



The CASEL Forum

Educating All Children for Social, Emotional, and Academic Excellence: From Knowledge to Action

On Monday, Dec. 10, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) hosted 75 leaders in education and related fields for a day-long forum in New York City to raise awareness about social and emotional learning (SEL), introduce important scientific findings related to SEL, and help cultivate a broader movement to implement SEL nationwide.

CASEL is an international leader in defining, establishing, and expanding the field of social and emotional learning (SEL). Founded in 1994 by a group that included Daniel Goleman, the best-selling author of *Emotional Intelligence*, and educator-philanthropist Eileen Rockefeller Growald, CASEL has worked systematically over the years to establish the field of SEL and enlist educators throughout the U.S. and abroad to expand the practice of school-based SEL programming.

SEL helps children as well as adults develop the fundamental social and emotional skills for life effectiveness. In SEL programming, schools, families, and communities partner to teach students how to build positive relationships, solve problems, exercise self-control, and behave ethically. Students learn a range of skills that include recognizing and managing emotions, developing caring and concern for others, communicating effectively, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively. Well-designed SEL programming teaches these skills as part of the standard curriculum, often combining them with instruction in traditional academic areas like reading and social studies. In addition, it reinforces the skills through a schoolwide emphasis on a positive, caring climate with high expectations for all students.

The occasion for the December 2007 Forum was the conclusion of the latest phase of a multi-year research project. This research establishes clear linkages between SEL programming and a variety of desirable outcomes for young people, including positive behaviors in and out of school and quantifiable academic success. At a time when today's schools are experiencing tremendous pressure to focus on students' academic achievement, SEL programming, according to the CASEL research, is

clearly associated with improved academic performance in addition to numerous other benefits.

The research, supported by the W.T. Grant Foundation, was jointly conducted by Joseph A. Durlak, Professor of Psychology at Loyola University Chicago, and CASEL President Roger P. Weissberg, Professor of Psychology and Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. It consisted of a meta-analysis of more than 700 reports and evaluations of existing SEL programs. The CASEL Forum showcased preliminary findings from the meta-analysis, focusing on 207 school-based studies that met exacting criteria for scientific validity.

Throughout the day, activities included keynote presentations, viewing of a video on SEL produced by the George Lucas Education Foundation, and discussions in small groups and among participants about strategic activities to advance SEL research, practice, public policy, communications, and building the field. The Forum ended with participants making commitments about ways they will work to further these efforts.

This report summarizes key ideas from the CASEL Forum. Readers who want to learn more about the Forum presentations and participants are encouraged to visit CASEL's website (www.CASEL.org—click on "News and Events").



(From left) Eileen Rockefeller Growald, George Lucas and Daniel Goleman.

Forum Overview

The Forum had two major components: a morning “Knowledge” segment that explained SEL and shared news from the scientific front on SEL impacts on students, and an afternoon “Action” segment that defined the strategic next steps required to make SEL more broadly known and practiced in schools for maximum benefit to children. The Forum was moderated by Timothy P. Shriver, Chair of CASEL’s Board of Directors, the CEO of Special Olympics, and one of CASEL’s founders.

Morning Sessions: What We Know About SEL

Welcome and Setting the Stage

The opening session introduced the Forum’s major conveners: **Daniel Goleman, Eileen Rockefeller Growald, and Mark Greenberg**, Professor of Psychology at Penn State, an acknowledged leader in the area of scientific research on SEL, and a member of CASEL’s Board of Directors. **Linda Lantieri**, also a member of CASEL’s Board and Director of the Inner Resilience Program-Tides Center, set the stage for SEL with a warm-up exercise to give the audience a chance to share interests in SEL and expectations for the day in small groups.

Overview of CASEL and SEL

Timothy Shriver described his own involvement with the field of social and emotional learning and CASEL as a way of illustrating the evolution of the field. In the 1980s, Shriver played an active role in developing and coordinating the district-wide SEL program in the New Haven, Connecticut, public school system, widely recognized as a pioneer in SEL policy and practice. There he began working closely with **Roger P. Weissberg, Daniel Goleman, Eileen Rockefeller Growald**, and many others who are now at the forefront of SEL. He has remained closely involved with CASEL since the organization’s inception.



