



COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (CASEL)

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE REPORT CARD **Student Success Depends on More Than Test Scores**

Student success depends a great deal on what we call “the other side of the report card.” Students who are actively engaged in class and come prepared, who cooperate with their peers, who resolve conflicts peacefully, who complete their work, who attend school often and on time, and who demonstrate initiative and leadership are more likely to succeed in school and, ultimately, in life.

If these characteristics are so important, why don’t newspapers rank schools in terms of the social and emotional aspects of education as well as test scores? In life, doesn’t it matter who shows up, who works well with others, who can solve problems, who is prepared for what must be done, who can function as part of a team, and who is an ethical person? Are these attributes any less important than algebra, geometry, chemistry, and spelling?

With the recent focus on the academic side of the report card, we risk losing sight of the other side—the side that reflects how we live with one another, whether we are inclined toward peace or war, and whether we have the skills we need to avoid violence and alcohol and drug abuse. The interpersonal life of schools rests on the character of the people involved and the skills they need to carry out their tasks effectively. The skills of sound character and citizenship have recently been termed emotional intelligence or social and emotion learning. However, their importance was recognized from the earliest days of public education in the writings and advocacy of Horace Mann.

Skills for academic and life success

Research conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory for Student Success (a U.S. Department of Education regional laboratory) is yielding a clearer picture of the skills and competencies students need for academic and life success. Our research

confirms that social and emotional factors affect academic grades and school performance. Furthermore, we have found that enhancing social-emotional competencies, in combination with a positive, supportive classroom and school climate, can improve academic performance.

A number of teachable skills underlie positive child development and academic performance. These skills include knowing and managing emotions, recognizing strengths and areas of need, showing ethical and social responsibility, taking others’ perspectives and sensing their emotions, respecting others and self, appreciating diversity, setting adaptive goals, solving problems, listening and communicating clearly, building relationships, cooperating, negotiating, and managing conflict nonviolently, and seeking and giving help.

Teachers who review this list tell us it captures the skills they know students need to put their knowledge to productive use and to live as responsible citizens in our increasingly complex society. Indeed, think about any of the character traits we want students to have, such as respect or honesty. What are the skills necessary to act respectfully and honestly and to conduct your life with these traits as guiding principles? Almost any answer would include skills from the above list.

Teachers and teacher educators alike should be aware of research and field-tested methods for building these skills in students. (See the box on page 30 for more information.) And the same skills can help parents be more supportive of the work of educators.

School conditions for success

What kinds of schools create the conditions under which students’ cognitive, affective, and interpersonal growth flourishes? Our field studies at CASEL and research by the Character Education Partnership support the view that systematic attention to the other side of the report card enhances and promotes academic learning. Such

attention-or the lack thereof-influences how children conduct themselves in the classroom; how they respond to lectures, cooperative learning groups, tests, projects, and all the personal and interpersonal tasks in school through which learning takes place; and the direction of their ethical and moral compass.

The research also strongly suggests that schools must organize themselves effectively if students are to develop sound character and see themselves and their learning as positive resources for their families, schools, workplaces, and communities. Skills and knowledge must be imparted in a way that reinforces and exemplifies these behaviors if students are to learn to participate actively in the institutions that allow for a free and democratic society.

Schools of social, emotional, character, and academic excellence generally share five main characteristics:

1. A school climate that articulates specific themes, character elements, or values, such as respect, responsibility, fairness, and honesty;
2. Explicit instruction and practice in social-emotional learning skills.
3. Developmentally appropriate instruction in ways to promote health and prevent problems.
4. Services and systems that enhance students' coping skills and provide social support for handling transitions, crises, and conflicts.
5. Widespread, systematic opportunities for positive, contributory service.

These schools send messages about character, about how students should conduct themselves as learners, about the respectful ways staff members should conduct themselves as educators, and about how staff and parents should conduct themselves as supporters of learning.

Many such schools have incorporated social-emotional learning or character education into their overall mission statements or school board policies. They have ongoing, coordinated, research-based programs to teach skills for social and emotional learning and to infuse character into various aspects of the school routine and environment. These schools also devote time to preventing problems such as bullying and other forms of violence; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; and pregnancy.

The most forward-looking of these schools organize student support and guidance services that anticipate situations rather than merely react to them. They provide assistance for children as they and their families face life crises and challenges, rather than wait until academic or behavioral problems are obvious. These schools also

teach all students conflict resolution skills, since all of them will experience many interpersonal conflicts in school and the community. Finally, these schools put a strong emphasis on high-quality service-learning experiences, certainly at the high school level, but also, in many cases, in earlier grades.

