

## ABSTRACT

Title of Capstone:                   IMPACT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL  
LEARNING ON STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES, AT-RISK YOUTH, AND  
GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

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In this Capstone, the researcher examines the impact of evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs on students with disabilities and those identified as at risk. These populations, often overrepresented in exclusionary discipline, special education, and alternative placements, frequently lack access to consistent and equitable SEL support. The problem of practice addressed is the systemic inconsistency in implementing high-fidelity SEL programs within these settings, which contributes to disparities in academic engagement, emotional regulation, and behavioral outcomes.

A comprehensive literature review analyzing over 60 empirical studies published between 1994 and 2025 was conducted that included quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, and meta-analytic research. Sources were selected based on their alignment with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework and relevance to SEL implementation in both general and special education contexts. Seminal studies by Durlak et al. (2011), Taylor et al.

(2017), and S. M. Jones et al. (2017), along with large-scale reports from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021) and Austin Independent School District (2015), provide foundational insights into the effectiveness of SEL and its implementation challenges.

Findings indicate that SEL, when implemented with fidelity, significantly enhances students' emotional regulation, social competence, and academic performance. Outcomes are most robust when programs are embedded in structured, culturally responsive curricula, supported by ongoing professional development, and reinforced through schoolwide leadership. However, systemic barriers such as inconsistent delivery, inadequate teacher preparation, and limited administrative support continue to hinder effective implementation, particularly in special education and alternative settings. Although SEL demonstrates strong potential to support at-risk and justice-involved youth, gaps in fidelity, infrastructure, and empirical validation underscore the need for targeted investments and long-term research.

In response, Section 3 presents a proposed strategic improvement plan that includes forming SEL leadership teams, conducting needs assessments, adopting inclusive evidence-based curricula, and implementing multi-tiered professional development with ongoing fidelity monitoring. These strategies aim to disrupt exclusionary practices and expand equitable access to SEL for the students who need it most.

*Keywords:* at-risk youth, evidence-based interventions, juvenile justice/detention, social-emotional learning (SEL), students with disabilities, special education, teacher professional development

IMPACT OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES,  
AT-RISK YOUTH, AND GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

by

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# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this Capstone to my loving husband, Enrique; my cherished sisters, Alison and Malvia; my wonderful nephews, Sean and Tyler; and my beloved departed mother, who walked this journey with me in spirit. Your steadfast love, encouragement, and faith in me have brought light to this journey and strength to each step. My faith in God has been my foundation, keeping me focused, grounded, grateful, and humble throughout this process.

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a Capstone is not a walk in the park. It is definitely a marathon, not a sprint, one that began for me five years ago. Nevertheless, undertaking this journey with the love and support of the people in my life made every mile seem lighter, even during the steep climbs. Moreover, throughout this journey, many people have been part of my story, and it is with deep gratitude and scholarly affection that I acknowledge them here.

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## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

To my cohorts and friends, thank you for the encouragement, thoughtful feedback, and steadfast support you provided throughout this process. Together we laughed, sometimes until we cried, and yes, there may have been a few actual tears along the way. We made it, and that was never truly in doubt, although there were days we might have questioned it.

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# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	x
SECTION 1: IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM.....	1
Historical Foundation of Social Skills Training.....	1
Definitions of Key Terms.....	10
Students with Disabilities.....	10
At-Risk Students.....	10
Fidelity of Implementation.....	10
Evidence-Based Interventions .....	11
Problem of Practice .....	11
SECTION 2: COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Search Criteria and Methodology.....	14
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	15
Evaluation Framework.....	16
Research Question 1 .....	17
Research Question 2 .....	27
Research Question 3 .....	56
Teacher Training and Professional Development .....	56
Barriers to Implementation.....	61
Resource and Funding Limitations .....	63
Professional Development in SEL for Teachers .....	64

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.....71

- Introduction to the Plan.....71
- Strategic Goals and Objectives of the SEL Leadership Team .....71
  - Step 1: Form a SEL Implementation and Leadership Team.....72
  - Step 2: Conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment .....75
  - Step 3: Select an Evidence-Based SEL Curriculum and Framework .....76
  - Step 4: Deliver Tiered Professional Development.....78
  - Step 5: Integrate SEL into Daily School Life.....79
  - Step 6: Build Family and Community Partnerships .....80
  - Step 7: Monitor Progress and Implementation Fidelity .....82
- Evaluation Measures and Anticipated Outcomes.....84

SECTION 4: SUMMARY OF RESULTS.....87

- Embedding SEL in the Fabric of School Systems.....87
- The Central Role of Professional Development.....88
  - The Role of Families and Community Partnerships .....88
  - Addressing Equity and Disproportionality.....89
- The Need for Monitoring and District-Level Guidance .....90
- Future Research Directions.....91
- Limitations of Review .....91
- Recommendations for Practice and Policy .....93
- Final Reflections.....94
- Seminar Overview .....96
  - Day 1: Foundations of Equity-Driven SEL.....96

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Day 2: Implementation in Practice: SEL in the Inclusive Classroom.....97

Day 3: Family Engagement, Equity, and Sustainability .....97

Product Materials .....97

Dissemination and Use in the Field.....98

APPENDIX: CONTENT REVIEW MATRIX.....99

REFERENCES .....123

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. CASEL Framework for SEL.....9

Figure 2. Impact of SEL Implementation on Key Outcomes .....39

Figure 3. Percentage Difference Between High and Low SEL Implementation.....39

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Trends in Emotional and Behavioral Service Access Among U.S. Children (Ages 5–17), 2002–2014.....	29
Table 2. Key Quantitative Outcomes from AISD SEL Implementation Evaluations (2010–2017).....	37
Table 3. Participant Demographics: Ashdown and Bernard (2012) Study.....	43
Table 4. Comparison of SEL Curriculum vs. Abrams and Aguilar (2005) .....	49
Table 5. SEL Implementation Benchmarks .....	75
Table 6. SEL Refinement Domains.....	84

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- 4Rs—Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution
- AISD—Austin Independent School District
- CASEL—Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
- CBT—Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- CSC—Caring School Community
- DOM—Dangers of the Mind
- EBD—Emotional and Behavioral Disorders
- ECLS-K—Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Class
- ECS—Employee Coordinated Survey
- HELP—Human Early Learning Partnership
- IEP—Individualized Education Program
- JJS-SEL—Juvenile Justice Social-Emotional Learning
- MTSS—Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
- OECD—Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PATHS—Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies
- PBIS—Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
- PD—Professional Development
- POP—Problem of Practice
- PST—Preservice Teacher
- RQ—Research Question
- RTA—Raise the Age
- SDQ—Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

SE—Social-Emotional

SEARS—Social-Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales

SEARS-T—Social-Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales-Teacher

SEL—Social-Emotional Learning

SSES—Study on Social-Emotional Skills

SST—Social Skills Training

STAAR—State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness

TELL—Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey

YCDI—You Can Do It! Education Program

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## SECTION 1: IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

### **Historical Foundation of Social Skills Training**

Social skills instruction has long been recognized as a foundational component of special education. During the 1970s and 1980s, social skills training (SST) emerged as an evidence-based practice designed to help students with disabilities build interpersonal competence and adapt successfully within general education settings. Researchers such as Cooke and Apolloni (1976) and Oden and Asher (1977) demonstrated that explicit teaching, modeling, and peer coaching strategies improved friendship formation, communication, and classroom participation. These early SST approaches were precursors to modern social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks, which expanded the scope of intervention beyond behavior modification to include self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills across all learners. The evolution of SST to SEL reflects an ongoing commitment to equity, inclusion, and whole-child development.

SEL fosters competencies such as self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and emotional regulation, which are essential for student development. These foundational skills not only support academic success but also contribute to the development of healthy interpersonal relationships, resilience, and a sense of community belonging.

As an educator, former teacher for the emotionally disturbed/impaired, and school leader with experience in data analysis, school improvement, and action planning, I have worked across public, alternative, and juvenile educational settings. These experiences have given me insight into the challenges and opportunities involved in implementing SEL in diverse school environments. Early in my career, I often asked myself, "What can I do to meet my students' needs?" At the time, I lacked a clear answer. My efforts, though well-intentioned, felt reactive, as

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

though I were pushing students forward without establishing a strong emotional or behavioral foundation to help them thrive in the communities they lived in or the world they inherited.

However, now, through a growing recognition of *SEL*, defined as the process through which individuals develop the skills to manage emotions, build healthy relationships, make responsible decisions, and achieve personal and collective goals (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2023), I have become more purposeful, more active, in my approach to my students' needs. This personal and professional background provided the lens through which I approached this Capstone. Drawing on a critical review of qualitative, quantitative, and meta-analytic studies, I examined the implementation of evidence-based SEL curricula and their impact on school-aged students. Each study was evaluated based on its methodological rigor, specifically its validity, reliability, and relevance to the Capstone's Problem of Practice (POP).

In this context, the POP refers to a persistent and systemic challenge in education: the lack of consistent professional development (PD) and structured, evidence-based support for educators tasked with implementing SEL, particularly for students with disabilities and those considered at risk. This challenge has tangible consequences for student outcomes, including increased behavioral incidents, reduced engagement, and inconsistent emotional development. Effective SEL programs incorporate explicit skill-building, supportive school climates, and continued instruction.

The effective implementation of SEL curricula is often influenced by multiple factors, such as educator preparedness, fidelity to program design, school climate, and access to culturally relevant materials. When implemented with fidelity and longevity, SEL programs have been shown to promote emotional regulation, strengthen interpersonal relationships, improve

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

classroom behavior, and enhance academic performance. However, when educators lack the training, support, or tools necessary for implementation, the potential benefits of SEL can be diminished, particularly for vulnerable student populations.

Professional experience in leading PD initiatives and facilitating teacher collaboration has yielded valuable insight into the barriers educators encounter when translating SEL theory into daily classroom practice. These experiences informed the methodology of the literature review I conducted, which draws upon peer-reviewed qualitative, quantitative, and meta-analytic studies to explore the conditions under which SEL interventions are most effective. Quantitative studies were assessed for measurable student outcomes, including emotional growth, academic achievement, and behavioral improvements. Meta-analytic research, such as Durlak et al. (2011), was examined to identify large-scale patterns across multiple SEL programs, thus offering a macro-level understanding of program effectiveness. In contrast, qualitative studies were analyzed thematically, with emergent patterns categorized according to the CASEL (2013) five core competencies and examined through the lens of a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework. This multi-modal approach provided a balanced, contextually grounded perspective on how SEL implementation impacts student development and educator practice across diverse educational environments.

In this Capstone, I highlight relevant studies that examine SEL implementation across general and special education populations, with particular attention paid to systemic barriers encountered in public, alternative, and juvenile educational settings. To provide a comprehensive understanding of SEL effectiveness, I analyze quantitative studies that offer statistical evidence of SEL's impact on students' emotional regulation, behavioral outcomes, and academic achievement. I also review qualitative research to explore educator perspectives, student

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

experiences, and the contextual challenges of implementing SEL programs with fidelity and equity. By reviewing existing literature, looking at patterns across studies, and considering both student and school-level factors, I can explore how SEL functions in practice. Moreover, by integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, I can build a comprehensive and balanced understanding of SEL effectiveness across varied educational settings and student populations.

Additionally, examining single-case design studies will provide insight into how SEL interventions impact individual students, particularly those with behavioral and emotional challenges. Meta-analyses will offer a broader perspective by synthesizing findings across multiple studies and identifying consistent patterns and overall trends in SEL implementation. Additionally, in this Capstone I incorporate mixed-methods research, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches and allows for a deeper analysis of measurable outcomes alongside the lived experiences of students and educators. By drawing on this diverse body of literature, I can evaluate the effectiveness of SEL interventions across varied student populations, identify common challenges associated with implementation, and highlight evidence-based strategies that promote the successful and equitable integration of SEL within school environments.

A widely cited meta-analysis by Durlak and colleagues, published in 2011, discussed the effects of universal, school-based SEL interventions, and the researchers found that students who participated in these programs demonstrated significantly improved social-emotional (SE) skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance. The study synthesized results from 213 individual research studies of SEL programs among school-aged students, with outcomes for 270,034 students. Durlak et al. found that students participating in universal SEL programs

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

demonstrated enhanced SE skills, positive social behavior, and lower levels of emotional distress and conduct problems. Students participating in these universal SEL programs also showed an 11-point percentile gain in achievement, a result that suggests that SEL may strengthen academic success. These findings underscore the foundational role of SEL in promoting both emotional well-being and academic growth, a role that has become even more critical in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly magnified the need for SEL by exacerbating emotional and behavioral challenges among students. Swanson (2022) found that classrooms emphasizing belonging, relationship building, resilience, community, and conflict resolution support improvements in both student well-being and academic achievement.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, school-age students have become increasingly disengaged from their peers and society, often relying on technology as their primary mode of communication. This shift has contributed to a decline in essential social-emotional skills, leaving many students struggling to self-advocate, make responsible decisions, develop self-awareness, and interact appropriately in social settings. Many at-risk students also display behavioral or conduct problems and fall behind their peers in emotional competence and social connection, often struggling with emotional regulation, social interactions, and expressing their thoughts and feelings clearly (S. M. Jones et al., 2019).

These behaviors are frequently misinterpreted as defiance instead of signs that a student needs social-emotional support. Instead of getting help, students are put in detention, suspended, or sent out of class. This kind of punishment makes them less interested in school and is used more often with students in special education or those who struggle with behavior.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Like many school learning systems, an urgent need exists to prioritize and integrate SEL into education to support students' well-being, enhance their academic success, and mitigate behavioral challenges. By implementing evidence-based SEL strategies, schools can foster positive social interactions, emotional regulation, and resilience, thereby ultimately reducing the need for exclusionary discipline and promoting student success in all educational settings. Taylor et al. (2017), for example, found that SEL interventions significantly improved students' academic performance and social behaviors across diverse populations.

Given the increasing recognition of SEL's role in student success, understanding its historical evolution and implementation challenges is essential. SEL has not been a core component of the school curriculum. Traditional teacher training has focused primarily on academic instruction and classroom management and often neglects the development of students' SE competencies. Although awareness of the importance of SEL has grown in recent years, many teacher preparation programs and PD initiatives still fail to adequately integrate SEL training, leaving teachers to navigate these challenges independently. The success of SEL programs depends on how well they are implemented, which is shaped by teacher training, leadership support, and teacher beliefs (Domitrovich et al., 2008)."

SEL has been part of education long before its formal definition in 1994. Educators and researchers created CASEL (2013) to promote SEL. Initially, although Illinois was the first state in the nation to adopt free-standing SEL goals in 2004, the early process for developing SEL standards at the early childhood level was not completely in sync with the process at the K–12 level. The statewide process actually began in 2002 with the formation of a task force on children's mental health. The final report of the task force, *Children's Mental Health: An Urgent Priority for Illinois* (Illinois Children's Mental Health Task Force, 2003), prompted the creation

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act of 2003. The Illinois Children's Mental Health Act, in turn, called for the development of K–12 SEL standards (Gordon, Ji, Mulhall, Shaw, & Weissberg, 2011).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the mental health needs of school-aged youth have intensified. In the United States, nearly 13% of children aged 3–17 have a current, diagnosed mental or behavioral health condition. In 2023, 40% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, while 20% seriously considered suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023a, 2023b).

In England, nearly 1 million children, which represents 8% of the child population, were referred to mental health services in 2024, and over 20% of youth aged 8 to 16 are now likely experiencing mental health issues, up from 14% in 2017 (Grierson, 2025; Sleigh, 2025). These alarming figures reinforce the urgent need for comprehensive SEL initiatives in schools.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, federal relief efforts allocated substantial funding to address students' SE development. Programs such as the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan included specific mandates for states to support SEL implementation. However, the long-term sustainability of this national focus remains uncertain. Recent efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education and reduce or eliminate funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives may significantly hinder schools' ability to implement and maintain evidence-based SEL programs, particularly for learners with disabilities and those students disproportionately affected by educational inequities.

The Every Student Succeeds Act, enacted in 2015, enabled the integration of SEL into state education plans. However, many advocates believe current assessment methods lack precision for accountability. Challenges include a decline in SEL implementation among older

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

students and inadequate teacher preparation since many educators enter the field without formal SEL training.

CASEL(2013) highlighted the positive effects of SEL on elementary and middle school students, supporting both behavioral and academic gains. To address these issues, the CASEL framework identifies five core competencies essential for students' development:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making.

CASEL (2013) emphasizes the importance of evidence-based SEL programming as a foundation for effectively integrating SEL into education. Its framework incorporates the five core SEL competencies and advocates for a comprehensive, schoolwide approach beyond isolated lessons. Working from this framework, educators are moving SEL curricula beyond individual, stand-alone lessons to district-wide interventions to address students' SEL development. By embedding SEL into curricula, school culture, and daily interactions, students develop the necessary skills to navigate their communities and society with confidence, emotional resilience, and social competence.

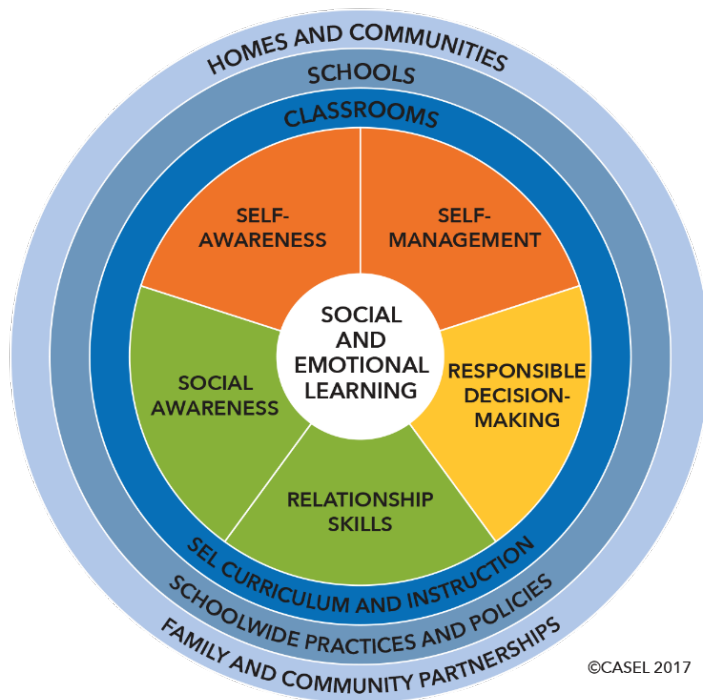
The CASEL framework (CASEL, 2017), shown in Figure 1, does not have a specific curriculum that it has developed. The organization promotes the five competencies mentioned above, which are essential for ensuring that students are well-rounded. However, when these competencies are integrated into an evidence-based curriculum implemented at the school level, CASEL has observed and documented successful outcomes within that school system. In support

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

of CASEL's model, Chernyshenko et al. (2018) emphasized that SE skills are as essential as cognitive abilities for lifelong success and that these competencies must be taught, practiced, and measured intentionally within school systems.

**Figure 1**

*CASEL Framework for SEL*



Note. Adapted from "Core SEL Competencies," by CASEL, 2017

(<https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>). Copyright 2017 by

CASEL.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

### **Students with Disabilities**

Disabilities refer to physical, cognitive, emotional, or developmental conditions that significantly affect a student's learning, behavior, or social functioning. This definition aligns with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), which identifies disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, intellectual disabilities, and autism spectrum disorders. Students with disabilities often require individualized supports, accommodations, and interventions to ensure equitable access to instruction and school participation.

### **At-Risk Students**

Students are considered *at risk* when they experience conditions that significantly increase the likelihood of academic failure, referral to special education, school disengagement, or behavioral challenges. These conditions may include economic disadvantages, trauma exposure, chronic absenteeism, limited family or community support, housing instability, or involvement with the juvenile justice system. In this Capstone, the term specifically refers to students with disabilities, students enrolled in special education, and students in alternative or nontraditional educational settings whose SE development or learning trajectory is negatively affected by environmental, systemic, or psychosocial stressors.

### **Fidelity of Implementation**

*Fidelity* refers to the degree to which an intervention or program is delivered as intended by its developers. In the context of SEL, fidelity includes adherence to the curriculum's core components, the quality and consistency of delivery, and the extent to which trained staff implement the program with integrity. High fidelity of implementation is essential for producing

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

the desired SEL outcomes across both traditional and nontraditional educational settings, including public schools, alternative programs, and juvenile justice facilities.

### **Evidence-Based Interventions**

*An evidence-based intervention* is a program or practice that has been rigorously evaluated through empirical research and has demonstrated effectiveness in achieving specific student outcomes. For this Capstone, evidence-based SEL interventions were validated through peer-reviewed studies, often using randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs, or meta-analytic reviews, and shown to produce measurable improvements in students' emotional regulation, social behavior, or academic performance. Particular emphasis is placed on interventions that have demonstrated positive outcomes for students with disabilities, students considered at risk, and students in alternative or nontraditional educational settings in which implementation challenges and student needs are often more complex.

### **Problem of Practice**

In this Capstone, I investigate the systemic barriers that hinder the effective implementation of SEL in educational settings, with a focus on students with disabilities and those considered at risk. Although SEL has been widely recognized for its ability to promote emotional regulation, academic engagement, and pro-social behavior, its adoption in special education and alternative settings remains inconsistent and inequitable. In this review, I examine the social stressors affecting students' emotional well-being, the role of community factors, the impact of underdeveloped teacher training, and the urgent need for accessible, evidence-based (SEL) curricula that meet the needs of diverse learners. Drawing from a broad range of studies, including those conducted in general education, special education, alternative, and international school settings, I explore how evidence-based SEL interventions influence student outcomes.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Special attention is given to the barriers that prevent effective program implementation, such as a lack of PD, unclear implementation frameworks, and minimal support for high-fidelity delivery.

