



Timothy Shriver was one of the founders of the social and emotional learning field, helping to co-found CASEL more than 20 years ago. He currently serves as CASEL's chairman as well as co-chair of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. He also chairs the Special Olympics and in that capacity he happily serves together with over four million Special Olympics athletes in 170 countries, all working to promote health, education, and a more unified world through the joy of sports.

You were there at the creation of this field 20 years ago. What has changed?

“There have been three major changes. First, there is a whole new appreciation for meeting the developmental needs of *all* children: privileged, disadvantaged, red states and blue states, north-south-east-west, spanning all demographics. When we started, it was more of an equity agenda to address the needs of low-income and minority students.

Second, there is a dramatic change in our understanding of the effectiveness of quality SEL. We've documented reductions in discipline incidents and behavior problems, and increases in academic achievement.

Third, education leaders are hungry for solutions, a new framework to address challenges that goes beyond who pays and who gets punished, which has dominated the recent debate. There's a new thirst for practical educational solutions that get to the heart of teaching and learning, not just pay and punishment.”

How would you characterize the current environment?

“This is most fertile education reform landscape in my lifetime. It's a whole new dynamic with thousands of actors: teachers creating their own curriculum, schools and districts developing new strategies, and states and districts developing new policies.”

What has been the role of the districts in CASEL's Collaborating District Initiative (CDI) in helping to advance these practices and policies?

“They've made an enormous difference. It is one of the most ambitious school reform undertakings in the country. No one takes on Chicago, Austin, Cleveland, Anchorage, Sacramento, Oakland, Nashville, Washoe County, Atlanta, and El Paso. The institutions are just too complex. That's exactly why CASEL took it on, knowing that reforms often fail because of all the complexity. Thanks to the sustained commitment of these districts to do paradigm-shifting work, we're beginning to see [results](#). Is it perfect? No, science is slow-moving. But we are closer to breakthroughs than ever before.”



What are some of those major paradigm shifts?

“The subjects used to be math, science, reading, history. Now the subjects are kids. They’re the actors. Schools used to be places that mainly disseminated information. Now they’re places of inspiration where kids get motivation, connections, bonding drive, and direction. Schools used to be for cognitive development. Now they’re integrating cognitive, social, and emotional development. Learning used to be passive. Now it’s more active.”

Going forward, what do you see as the biggest opportunities?

“Thousands of superintendents, school boards, mayors, and communities are now ready. There’s a tidal wave of demand. Evidence-based programs and strategies that yield results exist. The challenge is whether we can create enough supply of expertise and training to meet the demand.”

Do you see other challenges?

“We need to communicate clearly so we don’t create a backlash, which happens anytime there are big shifts and big progress. And too many policies and programs are still fragmented, funded separately, and not integrated. We need to stop doing what doesn’t work and redirect resources in a more integrated way.”

What is the role of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development in advancing the work?

“As a coalition of leaders in the field, the commission’s role is to develop a consensus point of view among Republicans and Democrats, north and south, east and west, progressive and conservatives so that educators can move forward without fearing they’ll be unfairly attacked by partisans. That means developing consensus among policymakers on the conditions that will support integrated academic, social, and emotional learning and among scholars on priorities such as assessment. And in practice, developing a framework for implementing and scaling evidence-based work.”

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