useful as Illinois moves forward and a "state scan" being conducted by CASEL may be instructive. This is especially true in early childhood, where other states have made considerable progress; Illinois remains in front of other states in terms of standards for K-12. CASEL's state scan is being funded by the Buena Vista Foundation and the NoVo Foundation and entails a review of the pre-kindergarten and K-12 learning standards of all 50 states to determine where and how SEL is being addressed.[28] Reviews of learning standards and interviews with key state contacts (conducted as part of the CASEL state scan) have revealed wide variability among states in learning standards that support social and emotional learning. Pre-K learning standards (from birth to 4) appear much more thorough in their coverage of SEL competencies than K-12 standards; many states (including Illinois) currently have standards that refer specifically to social and emotional development for infants and toddlers, and most states (including Illinois) have such standards for preschool. Some states also provide guidelines for early childhood caregivers about

### Links to examples of state innovations in SEL

**Kansas communication standards**
http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3511#comStd

**Washington communication standards**
http://www.k12.wa.us/CurriculumInstruct/communications/Standards/default.aspx

**Tennessee service learning**
http://www.tn.gov/education/ci/service/index.shtml

**Pennsylvania draft interpersonal skills learning standards**
http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_school_climate_standards/18977/pennsylvania_interpersonal_skills_standards_(draft)/682169

**Oklahoma school climate standards**
http://sde.state.ok.us/curriculum/Essential/pdf/Rubric4.pdf

**Pennsylvania draft school climate standards**
http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania_school_climate_standards/18977/pennsylvania_school_climate_standards_%28draft%29/682166

how to support social and emotional development, as well as suggestions for how caregivers can monitor progress toward standards in young children. A small number of states (e.g., Idaho and Pennsylvania) are also beginning to develop specific SEL standards for kindergarten and early elementary grades as part of a process designed to align preschool, kindergarten, and early elementary education.

In contrast, Illinois remains the only state that provides clear, comprehensive free-standing SEL standards for K-12 education, although a few other states have or are developing free-standing standards that address specific dimensions of SEL, such as communication, interpersonal skills, service learning, and school climate (see box). In K-12 education one often finds that SEL content is integrated into standards for other learning areas, including Health Education, Social Studies, and Language Arts. For example, 38 states have now agreed to adopt the Common Core Standards for Language Arts, which include SEL content on speaking and listening skills.

*Since Illinois led the way, other states have begun to establish SEL standards, including pre-K as well as K-12 standards.*

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*Illinois was the first state to establish social and emotional learning standards and the state has invested in a professional development project and pilot program to implement these standards.*

SEL standards in most states are not assessed, yet efforts to collect outcome data will likely be important to continued public and legislative support for SEL in Illinois, as well as in other states, and schools are encouraged to collect data on student outcomes to determine the impact of their SEL implementation efforts. Such data are important to teachers and administrators implementing SEL programs because they help identify areas of students' development that might benefit from SEL, and because they provide evidence about the effectiveness of efforts to address these areas. Such data collection and analyses can thus be an incentive, and can become instrumental in demonstrating to key stakeholders that it is important to continue to implement and sustain SEL because of its positive effect on students.

### Summary and Conclusions

Illinois was the first state to establish social and emotional learning standards and the state has invested in a professional development project and pilot program to implement these standards. Systematic

monitoring and case studies of the pilot schools suggest that administrators and teachers recognize the importance of SEL. Illinois has made substantial progress toward putting the standards into practice. The experience in Illinois has also identified many of the challenges involved. Because of its success in developing and implementing pre-K-12 SEL standards, Illinois has become an example to other states in the country. A key challenge that lies ahead involves scaling up to promote quality programming to implement the Illinois SEL standards in all 870 school districts and 4,000 schools. Possible future priorities to help Illinois achieve this vision include:

- Conducting a statewide survey of school districts to determine the status of their current SEL programming efforts and their needs to support continuous

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*Because of its success in developing and implementing pre-K-12 SEL standards, Illinois has become an example to other states in the country.*

improvement of programming.
- Developing strategic communications and support mechanisms to share the latest advances in SEL research, practice, and policy with educators, policymakers, and the public.
- Developing and broadly implementing training approaches for district and school personnel to implement quality school-wide SEL programming.
- Establishing model assessment systems and student report cards to monitor the impact of SEL programming on student outcomes and inform planning to improve district and school programming.
- Working with Illinois Colleges of

Education and other educator preparation groups to provide quality pre-service SEL implementation and assessment training for administrators, teachers, and student support personnel.