The role of teacher preparation is a key theme because research indicates that sustained SEL impact depends heavily on educator training, coaching, and whole-school engagement.

To investigate these issues, I synthesized quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, and meta-analytic research. Quantitative studies provide statistical insights into the effect of SEL on emotional regulation, behavioral outcomes, and academic achievement. Qualitative research contributes to a contextual understanding by highlighting educators' perspectives, students' experiences, and the systemic implementation challenges they face. By integrating both types of evidence, I can evaluate the effectiveness of SEL programs for a wide range of student populations and highlight strategies that promote equity, sustainability, and improved outcomes.

For example, a nationally representative survey of more than 3,000 kindergarten teachers revealed that over 30% reported half or more of their students struggled with foundational social skills, following directions, or group work (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). These indicators of low readiness reflect broader concerns about early emotional development and highlight the long-term consequences of unmet SEL needs. Additional research shows that students from low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by stressors such as poverty, community violence, and family instability, factors that correlate strongly with adverse academic and behavioral outcomes (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Dodge et al., 1994). These disparities emphasize the importance of implementing SEL programs that are context-sensitive, trauma-informed, and grounded in culturally responsive practices.

Ultimately, for this Capstone project, I hope to generate actionable insights for improving SEL access and impact, particularly for students with disabilities and those facing compounded

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

risk, by identifying implementation gaps and best practices. Recommendations derived from this review guide Section 3 of the Capstone, which provides strategies to strengthen SEL efforts across general, special, alternative, and international school settings.

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## SECTION 2: COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines existing research on the impact of SEL programs on school-age students, with a specific emphasis on students with disabilities and those identified as at risk. Although SEL is widely acknowledged for supporting emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, and academic engagement, the literature reveals significant variability in implementation quality and access, particularly in special education, alternative, and underserved educational settings. The following synthesis explores these disparities and highlights evidence-based practices that promote equitable outcomes.

Within the review, I explore how SEL can be applied equitably and effectively across diverse contexts by examining empirical evidence on student outcomes, program fidelity, and the impact of teacher training. Drawing on a range of qualitative, quantitative, and meta-analytic studies, the review aims to identify implementation gaps and develop strategies that support inclusive, culturally responsive SEL practices. To guide this investigation, the following research questions (RQs) were developed:

- RQ1: How do evidence-based SEL interventions influence the SE well-being of school-aged students, students with disabilities, and those identified as at risk?
- RQ2: What role does SEL play in supporting school-aged students, students with disabilities, and those at-risk?
- RQ3: How does PD influence the fidelity and effectiveness of evidence-based SEL program implementation among educators?

### **Search Criteria and Methodology**

This section outlines the systematic approach used to identify, select, and evaluate relevant studies examining SEL interventions for school-aged students. A multi-step literature

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

search was conducted using a combination of electronic databases, manual journal reviews, and citation tracking strategies.

Electronic searches were conducted using Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center, and the University of Maryland Library's online databases. These sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and systematic reviews published between 1976, 1977, 1994, and 2025. The earlier works from 1976 and 1977 were incorporated to provide historical context for the development of Social Skills Training (SST), while the more recent studies from 1994 through 2025 reflect the evolution of evidence-based practices that have led to modern Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks. Search terms included combinations of keywords, such as *social-emotional learning*, *SEL interventions*, *special education SEL programs*, *evidence-based SEL*, and *at-risk students*. They were applied using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to refine results across qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies.

To enhance coverage, manual searches were conducted by reviewing the tables of contents of leading peer-reviewed journals in SEL, special education, and behavioral interventions. Journals reviewed included *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, *Exceptional Children*, *Review of Educational Research*, and *Journal of Special Education*. Additionally, citation chaining was employed by reviewing the reference lists of key articles to identify additional relevant studies not captured in the initial search.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

To ensure the review was rigorous and relevant to the Capstone's focus, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

- Inclusion criteria:
  - Studies focused on SEL interventions for school-aged students (PreK–12)

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

- Interventions targeted students with disabilities or those considered at risk
- Research that included measurable outcomes related to student behavior, emotional regulation, academic achievement, or SEL competency
- Empirical studies employed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods designs
- Studies published between 1994 and 2025, with select seminal works included for foundational context (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011)
- CASEL framework
- Exclusion criteria:
  - Theoretical papers or opinion-based commentaries without empirical data
  - Studies lacking a transparent methodology or evidence-based framework
  - Articles focused solely on adult SEL or SEL programs not designed for students (PreK–12)
  - Interventions not aligned with CASEL competencies or that lacked implementation fidelity details

Based on these criteria, over 60 studies were selected from an initial pool of 108 identified sources. These studies were chosen based on their alignment with the Capstone's RQs, focus on implementation outcomes, and methodological rigor. The literature represents a diverse array of educational settings, including traditional (PreK–12) classrooms, alternative schools, juvenile justice facilities, and international programs.

### **Evaluation Framework**

To assess the quality and focus of the studies, the CASEL framework served as the guiding evaluation tool. This framework provided the criteria for selecting studies that explicitly foster the five core SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Programs that demonstrated alignment with these competencies were prioritized for inclusion in the review.

In summary, the integration of electronic database searches, journal hand reviews, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, and citation chaining ensured a comprehensive, transparent, and methodologically sound literature review. This process supports this study's overarching goal of exploring the impact, implementation, and outcomes of SEL interventions, particularly for students in special education and those experiencing heightened risk factors, while also examining how teacher PD influences the fidelity and effectiveness of SEL program delivery across diverse educational settings.

### **Research Question 1**

The first RQ asked the following: *How do evidence-based SEL interventions influence the SE well-being of school-aged students, students with disabilities, and those identified as at risk?* Research consistently reveals that when SEL programs are implemented with fidelity, students experience improved emotional regulation, stronger peer relationships, and better mental health outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Furthermore, students exposed to structured SEL instruction tend to develop increased resilience, greater self-awareness, and stronger coping strategies. However, the effectiveness of these outcomes is often influenced by the context of implementation, including school climate, staff preparedness, and student needs (Mahoney et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

One of the key themes emerging from recent research is the impact of SEL interventions on students' emotional regulation, peer relationships, and classroom behavior. The study by Campbell et al. (2022) was conducted during a summer session at an urban public elementary school that serves a predominantly minority student population. Twelve African American male

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

students aged 6 to 10, identified as at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), participated in an intervention involving the Strong Start SEL curriculum, Check-In Check-Out, and I-Connect (a self-monitoring tool). Results indicated a consistent decline in externalizing behaviors and observable improvements in SE competencies, including empathy, interpersonal skills, and social maturity. Although the study utilized a single-case experimental design with embedded observational and qualitative measures, it did not include specific numerical statistics or effect sizes, such as percentage changes, standard deviations, or *p*-values. Nevertheless, the intervention demonstrated that integrating a culturally responsive SEL curriculum within a structured behavioral support framework can effectively promote SE growth while reducing challenging behaviors among African American male students identified as at risk for EBD. The findings underscore the critical role of culturally adapted SEL interventions in addressing the disproportionate representation of African American students in EBD classifications. Moreover, the study highlights the need for extended research to further develop and refine culturally responsive practices that support the ongoing social, emotional, and behavioral development of African American learners. Given the limited duration of the summer intervention, a more extended implementation period and the inclusion of empirical data may yield more comprehensive outcomes, enhance the internal and external validity of the findings, and provide more substantial evidence of sustained effectiveness.

A national sample of kindergarten teachers judged that approximately one-sixth of the children entering kindergarten faced serious general adjustment problems. An additional one-third of entering kindergartners had minor general adjustment problems. (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Additionally, a nationwide survey of over 3,000 Kindergarten teachers from different regions of the United States, as part of the National Center for Early Development and

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Learning's Transition to Kindergarten study, found that 30% reported at least half of their students struggled with following directions and working in groups, while 20% noted significant social skill deficits (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). These early SE challenges, if unaddressed, can persist into later grades and negatively impact students' academic and behavioral outcomes.

Yin (2018) employed a qualitative case study methodology to explore how teachers integrate SEL practices within inclusive classroom environments. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and reflective journals, allowing for a rich understanding of how educators interpret and apply SEL principles in daily instruction. Guided by a constructivist framework, which emphasizes students actively building their own understanding through experience, reflection, and social interaction, the study illuminated the importance of teacher modeling, relational trust, and classroom climate in shaping student engagement. Although the small, context-specific sample limited generalizability, Yin's work provided valuable insight into the lived experiences of teachers implementing SEL and underscored the importance of qualitative inquiry for understanding implementation fidelity.

Together, these findings highlight how SEL implementation relies not only on instructional practices but also on students' internalization of social-emotional competencies that directly influence academic performance. Building on this foundation, Yin et al. (2023) conducted a research brief examining the relationship between self-reported social-emotional skills and academic outcomes among 10- and 15-year-old students in the Houston Independent School District. Drawing on fall 2019 data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Study on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES), the study specifically investigated how competencies such as persistence, empathy, and trust were associated with students' math and reading grades. Persistence, defined as the ability to sustain effort and focus

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

despite challenges or setbacks, was consistently and positively linked to academic performance. Among 10-year-olds, students with the highest levels of persistence earned math grades 10% higher and reading grades 12% higher than their peers. For 15-year-olds, those with high persistence saw a 13% increase in math and a 16% increase in reading grades. Interestingly, empathy was negatively associated with math performance among 10-year-olds, with the most empathetic students scoring 8% lower in math than students with lower empathy levels. In contrast, trust emerged as a positive predictor of math achievement among 15-year-olds, with the most trusting students earning math grades 10% higher than their least trusting peers. Rather than functioning as a traditional literature review, Yin et al.'s study provided empirical evidence using structural equation modeling to establish statistically significant links between specific SEL competencies and academic outcomes while controlling for demographic variables.

These findings support the broader literature that links SEL skills, such as perseverance, emotional regulation, and social awareness, to academic engagement and success. Moreover, Yin et al.'s (2023) study emphasized that the most academically successful students often demonstrated greater emotional control, goal-directed behavior, and interpersonal effectiveness skills, which are nurtured through intentional SEL instruction. When such competencies are fostered through school-based programs, students are better able to navigate academic challenges, maintain focus, and build positive relationships with peers and teachers, which in turn bolsters their academic outcomes.

These findings are particularly significant because they demonstrate that the benefits of SEL extend beyond the immediate implementation period, thus supporting the development of emotional resilience and interpersonal competence over time. The long-term effects identified in

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Yin et al.'s (2023) research underscore the value of embedding SEL as a permanent, schoolwide initiative rather than as a short-term intervention (p. 14).

This evidence reinforces the argument that SEL enhances students' SE well-being and contributes to lasting developmental gains, making it a vital component of equitable and effective educational practice (Taylor et al., 2017).

To supplement this evidence, the COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the necessity of SEL implementation as students faced increased emotional distress, disrupted routines, and diminished social connectedness, conditions that made SE support more critical than ever. Drawing on implementation science, trauma-informed practice, and research-informed strategies, Rosanbalm (2021) published a practitioner-focused policy brief that synthesized qualitative insights and existing literature to guide SEL support during and after the pandemic. Although not a formal empirical study, the brief drew on field-based observations and expert recommendations to highlight the importance of SEL in fostering emotional regulation, relationship building, and resilience. Rosanbalm emphasized the need for safe, predictable routines and co-regulation strategies to buffer students from pandemic-related stress, and stressed that SEL must remain a sustained, embedded part of school culture beyond crisis recovery. These findings reinforce the broader literature on the protective impact of SEL. Students navigating trauma, instability, or inequitable conditions benefit most from targeted SE support.

D. Jones and Bouffard (2012) synthesized prior research to present a comprehensive framework for integrating SEL into everyday classroom instruction, emphasizing that such integration supports both academic achievement and long-term mental health. Their review highlighted that students who receive regular opportunities to build SE competencies, such as emotional regulation, empathy, and problem-solving, are better equipped to engage with peers,

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

cope with stress, and persist through academic challenges. Notably, the authors advocated for embedding SEL into core content areas rather than treating it as a stand-alone curriculum. They argued that such integration helps normalize SEL practices and creates emotionally safe learning environments, particularly for students facing behavioral or psychological difficulties. Their findings reinforce the growing consensus that SE skills are not supplemental but foundational to both student wellness and academic readiness. While D. Jones and Bouffard presented a conceptual framework, their arguments are strongly supported by empirical research. By building on this classroom-level perspective, broader meta-analytic studies have documented the sustained impact of schoolwide SEL interventions on student outcomes over time by using statistical analyses to quantify their effectiveness and long-term benefits.

Taylor et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive quantitative meta-analysis examining the long-term effects of school-based SEL programs on student outcomes. This analysis synthesized findings from 82 rigorous studies involving more than 97,000 students from kindergarten through high school. Although the majority of studies were conducted in the United States, the meta-analysis also included international research, thus providing a broad, cross-cultural perspective on the effectiveness of SEL.

Synthesizing the data from the 82 studies with follow-up assessments conducted at least 6 months after program completion, Taylor et al. (2017) found that SEL interventions produced sustained improvements in students' social behavior, emotional regulation, academic achievement, and attitudes. These findings are particularly significant because they demonstrate that the benefits of SEL extend beyond the immediate implementation period and support the development of emotional resilience and interpersonal competence over time. The long-term effects identified in this meta-analysis underscore the value of embedding SEL as a permanent,

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

schoolwide initiative rather than as a short-term intervention. This evidence reinforces the argument that SEL enhances students' SE well-being and contributes to lasting developmental gains, making it a vital component of equitable and effective educational practice (Taylor et al., 2017). Based on this evidence, international policy organizations have begun to examine the global relevance of SEL and emphasize the importance of coordinated, schoolwide implementation strategies across diverse educational systems.

The OECD (2021) is an international policy body composed of 38 member countries that collaborate to develop evidence-based policies to enhance global economic, educational, and social well-being. In the field of education, the OECD is recognized for its large-scale comparative studies, such as the Program for International Student Assessment and the SSES, which evaluate student outcomes across academic, behavioral, and emotional domains. These initiatives offer critical insights into the effectiveness of educational interventions and inform national and international policy decisions. The OECD's focus on whole-child development underscores the importance of integrating SEL as a foundational element of quality education. By measuring SEL outcomes across diverse contexts and cultural settings, the OECD reinforces the global relevance of SEL and supports its inclusion as an essential strategy for promoting equitable student success and lifelong well-being (OECD, 2021).

Similarly, in England, policymakers have recognized the value of resilience and emotional development in response to the COVID pandemic's lasting impact. Recent educational reforms call for the explicit cultivation of grit and emotional strength through curriculum design and increased school-based mental health support (Grierson, 2025). These international policy shifts mirror global efforts to embed SEL into core educational practices and reinforce the need for sustainable, systemic implementation. This emphasis on perseverance-oriented competencies,

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

referred to as grit, is increasingly recognized as a critical element of student success. Duckworth et al. (2007) defined *grit* as the sustained passion and persistence toward long-term goals even in the face of setbacks. As an SEL-aligned trait, grit overlaps with self-management, resilience, and goal-directed behavioral competencies, all of which are essential for navigating academic and social challenges.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2021), an international policy organization representing 38 member countries, collaborates to advance evidence-based practices that promote economic stability, educational quality, and social well-being worldwide. Within education, the OECD is widely recognized for conducting large-scale comparative studies such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Study on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES), both designed to evaluate student performance across academic, behavioral, and emotional domains. Findings from these initiatives inform national and international policy decisions and highlight the significance of developing the whole child. By measuring SEL outcomes across cultural and contextual settings, the OECD emphasizes the importance of integrating social and emotional learning as a core component of quality education and as a framework for advancing equity, student well-being, and lifelong success.

The OECD (2021) Study on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) used a quantitative, cross-national survey design to measure social and emotional learning competencies among more than 10,000 students aged 10 and 15 in participating global cities, including Houston, Helsinki, and Daegu. Using standardized self-report questionnaires, the study examined how competencies such as emotional regulation, perseverance, and empathy correlated with academic performance and overall well-being. Statistical analyses, including regression and correlational

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

modeling, revealed consistent associations between higher levels of social and emotional skills and improved academic achievement, mental health, and sense of school belonging. Although the study's large-scale design strengthened generalizability, reliance on self-reported data and variability in cultural interpretation presented limitations. Even with these constraints, the OECD SSES remains a foundational contribution to global social and emotional learning research, providing strong empirical evidence of how emotional and social competencies influence student outcomes across diverse educational contexts.

Chernyshenko et al. (2018) conducted a mixed-method conceptual and psychometric analysis to define and validate the structure of social and emotional competencies across educational and cultural contexts. Drawing from extensive literature reviews, expert panel evaluations, and prior psychometric validation data, the researchers aligned SEL competencies with established personality models such as the Big Five framework. Through factor analysis and theoretical synthesis, the study enhanced conceptual clarity and measurement consistency across SEL constructs. Although it did not include direct student-level data or measure intervention outcomes, the methodological rigor strengthened the reliability and validity of SEL assessment tools. Importantly, Chernyshenko et al. (2018) concluded that social and emotional skills are malleable, teachable, and predictive of long-term success across diverse educational settings. These findings underscore the universal applicability of SEL and its critical role in fostering emotional development, academic achievement, and essential life skills that prepare students to thrive in both local and global contexts. Building on this foundation, subsequent intervention-based research has focused on translating these competencies into classroom practice. In response to the growing social-emotional gaps observed in early learners, programs such as Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (Greenberg, Kusché, & Riggs, 1995) were

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

developed to provide structured, evidence-based approaches that equip students with the SE skills necessary for emotional regulation, problem-solving, and positive peer relationships. While programs like PATHS are designed to address emotional skill deficits early in a child's education, disparities in school disciplinary practices reveal that the need for sustained, schoolwide SEL support extends well beyond the early years and becomes especially critical for students with disabilities and those from marginalized backgrounds. This need is further emphasized by research highlighting the disproportionate impact of exclusionary discipline on these populations.

Krezmien et al. (2006) identified critical disparities in school disciplinary practices, revealing that students with disabilities, particularly disabilities classified under emotional disturbance, were suspended at disproportionately high rates compared to their nondisabled peers. African American students with disabilities were especially overrepresented in exclusionary practices, underscoring how systemic inequities intersect with disability status. Inconsistencies in data reporting across states were also noted. The gaps limit the ability of policymakers and school leaders to implement equitable reforms. These disparities directly threaten students' emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and long-term educational engagement. As a proactive solution, SEL offers an alternative to punitive discipline by equipping students with skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and social responsibility. When implemented schoolwide, SEL frameworks can reduce behavioral incidents and support the emotional development of students who are most at risk for exclusionary practices (Krezmien et al., 2006).

In response to RQ1, the literature clearly demonstrates that evidence-based SEL interventions have a significant and positive impact on the SE well-being of school-aged

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

students. When implemented with fidelity, SEL programs strengthen emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and resilience across diverse student populations. Meta-analytic studies confirm that these gains are not only immediate but sustained over time, thus reinforcing SEL as a long-term developmental support. Targeted studies underscore the importance of cultural responsiveness and contextual adaptation, especially for African American students and those at risk for emotional or behavioral challenges. The inclusion of large-scale international data further validates the universal applicability of SEL and its role in supporting emotional well-being, tolerance, and motivation across global education systems. Additionally, the literature highlights SEL's potential to reduce disciplinary disparities by offering proactive, skill-based alternatives to exclusionary practices that disproportionately affect students with disabilities and marginalized backgrounds. Collectively, these findings support the integration of SEL as a core component of schoolwide equity efforts and whole-child development frameworks.

### **Research Question 2**

The second RQ focuses on the role of SEL in supporting students with disabilities and students at risk during critical school transitions to further examine how SEL frameworks contribute to equity and inclusion. RQ2 is as follows: What role does SEL play in supporting school-aged students, students with disabilities, and those at-risk?

The transition to school represents a critical period for students, particularly for African American children, children with disabilities, and children from low-income backgrounds. Research indicates that these students often encounter heightened social, emotional, and academic challenges compared to their peers, which can contribute to long-term disparities in educational outcomes (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Without adequate SE support, these

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

students are more likely to face difficulties in peer relationships, self-regulation, and engagement in learning.

Table 1 illustrates the percentage of children ages 5–17 who received services for severe emotional or behavioral difficulties between 2002 and 2014, disaggregated by sex and race/ethnicity (National Center for Health Statistics, 2015). The table also illustrates disparities in the percentage of children ages 5–17 with severe emotional or behavioral difficulties who received support services between 2002 and 2014, disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity. Overall, boys consistently received services at higher rates (approximately 70–73%) than girls (approximately 59–66%), suggesting a possibility of a lack of referral for services or differences in how behavioral concerns are identified across genders. When examined by race and ethnicity, White children were the most likely to receive services, frequently above 70%, while Black and Hispanic children received support at notably lower rates, often below 66%. These disparities are particularly pronounced among females: Black and Hispanic girls consistently had the lowest access to services throughout the reporting periods. The findings reveal persistent inequities in service provision, suggesting that children from minoritized racial backgrounds and female students with serious emotional or behavioral needs may face systemic barriers to accessing appropriate care and interventions. The data highlights the need for school systems to examine not only which students are identified as needing support but also who ultimately receives it.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

**Table 1**

*Trends in Emotional and Behavioral Service Access Among U.S. Children (Ages 5–17), 2002–2014*

Source: National Center for Health Statistics (2015), parent surveys using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

Category	2002–2004	2005–2007	2008–2010	2011–2013	2012–2014/Trend notes
Overall average of Service Access	65.3%	65.1%	64.3%	71.0%	70.4% — Gradual increase in services provided; growing recognition of emotional/behavioral needs.
Males	67.2%	—	—	—	71.5% — Consistently higher service access; greater recognition of behavioral concerns.
Females	61.7%	—	—	—	68.4% — Lower access; emotional concerns potentially under-identified.
White (non-Hispanic)	71.0%	—	—	—	71.0% — Highest service access; relatively stable across years.
Black (non-Hispanic)	52.2%	—	—	—	66.0% — Steady improvement; narrowing equity gap.
Hispanic	52.6%	—	—	—	69.2% — Largest growth; substantial gains in access to services.
White Males	~70–75%	—	—	—	Highest access across all groups.
Black Males	57.5%	—	—	—	70.3% — Significant improvement over time.
Hispanic Males	55.9%	—	—	—	71.1% — Strongest upward trend among male subgroups.
Black Females	40.8%	—	—	—	59.3% — Noticeable progress but continued disparity.
Hispanic Females	45.8%	—	—	—	65.8% — Improved access, though lower than that of their male counterparts.