CASEL President Roger P. Weissberg



Anchorage students engage in a trust exercise. (From “Educating Hearts: A Districtwide Commitment to Teaching How to Care,” www.edutopia.org.)

Video Presentation

Next, participants viewed a video presentation on SEL in the Anchorage, Alaska, school district produced for the Forum by the **George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF)**. Representatives of GLEF, including filmmaker George Lucas, were among the Forum’s participants.

The **Anchorage Public Schools** have included SEL programming throughout the district, K-12, for several years. Anchorage has found that SEL makes a significant difference in students’ attitudes toward school, has reduced problem behaviors, and has increased academic success. In addition, Anchorage has developed its own SEL learning standards and aligned its curriculum with those standards.

Recent Research Findings on School-Based SEL Programming and Student Success

CASEL President **Roger P. Weissberg** explained that CASEL’s focus from the beginning has been on identifying common ideas and practices inherent in a large number of diverse programs that address the social, emotional, and academic development of children and youth. The concept of social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a framework that creates unity and coherence for a wide range of programs that address positive youth development, problem prevention, health promotion, and children’s academic success.

Weissberg presented preliminary findings from CASEL’s **meta-analysis** of 207 such broadly-defined school-based SEL programs reaching nearly 300,000 students in grades K-12. The results are highly encouraging.



SEL programming is associated with significant improvements in students’:

- **Academic performance.** Students earn significantly higher grades and standardized test scores. For example, students at the 50th percentile in standardized achievement tests who receive SEL instruction improve an average 11 percentage points—to the 61st percentile.
- **Social-emotional skills**
- **Attitudes about self and others**
- **Positive social behavior**
- **Conduct problems**
- **Emotional distress**

Weissberg conveyed two other major findings from this study:

- The positive impact of SEL programming is strongest when school-based programs are taught by regular classroom teachers, as opposed to non-teaching staff.
- The quality of SEL program implementation, e.g., fidelity to the original program design and consistency of program delivery, is an important factor in whether a program’s positive impacts are realized.

He concluded that *SEL works*, achieving multiple positive outcomes including improved academic achievement; *it is doable*, in that good results can be obtained from programs run by existing school staff; and *it needs support* in the form of effective program implementation and federal and state policies, leadership, and professional development.



Richard Davidson delivers his keynote. (www.edutopia.org.)

The Neuroscience of Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning

The other morning keynote was delivered by **Richard Davidson**, one of the world’s leading experts on neuroscience, Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin, and Director of both the Waisman Center Brain Imaging Laboratory and the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience.

Davidson explained that the **neuroplasticity of the brain** across the life span allows changes in the brain to occur in response to experience. “Everything we now know indicates that training in SEL skills can change the brain,” Davidson said. “Education literally shapes the child’s brain and produces alterations that lay the foundation for all future learning, emotion regulation, and social functioning.”

A key brain area in emotional regulation is the **prefrontal cortex**. Brain images clearly illustrate that “from childhood to adulthood, larger and larger areas of the prefrontal cortex get bigger and bigger. The prefrontal cortex plays an increasingly critical role in the regulation of emotion,” he said. “Our goal in SEL is to foster a more adaptive pattern so that children are better able to regulate their emotions through adaptive responses.”

Davidson and his colleagues have been able to show how different emotions, particularly strong negative emotions, can affect the brain’s functioning. Among his research findings:

- High levels of the hormone **cortisol** can damage the brain and body, and people who are good emotion regulators maintain more adaptive levels. “Strategies of stress regulation are good not just for your brain but for your body. People who show strong activation in the prefrontal cortex have lower levels of cortisol at night.”
- Memory is impaired by high levels of anxiety. “If you’re learning skills to calm yourself,” Davidson said, “You’ll show improved emotional control and improved cognition. You’ll do better on tests of working memory, which underlies a lot of academic performance.”

