

CHAPTER TWO

**Educational  
Leadership for  
Academic,  
Social, and  
Emotional  
Learning**

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**E**ducational leaders have always been forced to address social and behavioral problems that find their way,

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uninvited, into the schools. This is a continuing challenge to which few genuinely effective responses have been developed. In the mid-1990s, we wrote an article for *Education Week* called "No New Wars!" (Shriver & Weissberg, 1996). It opened with a description of the myriad categorical responses to student problems that typified schools at that time. Discrete programs abounded that addressed student drug use, AIDS and pregnancy prevention, poor citizenship, discipline, and other problem behaviors. These problems still abound, and now we can add to the list of "crisis crusades" the programs generated by Columbine and other school shootings, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack and its aftermath, and concerns about the achievement gap and American students' underachievement in general. Educational leaders need to respond to these diverse challenges in a coherent and effective way that recognizes the reality of children and schools, as well as of the society in which we now live.

One approach is the reactive, short-term, categorical "war on the problem" approach that we wrote about in 1996. Given limited time in the curriculum; limited resources to support and sustain planned, ongoing, and coordinated initiatives; limited training supports; and the pressures of testing, it is understandable that educational leaders resort to this response. Nonetheless, it is unlikely to be effective for the following reasons:

- Staff members may work on similar issues without any coordination of expertise or resources.
- Few prevention programs last more than a few years; which is not long enough for improvements to be made.
- There is little developmental or curricular continuity across grade levels and schools.
- Many initiatives are reactive rather than preventive, so that by the time the work is begun, the problem is well out of hand.
- Different programs are frequently aimed at the same children, splitting them into categories of problem behaviors and never addressing the causes underlying the problems in the first place.

Meanwhile, the larger body of students receives little or no attention or help with the challenging developmental issues they

face. As a result, new prevention initiatives are met with ambivalence in most schools. School personnel frequently regard problem prevention campaigns with skepticism and frustration, because most have been introduced as a succession of disjointed fads. Fragmentation breeds breakdown, and the school emerges as a hodgepodge of social initiatives with little direction or effectiveness. At the same time, teachers are held more closely accountable than ever before for student performance on standardized tests. To them, these programs seem at best to be tangential to the academic mission; at worst, teachers see them as taking away precious time needed for academic focus. Unfortunately, they have also left undiminished those problems that spurred on the programs.

## **A NEW STRATEGY IS REQUIRED**

It is time for a different strategy. We need not counter each behavior issue that arises with a new categorical initiative that has no place in the structure of the school. Instead, schools can capitalize on what they are already in the business of doing: promoting the personal and social development and well-being of children en route to imparting academic skills and knowledge. They can proactively build comprehensive programs that help children develop academically, socially, and emotionally. We call these social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. As a result of SEL, children become competent in ways that can help them to learn better and to avoid problem behaviors. Such an approach requires leadership that is committed to creating a coherent vision and that will work to marshal the resources and the staff energy and skills needed to realize it.

We begin our description of the SEL approach by making explicit a few assumptions:

1. Virtually all educators and parents want to graduate young people who are knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and healthy.
2. Social and emotional factors are key contributors to producing positive outcomes, including academic performance that measures up to one's potential; positive relationships

with peers and adults; constructive citizenship; coping with stress, challenges, and developmental tasks; and making positive decisions across academic, social, and health domains. They are also key factors in preventing problem outcomes such as drug use, unwanted pregnancy, delinquency, bullying, violence, dropout, truancy, and underachievement.

3. Failure to live up to the potential for positive behavior, as well as rates of problem behaviors, are higher in most schools and communities than we would like.
4. Lack of motivation for achievement; lack of commitment to schooling, family and community; and engagement in problem behaviors co-occur.
5. Many of these issues could be addressed in the context of the same interventions.
6. Most schools are trying to educate knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and healthy students, but all schools could benefit from information and support about the latest advances in science and practice.

### **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: A PROACTIVE ALTERNATIVE**

Comprehensive SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges from supportive and challenging relationships and that many different kinds of problem behaviors are caused by the same risk factors. Developing and bolstering student strengths and preventing problems such as violence; drug abuse, or dropping out are most effective when multiyear, coordinated efforts develop children's social and emotional abilities through engaging classroom instruction, prosocial learning activities outside the classroom, and broad parent and community participation in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Comprehensive programs begin at an early age and continue in a developmentally appropriate sequence through high school. In addition, recent research shows that systematically building students' key SEL skills results in increased academic success as well.