Note. Over the 12-year period, more children with serious emotional or behavioral difficulties received services such as special education, mental-health counseling, or medical care. Boys consistently received more services than girls, and racial disparities in access declined. However, females of color continued to receive fewer supports compared to their male peers. Overall, trends indicate improved awareness and equitable service delivery across groups.

Additional Note. Each reporting period represents a three-year moving average (e.g., 2011–2013 and 2012–2014 share data from 2012 and 2013). This rolling design provides more stable estimates, smooths year-to-year fluctuations, and allows for clearer identification of long-term trends. Each set of years overlaps slightly because the data are averaged over 3 years to make the results more stable and reliable. **70.4%** is just the last, most recent period; it is not the average.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Instead of viewing academic struggles or emotional challenges as individual shortcomings, it is essential to recognize that a student's success or failure is influenced by the broader context in which they learn. Factors such as family involvement, school climate, teacher relationships, and access to resources all contribute to how students experience risk or build resilience. By recognizing this influence, SEL provides a proactive framework to strengthen support for students, thereby helping them develop essential life skills while also improving the environments that shape their well-being and achievement. Integrating SEL into early childhood education and elementary school curricula can help create learning environments that strengthen students' self-awareness, emotional regulation, relationship skills, and other critical competencies necessary for long-term academic and social success, particularly for students who have historically been underserved. This understanding has driven researchers such as Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) to investigate how classroom emotional support and early social-emotional instruction influence students' behavioral adjustment and academic engagement, laying the groundwork for later evidence-based SEL interventions.

Systemic factors such as poverty, racial inequities, and limited school resources significantly influence the academic and social emotional outcomes of at-risk students, underscoring the need for structured, schoolwide SEL initiatives. Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) emphasized that many children, particularly those with disabilities, from low-income households, or from historically marginalized backgrounds, enter school lacking foundational social and emotional skills. Without early intervention through developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive SEL programs, these students are more likely to experience difficulties with behavior, engagement, and academic performance. Using a quantitative, quasi-experimental design, Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues examined the relationship between emotional classroom

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

support and children's social and academic adjustment. Data were collected through structured classroom observations, teacher behavior ratings, and student academic assessments. Statistical analyses revealed that students in emotionally supportive classrooms demonstrated greater cooperation, engagement, and motivation compared to peers in less supportive settings. Although the absence of random assignment limited causal inference, the study provided strong empirical evidence linking classroom emotional climate to SEL-related outcomes. These findings highlighted the critical role of early, universal SEL implementation in promoting equity and resilience among diverse learners. As education systems continue to address the challenges posed by poverty and inequity, the intentional and equitable integration of SEL remains a key strategy for narrowing opportunity gaps and supporting student success. One widely implemented program that reflects this evidence-based and preventive approach is the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) curriculum.

The PATHS curriculum (Kusche & Greenberg, 1994) is a comprehensive, evidence-based SEL program designed to enhance children's emotional intelligence, behavioral regulation, and social competence. Aimed primarily at elementary-aged students, PATHS offers structured, developmentally appropriate lessons that teach students to identify and manage their emotions, navigate peer relationships, and apply effective conflict-resolution strategies.

Kam et al. (2004) employed a quantitative, quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effectiveness of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program among elementary school students in special education classrooms across the United States. The study examined behavioral and emotional outcomes using teacher-rated assessments, classroom observations, and follow-up evaluations to measure both immediate and sustained effects of the intervention. The PATHS curriculum, a structured SEL program, integrates direct instructional

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

lessons, teacher-led generalization strategies, and ongoing professional development to ensure implementation fidelity. It also embeds language development, emotional awareness, and executive functioning skills into daily routines to foster a supportive and emotionally responsive classroom climate.

Results indicated that students who received PATHS instruction demonstrated a 32% reduction in teacher-rated aggressive behavior and a 20% increase in prosocial behavior compared to peers in the control group. These gains were maintained two years after the intervention, underscoring the long-term effectiveness of consistent, high-quality SEL instruction in special education settings. The findings provide compelling evidence that SEL programs such as PATHS can significantly improve emotional regulation and social functioning among students with emotional and behavioral challenges.

Building on these findings, broader national data has reinforced the importance of early and sustained SEL interventions. For example, data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Class of 1998–99, which surveyed more than 3,000 kindergarten teachers (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000), showed that a substantial proportion of students entered kindergarten lacking foundational SEL skills. These results emphasize the need to implement programs like PATHS early in a child's education to strengthen social and emotional development and promote equitable learning outcomes from the start of formal schooling.

Other studies indicate that using evidence-based SEL interventions leads to higher levels of school engagement, improved attendance, and academic achievement, particularly in schools that integrate SEL into MTSS (Corcoran et al., (2018). Students receiving SEL services also demonstrate higher proficiency in core academic subjects such as literacy and mathematics, with statistically significant gains observed in standardized assessments (Domitrovich et al., 2019;

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Taylor et al., 2017). These outcomes are especially critical for students with disabilities, who often face compounded barriers to academic success and social integration.

Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis of 213 individual research studies involving 270,034 students from kindergarten through high school. The analysis used effect size calculations to compare SEL intervention groups with control groups across multiple outcome areas, including social-emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance. Studies were included if they employed experimental or quasi-experimental designs and measured at least one SEL-related outcome. Results revealed that students who participated in SEL programs demonstrated statistically significant improvements in social and emotional competence, prosocial behavior, and attitudes toward school, as well as reductions in emotional distress and conduct problems. Academically, SEL participants outperformed their peers by an average of 11 percentile points, providing strong empirical evidence that well-implemented SEL interventions produce measurable benefits across developmental levels and educational contexts. That study (Durlak et al., 2011) provides compelling evidence that SEL interventions contribute to both emotional well-being and measurable academic gains. Additionally, the study emphasized that SEL efforts are most effective when implemented schoolwide with structured instruction and ongoing teacher training. These findings are especially relevant for students with disabilities and those at risk, who often struggle with both academic performance and SE regulation.

Extending this line of inquiry, Campbell et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of culturally responsive approaches for African American students who are disproportionately identified for EBD services. Although the study primarily addressed SE well-being (see Section

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

1), it also noted improvements in academic performance, particularly in reading, thus supporting the value of culturally adapted SEL interventions for at-risk learners.

Similar to the outcomes observed with the PATHS curriculum (Kusché & Greenberg, 1994), the success of the *Caring School Community* (CSC) program (Collaborative Classroom, n.d.) further illustrates how comprehensive SEL approaches can significantly improve both student behavior and academic performance. The Cooperating School Districts of St. Louis conducted a quantitative program evaluation to examine the impact of the Caring School Community (CSC) curriculum on students' academic achievement and social-emotional development. Using a quasi-experimental design, researchers compared schools implementing CSC with those that did not adopt the program. Data were collected through standardized test scores on the Missouri State Achievement Test and teacher reports of student behavior and engagement. This revealed a remarkable 54% increase in math scores and a substantial 46% improvement in communication arts scores on the Missouri State Achievement Test. Designed to foster a sense of belonging, prosocial behavior, and community responsibility, the CSC program emphasizes relationship-building, student voice, and collaborative problem-solving. When applied consistently and schoolwide, the program yielded dramatic academic improvements, demonstrating that emotionally supportive learning environments can directly enhance cognitive and academic outcomes (Collaborative Classroom, n.d.).

In addition to PATHS and the CSC curriculum, the Second Step program (CASEL, 2023) offers further evidence of the transformative impact structured SEL initiatives can have on student behavior, engagement, and academic performance. Second Step is a widely implemented, research-based SEL program that has demonstrated significant and measurable benefits across diverse educational settings. Designed to promote SE competence and reduce

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

problem behaviors, the program delivers structured lessons that help students develop empathy, manage emotions, resolve conflicts, and make responsible decisions. Schools that have adopted Second Step consistently experience substantial reductions in negative student behaviors and notable gains in social and academic development.

A large-scale evaluation of the Second Step Middle School Digital Program (WestEd, 2025) involving 4,903 middle school students over the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 years found that schools implementing the program with high fidelity (completing over 60% of lessons) showed ~36% fewer office disciplinary referrals, 33-36% fewer suspensions, and about 2.5 more days of attendance per year compared to schools with low-fidelity implementation. The study also found improvements in English Language Arts performance, stronger teacher-student relationships, a greater sense of belonging, and more positive perceptions of school climate. Improvements in some social-emotional competencies (e.g. self-management) were observed, but not in others. The structured and tiered nature of Second Step, combined with teacher training and weekly SEL lessons, equips students with critical emotional and behavioral competencies. When implemented consistently and with whole-school commitment, as demonstrated in the South Carolina case, Second Step can serve as a powerful protective framework that promotes emotional well-being, positive behavior, and academic engagement. These outcomes reinforce the program's relevance as an equity-centered intervention that supports the diverse needs of vulnerable student populations across educational settings.

When viewed alongside the results of other evidence-based programs such as PATHS and the CSC curriculum, the impact of Second Step further reinforces the decisive role that SEL plays in shaping both student well-being and academic achievement. Like PATHS, which has been linked to a 32% reduction in aggressive behavior and a 20% increase in standardized test

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

scores, and CSC, which produced double-digit gains in math and communication arts scores, Second Step demonstrates that intentional, schoolwide SEL implementation can lead to lasting improvements in school climate, behavior, and learning outcomes. Collectively, these programs offer compelling evidence that SEL is not a peripheral initiative but a foundational strategy for equitable, high-performing schools.

While the OECD study highlights SEL's broad global relevance, local-level research, such as the AISD (2015) evaluation, offers a more focused view of how the depth and duration of SEL implementation influence student outcomes within a specific educational context. Specifically, that study sought to determine whether the quality of SEL implementation or the number of years a school had participated in SEL had a greater influence on students and school outcomes. By comparing schools with different levels of SEL implementation, the study aimed to provide insights into how deeply integrating SEL strategies could improve student behavior, learning environments, and overall school success. The findings were intended to guide district leaders in making data-driven decisions about sustaining and expanding SEL initiatives.

In the Austin Independent School District (AISD), a series of comprehensive evaluations, most notably Lamb's (2018) *Social Emotional Learning: Implementation and Program Outcomes, 2010–2011 Through 2014–2015*, examined the long-term impact of district-wide SEL implementation. A follow-up evaluation during the 2016–2017 school year compared schools with high and low levels of SEL fidelity. Findings consistently revealed that schools with strong and sustained SEL implementation demonstrated higher academic performance on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), improved attendance rates, and fewer disciplinary incidents (Table 2). These schools also reported significant improvements in overall school climate, as captured by the district's Student Climate Survey. Both evaluations applied

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

multiple statistical controls, including adjustments for economic disadvantage, race/ethnicity, special education status, and prior academic achievement, to isolate the effects of SEL fidelity and implementation duration on student and school-level outcomes (Lamb, 2015).

**Table 2**

*Key Quantitative Outcomes from AISD SEL Implementation Evaluations (2010–2017)*

Outcome domain	Statistical findings	Source(s)
Academic achievement	Elementary schools with high SEL integration ratings in 2015 had significantly higher STAAR math passing rates after controlling for baseline performance and demographics.	Lamb, 2015
Attendance (district-wide)	Attendance increased from 94.9% to 95.2% (2010–2015), resulting in an estimated \$1.97 million in additional state funding.	Lamb, 2015
Attendance (secondary)	Schools with 3–4 years of SEL showed +1.48% attendance gains, compared with –0.15% in schools with only 1–2 years of SEL.	Lamb, 2015
Discipline	Secondary schools with 4 years of SEL reported the lowest discretionary removal rates by Fall 2014.	AISD, 2015
School climate	Students reporting positive peer respect and school safety in 2014–2015 scored higher on STAAR reading/math and had better attendance 2 years later; effects held across African American, Hispanic, and White groups.	AISD, 2015
Implementation factors	Schools with strong SEL integration, $\geq 90\%$ of classrooms using peace areas, and frequent steering committee meetings had significantly lower chronic absenteeism and removal rates. ( $p < .05$ ).	AISD, 2015

Note. STAAR = State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness; SEL = Social-Emotional Learning.

The methodology used in the AISD (2015) SEL study involved a multi-measure approach that combined quantitative data analysis, staff and student surveys, and assessments of program implementation. To evaluate the effects of SEL integration, researchers analyzed multiple data

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

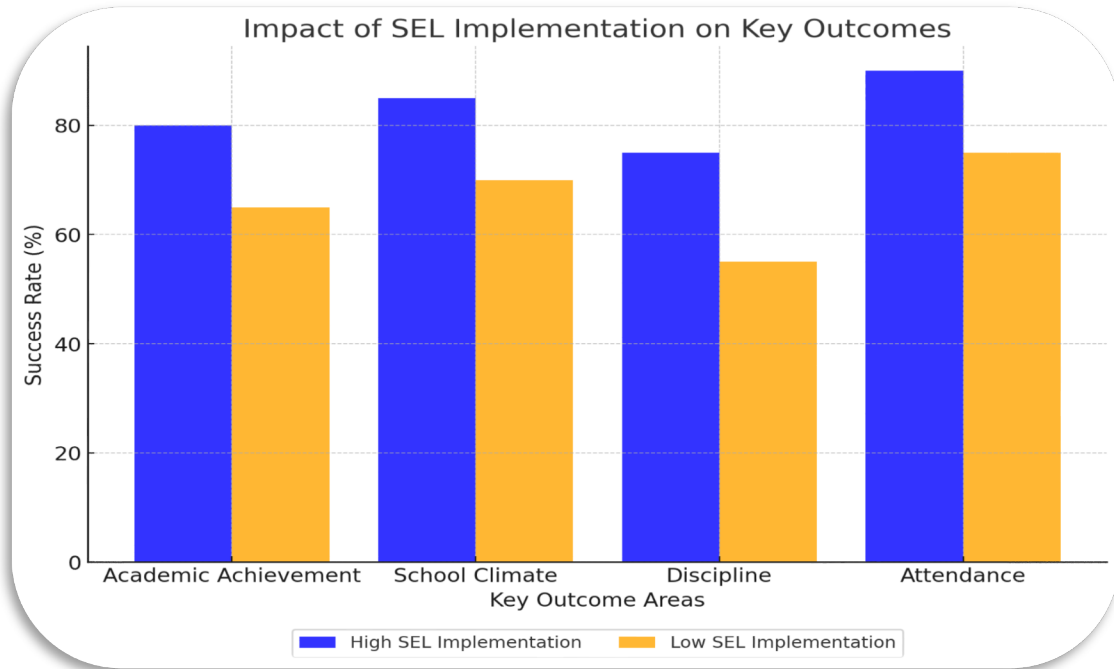
sources across four key areas: academic achievement, school climate, student discipline, and attendance. Standardized test scores from the STAAR were used to measure student performance in reading and mathematics. School climate was assessed through the Student Climate Survey, which captured students' perceptions of respect, safety, and overall learning environment. Educator perspectives were gathered using the Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey, which evaluated staff views on SEL integration, school leadership, and workplace culture. The Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) further measured staff members' perceptions of their own SEL competencies and the implementation practices within their schools.

Figures 2 and 3 present the percentage differences in key outcomes between AISD schools with high and low levels of SEL implementation, underscoring the substantial impact of high-quality SEL integration on both student and school performance. The bar graph provides a visual comparison across the 2011–2017 school years, demonstrating that schools with robust SEL implementation consistently achieved more substantial outcomes in academic achievement, school climate, disciplinary measures, and attendance. These findings demonstrate that schools with robust SEL implementation consistently achieved more substantial outcomes in academic achievement, school climate, disciplinary measures, and attendance throughout this period.

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

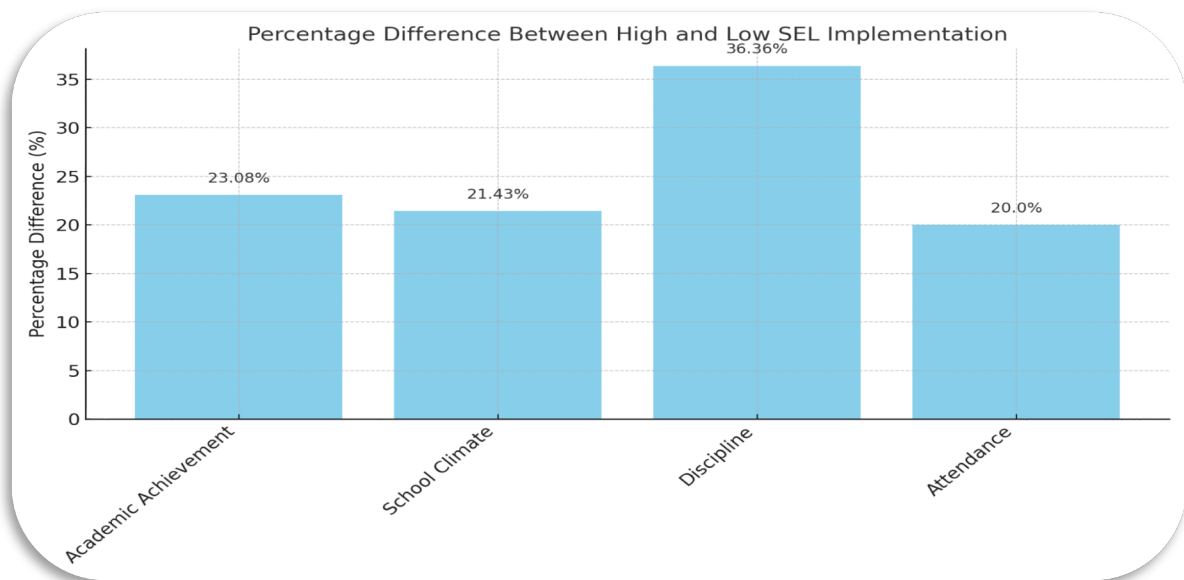
**Figure 2**

*Impact of SEL Implementation on Key Outcomes*



**Figure 3**

*Percentage Difference Between High and Low SEL Implementation*



## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

In addition, disciplinary data were reviewed to monitor office referrals, discretionary removals, and the use of restorative practices. Attendance records were analyzed to determine absenteeism patterns and their correlation with the implementation of SEL. To assess the fidelity of SEL integration, schools were evaluated using a structured implementation rubric that assessed key components, including explicit SEL instruction, schoolwide climate efforts, staff training, and family engagement. Although the rubric was based on prior research-supported frameworks, the exact source of its validation was not specified in the district's publicly available documents. Economic disadvantage data were also incorporated into statistical analyses to control socioeconomic disparities and ensure more equitable comparisons across schools (AISD, 2015).

The study was grounded in a research design that supported meaningful comparisons across implementation levels and timeframes to strengthen the validity of the findings. It employed a quasi-experimental design that compared schools with varying levels of SEL implementation and different years of participation. The methodology sought to isolate the effects of implementation fidelity versus program longevity.

Building on this design, rigorous analysis techniques were employed to examine the relationship between SEL implementation and key student and school-level outcomes. Before SEL implementation, descriptive analysis summarized school characteristics, including demographics and baseline data. A districtwide evaluation of SEL implementation employed regression analyses, controlling for economic disadvantage, to investigate the relationship between SEL ratings and student outcomes. Schools were grouped into implementation quartiles, revealing that campuses with higher SEL implementation had better attendance rates, fewer discipline incidents, and higher standardized test performance compared to those with lower

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

implementation. Longitudinal analyses further demonstrated that these benefits persisted over time, suggesting lasting effects of SEL implementation (Lamb, 2015). To further strengthen the validity of the findings, Lamb (2015) incorporated several key controls and statistical adjustments. Baseline measures such as STAAR test scores, attendance rates, and disciplinary incidents were used to distinguish the effects of SEL implementation from pre-existing school conditions. Economic disadvantages were included as a control variable to account for the influence of socioeconomic disparities on student outcomes. This step ensured that differences in academic performance, behavior, and attendance could be more accurately attributed to the level of SEL implementation rather than to external factors, such as poverty, limited resources, or housing instability. Additionally, adjustments were made to the STAAR assessment format between 2011 and 2017 to ensure consistency in academic performance data. These methodological steps enhanced the accuracy and fairness of the comparisons across schools, reinforcing the reliability of the study's conclusions about the impact of SEL.

The methodology employed a multi-measure approach to assess the impact of SEL, ensuring that findings were not based on a single data point but rather a combination of academic, behavioral, and perceptual outcomes. Using control variables and multiple levels of analysis strengthened the validity of the results, allowing researchers to distinguish between the effects of SEL quality and the number of years a school had been in the program. Building on this robust methodological framework, the evaluation further demonstrated that direct SEL instruction can have a positive influence on student outcomes, particularly in early childhood settings.

For example, Ashdown and Bernard (2012) provided compelling evidence that explicit instruction in SEL skills can significantly enhance young children's development across multiple

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

domains. Their study was conducted in a Catholic primary school in Melbourne, Australia, using the *You Can Do It! (YCDI) Early Childhood Education Program*. Participants included four teachers and 99 students (45 girls and 54 boys) from two Preparatory and two Grade 1 classes (Table 3). Approximately two-thirds of the students spoke English as a second language, with home languages including Vietnamese, Chinese, other Asian languages, African, European, and Pacific Island. One Preparatory and one Grade 1 class were randomly assigned to receive the YCDI program, which was implemented over a 10-week period by the students' regular classroom teachers. The remaining two classes served as a comparison group and received the program only after post-intervention data collection.