Implications for school boards

These research findings have clear implications for those concerned with educational policy and school governance. For those who believe, as we do, that excellence in education can and must include both sides of the report card, here is what research shows we must ask of our schools-and the implications of those findings:

- ❖ *Sound classroom structure and function are based on a foundation of caring relationships.* Schools must be organized to provide each student with a caring connection, ideally to another adult but at the very least to a peer mentor. Students must feel welcome in their schools and know that their presence matters to educators at least as much as to peers. This is why bullying and peer harassment are so insidious. They raise questions in children's minds about how much adults care about their safety. Those who are not victims may breathe a sign of relief, but they don't feel entirely safe—their turn could be next.
- ❖ *Students function better and learn more effectively when they are encouraged to have clear, positive goals and values, to manage their emotions and make responsible decisions, and to set goals for their own learning while pursuing the academic goals that must be reached to function well in our society.* Education must be explicitly goal oriented. Students need to know why they are in school and what they are working to accomplish. They need to define goals for learning so they will internalize what they learn and not simply forget it. (Such goals are especially important in the areas of health, character education, and the prevention of violence, pregnancy, and drug abuse.)
- ❖ *Students behave more responsibly and respectfully when given opportunities for moral action and community service.* From the earliest grades, students must have ways to contribute to their classrooms, schools, communities, municipalities, and the larger world. This starts with putting away the toys in kindergarten as a service to classmates and extends to such efforts as interning with legislators, working with model United Nations programs, and working on behalf of the poor and homeless.

- ❖ *A challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners motivates and helps them succeed.* Educators must aim as high as possible for each student and convey their belief in that student's potential. The goals of education must be to inspire students and extend their boundaries, rather than discourage them through negative evaluation. A realistic culture of "you can" and "let's find ways to achieve success" must predominate over a culture of "you can't."
- ❖ *The school staff must be a caring, moral community of learners and must model as well as teach caring and moral behavior.* Educators cannot expect more from children and teens than they do from themselves. Administrators are responsible for seeing that this is the case and cannot relegate it to secondary status when faced with competing demands.
- ❖ *The opportunities for a child to achieve moral probity and to reach social, emotional, and academic goals are enhanced when the school, parents, and community collaborate.* Schools must make ongoing efforts to reach parents, especially those who are hardest to reach. Many immigrant parents, single parents, and parents who have limited academic skills are unwilling, unable, or just plain afraid to interact with the school. The most effective schools have reached these parents through, for example, meetings in churches and other faith-based facilities, multilingual cable television programs and parenting materials, and meetings that include family dinner and child care. The message to parents is that perhaps the most important things they can do are to read to their children, become involved in their learning, provide guidance and supervision, and create a climate in which kids come to school every day emotionally, physically, and nutritionally ready to learn.
- ❖ *The concerns of students with special needs must be fully integrated into the mainstream functioning of the school as much as possible.* School and special services administrators must work cooperatively to ensure that character education, health, and drug- and violence-prevention programs are delivered to special education students as well as to their peers. Those who need the messages most must get the messages most clearly and frequently.

A new standard

Students' success in school and their preparation for active engagement in a complex, participatory democracy

depend greatly on the other side of the report card. We must organize our schools so that they promote both academic and social-emotional excellence. Indeed, the important message of recent research is that enhancing children's social, emotional, ethical, and academic development is one inseparable goal, rather than a set of competing priorities. This goal defines the educational standards for the 21st century.

This perspective poses challenges for those who are responsible for school policy and governance. The following steps can help a school district "go public" with this set of concerns:

- ❖ Introduce evidence-based instructional programs that promote students' social and emotional development.
- ❖ Communicate the importance of this instruction to students and parents.
- ❖ Outline clearly what social and emotional skills and positive character attributes are priorities, and assess progress being made in those areas.
- ❖ Modify items on the other side of the report card to carefully reflect these areas and ensure that they are rated seriously and carefully by teachers and combined with other indicators as deemed necessary.
- ❖ Summarize these data to look systematically at how well students and schools overall, are doing in these areas, and share the results with parents and the community.
- ❖ If educational leaders and policy makers provide students with school experiences that integrate academic, social, and emotional learning, character education, and education for service and citizenship, we will have the best chance in recent memory to truly leave no children behind. ■

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Our report, *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*, reviews 81 exemplary programs for social and emotional learning. It is available online at: www.casel.org or in print from the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) at Temple University by calling: 800.892.5550.

For additional reading:

Elias, M.J., Tobias, S.E., and Friedlnder, B.S. (2000). *Emotionally Intelligent Parenting*. New York: Harmony/Random House.

Elias, M.J., Tobias, S.E., and Friedlnder, B.S. (2002). *Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers: Guiding the Way to Compassionate, Committed, Courageous Adults*. New York: Harmony/Random House.

Elias, M.J., and others (1997). *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Novick, B., Kress, J.S., and Elias, M.J. (2002). *Building Learning Communities with Character: How to Integrate Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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