Uncoordinated programming assumes that the fix can and should be simple or quick. Such programming ignores the fact that problems such as poor achievement, youth drug use, violence, bullying, sexual promiscuity, and alienation are closely interrelated, complex, and develop over time within the broader context of the school, family, and community. When students fail or an unexpected outbreak of negative behavior among students occurs, the first question the public often asks is, "Who is to blame?" Typically, the next step is to adopt programs to "target" the problem or the offending children. Rarely, however, do the school, the parents, and the community come together to ask, "How can we provide a positive and supportive environment for our young people, from grades preK–12, which will be a lasting part of education in our community? How can we make events like these much less likely to occur in the future?"

### **What Exactly Is Social and Emotional Learning?**

Daniel Goleman (1998) described the five basic categories of emotional and social skills or competencies that SEL programming works to impart:

- *Self-Awareness*: Knowing what we are feeling in the moment, and using those preferences to guide our decision making; having a realistic assessment of our own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
- *Self-Regulation*: Handling our emotions so that they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand; being conscientious and delaying gratification to pursue goals; recovering well from emotional distress.
- *Motivation*: Using our deepest preferences to move and guide us toward our goals, to help us take initiative and strive to improve, and to persevere in the face of setbacks and frustrations.
- *Empathy*: Sensing what people are feeling, being able to take their perspective, and cultivating rapport and attunement with a broad diversity of people.
- *Social Skills*: Handling emotions in relationships well and accurately reading social situations and networks; interacting smoothly; using these skills to persuade and lead, to negotiate and settle disputes, for cooperation and teamwork.

Research clearly demonstrates that these skills can be learned. SEL provides systematic classroom instruction that enhances children's capacities to recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish prosocial goals and solve problems, and use a variety of interpersonal skills to effectively and ethically handle developmentally relevant tasks. The result is greater success in school and life (cf. Hawkins, 1997; Zins et al., in press). SEL, then, is the process of teaching and developing these skills and competencies through classroom-based instruction, role-play, modeling, and reinforcement throughout the school day. Today there are numerous nationally available, evidence-based SEL programs, and in addition to social and emotional skills enhancement, many also include content focuses, including alcohol, tobacco, and other drug prevention; violence prevention; and sexuality, health, and character education. Some SEL programs also have specific components to foster safe, caring, and supportive learning environments in classrooms and throughout the school (in the lunchroom, on the playground, etc.). Such environments have been shown to build strong student attachment to school and motivation to learn—actions strongly associated with academic success. Another consequence is more collegial and respectful relationships among school staff members and a greater commitment to professionalism and excellence.

The SEL approach realistically addresses the needs of students at their psychosocial roots. Underachievement and harmful behaviors develop in part from a complex web of familial, economic, and cultural circumstances. These conditions are part of the fabric of life and are difficult to attack. Yet strategies that help children develop the resilience to cope adaptively with modern-day stresses can be effective, and it is there that schools need to focus their efforts.

Many educators want to provide systematic instruction that enhances SEL but don't know how to begin. Others are working to carry out SEL in limited ways but need clear information on the best evidence-based programs, how to implement them, how to combine them, and how to lead effectively the charge to sustain them, including generating stable sources of financial support. In 1994, an organization was formed to address these needs—the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The

remainder of this chapter describes CASEL's work and the resources now available from CASEL to assist educational leaders.

## **SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS WHO WANT TO IMPLEMENT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

In conducting research for his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (1995), *New York Times* science writer Daniel Goleman became aware of the fledgling SEL movement—a new and growing cross-disciplinary field that addressed the development of children's emotional awareness, their social problem-solving skills, and their avoidance of risky health behaviors. Goleman joined forces with a group of scientists, educators, and philanthropists to establish an organization that would be devoted to promoting SEL in all schools, from preschool through high school. Thus, CASEL was established. CASEL includes and collaborates with an international network of leading researchers and practitioners in the fields of SEL, prevention, positive youth development, service learning, character education, and education reform. Its mission is to foster children's success in school and life by establishing scientifically based SEL as an essential part of education from preschool through high school. To accomplish this mission, CASEL has been guided by six goals:

- Advance the science of SEL
- Translate scientific knowledge into effective school practices
- Promote SEL as a foundation for academic learning
- Disseminate information about evidence-based SEL educational strategies
- Enhance the professional preparation of educators so they have the tools to implement high-quality SEL instruction
- Network and collaborate with educators, scientists, policymakers, and interested citizens to promote and increase the coordination of SEL efforts

CASEL began by providing a conceptual and defining framework for the field of SEL with its 1997 book, *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and distributed to more than 100,000 educators (Elias et al., 1997). CASEL also worked with ASCD to publish a special issue of *Educational Leadership* on SEL (ASCD, 1997). CASEL then turned to developing a strong base of scientific evidence of SEL impacts, with particular attention to social-emotional, academic, health, and behavioral outcomes. Numerous scholarly articles and books were produced (e.g., Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998; Zins, Elias, Greenberg, & Weissberg, 2000).