“The brains of our children are constantly being shaped, literally molded by experience, both of a negative and positive sort, wittingly or unwittingly,” Davidson said. “We must take the reins and promote positive brain changes by cultivating healthy social-emotional habits.”

Panel Presentation and Discussion of SEL Policy and Practice in Action

The morning concluded with a panel discussion serving as a bridge between the morning's scientific presentations and the afternoon's action agenda.

Mary Utne O'Brien, CASEL's Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and a Research Professor of Psychology and Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, hosted the session. She presented a snapshot of SEL policies and practices across the world, including Singapore, Spain, the UK, Australia, Canada, and states and districts in the U.S. She also discussed the importance of **state policies related to SEL**. CASEL has worked closely with the State of Illinois in developing state SEL curriculum standards, which are now part of the Illinois education code. "Standards are an important policy vehicle for promoting SEL practice," O'Brien said. "Standards at once clarify what is important for schools to teach and students to know, even as they permit considerable discretion and instructional creativity."

Carol Comeau, Superintendent of the Anchorage, Alaska, public schools, elaborated on **Anchorage's progress with SEL**. It began in the 1990s, she said, with introduction of the SEL curriculum *Resolving Conflict Creatively Program* (RCCP). It continued with the district's commitment to principles from the Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework, which emphasizes focusing on students' positive qualities and strengths to promote positive attitudes and behavior. Soon district leaders began to see SEL as a critical aspect of adapting to the rapidly growing social and ethnic diversity of the community. Eventually this led to the development of Anchorage's SEL standards and benchmarks. "We had some school board members who thought SEL was just about self-esteem," Comeau said. "But we were able to show that by embracing this work, it would and did increase academic achievement."



(From left) Mary Utne O'Brien, Linda Darling-Hammond



Zins Award Presentation. (From left) Maurice J. Elias, Sara Rimm-Kaufman, Charlene R. Ponti, Victoria Blakeney, Norris M. Haynes.

Janice Jackson, Lecturer in Educational Leadership and Organizations at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, recounted her extensive experience as a school district administrator, primarily in Boston and San Diego. SEL is not only doable, she said, **it is essential to a just urban education**. "We need to begin this work before children are having fights on the playground," she said. "We need to be educating children who understand that diplomacy is a better choice than violence, who see power not as something to fear but something to use for the common good." A key to promoting SEL programming in schools, she said, is to support teachers, principals, and others who are in the front lines of education in demanding, stressful times.

Luncheon and SEL Award Presentation

The highlight of the luncheon was CASEL's first annual presentation of the **Joseph E. Zins Awards for Early Career Contributions to SEL Research and Practice**. These awards, one for research and one for field-based practice, honor the late Joseph E. Zins, for many years a key member of the CASEL team and lead author of numerous CASEL publications.

The award winners for 2007 were **Sara Rimm-Kaufman**, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, who has specialized in studies of the *Responsive Classroom* approach to SEL, and **Victoria Blakeney**, Social and Emotional Curriculum Coordinator for the Anchorage, Alaska, school district.

Afternoon Sessions: From Knowledge to Action

The afternoon sessions focused on ways to strengthen the SEL movement. This began with a panel presentation that set the stage for all participants to engage in small work groups focusing on several key themes CASEL has identified as critical to advancing the SEL movement. The panel took the form of a series of informal interviews with the panelists conducted by CASEL co-founder **Daniel Goleman**.

Mark Greenberg addressed the issue of **advancing scientific research on SEL**. In recent years the field has made significant progress; for example, SEL intervention studies using tasks that assess neuro-cognitive development have demonstrated that children involved in SEL programming for just one year improve substantially on such tasks. “They’re able to control their cognitive and emotional responses,” Greenberg said. “As a result, they also become less aggressive and more socially and emotionally competent.”