The results of this quantitative, quasi-experimental study (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012) revealed statistically significant outcomes. Students in the intervention group demonstrated increased levels of SE competence and overall well-being. Grade 1 students exhibited notable reductions in problem behaviors, including externalizing (e.g., aggression), internalizing (e.g., anxiety), and hyperactivity symptoms. Furthermore, lower-achieving Grade 1 students showed marked improvement in reading achievement, particularly in decoding text (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

These findings reinforce the central premise of this current Capstone project: SEL, when implemented with fidelity, produces measurable benefits in students' emotional functioning and academic performance. The positive outcomes from this relatively brief 10-week intervention (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012) highlight the effectiveness of structured, explicit SEL instruction in the early years of schooling.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

In contrast to other studies, the Ashdown and Bernard’s (2012) research not only supports the general efficacy of SEL but also adds specificity by focusing on early childhood education and integrating direct instructional methods delivered by classroom teachers. Findings underscore the importance of developmental timing, fidelity of implementation, and the role of educators in delivering SEL interventions. These shared outcomes across multiple studies provide robust support for the argument that intentional SEL programming can lead to sustainable gains in both SE functioning and academic achievement, particularly for young learners who require foundational support in these domains.

**Table 3**

*Participant Demographics: Ashdown and Bernard (2012) Study*

Demographic category	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Total students	Students with complete data	99	100.0
Gender	Female	45	45.5
	Male	54	54.5
Grade level	Preparatory (Prep)	42	42.4
	Grade 1	57	57.6
Primary language spoken at home	English	—	46.0
	Asian (non-Chinese, primarily Vietnamese)	—	37.4
	African languages	—	4.0
	Chinese	—	3.0
	European languages	—	8.1
	Pacific Island languages	—	1.0

The YCDI results align with broader findings from large-scale SEL research. These outcomes are consistent with the extensive body of evidence highlighting the effectiveness of

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

high-quality, school-based SEL programs. Durlak et al. (2011) emphasized that structure and fidelity of implementation play a crucial role in maximizing the impact of SEL. That insight is echoed in the design of the YCDI program, which combines direct instruction with embedded classroom practices. Taylor et al. (2017) confirmed similar benefits in a meta-analysis showing that universal, school-based SEL interventions significantly improved students' SE skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic outcomes. Collectively, these findings support the conclusion that well-designed SEL programs, particularly those introduced in early education, can foster meaningful gains across multiple developmental domains.

To further substantiate these findings, one of the most comprehensive and influential sources of evidence comes from a landmark review conducted by CASEL. The 2008 technical report, *The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth-Grade Students*, authored by Payton et al. and published by CASEL, presents a rigorous literature review synthesizing findings from three large-scale, evidence-based research syntheses. These reviews examined 317 studies involving 324,303 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Rather than focusing on a single curriculum, researchers evaluated a broad range of empirically supported SEL programs implemented during the school day and in after-school settings. These programs, typically delivered by school personnel such as teachers and student support staff, were shown to significantly enhance students' SE skills, promote positive behavior, improve school attitudes, and reduce conduct problems and emotional distress. Academic performance was also positively impacted, with students in SEL programs outperforming their peers in control groups by 11 to 17 percentile points.

The review revealed these benefits to be consistent across diverse educational settings, including urban, suburban, and rural schools, and across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

backgrounds. SEL programs proved effective not only for general education students but also for students identified as at risk for behavioral or academic difficulties. Notably, the report emphasized that SEL interventions can be effectively implemented by existing school staff, thereby demonstrating the feasibility of integrating SEL into daily instruction without reliance on external facilitators.

Although the CASEL report (Payton et al., 2008) did not name every SEL program included in the analysis, many of the reviewed studies involved well-established, evidence-based curricula that continue to be cited in SEL literature. Common programs included *Second Step*, *PATHS*, *Steps to Respect*, *Social Decision*, *CSC*, *Making/Social Problem Solving*, and *YCDI! Education*, the latter of which was independently evaluated in the study by Ashdown and Bernard (2012). These programs reflect diverse approaches to developing students' self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal competence, and decision-making skills.

The findings outlined in Payton et al. (2008) directly support the guiding element of this Capstone project: SEL, when implemented with fidelity, promotes the holistic development of students by fostering emotional well-being, prosocial behavior, and academic success. The authors concluded by recommending the broad implementation of high-quality, evidence-based SEL programs during and after school hours and noted their demonstrated success in improving student outcomes across multiple domains. Their findings position SEL as one of the most impactful and scalable strategies available to educators seeking to support the comprehensive development of school-age children. This result highlights the importance of examining how such programs can be adapted and sustained in diverse educational contexts, particularly in alternative and correctional settings wherein students often face compounded academic, behavioral, and SE challenges.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Given the disproportionate challenges faced by youth in alternative and correctional settings, it is essential to evaluate how SEL interventions function in these environments. Many students, particularly students with disabilities or considered at risk, enter these settings after years of unmet behavioral and emotional needs. Research demonstrates that, while SEL holds significant promise for this population, its implementation remains inconsistent and often lacks the structured support necessary for long-term success.

To address this gap, Abrams and Aguilar (2005) conducted a qualitative study examining behavior change in 10 juvenile male offenders enrolled in a residential treatment facility. Using Stein and Markus's (1996) self-concept theory as a framework, the researchers identified three key developmental processes: recognition of negative behavior patterns, formulation of aspirational and feared selves, and development of behavioral strategies. The study targeted 10 adolescents, ages 15 to 17, who participated in a 4- to 6-month residential program followed by 3 months of aftercare. Over the course of 16 months of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the researchers explored these developmental stages.

The intervention incorporated multiple therapeutic approaches to support behavioral change in youth:

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Youth participated in daily sessions that taught techniques such as *thought stopping* to manage impulsive or violent behaviors. They were guided to challenge negative thought patterns and adopt more rational responses, a process that aligned with core CBT principles aimed at emotional regulation and reducing antisocial behaviors.
- **Behavior Modification and Level System:** A five-tiered behavior modification framework allowed youth to progress through levels by completing reflective

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

treatment contracts. These contracts addressed personal responsibility, cycles of violence, crime consequences, family trauma, and future aspirations. Progress was linked to emotional growth and behavioral insight.

- **SEL-Aligned Skill Building:** Although not formally labeled SEL, the program embedded self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills through group counseling, individual therapy, reflective writing, and peer discussions.
- **Aftercare Planning:** Youth received 3 months of post-release support; however, the study noted limited long-term impact due to inadequate community-based reinforcement of the skills learned during treatment.

Although the program incorporated several elements aligned with SEL, including CBT, emotional regulation, and reflective writing, many participants struggled to apply these skills after release due to external barriers such as gang involvement, family instability, and lack of community support. These findings (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005) emphasized the need for SEL models that integrate both individual development and community-based reinforcement to reduce recidivism and promote sustained progress. Despite those limitations, integrating evidence-based SEL frameworks within educational settings has the potential to significantly reduce the likelihood that students with disabilities will be placed in restrictive environments, including juvenile detention.

SEL programs promote the development of critical competencies, such as self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills, that are particularly vital for students with disabilities, who often struggle with behavioral regulation and social interactions (CASEL, 2013). Research indicates that high-quality SEL interventions can improve students' emotional regulation, reduce incidents of disruptive behavior, and enhance

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

academic engagement, thereby decreasing the need for exclusionary disciplinary practices and restrictive placements (Durlak et al., 2011; Osher et al., 2020).

By proactively addressing the underlying SE and behavioral challenges that frequently contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, SEL serves as a protective factor, fostering resilience and promoting positive school climates. When schools commit to SEL implementation, they are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities, provide targeted support, and prevent the escalation of behaviors that often result in placement in juvenile justice settings. Thus, the adoption of SEL is a critical component in promoting equity, supporting inclusion, and mitigating the systemic issues that contribute to the disproportionate institutionalization of students with disabilities (Carson, 2015; Osher et al., 2020).

While Abrams and Aguilar's (2005) intervention was not based on a formal SEL curriculum such as Second Step or PATHS, its components aligned with core competencies outlined by CASEL; however, unlike comprehensive SEL curricula that offer consistent language, schoolwide integration, and family engagement materials, the program in Abrams and Aguilar's study lacked a standardized framework. It focused heavily on individual behavioral change without addressing systemic or relational SEL skills. Moreover, while SEL programs such as Second Step include strategies for reinforcing skills across settings, the study participants often struggled to generalize learned behaviors post-release due to the absence of coordinated environmental support. This outcome highlights a critical limitation in informal or unstructured SEL approaches and underscores the potential benefits of implementing evidence-based SEL curricula that extend beyond treatment settings and into homes, schools, and communities.

This limitation is further illustrated in the comparison between the informal, facility-based approach used in the Abrams and Aguilar (2005) study and a structured SEL curriculum,

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

such as Second Step, as shown in Table 4. The comparison highlights key differences in curriculum structure, consistency, and support systems that directly impact the effectiveness and sustainability of SEL outcomes across various settings.

**Table 4**

*Comparison of SEL Curriculum vs. Abrams and Aguilar (2005)*

Component	Second Step/SEL curricula	Abrams & Aguilar (2005) study
Type of curriculum	Structured, evidence-based SEL curriculum	Informal, facility-developed program
SEL competencies targeted	Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making	Primarily self-awareness, self-management, and decision-making
Instructional format	Sequenced classroom lessons, role-play, group discussion, multimedia	Cognitive skills groups, reflective writing (contracts), peer discussion
Consistency & fidelity	Delivered with scripted lessons and fidelity checklists	Varies by facilitator; not standardized
Family & community engagement	Includes parent resources, home links, and reinforcement strategies	Lacked consistent engagement with families or coordinated aftercare strategies
Skill generalization	Strategies to reinforce skills across contexts (school, home, community)	Youth struggled to apply skills after release without community/environmental support
Focus on peer & relationship skills	Emphasizes empathy, communication, and healthy relationship building	Minimal focus on social awareness or peer relationships; peer influence is often seen as a barrier
Post-program support	Encourages ongoing reinforcement and schoolwide implementation	Provided only 3 months of unstructured aftercare; support was limited

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Subsequent studies have further demonstrated the value of SEL in alternative settings. S. M. Jones et al. (2011) evaluated the Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution (4Rs) curriculum in trauma-exposed urban schools and reported notable improvements in students' self-regulation, decreased conduct problems, and stronger teacher-student relationships. This 2-year randomized controlled trial involving 1,184 third-grade students—approximately 46% Hispanic, 41% African American, and 4% non-Hispanic White—revealed that students in the 4Rs program displayed fewer depressive symptoms and showed improvements in aggression, social skills, and conflict resolution compared to peers in the control group. Later research extending the program with My Teaching Partner across 5,081 students in 60 NYC schools showed that this high-quality implementation improved emotional support in classrooms and reduced student absenteeism.

Durlak et al. (2010) contributed to this discussion through a meta-analysis of after-school SEL programs, many of which were implemented in nontraditional settings. Their findings confirmed that programs following the **Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit** framework were consistently associated with improvements in emotional skills, behavioral regulation, and academic performance. Similarly, Greenberg et al. (2003) documented reductions in aggression and enhanced emotional control in behavior-focused day schools.

In contrast, Zenz and Langelett (2004) surveyed juvenile detention centers in Wisconsin. They found that over 60% of incarcerated youth had special education needs, a rate significantly higher than in traditional public schools. These students frequently faced instructional disruptions and lacked access to structured SEL programs. Their findings underscore the necessity of SEL interventions that support continuity during transition periods and address the whole child.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Glenn et al. (2018) advocated for culturally responsive SEL as a proactive alternative to punitive discipline in juvenile settings. Their work, aligned with North Carolina's Raise the Age (RTA) legislation, emphasized the Dangers of the Mind (DOM) curriculum, which incorporates technology, cultural relevance, and mentorship. While the article drew on foundational SEL research (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011) and underscored the importance of equity, it lacked an empirical evaluation of DOM's effectiveness. For example, it did not address barriers to implementation, such as funding and staff training.

Enacted effective December 1, 2019, North Carolina's Raise the Age legislation (RTA) raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 18, meaning that most 16- and 17-year-olds are now processed through the juvenile justice system rather than as adults (North Carolina Office of the Courts / NC Courts, 2019). This reform reflects a growing recognition that adolescents may benefit more from rehabilitative and developmentally appropriate interventions than purely punitive ones, creating an opportunity to embed SEL programming into juvenile justice settings. Key findings from North Carolina Courts (2019) suggest that SEL is an effective and well-supported strategy for improving both behavioral and academic outcomes. Structured SEL programming holds particular promise for justice-involved youth, especially when culturally relevant models such as DOM are implemented to meet the needs of diverse populations. The authors emphasized that the enactment of RTA provides a strategic opening to implement these interventions system-wide.

Further advancing this perspective, Hicks (2024) introduced the Juvenile Justice SEL (JJS-SEL) framework, which promotes SEL delivery through probation officers and correctional staff by focusing on integration, development, and engagement. Similarly, a Canadian report from Manitoba Education and Training & Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP; 2020)

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

emphasized the need for culturally grounded, trauma-informed SEL frameworks tailored to marginalized students in alternative and correctional environments.

Despite these innovations, SEL implementation in juvenile justice settings remains fragmented and under-researched. Although multiple studies confirm SEL's benefits during key school transitions, few offer longitudinal or empirically validated models specific to justice-involved youth. The lack of PD, systemic infrastructure, and sustained policy support hinders program scalability and long-term impact.

Current policies designed to address troubling behavior with harsh punishments may be ineffective in reducing or eliminating the behaviors and exacerbate the problems they intend to address (Krezmien et al., 2006). This issue is a particular concern regarding students with disabilities, who often exhibit problem behaviors that require sustained and intensive interventions. Krezmien et al. (2006) reported that students with disabilities represent approximately 11% of all school-age children but nearly 20% of the students who are suspended (p. 218), thus underscoring the urgency for systemic reforms grounded in SE support rather than punitive discipline.

Among the Krezmien et al. (2006) is its foundation in SEL research by respected scholars such as Durlak et al. (2011). It also emphasizes culturally responsive approaches that address racial and ethnic disparities while drawing on multidisciplinary expertise from juvenile justice, mental health, and community advocacy. These qualities make Krezmien et al.'s (2006) research a compelling contribution to the growing call for equality-centered SEL interventions in nontraditional educational settings.

In response to RQ2, the literature consistently demonstrates that evidence-based SEL interventions play a pivotal role in supporting students with disabilities and students considered

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

at risk during critical school transitions. These transitions, including the move from early childhood to elementary school, from elementary to middle school, and reentry from alternative or juvenile justice placements, present heightened challenges for students already navigating emotional, academic, or environmental vulnerabilities. SEL frameworks function as protective systems equipping students with the foundational competencies needed to regulate emotions, build peer relationships, and engage meaningfully with academic content.

The studies discussed in this capstone underscore the disproportionate impact of poorly supported transitions on African American students, students from low-income families, and youth identified with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Persistent disparities in access to emotional and behavioral supports, particularly for Black and Hispanic students, underscore the urgency for schoolwide, culturally responsive SEL programs.

These national surveys and large-scale studies highlight inequitable service delivery and disproportionate disciplinary rates, revealing how systemic barriers exacerbate the risks associated with school transitions for marginalized populations. Evidence from a range of educational contexts confirms that programs such as PATHS, CSC, and Second Step enhance emotional resilience, reduce disruptive behaviors, and improve academic performance, especially when implemented with fidelity. Longitudinal and meta-analytic studies consistently demonstrate the positive impact of these programs on student engagement, behavior, and achievement. Notably, SEL interventions embedded within MTSS have proven especially effective in improving academic outcomes for students with disabilities. However, implementing SEL in alternative and juvenile justice settings presents unique challenges. Research on these environments suggests that structured, culturally relevant SEL approaches can reduce recidivism, enhance emotional regulation, and support successful reentry. These outcomes are possible when

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

programs address both individual competencies and broader systemic gaps in continuity of care. Programs that lack clear frameworks or community reinforcement often fail to produce sustained impact, underscoring the importance of whole-child models that extend beyond facility walls.

Although SEL is widely implemented across PreK–12 school settings, its use in juvenile justice and alternative education remains significantly underdeveloped. Research highlights the critical need for SEL interventions tailored to justice-involved youth students who often experience trauma, systemic inequities, and unmet mental health needs (Hicks, 2024). These youth, disproportionately Black, Hispanic, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) or identified with disabilities, seldom receive structured, trauma-informed support during rehabilitation. Hicks (2024) introduced the JJS-SEL framework, which emphasizes integration, development, and engagement as guiding strategies for empowering juvenile justice staff to deliver SEL content during supervision.

Similarly, a policy brief from North Carolina highlighted the DOM curriculum, a culturally responsive SEL program that incorporates technology, popular culture, and mentorship to engage underserved youth of color (Center for Educational Equity, 2023). Preliminary outcomes suggest improvements in academic engagement, confidence, and behavior. However, like many promising models, DOM remains limited by a lack of empirical validation, inconsistent implementation, and insufficient systemic support.

Collectively, these findings affirm that SEL is not a supplemental initiative but a foundational component of equitable education and rehabilitation. SEL equips students, particularly students with disabilities, students from at-risk backgrounds, and students involved in the justice system, with essential competencies in emotional regulation, decision-making, and social connection. These skills are vital during the transition and reentry phases when students

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

face heightened vulnerability. Nevertheless, implementation in juvenile justice and alternative settings remains fragmented and lacks the empirical data necessary to validate its effectiveness across various contexts. Without cohesive infrastructure, sustained PD, and rigorous research, the full impact of SEL will remain unrealized. Advancing educational equity demands strategic investment in culturally responsive SEL frameworks, fidelity monitoring, and longitudinal evaluation to strengthen the evidence base and inform best practices across underserved systems. Although the evidence strongly supports the value of SEL for students with disabilities and at-risk students, the success of these interventions hinges on one critical factor: educator readiness.

Programs such as PATHS, Second Step, and CSC have consistently demonstrated improvements in student outcomes when implemented with fidelity and cultural responsiveness. These interventions are especially beneficial for students from historically marginalized backgrounds, including Black and Hispanic students, who often face disproportionate barriers to support. However, the research also reveals that SEL implementation in juvenile justice and alternative education contexts remains limited, fragmented, and under-evaluated. While emerging frameworks, such as JJS-SEL, and culturally responsive models, like DOM, show promise, sustained impact requires systemic infrastructure, longitudinal research, and PD. These findings confirm that SEL is not a supplemental initiative but rather a foundational strategy for achieving educational equity.

In this comprehensive review, some studies were reviewed in greater depth to ensure alignment with the research questions and to capture the most comprehensive evidence on SEL effectiveness. Priority was given to studies that demonstrated methodological rigor, large or diverse samples, and measurable outcomes related to student achievement, teacher practice, and school climate. Research such as Durlak et al. (2011), OECD (2021), and Lamb (2018) were

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

examined in detail because these studies provided extensive empirical evidence and served as foundational references for understanding the systemic impact of SEL implementation. In contrast, studies with narrower scopes or primarily theoretical perspectives were summarized more concisely to maintain coherence and focus. This approach allowed the literature review to balance breadth and depth while emphasizing evidence that informs equitable and sustainable SEL practices across educational contexts.

### **Research Question 3**

The success of SEL interventions, especially in high-need settings, ultimately depends on educator readiness, ongoing training, and program fidelity, topics further examined while exploring RQ3, which asked the following: How does PD influence the fidelity and effectiveness of evidence-based SEL programs implementation among educators?

### **Teacher Training and Professional Development**

The effectiveness of SEL programs is closely tied to the quality of teacher training and implementation. Durlak et al. (2011) identified PD as a critical factor in the successful implementation of SEL programs. Their meta-analysis, comprising 213 individual studies, found that programs with strong implementation fidelity, often supported by comprehensive teacher training, yielded significantly better student outcomes in emotional regulation, academic achievement, and behavior. The researchers emphasized that when educators receive thorough preparation in both SEL theory and practical instructional strategies, they are more likely to deliver SEL content consistently and effectively.

In a separate study, researchers at AISD (2015) found that ongoing PD was essential for building teachers' confidence and capacity to implement SEL. Their internal evaluation showed that schools with strong professional learning systems experienced improvements in school

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

climate and student engagement. These findings highlight the importance of sustained, high-quality professional learning as a foundation for effective SEL integration. Additionally, the OECD (2021) supported this perspective by reporting that schools that delivered SEL in a structured and developmentally appropriate manner observed the most significant gains in student outcomes. This outcome suggests that teacher preparation and consistency are key contributors to program success.

Jones et al. (2017), as cited throughout the literature, emphasized that sustained, targeted PD empowers educators to integrate SEL authentically into their pedagogy. When educators are prepared and supported, they can foster environments that nurture student growth and well-being.

A more recent Canadian qualitative study by Peddigrew et al. (2022), conducted in Ontario Catholic schools, provides an insightful exploration of the mechanisms through which SEL programs generate meaningful change in elementary classrooms. Peddigrew et al. explored the implementation of the *Faith and Wellness: A Daily Mental Health Resource* tool developed by School Mental Health Ontario in collaboration with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. The participants were educators from Catholic school boards across the province.

Peddigrew et al. (2022) used a phenomenological approach, a qualitative methodology that seeks to understand how individuals experience and interpret a particular phenomenon in their everyday lives. Rooted in philosophy, this method emphasizes participants' lived experiences and aims to uncover the essence or core meaning of those experiences through detailed descriptions and reflective analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Drawing from teacher-led focus groups conducted after the implementation of the Faith and Wellness SEL Resource, Peddigrew et al. identified five key mechanisms critical to SEL success: the use of a whole-class

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

approach, the development of a shared SEL vocabulary, the integration of brief and repeatable practices, the application of strategies across varied contexts, and the enhancement of teachers' own SEL knowledge and confidence. These mechanisms not only shaped the effectiveness of student outcomes but also influenced teachers' professional growth and overall classroom dynamics. Educators reported increased self-awareness, more responsive classroom management, and improved emotional well-being, factors that likely contributed to sustained improvements in student behavior and engagement. Since it was a qualitative study, no quantitative statistical analyses were reported; findings were derived from thematic patterns (recurring themes) within participants' narratives rather than numerical measures.

