Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

A summary of the scientific literature on social emotional learning (SEL) in schools.



How This Impacts Children's Development

Children with strong social and emotional learning (SEL) skills tend to perform better in school, build healthier relationships with peers and adults, adjust more effectively emotionally, and enjoy better mental

health. Additionally, school-based mentoring and participation in community projects can further enhance these positive outcomes.

READ THE BRIEF: New Approaches to Social and Emotional Learning in Schools, 2012

READ THE BRIEF: Raising Healthy Children: Strengthening Children's Development in Early Childhood and School Settings, 2011

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- Research suggests that schools should integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) skills into daily work with students and daily school routines, both inside and outside of the classroom.
- SEL includes: 1) students' understanding and appropriate expression of emotion, 2) social and interpersonal skills such as interacting positively with adults and peers, and navigating social situations, and 3) the ability to control and direct attention and inhibit inappropriate responses.
- Most SEL programs are offered at the elementary school level, with fewer options for middle and high schools. Preschool programs that emphasize SEL can also support the development of academic skills, while early childhood programs generally place a strong focus on social and emotional development.
- Well-designed and implemented SEL programs are linked to positive, though modest, outcomes in social, emotional, behavioral, and academic areas. Programs focused on strengthening specific skills can help reduce bullying and lower the likelihood of serious behavior problems, especially among high-risk students.
- Research suggests that effective school-based SEL approaches should integrate social, emotional, and academic skills across all school contexts, foster positive relationships to build self-regulation, and influence overall school culture and climate.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

1. Develop and implement state and local standards focused on SEL learning programs that are appropriate to diverse communities and varying age ranges can improve social and emotional development as well as academic performance.

2. Provide training and ongoing support to administrators, teachers, and staff, both in SEL approaches integrated into daily routines and on the implementation of evidence-based programs.
3. Develop valid and reliable measures of SEL practices and skills to articulate clear expectations and benchmarks.
4. Integrate SEL into federal programs like Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, while ensuring adequate and flexible funding to meet the unique needs of schools.
5. Embed SEL into larger education reform efforts and make clear the links with academic achievement (e.g. indicate the connections between specific SEL skills and elements of the Common Core Standards).

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