Greenberg noted the field still faces numerous basic scientific questions. There is a need for more outcome data related specifically to SEL programming—for example, impact data reflecting school-based SEL programming across the K-12 grades. There is also a need for continued meta-analysis and communication pieces to broadly disseminate the scientific information to SEL policy makers and educators. Greenberg stressed the importance of SEL program implementation quality and the field’s need for more study of ways to improve implementation and sustainability. Developing SEL assessment tools is also a major priority for the field.

Next to speak was **Maurice J. Elias**, a long-time CASEL leader and collaborator, Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University, and the author of numerous books and articles on SEL. Speaking on **how to improve SEL practice**, he emphasized that more extensive programming for pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 is especially important. “We can’t assume our children will just pick up these skills in everyday life,” he said. “To make sure kids get these skills, they need to be taught in the schools at every grade level.”

Daniel Goleman pointed out that schools and teachers are under tremendous pressure to raise students’ scores on standardized tests, not to address how well they have learned SEL skills. Elias agreed but added, “There’s a lot of SEL work being done in schools. We need to begin weaving these interrelated efforts together. For example, the state of New Jersey is developing a safe and civil schools initiative with SEL at the core.” He added that

SEL helps to create a common language for interrelated efforts and initiatives. Another key to bringing SEL into the mainstream of education, Elias said, is to make it part of teacher certification.

J. Lawrence Aber, an internationally recognized expert in child development and social policy and Professor of Applied Psychology and Public Policy at New York University, spoke about expanding public policy related to SEL. “One of the things we’ve heard today is that policy exists at multiple levels,” he said. Policy making is inevitably political, he continued. “Is SEL based on religion, morals, and values? Or is it based on science and rational evidence? We have to address both of these.” That, in turn, involves careful consideration of the terminology used in talking about SEL and the basic messages of the discussion.

The fourth panelist, filmmaker and master communicator **George Lucas**, addressed the topic of **strategic communication about SEL**. Goleman began by asking, “What would it take to get the message of SEL to the broadest public?” Lucas replied that the evidence, statistics, and neuroscience highlighted in the morning’s keynote presentations are critically important. “People need to be able to say, ‘We can prove this,’” he said. Another key aspect of successful communication about SEL is to avoid jargon and tell good stories about success. “That kind of storytelling,” he said, “is a basic component of the George Lucas Educational Foundation.”

Goleman then asked what Lucas would recommend as a key message about SEL to parents. “The fact that it helps kids do better on their tests,” he replied. “That’s the biggest point to get parents behind it. Also the science of it, showing that kids can be taught ‘good manners’ and the kind of leadership skills needed in today’s workplace. Parents will support these ideas.”



James Comer (Professor, Yale University School of Medicine) and Anne Veneman (Executive Director, UNICEF)

Small Work Groups and Discussion

The final activity of the day was small-group discussions focused on key themes involved in advancing the SEL movement, followed by report-outs to the whole group. Here are the participants' recommendations for each theme:

Advancing the Science

Presenter: J. David Hawkins

- Conduct more research on the link between SEL and academic achievement; study the integration of SEL content and basic academic subject matter; and do more longitudinal studies of SEL programs in K-12.
- Assess the core components or critical ingredients of effective SEL. That requires identifying the three or five things that will make a difference.
- Include more research controls in studies, comparing the effectiveness of SEL programming relative to other classroom activities and programs.
- Investigate how best to increase educator SEL competencies and skills. This might involve testing different methods of training and technical assistance in a randomized control trial.
- Develop standardized measures of SEL outcomes—a measurement package useful across studies and different SEL interventions.
- Perform more cost-benefit analyses of these kinds of programs.

Informing and Expanding Educational Practice

Presenter: Linda Darling Hammond

- Make schools and teachers aware of the connections between SEL, child development research, and best educational practices.
- Clearly articulate how SEL is supported by specific instructional practices, such as cooperative learning and project-based learning.
- Provide teacher supports for SEL that reflect an understanding of the current educational context, including the enormous pressure on schools to streamline the curriculum and cut back on such “extras” as recess.
- Offer professional development opportunities that support SEL.
- Develop a policy framework for SEL that encompasses accreditation and licensure.
- Sponsor SEL activities for the members of Congress.