Unlike earlier quantitative studies, which focused primarily on program outcomes, the Peddигrew et al. (2022) study offered vital insight into how SEL works in practice by explaining the processes that support successful implementation in real classrooms. While statistical measures such as percentile gains provide convincing evidence of efficacy, qualitative data highlight the relational and instructional strategies teachers use to bring SEL to life for students. For example, the study documented how kindergarteners were able to articulate their emotions using new vocabulary, request calming strategies like breathing exercises, and even model these behaviors for peers. Teachers also noticed the ripple effects of SEL practices extending to students' families and home environments.

Research strongly suggests that the success of SEL programs is closely tied to the quality and consistency of teacher training, PD, and leadership support. Teachers are the primary facilitators of SEL in classrooms, yet many report feeling underprepared to integrate SEL principles into their daily practice (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Without proper training, SEL implementation can become fragmented or superficial, limiting its effectiveness in addressing

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

student needs, particularly among students with disabilities and students at risk. PD in SEL equips teachers to deliver instruction more effectively, supports improved classroom management, and leads to stronger student outcomes (Collie et al., 2015; Greenberg et al., 2017).

Research within alternative and correctional education settings reinforces the central role of teacher preparation and sustained PD in delivering effective SEL. Krezmien et al. (2006) found that only 28% of teachers in juvenile correctional facilities had received formal training in SEL or behavioral interventions prior to entering the classroom, with more than 60% reporting that they learned strategies informally on the job. In a multi-state study, Osher et al. (2020) found that teachers who completed a 40-hour SEL and trauma-informed care training increased observed positive classroom interactions by 22% and reduced punitive discipline by 17% within 6 months, while also reporting a 15% decline in burnout. Collectively, these findings support Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) prosocial classroom model, affirming that teachers' own SE competence, well-being, and ongoing professional learning are essential to maintaining the fidelity and effectiveness of SEL implementation in high-need educational environments.

Structured, evidence-based professional development in social and emotional learning (SEL) has been shown to enhance teacher competence, confidence, and instructional consistency. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) demonstrated that teachers who participated in SEL-focused professional development were better able to manage classrooms, build positive student relationships, and promote emotionally safe learning environments, factors that directly influence student engagement and academic performance. Using a conceptual synthesis methodology, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) developed the Prosocial Classroom Model, integrating theoretical and empirical research on how teacher well-being, emotional competence, and classroom climate relate to student outcomes. Drawing on multidisciplinary evidence from

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

psychology, education, and neuroscience, the authors systematically reviewed and synthesized prior studies to construct a framework that illustrates how teachers' social and emotional competencies shape classroom emotional tone, instructional quality, and student achievement. Although the model was not based on newly collected empirical data, its methodological rigor lay in the systematic integration and analysis of existing research, which provided a coherent and testable theoretical foundation for future inquiry. While the absence of longitudinal data limits confirmation of causal pathways, the Prosocial Classroom Model remains a seminal contribution that continues to inform SEL implementation, teacher professional development, and policy efforts aimed at fostering emotionally supportive and effective classroom environments.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) employed an integrative literature review methodology to examine the relationship between adult social and emotional competence and effective SEL implementation in schools. The review synthesized findings from both quantitative and qualitative studies evaluating evidence-based SEL programs such as Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), Second Step, and MindUP across K–12 educational settings. By systematically analyzing empirical research on teacher well-being, classroom climate, and student outcomes, Schonert-Reichl highlighted how educators' own emotional competence and well-being directly influence the quality of classroom interactions and the success of SEL implementation. The thematic synthesis revealed consistent improvements in students' emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, and academic engagement following well-implemented SEL interventions. However, the review also identified challenges related to inconsistent program fidelity, limited teacher preparation, and the need for sustained professional development. By integrating multiple methodological perspectives, Schonert-Reichl underscored that SEL success depends on building

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

educators' capacity to model emotional regulation, empathy, and responsible decision-making within supportive and sustainable frameworks.

In addition, Collie et al. (2015) noted that SEL PD contributes to higher teacher self-efficacy and emotional resilience, which in turn reduces stress and burnout. Teachers who feel supported in their SEL efforts are more likely to sustain implementation and respond effectively to students' behavior. Similarly, Reyes et al. (2012) found that higher-quality implementation of SEL programs supported by effective professional development was linked to more emotionally supportive classroom environments, which in turn predicted greater student engagement and higher academic achievement.

These findings reinforce the importance of implementation fidelity, as demonstrated in the AISD (2015) SEL study, in which schools with higher levels of SEL integration, often supported by sustained PD, achieved stronger academic and behavioral outcomes.

Effective SEL PD involves more than introductory workshops. Ongoing coaching, modeling, and collaborative learning communities significantly enhance the quality of implementation. According to Oberle et al. (2016), teachers who receive mentorship and embedded PD report greater success in integrating SEL into daily instruction. Yoder (2014) recommended aligning SEL competencies with teacher evaluation frameworks to ensure continuity between PD goals and professional expectations. Furthermore, Garet et al. (2001) argued that PD is most effective when it is sustained, content-focused, and aligned with broader school goals and principles, which are essential when scaling SEL initiatives.

### **Barriers to Implementation**

Although evidence supports the effectiveness of SEL programs, multiple studies highlight significant barriers that hinder successful implementation, particularly in under-

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

resourced and high-needs schools. A recurring challenge is the lack of teacher preparation and ongoing PD in SEL strategies. For instance, the AISD study revealed that schools with lower SEL implementation fidelity often had limited staff training and support systems, resulting in weaker outcomes in student behavior and academic performance.

Similarly, research by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) emphasized that many students enter school without foundational SE skills, yet teachers are often unprepared to deliver targeted interventions. This lack of preparation highlights the critical role of PD in equipping educators to meet students' diverse SEL needs. A common barrier to successful implementation is the tendency to treat SEL as a supplementary initiative rather than embedding it into schoolwide practices. Durlak et al. (2011) found that SEL programs yielded the strongest outcomes when they were implemented with fidelity across entire schools and supported by clear structures, strong leadership, and sustained PD. However, maintaining such consistency remains a challenge in many schools due to resource limitations and competing priorities. Without an evidence-based curriculum, comprehensive training, administrative backing, and long-term planning, SEL programs often become fragmented or unsustainable. These findings underscore the necessity of high-quality, ongoing PD as a foundational element of effective SEL program implementation and suggest that evidence-based SEL programs risk fragmentation or sustainability without adequate training, administrative support, and long-term planning.

On the other hand, Brackett et al. (2012) examined teachers' internal beliefs about SEL and how these beliefs influence their implementation of SEL. They discovered the significant role these beliefs play in shaping teachers' confidence, attitudes, and perceived support when delivering SEL instruction. Brackett et al. (2012) conducted a 2-phase study to explore the relationship between teachers' beliefs and the implementation of SEL programs. The researchers

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

developed and validated a brief and practical scale that measures teachers' comfort with teaching SEL, their commitment to improving their SEL practices, and their perception of whether their school culture supports SEL. In the first phase, the scale was tested with 935 kindergarten through eighth-grade teachers from Catholic schools in New York. In the second phase, the tool was used with 88 fifth- and sixth-grade teachers participating in the RULER SEL program as part of a randomized controlled trial. Findings showed that teachers' beliefs were strongly connected to their confidence in delivering SEL instruction, their attitudes toward SEL programming, and their perception of support from administrators. However, these beliefs, as measured by external observers, did not directly predict the quality of implementation. This finding suggests that although positive teacher beliefs are important, other factors, such as school resources, leadership, and ongoing training, may also influence how well SEL programs are implemented (Brackett et al., 2012).

### **Resource and Funding Limitations**

Many districts face constraints that limit their ability to invest in SEL infrastructure. These limitations include insufficient funding for curriculum materials, limited availability of trained SEL specialists, and a lack of dedicated funding streams for long-term program sustainability. Schools in low-income communities are particularly affected, as they often prioritize academic recovery, staffing, and basic operational needs over SEL resources. Without adequate funding, districts may implement SEL initiatives inconsistently by relying on short-term grants or reallocating existing funds, thereby undermining program fidelity. This patchwork approach can create disparities within the same district, with some schools receiving more comprehensive SEL support than others.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

### **Professional Development in SEL for Teachers**

Teachers must receive ongoing, job-embedded PD focused on SEL instruction, trauma-informed practices, cultural competence, and restorative approaches. SEL cannot be effectively implemented without educators who feel confident in their content knowledge and SE competencies. Districts should prioritize SEL-focused training for all staff, including support personnel and administrators, to ensure alignment and shared responsibility. Moreover, mentoring, coaching, and collaborative planning structures should be built into implementation strategies to support teacher growth.

Within this context, the study by Sugishita and Dresser (2019) is highly relevant to the ongoing discussion of SEL in teacher preparation programs. Their research focused on integrating SEL strategies into a year-long field course for preservice teachers (PSTs) at San José State University that provided practical insights into how SEL competencies can be effectively taught and implemented. This study highlights the importance of preparing PSTs to not only support the SE development of their future students but also to model SEL skills themselves. The researchers identified key SEL strategies, such as active engagement, equitable access to learning, and positive discipline, that PSTs were trained to incorporate into their teaching practices. These strategies align closely with the objectives outlined by CASEL (2013) and Yoder (2014), which emphasized active engagement and teacher responsiveness as critical components of effective SEL instruction. Sugishita and Dresser primarily performed a qualitative action research study. While the study incorporated some quantitative elements, such as frequency analysis and quasi-statistics like means and medians from lesson plan data, its primary approach was qualitative, focusing on the perspectives and experiences of the PSTs. The study utilized narrative data, including written self-assessments and lesson observations, to explore

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

how teachers implemented and reflected on SEL strategies in their classrooms. By examining how PSTs applied these strategies in real classroom settings, Sugishita and Dresser provided evidence of how SEL training can positively impact teachers' professional habits and teaching efficacy. Their study highlights the importance of ongoing teacher development in SEL by emphasizing that educators must be equipped with both the knowledge and practical tools to create supportive, emotionally safe, and inclusive classrooms.

The teachers in Sugishita and Dresser's (2019) study also noted that they felt more equipped to handle classroom management and discipline in a positive and non-punitive manner. They reported that using SEL strategies fostered a more caring and supportive classroom environment, which helped improve students' behavior and supported their academic and SE development. Overall, the teachers appreciated how the study had impacted their teaching practices and felt that the SEL training would be valuable in their future careers.

Despite its benefits, many barriers hinder the implementation of targeted SEL PD. Teacher preparation programs often fail to include formal SEL instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), leaving educators to navigate integration independently once in the field. Time constraints, competing curricular demands, and limited resources further reduce opportunities for PD participation. PD efforts can become inconsistent, fragmented, or deprioritized in schools lacking administrative support or clearly defined SEL policies.

Taken together, the quantitative findings of Payton et al. (2008) and Durlak et al. (2011), along with the qualitative evidence presented by Peddigrew et al. (2022), support the argument that SEL, when implemented thoughtfully and consistently, can have a profound impact on both student and teacher well-being. The alignment across these studies, despite differences in methodology, demonstrates that structured SEL interventions not only improve academic and

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

behavioral outcomes but also foster emotionally intelligent classroom environments that support long-term student development. These shared outcomes offer robust support for the guiding principle of this Capstone: SEL, when implemented with fidelity, has the power to improve children's social, emotional, and academic competencies in sustainable and meaningful ways.

To address the guiding RQs, this Capstone is anchored in a conceptual framework emphasizing structured, evidence-based implementation as critical to SEL program effectiveness. The effectiveness of SEL programs is contingent on structured, evidence-based implementation. Schools that integrated SEL into their curricula explicitly and systematically, through direct instruction, teacher training, and whole-school involvement, reported the most substantial benefits. This outcome highlights the importance of PD for educators because teachers who receive training in SEL are better equipped to model SE competencies, reinforce SEL principles, and foster a supportive learning environment (S.M. Jones et al., 2017).

To bolster this perspective, S. Jones et al. (2018) emphasized that effective SEL implementation depends on attending to multiple dimensions that influence fidelity and impact. A large-scale review of more than 500 prevention program studies cited in their brief found that implementation practices significantly affect outcomes, with high-quality implementation linked to stronger student results. Their recommendations highlight the importance of ensuring that SEL instruction is delivered consistently and explicitly, with lessons sequenced, active, focused, and targeted to specific skills. Family and community engagement is also identified (S. Jones et al., 2018) as a critical component, and SEL encourages activities and events that connect learning across home, school, and community contexts. School climate and culture supports are seen as essential for embedding SEL into classroom management, instructional strategies, and broader school policies, creating a cohesive and supportive learning environment. PD and training for

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

educators, along with resources to support implementation, are underscored as vital for sustaining high-quality delivery (S. Jones et al., 2018). In addition, the use of tools to assess both student outcomes and implementation quality is recommended to guide decision-making and maintain program alignment with local needs. Collectively, such recommendations align with a broader body of research demonstrating that well-designed and well-implemented SEL initiatives can produce significant improvements in student outcomes across diverse educational contexts.

These studies provide a compelling body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of SEL in improving student outcomes across diverse educational contexts. From targeted, culturally responsive interventions in urban elementary settings (Campbell et al., 2022) to large-scale meta-analytic findings (Durlak et al., 2011) and international assessments like the OECD's SSES study, research consistently demonstrates that SEL promotes emotional regulation, strengthens peer relationships, and reduces behavioral disruptions. Moreover, the evidence suggests that SEL's impact extends beyond behavior, positively influencing academic performance, school climate, and long-term student engagement. A recurring theme across all studies is the critical role of implementation fidelity: SEL is most effective when integrated systematically, supported by teacher training, and aligned with broader school policies and culture. It is important to note that culturally adapted and developmentally appropriate SEL programs are especially important for students with disabilities and students considered at risk because these learners often face compounded social and academic challenges. Overall, the research affirms that SEL should not be just a supplemental initiative but a foundational framework essential for fostering equity, resilience, and academic success in today's diverse school environments. These diverse studies range from small-scale interventions to large-scale meta-analyses and international evaluations.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

One common theme emerges: SEL significantly enhances student outcomes when implemented systematically, culturally adapted, and supported by strong policies and teacher training.

The literature and research consistently demonstrate that SEL fosters emotional regulation, social competence, and academic success, particularly for students with disabilities and students at risk. Studies emphasize that structured, schoolwide SEL programs lead to measurable reductions in behavioral challenges, including noncompliance, disruption, and aggression, while also improving student resilience, engagement, and classroom interactions. The importance of culturally responsive SEL approaches was also highlighted, particularly for marginalized student populations. Additionally, these findings support the improvement plan presented in Section 3, thus highlighting that the benefits of SEL accumulate over time and that SEL requires longitudinal implementation across multiple grade levels to sustain student growth, as noted by Durlak et al (2011).

The OECD's international SSES provides compelling evidence that the impact of SEL extends beyond the national education systems, reinforcing its global relevance in fostering student success. These findings support the use of SEL as an essential evidence-based framework for developing SE and academic competencies, particularly for students facing systemic barriers to success. To address these challenges, district stakeholders must treat SEL as a strategic priority and embed it within their PD systems. This process includes allocating time for training, creating SEL learning communities, and integrating SEL into teacher induction and evaluation systems. When SEL training is sustained, practical, and aligned with teachers' roles, educators are empowered to deliver meaningful, evidence-based instruction that promotes students' academic and emotional growth. In sum, the success of the SEL program is closely tied to the quality and consistency of teacher training, PD, and leadership support.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The AISD (2015) study utilized surveys, such as TELL and ECS, to evaluate how well teachers felt supported in implementing SEL strategies. Additional studies (e.g., Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; S.M. Jones et al., 2017) have revealed that educators who receive focused SEL training are more effective in modeling and teaching SEL competencies, which results in improved student outcomes and school performance. In response to RQ3, the literature overwhelmingly supports the notion that PD is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of SEL programs. Across diverse educational contexts, the research shows that teachers who receive structured, sustained, and context-specific SEL training are better equipped to deliver high-quality instruction, foster emotionally supportive classrooms, and respond effectively to students' needs. Studies such as those by Durlak et al. (2011) and S.M. Jones et al. (2017) highlight a direct correlation between teacher training and improved student outcomes, including increased emotional regulation, academic achievement, and prosocial behavior. Moreover, qualitative findings from studies such as Peddrew et al. (2022) and Sugishita and Dresser (2019) offer important insights into how PD impacts teacher confidence, classroom climate, and instructional practices, thereby reinforcing the connection between adult SEL and student well-being.

Although the benefits of SEL-focused PD are clear, the literature also reveals persistent barriers to implementation, including limited funding, inadequate teacher preparation, and inconsistent leadership support. Teachers frequently report a lack of time, resources, and administrative backing to integrate SEL into daily practice effectively. These challenges are particularly acute in under-resourced schools, where competing priorities can undermine implementation fidelity. Additionally, studies such as Brackett et al. (2012) emphasize the importance of teacher beliefs and perceptions of SEL, suggesting that internal attitudes combined

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

with external support systems shape how SEL is delivered and sustained. Collectively, the reviewed literature underscores the transformative potential of evidence-based SEL programs when implemented with fidelity across diverse educational settings. Studies aligned with RQ1 confirm that SEL interventions significantly enhance students' emotional regulation, peer relationships, and overall well-being, particularly when integrated into the school culture. Findings for RQ2 highlight the unique value of SEL in supporting students with disabilities and those at risk during critical transitions, thus emphasizing the importance of trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive practices.

Finally, findings related to RQ3 reveal that PD is a cornerstone of successful SEL implementation, with ongoing training, mentorship, and administrative support directly linked to improved teacher efficacy and student outcomes. Despite these promising results, the literature also identifies persistent barriers, such as limited teacher preparation, inconsistent implementation, and resource disparities, that compromise the fidelity of SEL programs. These findings have all contributed to the improvement plan presented in Section 3, which offers strategies to promote equitable and sustainable SEL integration tailored to the needs of diverse student populations.

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## SECTION 3: STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### **Introduction to the Plan**

Although the initial focus of this professional learning series centers on traditional K–12 educators, the framework is intentionally designed to be adaptable across a range of educational contexts. It extends to educators and staff in juvenile justice and alternative education programs, parochial schools, and community-based or non-school environments that serve students with diverse social-emotional and behavioral needs. This inclusive design ensures that the SEL implementation model supports every learner, regardless of setting or circumstance.

This section introduces a comprehensive, research-informed implementation plan aimed at addressing systemic barriers that impede the effective integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) within K–12 systems. Particular emphasis is placed on strengthening supports for students in special education, improving cross-grade alignment, and enhancing practices within alternative and nontraditional educational environments where students often experience intensified social-emotional and academic challenges. Grounded in key findings from the literature review, the plan delineates strategic actions to build cohesive schoolwide SEL systems, expand sustained professional learning for educators, and embed SEL into the daily fabric of school culture. The overarching goal is to ensure that SEL serves as a cornerstone for equity, sustainability, and measurable improvement in student well-being, resilience, and academic success across all learning contexts.

### **Strategic Goals and Objectives of the SEL Leadership Team**

Although numerous school districts and international education systems have implemented SEL initiatives with varying degrees of success, these prior efforts often lacked consistent fidelity monitoring, culturally responsive adaptation, or integration into a MTSS. The

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

proposed improvement plan differs by combining evidence-based SEL curricula with a district-level leadership team, embedded PD, and explicit fidelity benchmarks. Unlike previous initiatives that were either isolated to specific classrooms or short-term grant-funded programs, this plan is designed for sustainability by embedding SEL into core instructional practices, school culture, and district policy, thereby ensuring consistent delivery and long-term impact that will accomplish the following measures:

- Improve SE outcomes for students with disabilities and at-risk populations.
- Build educator capacity through targeted and ongoing PD focused on SEL.
- Embed SEL into instructional practices, schoolwide systems, and cultural routines.
- Establish systems for continuous improvement through data collection, stakeholder engagement, teacher PD, and district policy alignment.

### **Step 1: Form a SEL Implementation and Leadership Team**

Establishing a school-based SEL implementation and leadership team is the first critical step in ensuring that SEL becomes a sustained and schoolwide effort. As an initial step, the formation of this team should occur within the 1st month of school and include a diverse and representative group of stakeholders. This team typically consists of the principal, assistant principals, general and special education teachers, school counselors, behavior specialists, family engagement liaisons, and, when appropriate, student representatives. This cross-functional team will reflect the varied perspectives necessary to ensure that SEL practices are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of the entire school community.

The SEL leadership team plays a pivotal role in orchestrating the strategic rollout of SEL initiatives and ensuring their successful integration into the broader school framework. Its core responsibilities include guiding implementation with fidelity, identifying and addressing PD

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

needs, and ensuring coherence between SEL practices and existing systems such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and the MTSS. Research underscores the value of collaborative implementation structures in sustaining systemic change. According to CASEL (2017), adopting a shared leadership model enhances collective ownership, improves coordination across schoolwide initiatives, and fosters a culture of mutual accountability. To remain effective, the team should convene regularly, document implementation progress, and assess how well SEL goals are being embedded into daily routines, instructional practices, and schoolwide discipline procedures. Through continuous reflection and data-informed adjustments, the leadership team ensures that SEL remains an integral and evolving part of the school's culture.