Building on this scientific foundation, CASEL then shifted its primary emphasis to advancing the practice of SEL. For example, one CASEL project developed preservice and inservice curricula for teachers. Another project was designed to support strong school-family partnerships (producing research-based strategies and materials that help educators enhance communication between families and schools and that promote parent involvement). Other projects focus on program implementation and evaluation (identifying effective strategies for implementation, monitoring, and assessment of SEL practice). But the heart of CASEL's work is now focused on providing educational leaders—the key decision makers in schools and districts—with the tools they need to create effective SEL for their students.

### **Educational Leaders' Guidelines for Effective SEL Programming**

CASEL developed a set of seven "Guidelines for Effective SEL Programming." Distilling research, experiential knowledge of educational leaders around the country about what makes for effective and sustained SEL programming, and federal and other national guidelines (e.g., Elias et al., 1997; Learning First Alliance, 2001; and the U.S. Department of Education's "Principles of Effectiveness"), CASEL articulated these seven guidelines that apply to any well-planned, effective SEL effort and are consistent as well with thinking about broader school reform. Effective schoolwide and districtwide SEL programming has the following characteristics:

1. *Effective SEL Is Grounded in Theory and Evidence.* Effective SEL programming uses approaches that are grounded in theory, so that implementers understand their key components in conceptual as well as operational terms. Effective SEL approaches also have strong empirical evidence of effectiveness based on scientific research.
2. *Effective SEL Is Developmentally and Socioculturally Appropriate Content.* Effective SEL programming is developmentally appropriate, with clearly specified learning objectives for each grade level. It starts before students are pressured to experiment with risky behaviors and continues through adolescence. It is also culturally appropriate, both in the sensitive and respectful manner in which it is implemented and in its content, which addresses cultural sensitivity, respect for others, and applications to culturally complex real-life situations.
3. *Effective SEL Promotes Skills and Core Ethical Values.* Effective SEL programming emphasizes students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and their understanding of information about targeted social and health domains. It also addresses students' attitudes and values about themselves, others, and tasks, and their perceptions of social norms. It does so through both classroom lessons and practice throughout the school day. Too many ineffective programs stress knowledge about specific problems and fail to concentrate on the values and skills necessary to help children engage in positive academic and health behaviors.
4. *Effective SEL Coordinates Positive Youth Development and Problem Prevention Programming.* Effective SEL programming provides a coordinating framework for the otherwise fragmented array of efforts schools and districts undertake to promote the positive development of youth (e.g., through character education, service learning, mentoring, health promotion, etc.) and prevents problem behaviors (e.g., low achievement, substance abuse, bullying, pregnancy and AIDS prevention, delinquency, etc.). It is also critical to coordinate SEL with academic subjects addressed in the curriculum. Thus, SEL simultaneously—and seamlessly—addresses students' social, emotional, ethical, physical, and academic well-being, rather than focusing on one categorical outcome.
5. *Effective SEL Integrates Schoolwide, Family, and Community Partnerships.* Effective SEL programming is coordinated with all

academic instruction, as well as with mental health, health, and student support services. It also actively involves parents, community members, and school staff in ongoing application of SEL from the classroom to everyday life situations through modeling, feedback, and positive reinforcement.

6. *Effective SEL Addresses Critical Implementation Factors: Leadership, Resources, Policy Alignment, and Training.* Effective SEL programming addresses the factors that determine the long-term success or failure of school initiatives, including involved and supportive leaders who model SEL practices, adequate resources, and alignment with other policies that govern school practices. It also incorporates well-planned, high-quality training, professional development, technical support, and supervision.

7. *Effective SEL Includes Ongoing Evaluation and Continuous Improvement.* Effective SEL programming begins with needs assessment data to ensure appropriate fit between student needs and selected responses and then uses evaluative data for staff feedback and continuous improvement, to assess progress toward specified goals, and to provide accountability to stakeholders.

### **“Safe and Sound”: The CASEL Review of SEL Programs**

The guidelines provide educational leaders committed to SEL with a realistic picture of the scope of work involved, but the most pressing question often is, “Where do I start?” Once administrators are convinced of the need for SEL programming in their district, the best place to begin is with an evidence-based program that imparts SEL skills, effectively prevents problems, and helps students realize their best academic performance. To identify and share information about such programs, CASEL received funding from the Department of Education to prepare *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leaders’ Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs*. The guide is designed to help educators make wise choices among the large field of available programs and to help schools identify the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in their current prevention efforts. Consistent with its commitment to promoting more comprehensive, coordinated efforts to prevent

