LEVERAGING SEL TO PROMOTE EQUITY: What Educators Need to Know and Do

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Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded in 1994 to help make social and emotional learning (SEL) an essential part of education, PreK - high school.

CASEL’s work leverages state, district, and school contexts with a worldwide network of collaborators to:

• Advance the science of SEL
• Expand high-quality, evidence-based SEL practice
• Improve state and federal policies
WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)?
SEL is...

The process through which children 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’s Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) is a national collaboration launched in 2011 among CASEL, AIR, and 8 large urban districts aimed at supporting school districts’ capacities to systemically promote SEL for all students.

Research questions:

- What does systemic SEL mean and how is it achieved?
- Is systemic SEL feasible in large urban districts?
- What are the outcomes for students?
District Partnerships

2011
Anchorage, AK
Austin, TX
Cleveland, OH

2012
Chicago, IL
Nashville, TN
Oakland, CA
Sacramento City, CA
Washoe County, NV

2012
DuPage Co. IL
Warren City, OH
Youngstown, OH

2015
Atlanta, GA

2016
El Paso, TX

2017
Baltimore, MD
Boston, MA
Dallas, TX
Denver, CO
Minneapolis, MN
Palm Beach, FL
Tulsa, OK
Created in 2016 as a CDI professional learning community to help districts develop SEL/Equity integrated practices and policies.

- Research and Practitioner Panels
- Webinars
- Cross-District Biannual Conferences
Equity and SEL: Partner District Challenges

- Discipline disparities
- Students feeling unsafe and disconnected from school
- Academic and behavior issues
- Hiring and on-boarding practices were not effective
DISTRICT RESPONSES’ TO SEL/EQUITY CHALLENGES

- District policy to reduce suspensions
- Restorative Practices
- Culturally responsive teaching in SEL
- HR practices and policy changes
- Collaboration across departments
- School/Community Task Force
Next steps: 
CASEL SEL Wheel

HOMES & COMMUNITIES

SCHOOLS

CLASSROOM

SEL CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

SCHOOLWIDE PRACTICES & POLICIES

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

SELF-AWARENESS

SELF-MANAGEMENT

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
BACKGROUND
SEL & EQUITY
Aspen Institute – NCSEAD
Council of Distinguished Scientists Consensus Statement

• Social, emotional and academic development matter

• Social and emotional skills are malleable

• Schools play a central role in SEAD

• Focusing on SEAD is worth it
Essential Questions
Each Community Must Answer

• What do we want our children to become, to know, and to be able to do when they graduate?

• How can the entire community be organized to ensure that all students reach the stated goals?
Impacts and influences of SEL among diverse groups of students

• Demographic shifts

• Youth from various backgrounds are placed at elevated risk for under-realized potential, problem behaviors and constrained long-term life chances

• Disagreement around causes and correctives

• Tendency to employ student skill development-focused SEL programs in low-resourced schools to address “discipline” problems

• Need for more attention to context-focused programs and/or on the reduction of “opportunity” gaps (high-quality instruction, improved student-teacher relations and desirable student outcomes)

• Need for insight into possible variation based on student or school demographics (e.g., classrooms, school and/or district-level racial/gender/income homogeneity or heterogeneity)
Educational equity through transformative SEL

• Educational equity implies that “every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education despite race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income” (CCSSO, 2017)

• In addition to required funding, striving for educational equity challenges us to examine biases and interrupt inequitable practices. We can then create inclusive, multicultural school environments that reveal and cultivate the interests and talents of children, youth, and adults from diverse backgrounds (Nat’l Equity Project).

• Justice-oriented global citizenship as a developmental imperative to address inequities (i.e., education, health, wealth and environment) and promote collective wellbeing

• Situated in global history of power, privilege, oppression, resistance, empowerment, and self-determination/liberation that is raced, classed, aged and gendered

• Schools and classrooms as mini-polities

• SEL as a viable lever for justice-oriented civic/sociopolitical development trajectories

• Academic excellence is foundational to realizing this developmental imperative
• Preliminary work on equity elaborations of CASEL core competencies for children and youth

• Anchored in a cultural analysis – prevailing cultural themes/ orientations and implications for in-group/out-group relations

• The roots of transformative SEL
Self-Awareness
(children and youth)

**CASEL**
- Labeling one’s feelings
- Relating feelings and thoughts to behavior
- Accurate self-assessment of strengths and challenges
- Self-efficacy
- Optimism

**Equity Elaborations**
- Examining the importance of various social identities
- Deriving constructive meanings of social identities
- Grounding in and affirming of cultural heritage(s)
Self-management
(children and youth)

CASEL

• Regulating one’s emotions
• Managing stress
• Self-control
• Self-motivation
• Stress management
• Setting and achieving goals

Equity Elaborations

• Coping with acculturative stress
• Coping with discrimination/prejudice
Social awareness (children and youth)

CASEL

• Perspective taking
• Empathy
• Respect for diversity
• Understanding social/ethical norms
• Recognizing family, school and community supports

Equity Elaborations

• Discerning the importance of diversity (situational)
• Understanding the meaning of diversity in contexts (climate)
• Recognizing cultural demands & opportunities
• Collective efficacy
Relationship skills (children and youth)

CASEL

• Building relationships with diverse individuals and groups
• Communicating clearly
• Working cooperatively
• Resolving conflicts
• Seeking help

Equity Elaborations

• Demonstrating cultural competence
• Leveraging cultural fluency
Responsible decision-making
(children and youth)