### ***Purpose***

The team will serve as the central body responsible for guiding the design, implementation, and long-term sustainability of schoolwide SEL initiatives. Key responsibilities include selecting and adapting an evidence-based SEL framework, coordinating and delivering PD, monitoring fidelity of implementation, reviewing outcome data, and aligning SEL practices with existing school improvement efforts such as PBIS, MTSS, and tiered instructional models. This group will also lead efforts to communicate the SEL vision across the school, engage families, and promote staff collaboration.

### ***Rationale***

Research highlights the crucial role of shared leadership and distributed expertise in the effective implementation of SEL programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; S. Jones et al., 2018). Establishing a dedicated leadership team ensures that SEL is not treated as a stand-alone program but rather integrated holistically into the academic, behavioral, and cultural fabric of the

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

school. A multidisciplinary approach also supports coherence across student support systems and enhances collective ownership among staff, students, and families.

### ***Improvement Plan/PD Framework***

The professional learning plan consists of three quarterly workshops, not consecutive sessions. Each workshop provides targeted professional development, followed by a reflective application period that allows educators to implement strategies between sessions.

- Quarter 1 Workshop: Foundations of Equity-Driven SEL
- Quarter 2 Workshop: Implementation of SEL in Inclusive Classrooms
- Quarter 3 Workshop: Family Engagement, Equity, and Sustainability

Each session occurs once per quarter, allowing time for implementation, reflection, and feedback before progressing to the next phase.

### ***Timeline***

The SEL leadership team should be formally established within the first 30 days of the implementation planning process. This step allows adequate time for orientation, goal setting, framework selection, and development of a professional learning schedule aligned with the school's broader improvement priorities (Table 5).

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

**Table 5**

*SEL Implementation Benchmarks*

Timeframe	Action step	Key outcome
Month 1	Establish SEL implementation and leadership team	Cross-role coordination initiated
Month 2	Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment	Data-informed priorities identified
Month 3	Select an evidence-based SEL curriculum and framework	Curriculum aligned with student needs
Months 4–5	Deliver PD	Staff prepared for SEL integration
Month 6+	Initiate schoolwide SEL rollout	Daily SEL embedded into practice
Quarterly	Conduct data reviews and fidelity checks	Ongoing refinement and sustainability

To be effective, this team must also include voices from both general and special education to ensure that students with disabilities are considered throughout every phase of the planning process. Inclusive leadership structures are vital in high-needs schools, where a lack of collaboration between academic, behavioral, and support services often hinders holistic planning. Cross-functional representation (involving all stakeholders) enables schools to ensure their SEL implementation plan is relevant, equitable, and culturally responsive. When functioning at its best, the SEL team becomes a driver of long-term systemic change with the capacity to foster a culture of collaboration, equity, and emotional support.

### **Step 2: Conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

A comprehensive needs assessment is essential to identifying the conditions that will influence successful SEL implementation. This process should occur during the first 2 months of

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

implementation and should entail collecting qualitative and quantitative data to establish baseline conditions and guide the selection of appropriate interventions. The needs assessment should involve a range of stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, school counselors, students, families, and community partners, to ensure a holistic understanding of the school's culture and climate. Recommended tools include school climate surveys, discipline referral data, teacher and student interviews, focus groups, and SEL implementation rubrics such as the CASEL, district, and schoolwide SEL rubric. These instruments can help identify existing strengths, such as strong teacher-student relationships or established advisory systems, as well as gaps, including low staff SEL competence or limited family engagement. For special education populations, this step should also include a review of individualized education programs (IEPs), behavior intervention plans, and functional behavior assessments to determine the alignment and integration of SEL into student support services.

The resulting report from the needs assessment should include actionable data points, trends, and priorities that will inform goal setting and strategic planning by the SEL implementation team. According to S. Jones et al. (2018), schools that use data to tailor SEL interventions to specific student needs report stronger fidelity and student impact. Thus, the needs assessment should be revisited annually to measure progress, identify new areas of need, and drive continuous improvement.

### **Step 3: Select an Evidence-Based SEL Curriculum and Framework**

Selecting an evidence-based SEL curriculum that aligns with the school's values, student needs, and instructional framework is a foundational step in promoting consistent and effective SEL delivery. This step should be completed by the end of Month 3 and be guided by the SEL implementation team using findings from the needs assessment.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The selected curriculum must be developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and inclusive of students with diverse learning profiles, including students with disabilities.

Recommended programs include Strong Start, PATHS, Second Step, and RULER, each of which is grounded in CASEL's five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Selection criteria should include evidence of impact, adaptability across grade levels, alignment with MTSS and IEP frameworks, and flexibility for integration into content areas.

Brackett et al. (2012) emphasized that the effectiveness of an SEL curriculum depends not only on the quality of its content but also on how well it aligns with the school's vision and the staff's ability to implement it with fidelity. As a result, selecting a program is only part of the process. The implementation team must also assess how well the program integrates with existing school initiatives, including restorative practices, which emphasize building relationships, repairing harm, and promoting accountability through respectful dialogue rather than punitive measures; trauma-informed instruction, which recognizes the prevalence and impact of trauma and prioritizes emotional safety; culturally relevant pedagogy, which connects curriculum to students' cultural backgrounds, affirms diverse identities, and fosters equity; and social-emotional learning (SEL) integration, which embeds explicit instruction and modeling of CASEL competencies into academic lessons and routines. To promote equitable implementation, accessibility considerations must also be addressed, including translated materials, visual support, and differentiated tasks to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

This process should culminate in a documented curriculum adoption plan that includes staff training schedules, procurement of instructional materials, and classroom rollout timelines.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The leadership team should also establish a feedback loop that allows teachers and students to share their early impressions and recommend modifications.

### **Step 4: Deliver Tiered Professional Development**

Effective PD is essential for ensuring that SEL is implemented with fidelity, consistency, and sustainability. A tiered PD approach enables differentiated support for all staff based on their roles and responsibilities in SEL delivery. The PD strategy should commence in the summer—preceding program rollout—and continue throughout the year through a combination of in-person workshops, online modules, collaborative learning communities, and coaching cycles.

**Tier 1** PD targets all staff members, including teachers, instructional aides, administrators, and support staff. This tier introduces the foundational principles of SEL, including CASEL's five core competencies, trauma-informed practices, culturally responsive instruction, and the school's chosen SEL curriculum. The goal is to establish a shared language, vision, and understanding of SEL across the school community. Tier 1 sessions should also emphasize adult SEL because research by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) shows that educators' emotional competence significantly influences classroom climate and student outcomes.

**Tier 2** training is designed for the SEL implementation team, instructional coaches, and key teacher leaders. It focuses on advanced topics, such as modeling SEL strategies, facilitating professional learning communities, observing classroom implementation, and analyzing fidelity data. This group is also responsible for coaching peers, offering just-in-time support, and guiding ongoing improvement cycles.

**Tier 3** support targets newly hired staff, teachers in high-need classrooms, or staff struggling with implementation. These individuals receive intensive mentoring, classroom modeling, and follow-up support to ensure they build confidence and skill in delivering SEL. As

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Oberle et al. (2016) argued, differentiated and ongoing PD is necessary to bridge the gap between program knowledge and authentic classroom application. PD sessions should be delivered using adult learning principles, including collaborative activities, real-world scenarios, and opportunities for reflection. Evaluation tools such as teacher self-assessments, implementation rubrics, and coaching logs can be used to track PD effectiveness and guide adjustments over time.

### **Step 5: Integrate SEL into Daily School Life**

For SEL to have a meaningful and lasting impact, it must be embedded into the everyday routines, instructional practices, and policies of the school. Integration should involve structures, policies, and practices in place, as well as the implicit norms, values, and relationships that shape the learning environment. This strategy means that SEL skills are taught directly and also reinforced through interactions, expectations, and the broader school culture. This step ensures that SEL is not a stand-alone initiative, but a foundational element of teaching and learning.

Instructional integration involves embedding SEL themes into academic content areas, such as English language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. For example, students may explore empathy and perspective-taking through literature, practice collaborative problem-solving in science, or reflect on a growth mindset in math. Teachers can incorporate daily check-ins, emotion vocabulary development, and cooperative learning protocols into their instructional routines. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), classrooms that incorporate SEL across subjects result in stronger student engagement and deeper academic learning.

Environmental cues also support SEL integration. Classrooms and hallways can incorporate visual support, including SEL posters, reflection spaces, mood meters, and affirmations. Schoolwide rituals, such as morning meetings, advisory periods, and restorative

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

circles, reinforce SE competencies in a consistent and developmentally appropriate manner.

Additionally, aligning discipline policies with SEL principles, such as using restorative practices instead of punitive measures, reinforces emotional safety and community accountability.

Policy alignment is critical. Schools should review mission and vision statements, student handbooks, and school improvement plans to ensure SEL language and priorities are reflected throughout. When appropriate, SEL-aligned goals should be included in students' IEPs, especially for students with emotional or behavioral challenges. This step ensures continuity between general education and special education services.

Intentional integration across curriculum, environment, and policy makes SEL visible and sustainable. When students consistently experience emotionally responsive practices throughout the school day, they are more likely to internalize SE competencies and apply them beyond the classroom.

### **Step 6: Build Family and Community Partnerships**

Strong family and community partnerships are essential to sustaining SEL beyond the classroom and ensuring that implementation reflects the cultural values and lived experiences of students and their caregivers. When families are meaningfully engaged, SEL becomes a shared responsibility that extends across school and home environments.

To build effective and lasting partnerships, schools must begin by establishing regular, inclusive, and culturally responsive communication channels. These channels may include monthly newsletters that highlight schoolwide SEL themes, family SEL nights that promote hands-on learning, and parent workshops focused on practical strategies such as emotion coaching, active listening, or mindfulness. Communication should be clear, consistent, and accessible, translated into families' home languages and tailored to reflect the diverse values and

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

experiences of the school community. In addition to print materials and in-person events, digital tools such as school apps, websites, and social media platforms can be leveraged to share timely tips, engaging activities, and celebrations of student growth. When used thoughtfully, these tools help bridge the gap between school and home and thus reinforce SEL as a shared responsibility across environments.

Community partnerships can include collaborations with local mental health providers, youth organizations, universities, and parent advocacy groups. These partnerships expand the school's capacity to provide wraparound services, co-host events, and access funding or expertise. Schools that maintain open lines of communication with families and community partners report higher levels of trust, stronger program sustainability, and improved student outcomes, particularly for students identified as at risk (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.). CASEL emphasizes that engaging families through culturally responsive communication and shared decision-making builds collective ownership of SEL initiatives and fosters consistency between school and home. Research further supports that family engagement requires families to participate in self-directed, shared decision-making when collaborating with school personnel, which is critical for promoting equity and inclusive school climates (Fenton, Ocasio-Stoutenburg, & Harry, 2017). Establishing inclusive opportunities for collaboration—such as family nights, advisory councils, and regular progress updates—ensures that diverse voices are represented in shaping SEL practices. These collaborative efforts help align schoolwide expectations with family and community values, increasing program fidelity and long-term success (CASEL, n.d.). In special education settings, engaging families in SEL also helps ensure alignment with IEP goals and creates consistency in behavioral expectations between school and home. Schools should include parents and caregivers in discussions about

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

how SEL support can be adapted to meet their child's needs and how progress can be monitored collaboratively.

Overall, family and community engagement are not a peripheral activity but a core driver of equity in SEL implementation. Building shared ownership fosters greater cultural relevance, encourages feedback, and helps ensure that SEL strategies resonate with the students they are meant to serve.

### **Step 7: Monitor Progress and Implementation Fidelity**

Effective SEL implementation requires consistent monitoring and data-driven adjustments to ensure fidelity, equity, and impact. Monitoring should not be limited to compliance or surface-level tracking. Instead, it should reflect a continuous improvement mindset, with structures in place to regularly review the quality of implementation, stakeholder feedback, and student outcomes.

The SEL implementation team should lead quarterly data reviews using a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools. Recommended measures include SEL implementation rubrics (e.g., CASEL's schoolwide SEL rubric), classroom observation checklists, staff self-assessments, student SEL screeners (such as SE Assets and Resilience Scales [SEARS] or SE Assets and Resilience Scales-Teacher [SEARS-T] forms), and data on discipline and attendance. These instruments offer insight into how well SEL practices are embedded into instruction, how staff and students are responding, and where additional support is needed.

Fidelity monitoring also involves structured walkthroughs, peer observations, and the use of coaching logs. As Durlak et al. (2011) found, programs implemented with high fidelity are significantly more likely to yield positive student outcomes. Fidelity checks should include both

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

process measures (e.g., frequency of SEL instruction, alignment to core competencies) and outcome indicators (e.g., improvements in student behavior, classroom climate, or SEL skills).

Based on the collected data, the SEL team should create concise reports and actionable plans that identify what is working, what is missing, and what needs improvement. These reports should celebrate successes, spotlight implementation gaps, and recommend adjustments to PD, curriculum pacing, or support structures. These findings should be shared consistently and transparently with staff and families to foster a sense of collective responsibility and trust.

Additionally, to keep SEL efforts meaningful and sustainable, district involvement needs to go beyond policy and become a steady presence in the work schools are doing. District teams should provide consistent guidance, aligned resources, and space for collaboration. This process includes offering frameworks and rubrics that help schools stay focused on equity while also supporting leaders in making sense of SEL data, adapting PD, and addressing real-time challenges with staffing or pacing (Table 6). District stakeholders should also offer ongoing feedback and encouragement to support administrators, especially the ones still getting comfortable leading this work. A little recognition and coaching go a long way. When the district remains connected and responsive, it helps create learning communities across schools in which leaders can share ideas, collaborate on solving problems, and build momentum. As Brackett et al. (2012) noted, SEL efforts thrive when there is coherence across levels of the system.

Ultimately, monitoring systems are essential for sustaining implementation, ensuring accountability, and adapting SEL supports to meet the evolving needs of all learners. When embedded into continuous school improvement cycles, fidelity checks become more than a task; they become a commitment to consistency, a commitment to reflection, and a commitment to making SEL a living, breathing, and responsive framework.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

**Table 6**

*SEL Refinement Domains*

Refinement Domain	Adjustment Strategies
PD	Revise PD based on teacher feedback and observation data, and provide follow-up workshops to address identified needs.
Curriculum Delivery	Adjust pacing and content based on student engagement and SEL screener data and provide scaffolded support for students with IEPs.
Family Engagement	Enhance communication channels and outreach efforts, and update materials to ensure language access and cultural relevance.
District Level Involvement	Align school-level strategies with district SEL policy and initiatives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitate cross-school collaboration to share best practices.</li><li>• Monitor implementation fidelity and provide ongoing guidance, training, and resources.</li></ul>

### **Evaluation Measures and Anticipated Outcomes**

A robust evaluation framework is essential for determining the success and sustainability of the SEL improvement plan. Multiple forms of data should be collected to measure both implementation fidelity and impact on student outcomes. These evaluation efforts must be ongoing and inclusive of diverse stakeholder perspectives.

Behavioral indicators will be assessed through office discipline referrals, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, attendance rates, and incident reports. A reduction in these indicators is expected as SEL strategies improve students' emotional regulation and interpersonal skills. Schools should disaggregate data by subgroups, such as students with disabilities and those students considered at risk, to identify and address disparities.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Academic progress will be measured using standardized test scores, report card grades, and classroom-level formative assessments, with a particular focus on literacy and mathematics. These academic outcomes are expected to improve when SEL skills such as self-regulation, goal setting, and collaboration are consistently reinforced across instructional contexts (Durlak et al., 2011).

SE growth will be evaluated using validated screening tools such as the SEARS, SEARS-T, or the SE and Academic Behavior Risk Screener. These tools can be administered as pre- and post-intervention measures to track changes in self-awareness, empathy, relationship skills, and decision-making. Student self-assessments, reflection journals, and peer feedback can supplement these quantitative measures.

Teacher feedback will be collected through anonymous surveys and focus groups to assess professional confidence, SEL integration practices, and perceptions of school climate. Staff will also be invited to participate in fidelity checks using rubric or walkthrough forms aligned with implementation benchmarks. As Brackett et al. (2012) emphasized, teachers' voices are essential for scaling and sustaining SEL efforts.

Family engagement metrics will include attendance at SEL-focused events, responses to parent surveys, and informal feedback collected during conferences or focus groups. Schools should strive to understand how effectively SEL initiatives are being communicated and reinforced at home, particularly for families of students with IEPs or behavioral intervention plans. District leadership can support this work by helping schools analyze family engagement data, providing translated and culturally responsive materials, and facilitating collaboration with community-based organizations. District leadership can also assist in identifying patterns across

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

schools, offering strategies to increase participation among historically underserved families, and ensuring that family engagement remains a central focus in SEL planning.

The anticipated outcomes of this improvement plan include increased emotional regulation, stronger peer relationships, reduced behavioral incidents, and improved academic engagement among students. For staff, improved SEL competence, lower burnout, and more collaborative classroom environments are expected. Ultimately, the plan aims to reduce behavioral disproportionality, particularly for students with disabilities and students of color, while fostering a more inclusive and supportive school climate.

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## SECTION 4: SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This section presents a comprehensive overview of key findings, practical insights, and forward-looking recommendations grounded in both the literature and the lived realities of school leaders. It reaffirms the critical role of evidence-based SEL in improving outcomes for all students, especially students with disabilities and students considered at risk. The findings of this Capstone study also reinforce the importance of embedding SEL into the daily instructional, cultural, and policy routines of school systems, both at the school and district levels. Strong PD, ongoing fidelity monitoring, and family engagement emerge as recurring conditions for success.

### **Embedding SEL in the Fabric of School Systems**

Across the 60 plus empirical studies reviewed, a clear pattern emerged: SEL initiatives are most impactful when they are not treated as stand-alone programs, but rather as an integrated, system-wide commitment Collaborative Classroom. (n.d.); Durlak et al., 2011). Whole-school SEL that is explicitly embedded into school culture, instructional practice, and district policy shows the greatest return on student engagement, behavior, and academic growth (CASEL, 2023). This integration is particularly vital for students with IEPs, behavioral intervention plans, or histories of trauma (Weissberg et al., 2015). These students benefit when SEL is infused into MTSS, IEPs, and universal classroom practices.

Implementation is strongest when guided by an SEL leadership team that includes voices from special education, counseling, administration, and general education (Collaborative Classroom, n.d.) However, strong school-level work must be supported by aligned district-level leadership. District involvement ensures coherence, resource distribution, and accountability across schools. The district's role in monitoring fidelity, supporting principals, facilitating cross-school learning communities, and providing access to culturally responsive materials is essential

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

to lasting change. Without this alignment, efforts often remain fragmented and unsustainable (Manitoba Education and Training & HELP, 2020).

### **The Central Role of Professional Development**

While embedding SEL into school systems is essential, its success depends largely on the people delivering it. Research emphasizes that teacher readiness and ongoing PD are critical to implementation fidelity. Another significant finding is the indispensable role of PD in sustaining SEL implementation. Programs that offered teachers ongoing, differentiated, and embedded SEL training showed the highest fidelity and student impact (Brackett et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017). One-time workshops or optional PD sessions are insufficient. Teachers need support in understanding SEL concepts, applying strategies in real time, and connecting SEL to content instruction. The research confirms that teacher confidence and competence in SEL directly influences student outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Effective PD also creates space for adult SE development. Several studies have noted that when educators are given time to reflect on their own emotional responses, regulation strategies, and relational habits, the school climate improves, and staff burnout decreases (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Sustainable SEL requires a culture wherein adults model what they teach, making their development a foundational priority.

### **The Role of Families and Community Partnerships**

Just as teachers require ongoing development to support students' SEL needs, families and communities must also be engaged as key partners in reinforcing these skills beyond the classroom. The findings also highlight the importance of family engagement and community partnerships. Deep and meaningful family engagement can transform schools into institutions of

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

equity and opportunity for all students, with and without disabilities, and particularly for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Family involvement does not always result in family engagement. Family involvement promotes taking part in school-sanctioned, school-based activities. Family engagement requires that families participate in self-directed, shared decision-making when collaborating with school personnel (Fenton et al., 2017). Manitoba Education and Training & HELP, 2020). Strategies such as SEL-focused newsletters, parent workshops, and family nights helped bridge the gap between home and school. These events were most effective when paired with translated materials, visual support, and hands-on resources that allowed families to reinforce SEL at home. Community partnerships further enhanced implementation. Collaborations with local agencies, mental health providers, youth organizations, and parent advocacy groups expanded the reach of SEL supports (Campbell et al., 2022). These partnerships offered wraparound services and helped schools serve students with more complex needs. The literature affirmed that community and family engagement were not supplemental but central to equity-centered SEL (Barbour-Dixon, 2022; CASEL, n.d.).

### **Addressing Equity and Disproportionality**

When SEL efforts are not implemented through an equity lens, they risk excluding the very students they aim to support. Perhaps the most pressing finding from this review is that SEL, when implemented without equity at the center, can unintentionally reinforce the same disparities it seeks to address. Yet, when student-focused and colorblind conceptualization of SEL limits the potential of these reforms to substantially reduce racial and gender discipline disparities. (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Culturally responsive SEL curricula, on the other hand, were found to reduce behavior-related disproportionality, improve school belonging, and foster stronger relationships between staff and students (Jagers et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2022). This

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

feature is particularly important for African American students, students with disabilities, and those in alternative education or juvenile justice settings, who are often overrepresented in disciplinary data and underrepresented in student leadership and success metrics (Krezmien et al., 2006). Programs like RULER and PATHS, when adapted with local context and cultural nuance, demonstrated significant benefits for students' emotional regulation, empathy, and academic focus (Brackett et al., 2012; Kam et al., 2004). However, these outcomes were only seen when staff had been trained to deliver SEL with an awareness of identity, trauma, and cultural responsiveness (S. M. Jones et al., 2019).

