

New York's 2006 Children's Mental Health Act

Legislative Justification for Social-Emotional Development and Learning

Source: Appendix A of [Guidelines and Resources for Social and Emotional Development and Learning \(SEDL\) in New York State](#). (Draft)

Bill Number: Bill A 9649C S 6672-C

Title: An act to ... incorporate social and emotional development into elementary and secondary school education programs

Justification: The legislature finds and declares that untreated mental health problems in children have serious fiscal consequences for the state because they affect the child's ability to learn and increases their propensity for violence, alcohol and substance abuse and other delinquent behaviors that are extremely costly to treat. One in ten children in this state suffers from a mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment, yet in any given year only twenty percent of these children receive mental health services. Many mental health problems are largely preventable or can be minimized with early intervention services that have been shown to be effective and that reduce the need for more costly interventions.

The legislature further finds that children's social and emotional development are essential underpinnings to their school readiness and academic success. A comprehensive, coordinated children's mental health system can most effectively help children with mental health problems. *From New York State Legislature- Bill Intent A 9649C S 6672-C*

Most discussions about American education have focused on the academic performance of students. Yet an overlooked and perhaps more vital component of education is social and emotional learning (SEL). And, the statistics are dramatic: 15% to 22% of the nation's youth experience social, emotional, and mental health problems requiring treatment; 25% to 30% of American children experience school adjustment problems; and 14% of students 12-18 years of age report having been bullied at school in the past 6 months. A child who comes to school anxious, afraid, or alienated is a child whose ability to learn will be significantly diminished.

Thus, there is growing evidence that suggests that a key component in meeting educational goals for children and youth, academic as well as social, and helping all children reach their highest potential is social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults develop the skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, form positive relationships, and successfully handle the demands of growing up in today's complex society.

Students of social and emotional learning have significantly better attendance records; their classroom behavior is more constructive and less often disruptive; they like school more; and they have better grade point averages. They are also less likely to be suspended or otherwise disciplined. Such proper classroom support can help close racial and economic achievement gaps. It is plainly obvious that such promising tools as SEL should be taught to prospective educators and used in classrooms.

This simple observation - that children who are given clear behavioral standards and social skills, allowing them to feel safe, valued, confident and challenged, will exhibit better school behavior and learn more – is of monumental importance as we attempt to improve our state’s public schools. We should not have to choose between academic achievement and the development of character. Rather we should concentrate on both. The time has come to help restore balance to our state’s classrooms and establish benchmarks for social and civic learning.

The government of Singapore prioritized social and emotional learning in their education system nationwide. Singapore students lead the world in technical brilliance--year after year they score at the top of international science and math competitions. Yet the international business community in Singapore complains that these same students are poor problem solvers, have difficulty coping with unexpected outcomes and setbacks, work poorly in the multi-racial work groups in which much of their work is carried out, and lack creativity. Singapore Ministry of Education scoured the globe for solutions-and decided their students needed SEL.

In New York State, teachers, graduating and certified to teach should be properly tooled to use and apply social and emotional learning. *From New York State Legislature- Bill Summary A01913 - S3895*