Expanding Public Policy

Presenter: Edward Zigler

- Clearly identify friends, allies, and opponents. Team up with natural allies—for example, organizations like Reach Out to Fight Crime and Invest in Children.
- Stress the benefits of SEL in terms of academic achievement.
- Expand the evidentiary base demonstrating the value of SEL. The brain development work has a particular resonance. Assessment is another important area to pursue.
- Build on the current momentum for preschool intervention by doing much more work on the preschool period.
- Build a parent constituency. Incorporate effective parent components into SEL programs.
- Advance policy at the state level.

Communicating Strategically About SEL

Presenter: Daniel Goleman

- Develop a media campaign.
- Be proactive. Seize opportunities as they naturally arise day to day, e.g., in the daily news.
- Establish something like an “Emotional Genius” award to garner media attention.
- Translate key messages into everyday language.
- Use more storytelling, as in the GLEF videos.
- Get the right messages to the right audiences. For parents it might be “SEL provides your child with skills to get a job.” For the business community it might be “This is what you’re looking for—21st Century workplace skills.”

Building Capacity for an SEL Movement

Presenter: Karen Pittman

This group emphasized that the time is ripe for this movement to have a major impact. CASEL has a strong and loyal base of funders and collaborators, and can play a major role in building capacity for the movement. In order to do so, CASEL should forge links with other groups and “camps” with similar goals to advance children’s healthy development, even if they don’t use the SEL language. Such new linkages could also extend the reach of the SEL field’s findings, and even its practices, to new settings and arenas, such as after-school programming, juvenile justice, and the home. Reaching families is essential.

Post-Forum Outcomes and Plans

Thus far, the Forum resulted in several specific outcomes that advance SEL. These include:

1. A front-page story in *Education Week* about the Forum, SEL, and CASEL's meta-analysis findings. The article appeared in the December 17, 2007 issue. It can be downloaded from the CASEL website.
2. A report of CASEL's meta-analysis findings highlighting links between SEL programming and improved student behavior, including academic performance. The meta-analysis has been submitted for publication in a peer-review scientific journal. Upon acceptance, CASEL will broadly disseminate information about the study findings and their implications for educational policy and practice.
3. Conversations and follow-up meetings with the office of Congressman George Miller, one of the Forum participants, to provide information about SEL as the House Education and Labor Committee, which he chairs, moves forward with the No Child Left Behind Act review, revision, and reauthorization process.
4. Interest on the part of several foundations in supporting CASEL's Working Group of national leaders on SEL assessment.
5. Discussions with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (which published CASEL's first book, *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*, in 1997) on ways to collaborate with CASEL. ASCD's March 2008 *Education Update* reported findings from the CASEL meta-analysis.
6. Preparation by the George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF) of a 12-minute DVD that "brings SEL to life." GLEF has also posted video interviews from the Forum event featuring some of the presenters (see below). CASEL has also initiated conversations with GLEF about partnering to create distance learning opportunities for educators.

The many excellent suggestions raised during the Forum's small-group sessions are shaping CASEL's plans to work with several states and countries to create SEL policies and implement evidence-based schoolwide SEL programming on a broad scale.

Web Resources

George Lucas Educational Foundation (www.glef.org): On this site you will find the SEL video shown at the Forum, and other SEL videos; video interviews with Forum participants; video excerpts from Richard Davidson's presentation; and other SEL resources.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.CASEL.org): On this site you will find Forum keynote presentation PowerPoints; the *Education Week* article and other publications related to the CASEL meta-analysis and Forum; Anchorage, Alaska and IL SEL standards and policies; Zins Award information, and a variety of resources for implementing SEL.

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**For more information about CASEL and social
and emotional learning, visit us at:**

www.CASEL.org



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