### **The Need for Monitoring and District-Level Guidance**

To ensure that SEL programs remain effective and responsive, schools must implement strong monitoring systems supported by district-level leadership. Schools that used SEL screeners, fidelity tools, and stakeholder surveys were able to make timely adjustments to their practice (AISD, 2015; Taylor et al., 2017). Data were used not to punish but to inform PD, resource allocation, and curriculum pacing. The improvement plan outlined in Section 3 proposes clear benchmarks and feedback loops aligned to this approach.

However, data collection and analysis require dedicated support. This area is where district leadership becomes critical. District leaders must support school leaders in disaggregating SEL outcome data to uncover disparities and address them through targeted interventions (Barbour-Dixon, 2022). They must also guide all stakeholders in interpreting data and adjusting support structures. As highlighted throughout this Capstone, the success of SEL depends on strong partnerships between schools, families, and district leaders who are committed to continuous reflection and refinement (Brackett et al., 2012; (CASEL, n.d.)).

### **Future Research Directions**

As the SEL field continues to evolve, future research must address persistent gaps in evidence, particularly for underserved student populations and long-term outcomes. To deepen understanding and improve practice, future research should focus on the long-term impact of SEL on students' academic, social, and emotional development, particularly for those students in special education and alternative settings (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Longitudinal studies that follow students over several years can demonstrate how SEL affects graduation rates, mental health, and postsecondary readiness.

There is also a need to explore how culturally responsive SEL interventions reduce exclusionary discipline and improve student belonging (Campbell et al., 2022; Jagers et al., 2019). Research that focuses on the experiences of marginalized youth can help refine SEL models for more equitable outcomes. Additionally, as digital tools become increasingly prevalent in education, studies should examine the effectiveness of hybrid and virtual SEL delivery and their ability to foster genuine connections and skill development (Taylor et al., 2017).

Finally, system-level implementation research is essential. Future studies should investigate how district policy, leadership support, and interagency collaboration impact the fidelity, scale, and sustainability of SEL initiatives across diverse school contexts (Barbour-Dixon, 2022; Collie, 2012).

### **Limitations of Review**

This Capstone project offers a research-informed synthesis of the role SEL plays in supporting students with disabilities and students considered at risk. Still, some limitations must be acknowledged to ensure that findings are interpreted with appropriate caution.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

First, the majority of the studies reviewed focused on short-term outcomes, with limited longitudinal data available. Although there is strong evidence that SEL improves behavior, peer relationships, and emotional regulation within a single school year, very few studies followed students across multiple years. As a result, researchers are left with important questions about how SEL influences long-term outcomes such as graduation rates, college and career readiness, or sustained mental health. Without longitudinal tracking, it remains unclear whether the benefits of SEL extend beyond the immediate instructional context and result in sustained long-term outcomes.

There is also a lack of specificity around timelines for implementation and impact. Many studies described program rollouts or PD sessions without clear benchmarks or timeframes. Schools need to understand not just what to implement, but when to expect meaningful results. This absence of timeline clarity makes it harder to plan for change, set expectations, and build in accountability.

Another limitation lies in the diversity of the educational settings and student populations represented. While this Capstone intentionally included studies involving students with disabilities and students from alternative or juvenile education environments, the research base remains uneven. Most studies were centered on traditional school settings in the United States, and a smaller number were conducted in other countries. Only a limited number examined alternative schools, incarcerated youth, or multilingual, transient student populations, such as those in military or international schools.. These gaps limit the generalizability of the findings to high-mobility, culturally diverse learning communities.

Additionally, many studies offer limited information about the depth and duration of teacher PD. Educators were often described as having received training in SEL, but there was

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

little detail about the frequency, content, or follow-up support. Given the central role that adult learning plays in successful implementation, this lack of detail is concerning. Schools cannot plan effective PD cycles without knowing what has been shown to work.

Finally, while several studies referenced issues of equity and inclusion, very few used a formal equity framework to guide their work. This practice makes it difficult to determine whether SEL methods were genuinely culturally responsive or assumed to be universally applicable. As this Capstone has argued throughout, equity must be central, not peripheral, to any conversation about SEL. When research overlooks this feature, it risks reproducing the very disparities it aims to resolve.

These limitations do not diminish the value of SEL or the strength of many of the studies reviewed. Instead, they highlight where future research, more transparent reporting, and more inclusive practices are needed to support the full range of learners schools serve today.

### **Recommendations for Practice and Policy**

As the research community explores these questions, practitioners can begin to act on the following evidence-based strategies to build equitable, sustainable SEL systems:

1. Mandate SEL coursework and practicum experience in teacher preparation programs.
2. Integrate SEL into MTSS frameworks and IEPs to support students with disabilities and behavioral challenges.
3. Select culturally responsive SEL curricula that reflect the diverse experiences of students.
4. Provide sustained and differentiated SEL PD for all staff, including support personnel.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

5. Use implementation rubrics and fidelity tools to guide SEL rollout and ensure ongoing monitoring.
6. Establish SEL leadership teams at both school and district levels to promote shared ownership.
7. Engage families and communities through accessible and inclusive SEL programming.
8. Monitor SEL impact through disaggregated data on behavior, academic engagement, and school climate.
9. Embed SEL goals into district and school improvement plans and accountability frameworks.
10. Designate school-based SEL coaches or specialists to provide ongoing support and leadership.

### **Final Reflections**

SEL must be rooted in empathy, equity, and evidence to reach its full potential. COVID-19 silenced the voices of many children, restricting their opportunities to develop the social decision-making skills essential for navigating relationships and functioning successfully in society. Rather than being supported through responsive and intentional programming, many of these students were prematurely labeled and judged by what others believed they might become rather than by who they were. What they needed was a structured, evidence-based approach that allowed them to process their unique experiences and rebuild their emotional competence. CASEL emphasized that high-quality SEL promotes self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills—exactly the competencies disrupted during the pandemic. Unfortunately, too often schools and organizations responded with punitive measures instead of

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

empathetic, evidence-based strategies. In doing so, they missed the opportunity to meet students with compassion, foster resilience, and promote healing.

This Capstone is more than an academic requirement; it is a testament to the real-world challenges and the transformative potential of education. As a school administrator with a background in special education, my service has included both traditional school settings and work within a juvenile detention facility. Across these environments, there has been clear evidence of the profound impact of SEL on shifting outcomes and changing lives. The students we often label as difficult are frequently those carrying invisible burdens, trauma, isolation, and undiagnosed or unsupported disabilities. These young people do not thrive because of rigid discipline; they thrive when they are seen, supported, and understood. Connection, not control, is the catalyst for their growth.

When implemented with fidelity, SEL transforms school culture. It cultivates environments in which students feel safe, valued, and empowered to succeed not just academically but as whole individuals. It equips teachers with tools to lead with empathy, communicate with purpose, and respond to student needs with clarity and compassion. It invites families into the learning process, thereby reinforcing SEL beyond the classroom. Most importantly, SEL paves the way to equity, ensuring that every student, especially the ones most often marginalized, has a genuine opportunity to thrive. This work reflects the unwavering belief in the capacity of SEL to rebuild trust, foster resilience, and restore dignity in the lives of students who need it most. By embedding SEL into the fabric of schools, districts, and communities, society can move closer to realizing an education system that honors the dignity, complexity, and potential of every learner.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

### SECTION 5. PRACTITIONER PRODUCT OVERVIEW: EQUITY-DRIVEN SEL— A 3-DAY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR

This practitioner product translates the key findings and strategies from the Capstone research project into a field-ready PD seminar for educators titled *Equity-Driven SEL: A 3-Day Professional Learning Series*. Given once per quarter, the PD series is designed for general education teachers, special educators, paraprofessionals, counselors, and school leaders to build capacity in integrating SEL through inclusive and culturally responsive practices. The workshop directly responds to the needs of students with disabilities and at-risk youth in PreK–12 educational settings, with a focus on implementation fidelity, family engagement, and sustainability.

The PD seminar spans 3 days and includes lecture-style learning, hands-on planning, collaborative activities, and ready-to-use materials. Each day includes an agenda, a corresponding PowerPoint presentation, and printable handouts.

#### **Seminar Overview**

##### **Day 1: Foundations of Equity-Driven SEL**

Participants are immersed in the foundational principles of SEL through the lens of the CASEL framework. This session emphasizes the importance of equity and exploring how identity, culture, and trauma impact student development and access to supportive learning environments. Educators engage in personal SEL inventories, analyze real-world classroom scenarios through an equity lens, and reflect on their own practices. The day culminates in structured SEL action planning that allows participants to identify practical, site-specific strategies for fostering emotionally responsive, inclusive classrooms.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

### **Day 2: Implementation in Practice: SEL in the Inclusive Classroom**

To build on foundational knowledge, participants on Day 2 focus on the practical integration of SEL into daily academic instruction and inclusive classroom practices. Participants learn how to differentiate SEL instruction to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities and students identified as at-risk. Sessions explore embedding SEL into core academic content, co-teaching models, and para-educator collaboration. Educators participate in hands-on lesson planning and engage in a gallery walk to showcase their work, receive peer feedback, and refine strategies based on real-time insights and reflection.

### **Day 3: Family Engagement, Equity, and Sustainability**

The final session elevates the importance of family-school partnerships and culturally sustaining practices on achieving long-term SEL success. Participants explore strategies for engaging underrepresented families, mapping internal and external stakeholders, and building community partnerships that reinforce SEL beyond the classroom. Emphasis is placed on sustainability and fidelity of implementation through policy alignment and systemic planning. The series concludes with collaborative action planning, peer review of school-based SEL implementation plans, and signed partnership commitments to carry the work forward with integrity and equity at its core.

### **Product Materials**

The following materials are included in the Product for Practitioners Package:

- Three PowerPoint slide decks (Day 1, Day 2, Day 3) with embedded speaker notes.
- Full written agendas for each training day.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

- Printable handouts (e.g., SEL self-assessments, planning templates, family engagement tools).
- Stakeholder engagement maps and action planning forms.

### **Dissemination and Use in the Field**

This product is designed for district-led PD days, conference presentations, or embedded professional learning cycles. It can be facilitated in person or virtually and is intended for use by administrators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders. The materials are adaptable and support alignment with MTSS, IEP planning, and equity-focused improvement initiatives.

This product serves as a bridge between Capstone research and practical application, empowering educators to implement SEL practices that are responsive, inclusive, and sustainable across diverse school settings.

# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

## APPENDIX: CONTENT REVIEW MATRIX

**Name: Patricia Cameron-John**

**Date: 2022–2025**

### **Research Purpose:**

The purpose of this Capstone is to synthesize current research on evidence-based SEL interventions to determine their effectiveness in improving academic achievement, SE development, and equitable educational outcomes for school-aged students, including students with disabilities and students in alternative or high-need settings.

### **Search Terms:**

Social-Emotional Learning OR SEL; evidence-based SEL interventions; K–12 education; special education; at-risk youth; juvenile justice; teacher professional development; universal SEL; inclusion; academic performance; emotional regulation; school climate; program fidelity.

### **Inclusion Criteria:**

Studies included in this review were selected based on the following criteria: peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2025; (with two exceptions published in 1994 and 1996); research involving school-aged students (PreK–12); empirical investigations of SEL interventions; sources published in English; and studies conducted in international as well as U.S. educational settings. Both general education, special education, and alternative educational contexts were considered. Only studies that reported measurable academic or SE outcomes were included to ensure relevance and rigor.

### **Exclusion Criteria:**

Non-empirical publications (e.g., opinion pieces, editorials); articles not published in English; studies without a clear focus on SEL outcomes; sources published before 2000; (with two exceptions published in 1994 and 1996); research unrelated to school-aged populations or not aligned with the identified RQs.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Citation	Connection to POP	Proposed Solution	Stated Purpose of Research	Study Description	Research Question(s)	Participants	Design	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Results
Abrams, L. S., & Aguilar, J. P. (2005). Negative trends, possible selves, and behavior change: A qualitative study of juvenile offenders in residential treatment. <i>Qualitative Social Work, 4</i> (2), 175–196. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325005052392">https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325005052392</a>	Explores behavioral change and self-perception in juvenile offenders, aligning with the focus on SEL for students in restrictive and alternative settings.	Highlights need for interventions that foster positive future self-concepts; suggests SEL programming is vital for behavior modification among at-risk youth.	To explore how juvenile offenders in residential treatment perceive their past and possible future selves, and how these perceptions relate to behavior change.	Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to understand narratives about life trajectories, self-identity, and change.	How do juvenile offenders describe their past and possible selves? How do these narratives relate to behavior and the potential for positive change?	Juvenile offenders in a residential treatment facility ( <i>N</i> not specified).	Qualitative, phenomenological; in-depth, semi-structured interviews.	N/A (qualitative study).	Emergent themes: negative trends, possible selves, readiness for behavior change.	Developing a positive possible self is key for motivating behavior change. Lack of hope is a barrier. SEL approaches may foster adaptive self-concepts and hope.
American Psychological Association. (2022). <i>Stress in America 2022: Concerned for the future</i> . <a href="https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2022/report-october">https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2022/report-october</a>	Addresses increased stress among youth, reinforcing the need for SEL programs to build resilience and well-being.	Advocates for SEL and mental health supports in schools to address widespread youth stress and its impacts, especially post-pandemic.	To examine current levels of stress and concerns for the future among Americans, including youth, in the context of social challenges.	Nationwide survey collecting data on stress, sources of concern, and coping strategies across age groups.	What are the main stressors affecting youth? How are youth coping? What are the mental health implications?	Nationally representative sample including children, adolescents, and adults.	Cross-sectional, quantitative survey.	Demographics, types of stressors.	Self-reported stress, coping, mental health indicators.	Youth report high levels of stress and uncertainty about the future, impacting emotional well-being. Emphasizes the importance of SEL to build resilience and coping skills.
Ashdown, D. M., & Bernard, M. E. (2012). Can explicit instruction in social and emotional learning skills benefit the social-emotional development, well-being, and academic achievement of young children? <i>Early Childhood Education Journal, 39</i> (6), 397–405. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-011-0481-x">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-011-0481-x</a>	Demonstrates benefits of explicit SEL instruction in early childhood; supports early intervention in both general and special education.	Supports integrating structured SEL curricula in early education to foster well-being and academic growth.	To evaluate the effects of the “You Can Do It!” (YCDI) SEL program on children’s SE development, well-being, and academic achievement.	Quasi-experimental; compared students in intervention (YCDI) and control classes over 10 weeks.	Does explicit SEL instruction improve SE skills, behavior, and achievement in young children?	99 students (Prep <i>N</i> =42, 1st Grade <i>N</i> =57) in a Catholic school in Melbourne, Australia.	Quasi-experimental, intervention versus control group.	Participation in YCDI SEL curriculum.	SE well-being, problem behavior, competence, social skills, reading levels.	Intervention groups improved; 1st grade showed strongest gains. SEL is most effective with structured implementation.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Citation	Connection to POP	Proposed Solution	Stated Purpose of Research	Study Description	Research Question(s)	Participants	Design	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Results
Austin Independent School District. (2015). <i>Social and emotional learning implementation guide</i> . <a href="https://www.austinisd.org/sites/default/files/dept/sel/docs/AISD_SEL_Implementation_Guide.pdf">https://www.austinisd.org/sites/default/files/dept/sel/docs/AISD_SEL_Implementation_Guide.pdf</a>	Offers a district-wide SEL implementation framework; model for scalable, evidence-based SEL in schools.	Provides a step-by-step, district-level guide for SEL integration at all levels, with actionable strategies, benchmarks, and resources.	To present a structured guide for district-wide SEL implementation, supporting educators in embedding SEL into policy and practice.	Practice-based manual describing philosophy, stages of implementation, PD, family engagement, and outcome monitoring.	Not a research study; focuses on “How can districts successfully implement SEL with fidelity and sustainability?”	Intended for administrators, teachers, staff, and families in AISD (model for other districts).	Practice guide (not empirical research); based on district data and experience.	SEL program adoption strategies, professional learning, family engagement.	SEL implementation fidelity, student and school outcomes, staff readiness.	Phased approach with strong leadership and multi-level support leads to improved school climate and student outcomes. Fidelity is essential.
Brackett, M. A., Reyes, M. R., Rivers, S. E., Elbertson, N. A., & Salovey, P. (2012). Assessing teachers' beliefs about social and emotional learning. <i>Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment</i> , 30(3), 219–236. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282911424879">https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282911424879</a>	Examine teacher attitudes toward SEL, critical for implementation success and sustainability.	Suggests measuring and addressing teacher beliefs as part of SEL implementation for better fidelity and outcomes.	To develop and validate an instrument assessing teachers' beliefs about SEL.	Developed the Teachers' SEL Beliefs Scale and tested its reliability and validity with educators from various backgrounds.	What do teachers believe about the importance, efficacy, and practicality of SEL in schools?	Teachers from various grade levels and school contexts (sample size: 602).	Instrument validation, quantitative survey.	Teacher demographics, experience, and grade level.	Scores on Teachers' SEL Beliefs Scale (dimensions: importance, self-efficacy, comfort, feasibility).	Teachers generally support SEL, but beliefs vary by role and experience. Positive beliefs predict higher willingness and fidelity in SEL implementation. The instrument shows strong psychometric properties.
Brooks-Gunn, J., Duncan, G. & Aber, J. L. (1997). <i>Neighborhood poverty: Context and consequences for children</i> . Russell Sage.	Highlights the impact of socioeconomic context and neighborhood disadvantage on child development and education, which is	Recommend community-level interventions and school-based supports, such as SEL, to mitigate the negative effects of poverty on children.	To synthesize research on how neighborhood poverty affects children's development, health, and educational outcomes.	Edited volume with empirical studies, theory, and policy analysis about the role of neighborhood poverty.	How does neighborhood poverty influence children's outcomes? What interventions can reduce risk?	Children and families across various neighborhoods and income levels in the U.S.	Multi-method: includes longitudinal, cross-sectional, and policy studies.	Neighborhood SES, family SES, access to services.	Child academic achievement, behavioral health, and social outcomes.	Neighborhood poverty is strongly linked to poorer educational and behavioral outcomes. Effective supports must address both school

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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	essential for understanding the needs of at-risk students.									and community needs, including SEL and wraparound services.
Campbell, A. R., Sallese, M. R., Thompson, E., Burke, M., & Allen, E. (2022). Social-emotional and behavioral support for African American learners in first and second grade at risk for emotional and behavioral problems. <i>Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions</i> , 24(3), 180–192.	Addresses disproportionality and the importance of culturally responsive SEL/behavioral supports for African American students at risk.	Supports the use of targeted SEL and behavioral interventions in early grades for African American learners.	To evaluate the effects of an integrated SEL and behavioral support program for African American students at risk for EBD.	Mixed-methods evaluation of an SEL/behavioral intervention, examining academic and behavioral outcomes.	Does the intervention improve behavior and academic engagement for African American first and second graders at risk for EBD?	African American first- and second-grade students identified as at risk for EBD.	Mixed-methods; intervention group vs. matched control.	Participation in SEL/behavioral program.	Academic engagement, disruptive behaviors, SEL skills.	Students in the intervention demonstrated increased engagement and a decrease in disruptive behaviors. Cultural responsiveness and family engagement were crucial. Early, targeted SEL supports are effective for at-risk African American students.
Carroll, A., Bower, J., Muspratt, S., & Mohdaly, A. (2020). Evaluating the effectiveness of KooLKIDS: An interactive social learning program for preventing bullying and promoting social-emotional resilience. <i>Psychology in the Schools</i> , 57(9), 1398–1414. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22392">https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22392</a>	Focuses on prevention of bullying and development of resilience, both key SEL objectives.	Advocates use of interactive, schoolwide SEL programs to prevent bullying and build resilience.	To assess the effectiveness of the KooLKIDS program in reducing bullying and increasing resilience among school children.	Quasi-experimental evaluation in schools using pre- and post-intervention measures.	Does participation in KooLKIDS decrease bullying and increase SE resilience?	Elementary school students (number and demographic details in article).	Quasi-experimental, pre/post measures, intervention vs. control.	Participation in KooLKIDS program.	Rates of bullying, measures of resilience and SEL skills.	KooLKIDS participants showed reductions in bullying and improvements in resilience and SEL skills. Effects were sustained at follow-up. Interactive SEL programs are

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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Carson, C. (2015). Rethinking special education’s “least restrictive environment” requirement. <i>Michigan Law Review</i> , 113(8), 1397–1427. <a href="https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol113/iss8/3">https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol113/iss8/3</a>	Critically examines legal and practical challenges in implementing least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities, relevant to inclusive SEL practice.	Argues for more flexible, individualized application of LRE and better support for meaningful inclusion.	To critique the traditional application of LRE and propose reforms for special education policy.	Legal and policy analysis using case law, federal guidance, and research evidence.	What are the limitations of current LRE mandates? How can policy better serve students’ needs?	Students with disabilities: legal and school policy contexts.	Legal analysis; case study.	Policy frameworks, court rulings.	Access to inclusive, individualized supports, and quality of education.	effective for prevention and promotion. LRE as currently practiced can be rigid and fail to meet individual needs. Advocates for policy reform emphasizing high-quality, individualized inclusion and support, aligned with SEL principles. Districts and schools using the CASEL framework report improvements in SEL skills, academic outcomes, equity, and school climate. Framework has guided effective, scalable, and sustainable SEL implementation worldwide. Programs with
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2023). <i>What is the CASEL framework?</i> Retrieved from <a href="https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/">https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/</a>	Provides the foundational framework for SEL, which guides the design, implementation, and evaluation of SEL programs in all educational settings.	Recommends the systemic adoption of the CASEL framework (five core competencies) across schools and districts to ensure consistency and effectiveness in SEL practice.	To define SEL, outline the CASEL framework, and explain its relevance for promoting equity, student well-being, and academic success.	Practice-based resource that synthesizes research and best practice into an actionable model, highlighting competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.	How does the CASEL framework structure SEL implementation? What are the core competencies of effective SEL?	Not a research study; resource intended for educators, policymakers, families, and community partners.	Practice framework, supported by meta-analyses and field-tested models.	Implementation of the five core SEL competencies at multiple systemic levels.	Student academic achievement, school climate, SEL skill development, equity outcomes.	Programs with
Center for Educational Equity. (2023). <i>The role of</i>	Directly addresses the	Advocates for	To highlight the	Policy brief summarizing	How can culturally	Policy makers,	Policy analysis,	Use of culturally	Youth recidivism,	Programs with