CASEL
- Identifying problems
- Analyzing situations
- Solving problems
- Evaluating
- Reflecting
- Ethical responsibility

Equity Elaborations
- Considering diversity salience and climate
- Assessing the impact of one’s beliefs and biases
- Pursuing inclusive, mutually beneficial solutions
- Reflecting on the broader ethical consequences of one’s decisions for intragroup, intergroup and institutional relations
Schools as context for SEL and academic excellence through an equity lens

- Academic, social and emotional learning
- Mini-polity or microcosm of larger society
- White, middle-class female teachers
- Students from diverse racial, class, gender and cultural backgrounds
- Re-segregation of schools

- Makes equity an inherent consideration
Gap closing pattern - optimal
• Classroom community building
• Cultural integration
• Promoting racial/ethnic identity development
• Integrating equity content into academic subject areas
• Project-based, experiential and/or participatory approaches
Classroom community building

• A few SEL programs that highlight classroom community-building
  • *Child Development Project*
  • *Responsive Classrooms*
  • *Developmental Designs*

• Practices include: morning meetings; goal setting and social contracts; modeling/practicing routines; empowering teacher language; reflection/feedback on student products; collaborative problem-solving; a balanced discipline strategy

• Key findings:
  • Student social skills
  • Teacher-student relations
  • Reading and math skills
  • Impacts most pronounced for students with low initial academic scores (math)
  • School and civic engagement
Quick Summary

• Positive youth development and stage-environment fit

• Democratic processes (e.g., procedural and interpersonal justice)

• Limited explicit attention to sociopolitical/distributive justice issues
Several reviews point to the positive impacts of SEL skill-focused culturally-grounded prevention programs on the onset and growth of risk behaviors (violence, unsafe sex, substance use) among African American youth.

The research on Latino youth is thinner although some effective programs have been identified.
Culturally relevant education (CRE; Aronson & Laughter, 2016) based on the common features of culturally responsive teaching, and culturally relevant pedagogy:

- connecting student’s cultural assets and references to academic concepts and skills,
- employing curricula that encourages student reflection on their own lives and society,
- supporting student cultural competence by facilitating learning about their own and other cultures, and
- pursuing social justice through critiques of discourses of power.
**Examples of CRE findings**

- **Mathematics:**
  - increased time on task/motivation (math problems)
  - 27/28 Latino middle school students showed increased scores on coursework, quizzes and test scores
  - Increased confidence and grades

- **Science:**
  - increased engagement and motivation
  - Pre/post increase in math and science thinking skills

- **History/social studies:**
  - Gained awareness of power of political movements and effects of racism
  - Positive gains in critical understanding for both students of color and white students
Examples of CRE findings
(Aronson & Laughter, 2016)

- **E/LA**
  - High motivation and creativity
  - Relatively higher test scores, grades, attendance and college enrollment
  - Significant growth on California Standards Test

- **Motivational outcomes**
  - Increased academic motivation
  - Increased content interest
  - Increased confidence in and facility with content discourse and test taking
Quick Summary

- Requires and supports “cultural competence” development for teachers and students

- Limited “evidence” of impacts on social, emotional and academic competence development
Project-based, experiential and participatory learning

- There is some evidence that:
  - Project-based learning (e.g., English & Kitsantas, 2016; Hutchinson, 2016)
  - Experiential learning opportunities, such as service learning (Celio et al., 2011) and
  - Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR; Ozer, 2016)
  - can increase social, civic and academic skills across diverse groups of students

- Being used in our OST diversity pipeline program
Project-based learning (Condliffe et al, 2017)

- Uses design principles that can be implemented in any subject area
  - Driving questions to motivate learning
  - Target significant learning goals (e.g., content standards)
  - Use projects as central instructional approach
  - Dedicate sufficient time to PBL
- Implications for students
  - Promotes construction of knowledge (in-depth inquiry, critical thinking, etc)
  - Cultivates student engagement
  - Uses scaffolds to guide student learning
  - Encourages student choice
  - Supports collaborative learning
PBL and student outcomes

- **Social and emotional competencies**
  - Increased attendance
  - Positive attitudes toward diverse classmates

- **Academic**
  - Positive attitudes toward learning
  - Preference for experiential v traditional
  - A reduction in gender gap in science achievement (boys improved more)
  - A reduction in race and SES gap in math
Quick Summary

• Movement away from adult-led (e.g., researcher, teacher, youth worker) toward youth-led SEL work

• Most forms of SEL are necessary, but not sufficient to advance an equitable multicultural, multilingual society and global community

• Equity elaborations and transformative SEL reflects an appreciation of the root causes of inequities (structural and internalized oppression) and a pursuit of equity outcomes
LOOKING FORWARD
SEL & EQUITY
**NCSEAD CDS**

**Research for the Next Generation**

- Need for solid constructs and associated measures within a developmental progression
- Understand and promote high-quality training and professional development
- Advance integrated and explicit approaches to cognitive and social-emotional development
- Examine social-emotional effects at both the student and school levels
- Look at factors affecting successful implementation
- Equity and the intersection of social, emotional and academic development
Specific future directions

• Rigorous examination of programs, processes and practices (e.g., community-building, project-based learning) that highlight equity-elaborated competencies and academic learning as individual or group outcomes
• Teacher/youth worker SEC
• Teacher/youth worker pre- and in-service PD
• In school, family and OST congruence/disjunctures (Rubin, 2007; Taft & Gordon, 2013)
• Assessments – process, intervening and outcome
Q&A
THANK YOU!

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