

FOR RELEASE: November 9, 2020



## CASEL Announces 2020 Award Recipients for Excellence in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Research and Practice

CHICAGO, IL – To recognize outstanding achievements in the field of [social and emotional learning](#) (SEL), the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has selected two recipients of the Mary Utne O'Brien Awards for Excellence in Expanding the Evidence-Based Practice of SEL and two recipients of the Joseph E. Zins Awards for Social and Emotional Learning Action Research. To celebrate innovation and excellence in SEL and to support strong leadership across the growing field, CASEL is honoring **Byron Sanders** (Big Thought) and **Dr. Sheldon Berman** (Andover Public Schools) for the 2020 Utne O'Brien Awards for Practice, as well as **Laura Hamilton Ph.D** (ETS) and **Clark McKown, Ph.D** (xSEL Labs) for the 2020 Zins Awards for Research.

“Joe Zins and Mary Utne O'Brien helped to establish the field of SEL and did groundbreaking, collaborative work to advance SEL research, practice, and policy. These awards were named in their honor to recognize today's leaders who carry on the legacy of impactful action research and SEL implementation to positively change the lives of students across the world,” said CASEL Co-Founder and Chief Knowledge Officer, Dr. Roger P. Weissberg. “This year's recipients are all leading innovative, inspirational work that helps support the social and emotional development of all young people.”

Learn more about the awards: <https://casel.org/awards/>

### **Mary Utne O'Brien Awards for Excellence in Expanding the Evidence-Based Practice of SEL**

This award honors leadership related to effective implementation of SEL, presented to district or school leaders who have provided the vision, inspiration, and practical strategies for developing the infrastructure and support for high-quality SEL at the district or school level. Learn more about this year's recipients:



**Dr. Sheldon H. Berman** is currently the superintendent of the [Andover Public Schools](#) in Massachusetts. Over a 28-year career as a superintendent, he implemented systemic SEL programs in each of the four districts he has led. Dr. Berman has also provided national leadership in multiple organizations that champion SEL and authored numerous articles and books on SEL topics. He was a member of the Council of Distinguished Educators of the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development and served as the primary author of the Commission's report on SEAD practice.

"It is truly an honor to be one of this year's recipients of the Mary Utne O'Brien Award for Excellence," notes Dr. Berman. "As a superintendent for 28 years, I've witnessed the growing need for our students to feel known, cared about and valued and for our students to experience a sense of community in their classrooms and schools. Our students' social and emotional wellbeing is integral to their future success. The collaboration of our educators to create identity safe and culturally responsive classrooms benefits our entire society."



**Byron Sanders** is the President and CEO of [Big Thought](#), as well as a committed advocate for education, economic development, and creating equitable communities throughout Dallas, Texas. Sanders explores innovative ways to narrow the opportunity gap for children by connecting people and organizations to prepare young people in under-resourced communities for tomorrow's creative economy through quality in-school, after-school and community-partnership experiences.

"Social and emotional learning is power. Every child is born with innate greatness – the capacity to live their truest, most authentic life. Social-emotional skills open the door for youth to first recognize that greatness within themselves, then live with, work with, love with their community. In a very real sense, I believe our ability to bring social and emotional learning to life is the foundation to manifesting a just, equitable, and thriving world," said Sanders.

On [November 17](#), CASEL will host a free webinar with the two recipients on their areas of focus: adult SEL, including how teachers can build capacity and administrators can support, and aligning SEL across the school day and afterschool, including trauma-to-healing practices.

## **[Joseph E. Zins Awards for Social and Emotional Learning Action Research](#)**

This award honors research in the field of SEL, presented to research leaders who have advanced SEL in schools and school districts in important and meaningful ways. Learn more about this year's recipients:



**Laura Hamilton Ph.D.** is General Manager of Research Centers at [ETS](#), overseeing research centers that focus on a number of cross-cutting domains to help inform decision-making and advance the science and practice of assessment and learning. Hamilton’s own research has focused on producing evidence-based guidance to inform K-12 education policy and practice, particularly in the areas of social, emotional, and civic learning. Hamilton previously served as senior behavioral scientist and distinguished chair in learning and assessment at RAND.

“The opportunities I’ve had to collaborate with CASEL have significantly influenced my work and have been an important source of professional learning, so I’m truly honored to receive this award. I’m also grateful to the many other scholars and practitioners with whom I’ve had the privilege of collaborating. All of them made my work better, and I look forward to continued collaborations toward the shared, urgent goal of ensuring equitable access to high-quality SEL,” said Hamilton.



**Clark McKown, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor of Behavioral Sciences at [Rush University Medical Center](#) (RUMC) and founder and President of [xSEL Labs](#), whose mission is to improve student outcomes by helping educators understand children’s social-emotional strengths and needs. McKown is passionate about creating usable, feasible, and scientifically sound tools that help educators and their students.

“I’m honored to receive the Zins award. I hope this will help shine a light not just on my work, but on the valuable contribution of assessment in supporting consistent and high-quality SEL practices,” said McKown.

On [November 18](#), CASEL will host a second free webinar with the two recipients on their areas of focus: the connection between how teachers are promoting SEL and students’ civic learning and the role of SEL assessment in supporting consistent and high-quality practice.

-----

*CASEL is the nonprofit that founded the field of [SEL](#). Today, it collaborates with leading experts and districts, schools, and states nationwide to drive research, guide practice, and inform policy.*

####