



What the Experts Are Saying

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*Working in close collaboration with the faculty of education at the University of British Columbia (UBC), CASEL is pleased to announce the publication of a new report titled *To Reach the Students, Teach the Teachers: A National Scan of Teacher Preparation and Social & Emotional Learning* (February 2017). CASEL funded the research for the report, the first-ever scan of teacher preparation related to SEL, as part of a grant from NoVo Foundation. In this interview, we talked with Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, a professor of education at UBC and the report's lead author.*

Can you summarize the methodology of the UBC/CASEL study?

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 examined the teacher certification policies and requirements of the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. I worked with several graduate students at UBC as a team that met weekly. We developed a coding guide for CASEL's five social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies and decided to focus on three key components: (1) SEL for students, (2) the social-emotional competence of teachers, and (3) what we called the learning context—classroom, school, and community environments that promote SEL. We saw all three as foundational and necessary. We also thought it was important to determine the degree to which pre-service teachers learn about such aspects of SEL as promoting their own well-being, social awareness, and self-awareness, and how they make responsible decisions.

In Phase 2 we looked at the degree to which SEL was incorporated into what colleges of education throughout the U.S. are actually doing. There are over 1,400 institutions of higher education in the U.S. that prepare the majority of our nation's teachers. Approximately 200,000 teachers graduate each year from teacher preparation programs. We decided to look at the course descriptions on colleges' websites and to develop a representative sample of the largest programs.

Another strategy was to do interviews with deans of colleges of education who supported the incorporation of SEL into teacher preparation. Those interviews are included in the report.

Why is this study important?

It's important because it has implications for the foundations of becoming a teacher and what kind of teacher you'll be. When I was a student teacher in Illinois, I had an amazing sponsor teacher who showed how you create a caring classroom environment. Pre-service education is where you learn those basic skills—how you see children and how to be a teacher. If we want to scale up SEL, it's essential to look at this part of the process.



What were the key findings?

Our first question was would we even find anything? Would there even be any mention of SEL in the states' requirements? The answer was yes—in some states more than others. Some states mentioned several of the CASEL SEL competencies, and some said little or nothing about them. We didn't find a single state that had all five. The two SEL teacher competencies that were missing in almost every state were self-awareness and self-management. On the one hand, our findings in Phase 1 offered an optimistic picture. But if you're looking at teacher burnout and stress and nothing is required to address the underlying factors, that's a big problem.

Much less emerged about what teachers need to know about students' SEL. Almost 50% of the states required teachers to know something about students' SEL. Responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and self-management were most frequently mentioned. But missing in a lot of states was self-awareness and social awareness. That's really concerning.

Most states had something about creating a positive classroom climate and school-community partnerships.

What did you learn about what's being offered in teacher preparation courses?

We coded almost 4,000 courses for SEL content. Many of the courses included the social-emotional competencies of teachers. No state addressed all five dimensions of teacher SEL. The District of Columbia had the most, four of the five. The majority included decision-making and relationship skills, but there was less emphasis on self-awareness and self-management. Overall, there's a big disconnect between the states' requirements for teacher education and what colleges of education are providing.

What's most concerning is we found so little on how to promote students' SEL. It might be included in some departmental offerings such as courses on adolescent development, but we found almost nothing about how to actually promote SEL in the classroom. If we were to ask how many teachers today in a group of thousands learned about how to implement SEL as part of their pre-service education, you might have one or two who raise their hands.

We did find much more about the learning context, particularly classes on classroom management. But the majority focused on the negative—how to stop misbehavior. Few of them looked at how to promote positive behavior.

What does the study recommend for how to address the what are clearly pressing needs for improved teacher education related to SEL?

I like the idea of beginning with a convening to develop a strategic plan for how we can go about creating change. We need to look at what approaches are working now and devote resources to examining their efficacy and scalability. We need to answer questions such as what programs and/or training approaches are most effective for teachers at different points in their career?



In addition to a convening of thought leaders, we recommend three other strategies in the report: (1) advance SEL in teacher education through state policymaking, (2) advance the science and practice of SEL in teacher education through research, (3) identify and learn from successes.

Colleges of education can be slow to change. We need to think about how to create change and how to nurture the next generation of researchers, scientists, and practitioners. There are places where this is already happening—San Jose State and Rutgers, for example. For the SEL movement to succeed, we need to learn from their successes and develop a lot more of them.

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