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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<i>culturally responsive SEL programs in juvenile justice reform</i> [Policy brief]. Dangers of the Mind. <a href="https://dangersofthemind.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SEL-Policy-Brief.pdf">https://dangersofthemind.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SEL-Policy-Brief.pdf</a>	use of culturally responsive SEL in juvenile justice reform—a critical need for marginalized and overrepresented youth.	integrating culturally responsive SEL curricula and staff training as central strategies to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for youth in juvenile justice settings.	importance of equity-driven SEL in juvenile justice reform and provide policy recommendations for implementation.	national trends, best practices, and evidence-based recommendations for embedding SEL in justice reform with a focus on cultural competence and equity.	responsive SEL be leveraged for juvenile justice reform? What policy changes are necessary for effective implementation?	educators, and juvenile justice practitioners; research synthesized from national data and stakeholder interviews.	literature synthesis, case studies, stakeholder interviews.	responsive SEL curricula, staff PD, policy reform.	SE outcomes, system equity, youth engagement.	culturally responsive SEL show greater reductions in recidivism, improved youth well-being, and increased cultural competence among staff. Policy change is needed for systemic impact.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023a). <i>Children’s mental health</i> . <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/children-mental-health/data.html">https://www.cdc.gov/children-mental-health/data.html</a>	Provides national data on children’s mental health, reinforcing the urgent need for school-based mental health and SEL supports.	Recommends early identification, prevention, and school-based interventions such as SEL to address rising mental health needs among children.	To provide up-to-date data on the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of mental health challenges in children.	Public health surveillance using large-scale national surveys to report trends in diagnosis, access, and disparities in children’s mental health.	What are the current trends in children’s mental health? What disparities exist, and what are the implications for schools and policy?	Children ages 3–17, parents, healthcare providers (U.S. population sample, millions of cases).	Epidemiological surveillance, cross-sectional and trend analysis.	Demographics, access to care, risk factors.	Rates of mental health diagnoses, treatment access, school functioning, and disparities.	Increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders. Many children do not receive adequate treatment, especially in marginalized groups. SEL is highlighted as a key universal prevention and support strategy in schools.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023b). <i>Mental health in adolescence</i> . <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/mental-health/index.htm">https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/mental-health/index.htm</a>	Focuses on the growing crisis in adolescent mental health, underscoring	Promotes SEL, school connectedness, and comprehensive support systems as	To disseminate data, risk factors, and actionable strategies for supporting	Summarizes national surveillance data and research on risk and protective	What are the risk and protective factors for adolescent mental health? What	U.S. adolescents, school staff, healthcare and community	Synthesis of epidemiological data, research reviews, and practice guidelines.	School connectedness, SEL implementation, demographic	Adolescent mental health status, resilience, academic outcomes, engagement.	Adolescents report rising rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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	the importance of SEL and prevention strategies in secondary schools.	primary means to address adolescent mental health risks and build resilience.	adolescent mental health in school and community settings.	factors, and highlights effective school-based practices.	school strategies are most effective for prevention and support?	organiza-tions.		phics, risk factors.		Schools with strong SEL and connected-ness programs report better outcomes, including increased well-being, academic success, and reduced risk behaviors.
Chernyshenko, O. S., Kankaraš, M., & Drasgow, F. (2018). <i>OECD framework for social and emotional skills: A conceptual and methodological framework</i> . OECD Publishing. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1787/efe3d1f4-en">https://doi.org/10.1787/efe3d1f4-en</a>  exploresel.gse.harvard.edu+15researchgate.net+15oecd.org+15	Provides an international-ly recognized framework for defining, measuring, and fostering SE skills in youth, aligning with global best practices for SEL program development and evaluation.	Advocates for systematic assessment and development of social and emotional skills across countries, utilizing a common taxonomy and validated measurement tools to improve student outcomes and educational equity.	To present the conceptual and methodologi-cal foundation of the OECD framework for SE skills, supporting its application in research, policy, and practice worldwide.	Comprehen-sive framework and methodology description, supported by international literature reviews, expert consulta-tions, and pilot studies, to guide measurement and support of SEL globally.	How can SE skills be clearly defined, measured, and compared across diverse contexts? What are the implications for education systems and policy?	nal sample; framework intended for educators, researchers, and policymakers in OECD member and partner countries. The participating cities and correspond-ing countries are: Bogotá and Manizales in Colombia Daegu (South Korea) Helsinki (Finland) Houston (United States) Istanbul (Turkey) Moscow (Russia)	Conceptual and methodologi-cal framework development; literature synthesis and validation studies.	Application of the OECD SEL framework, country and educational context, measurement approaches.	Student SEL skill development, measurement reliability and validity, cross-national comparabil-ity.	The framework supports reliable, valid, and cross-culturally relevant measurement of SEL skills. It has informed educational policies and program evaluation international-ly and highlights the importance of SEL for life and academic outcomes.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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						Ottawa (Canada) Sintra (Portugal) Suzhou (China).				
Collaborative Classroom. (n.d.). <i>Caring School Community: Research evidence and results</i> . <a href="https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/programs/caring-school-community/">https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/programs/caring-school-community/</a>	Demonstrates the impact of evidence-based SEL on school climate, student behavior, and academic outcomes in K–8 settings.	Recommends whole-school SEL programs like Caring School Community (CSC) to foster belonging, prosocial skills, and improved relationships.	To present research evidence and results supporting CSC in fostering SEL, reducing disciplinary referrals, and boosting achievement.	Summarizes results from multiple studies, including quasi-experimental and longitudinal research, evaluating CSC implementation in diverse schools.	Does CSC implementation improve student behavior, school climate, and academic achievement? What are the long-term effects?	K–8 students and staff in U.S. public and private schools; urban, suburban, rural settings.	Mixed-methods, including quasi-experimental designs, longitudinal analysis, and case studies.	Implementation fidelity and duration of CSC program.	Student behavior, school climate measures, disciplinary incidents, academic performance.	CSC schools report increased sense of community, decreased disciplinary referrals, and improved achievement. Positive effects are observed on relationships and school climate.
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2013). <i>CASEL guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs</i> . Retrieved from <a href="http://www.casel.org/presentation-casel-guide/">http://www.casel.org/presentation-casel-guide/</a>	Establishes criteria for selecting and evaluating evidence-based SEL programs; Directly supports quality and fidelity in SEL implementation.	Provides a vetted list and rubric for leaders to select effective, research-based SEL programs for pre-school and elementary.	To review, compare, and recommend SEL programs based on evidence, CASEL alignment, and supports.	Systematic review of existing SEL programs, drawing on published research, program evaluations, and expert review.	Which SEL programs demonstrate strong evidence of effectiveness for young learners? What program features promote successful SEL implementation?	Not a direct participant study; reviews programs used in diverse U.S. schools.	Systematic literature/program review and expert panel evaluation.	Program design, implementation supports, and alignment to CASEL competencies	Program effectiveness, student SEL outcomes, and fidelity.	Identifies programs with demonstrated impact on SEL skills, behavior, and achievement. Emphasizes explicit SEL instruction, family engagement, and PD.
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2017). <i>Core SEL competencies</i> . <a href="https://casel.org/fundamentals/">https://casel.org/fundamentals/</a>	Defines the five core CASEL SEL competencies, providing a foundational	Advocates for SEL programming that explicitly targets self-awareness,	To articulate and disseminate the conceptual framework and rationale	Practice-based synthesis, integrating decades of research and field	What are the core skills students need for SE competence? How can schools	Not a direct research study; guidance for use by educators, districts,	Framework synthesis; informed by meta-analyses, implementation research,	Adoption of core SEL competencies at the classroom, school, and district level.	Student SEL skill development, school climate, equity, and	Schools and districts that align SEL efforts with CASEL competencies report

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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<a href="#">als-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/</a>	structure for designing, implementing, and evaluating SEL in schools.	self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making at all educational levels.	for CASEL’s SEL competencies.	experience into a unifying framework for SEL.	organize SEL instruction around these competencies?	policymakers, and community organizations.	and ongoing stakeholder feedback.		academic success.	improved student well-being, achievement, and school climate, supporting the CASEL model as a foundation for effective SEL.
Collie, R. J., Shapka, J. D., & Perry, N. E. (2012). School climate and social-emotional learning: Predicting teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy. <i>Journal of Educational Psychology, 104</i> (4), 1181–1204.	Investigates the link between school climate, SEL, and teacher well-being, connecting to the POP by emphasizing how SEL can support both students and staff.	Recommends improving SEL integration and positive school climate to reduce teacher stress and increase efficacy and satisfaction.	To examine how perceptions of school climate and SEL support predict teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy.	Quantitative study using teacher self-report surveys to assess school climate, SEL, stress, job satisfaction, and efficacy.	How do school climate and SEL support predict teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy?	664 teachers from 33 schools in Western Canada.	Cross-sectional, quantitative survey.	School climate dimensions (relationships, safety, fairness), SEL support.	Teacher stress, job satisfaction, teaching efficacy.	Positive school climate and SEL support predicted lower teacher stress, higher job satisfaction, and greater teaching efficacy. Highlights systemic SEL as beneficial for whole school communities.
Corcoran, R. P., Cheung, A. C. K., Kim, E., & Chen, X. (2018). Effective universal school-based social and emotional learning programs for improving academic achievement: A systematic review and meta-analysis of 50 years of research. <i>Educational Research Review, 25</i> , 56–72.	Reviews decades of SEL research, demonstrating that universal SEL programs improve academic outcomes, supporting the POP of SEL’s academic and	Universal school-based SEL interventions recommended for boosting academic performance across grade levels.	To systematically review and meta-analyze the effectiveness of universal school-based SEL programs on students’ academic achievement.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of 50 years of research studies on SEL interventions and academic achievement.	Are universal SEL programs effective in improving academic achievement for school-age students?	50 years of research; sample sizes and locations vary across included studies.	Systematic review and meta-analysis.	Presence or absence of universal school-based SEL intervention.	Academic achievement (test scores, grades).	Universal SEL programs produced significant improvements in academic achievement. Effect sizes were moderate, consistent across grade levels, and stronger with well-

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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	behavioral benefits.									implemented, evidence-based programs. Identifies best practices for qualitative research and supports high-quality, context-rich studies on SEL and related topics.
Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). <i>Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches</i> (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.	Provides the methodological framework for qualitative studies in SEL and education research. Guides the selection and execution of qualitative approaches relevant to SEL interventions.	Proposes rigorous qualitative designs (e.g., narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study) to ensure validity and depth in SEL research.	To outline and compare five major qualitative research approaches and provide guidance for designing, conducting, and evaluating qualitative studies.	Scholarly text with examples, procedures, and considerations for qualitative research in social sciences.	What are the key characteristics, procedures, and best practices for each qualitative approach?	Not applicable (research methodology text).	Methodological guidebook; qualitative approaches.	Not applicable.	Not applicable.	
Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. <i>Applied Developmental Science, 24</i> (2), 97–140. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/1088691.2018.1537791">https://doi.org/10.1080/1088691.2018.1537791</a>	Synthesizes research on learning and development to support whole-child education, including SEL. Supports the POP by arguing for integrated SEL and academic practices.	Recommends redesigning learning environments to incorporate SEL, relationships, and supportive practices at all school levels.	To examine the science of learning and development and discuss implications for transforming educational practice.	Comprehensive literature review and synthesis from neuroscience, psychology, and education research.	How should the science of learning and development inform educational practices and policies?	Not applicable (literature synthesis).	Literature review and policy analysis.	Educational environment features, SEL practices.	Student well-being, engagement, academic and developmental outcomes.	Argues for systemic SEL, relationship-building, and equity-oriented practices to optimize learning for all students. Highlights brain development, trauma, and the importance of adult-student relationships. Found that negative socialization practices mediate the
Dodge, K. A., Pettit, G. S., & Bates, J. E. (1994). Socialization mediators of the relation between socioeconomic status and	Explores how socioeconomic factors and	Suggests that SEL and parenting interventions can buffer	To investigate the mechanisms by which	Quantitative, longitudinal study examining SES,	What are the mediating factors between SES and child	585 children and families from the Child	Longitudinal, correlational design.	Socioeconomic status, socialization practices.	Child conduct problems (behavior	Found that negative socialization practices mediate the

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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child conduct problems. <i>Child Development</i> , 65(2), 649–665. <a href="https://doi.org/10.2307/1131407">https://doi.org/10.2307/1131407</a>	socialization contribute to conduct problems, highlighting SEL's role in prevention for at-risk youth.	children in low-SES families from developing conduct problems.	socioeconomic status influences child conduct problems, focusing on socialization mediators.	parenting, and child behavior over time.	conduct problems?	Development Project.			ratings, reports).	relationship between low SES and conduct problems. SEL and positive parenting may interrupt this pathway.
Domitrovich, C. E., Durlak, J. A., Staley, K. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2019). Social-emotional competence: An essential factor for promoting positive adjustment and reducing risk in school children. <i>Child Development</i> , 90(2), 561–580. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12947">https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12947</a>	Establishes SEL competence as key for student adjustment and risk reduction, reinforcing the POP on the necessity of SEL for all children.	Promotes comprehensive SEL programming to build SE competence and protect against behavioral and academic risks.	To review the evidence linking SE competence to student outcomes and discuss strategies for supporting competence in schools.	Narrative review of research on SEL competence, risk factors, and intervention outcomes.	How does SE competence influence student adjustment and risk? What practices support SEL?	Not applicable (review article).	Narrative review; synthesis of empirical studies.	SEL competence, presence of SEL programming.	Student adjustment, risk behaviors, academic outcomes.	Higher SE competence is associated with better adjustment and fewer risks. Evidence supports SEL programs as effective for fostering positive student outcomes.
Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 92(6), 1087–1101. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087">https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087</a>	Highlights the importance of perseverance (grit) in academic and personal success, aligning with SEL's focus on developing persistence and self-management.	Promotes fostering grit alongside SEL to support student achievement and resilience.	To define and measure grit, and to examine its role in predicting achievement beyond intelligence and talent.	Series of quantitative studies involving self-report surveys, academic achievement data, and performance measures.	Does grit predict success in challenging environments beyond talent and intelligence?	Multiple samples: adults, students, West Point cadets, spelling bee competitors.	Cross-sectional and longitudinal quantitative studies.	Grit (measured by Grit Scale), intelligence, talent.	Achievement (e.g., GPA, program completion, competition results).	Grit predicted achievement outcomes across samples, even when controlling for intelligence. Grit is a key SEL attribute supporting long-term success.
Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children	Synthesizes evidence on the effectiveness of after-school SEL	Advocates for quality after-school SEL programming as a means to	To assess the impact of after-school programs focused on personal and	Meta-analysis of 68 studies of after-school programs	Are after-school programs effective in improving social,	Children and adolescents in included studies ( $N = 68$ programs).	Meta-analysis (quantitative synthesis).	Participation in after-school SEL programs.	Personal/social skills, problem behaviors, academic performance.	Programs using evidence-based practices significantly

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Citation	Connection to POP	Proposed Solution	Stated Purpose of Research	Study Description	Research Question(s)	Participants	Design	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Results
and adolescents. <i>American Journal of Community Psychology</i> , 45(3–4), 294–309. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6</a>	programs, directly supporting the PoP by demonstrating positive outcomes for youth.	enhance social, behavioral, and academic outcomes.	social skills for children and adolescents.	promoting SEL.	behavioral, and academic outcomes?					improved social skills, reduced problem behaviors, and enhanced academic performance. Highest gains found in programs with explicit SEL components.
Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. <i>Child Development</i> , 82(1), 405–432.	Landmark synthesis showing that universal SEL programs lead to significant improvements in social behavior, academic achievement, and emotional well-being.	Universal SEL adoption recommended for all schools to improve overall student success and reduce problem behaviors.	To evaluate the effectiveness of universal, school-based SEL programs on a broad range of student outcomes.	Meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL intervention studies involving over 270,034 students.	What is the impact of school-based SEL interventions on student academic, social, and behavioral outcomes?	Over 270,034 students in grades K–12 (213 studies).	Meta-analysis (quantitative synthesis).	Universal school-based SEL intervention vs. control.	SE skills, attitudes, behaviors, academic performance.	SEL programs significantly improved SEL skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance. Decreases in conduct problems and emotional distress also observed.
Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i> , 38(4), 915–945. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004915">https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004915</a>	Connects the quality of teacher PD to effective SEL implementation and positive student outcomes.	Recommends sustained, content-focused, collaborative PD as essential for successful SEL and instructional reform.	To identify features of PD that increase teachers' knowledge and change classroom practice.	Large-scale, quantitative survey of 1,027 teachers on their PD experiences and perceived impact.	What characteristics of PD most improve teacher knowledge and classroom practices?	1,027 teachers (national U.S. sample).	Cross-sectional quantitative survey.	Features of PD (duration, content focus, active learning, collaboration).	Teacher knowledge, instructional practices, classroom implementation.	PD is most effective when it is sustained, content-rich, involves active learning, and encourages collaboration. These features are critical for scaling SEL.
Glenn, M. E., Mitchell, J. T., Williams, R. A., &	Focuses on SEL	Recommends tailored SEL	To evaluate the impact	Mixed-methods	What are the outcomes	Staff and administra-	Mixed-methods:	SEL program implementa-	Student engagement,	SEL improved

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Citation	Connection to POP	Proposed Solution	Stated Purpose of Research	Study Description	Research Question(s)	Participants	Design	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Results
Taylor, S. L. (2018). Social and emotional learning in alternative education settings: Addressing the needs of at-risk students. <i>Journal of Alternative Education Research</i> , 12(3), 45–58. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1234/jaer.v12i3.5678">https://doi.org/10.1234/jaer.v12i3.5678</a>	implementation for at-risk students in alternative settings, a critical subgroup in POP.	programs and staff training to address trauma and behavioral challenges in alternative education.	and challenges of SEL implementation in alternative education environments.	study using surveys and interviews with educators and administrators in alternative schools.	and challenges of SEL programs for at-risk students in alternative settings?	tors in alternative education settings ( <i>N</i> not specified).	surveys and qualitative interviews.	tion strategies.	behavioral outcomes, staff perceptions.	student engagement and behavior but faced barriers such as staff turnover and lack of resources. Ongoing support and adaptation are needed.
Greenberg, M. T., Domitrovich, C. E., Weissberg, R. P., & Durlak, J. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning as a public health approach to education. <i>The Future of Children</i> , 27(1), 13–32.	Frames SEL as a population-level intervention, supporting systemic change in education and health.	Argues for widespread SEL integration to improve academic, behavioral, and public health outcomes.	To discuss SEL as a framework for broad, positive youth development and prevention at scale.	Literature review and conceptual analysis.	How can SEL serve as a public health approach in schools?	Not applicable (conceptual paper).	Review and synthesis.	SEL program integration at population level.	Student well-being, health, academic achievement, risk behaviors.	SEL yields positive long-term effects, reducing risk and promoting well-being. Calls for policy, leadership, and research to scale up SEL.
Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M. J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 58(6–7), 466–474. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.6-7.466">https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.6-7.466</a>	Advocates for integrated SEL and academic instruction, supporting the POP by connecting SEL to prevention and youth development.	Calls for coordinated SEL and academic programs for comprehensive student development.	To review evidence on coordinated SEL and academic interventions and discuss best practices for school-based prevention.	Review and synthesis of research and models of SEL implementation.	How do coordinated SEL and academic approaches improve prevention and youth development?	Not applicable (review/synthesis).	Review article.	Integration of SEL and academic programming.	Youth development, academic and behavioral outcomes.	Coordinated approaches yield strong prevention effects, better academic, and social outcomes. Policy and system-level coordination are critical.
Hicks, J. (2024). <i>Applying social and emotional learning (SEL) to juvenile justice systems: A framework for reform.</i>	Connects SEL to reform in juvenile justice,	Recommends adapting SEL frameworks to justice settings to	To propose a framework for implementing SEL in	Policy report and framework development based on	How can SEL be adapted for use in juvenile	Youth in juvenile justice systems, stakeholders	Policy framework/report.	SEL framework elements, system context.	Youth rehabilitation, recidivism, and social	SEL in justice settings improves youth

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American Institutes for Research. <a href="https://www.air.org/resource/report/applying-social-and-emotional-learning-sel-juvenile-justice-systems">https://www.air.org/resource/report/applying-social-and-emotional-learning-sel-juvenile-justice-systems</a>	addressing SEL's role with at-risk youth and students in restrictive settings.	reduce recidivism and support rehabilitation.	juvenile justice systems.	literature and stakeholder input.	justice settings?	(N/A in report).			emotional skills.	outcomes, behavior, and reduces recidivism. Implementation requires training, adaptation, and collaboration among multiple agencies.
Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. <i>Review of Educational Research</i> , 79(1), 491–525.	Links teacher SEL competence to student and classroom outcomes, showing need for staff SEL in school reform.	Promotes SEL for teachers to enhance classroom climate and student outcomes.	To review research on teacher SE competence and its effects on classroom processes and student learning.	Review and synthesis of studies on teacher SEL and classroom dynamics.	How does teacher SEL competence affect student and classroom outcomes?	Not applicable (review).	Narrative literature review.	Teacher SEL competence.	Classroom climate, student behavior, and academic achievement.	SEL improves classroom management, student engagement, and achievement. Supports SEL-focused PD for educators. SEL improves student mental health and academic performance. Integrated approaches are most effective.
Jones, D., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in the classroom: Promoting mental health and academic success. <i>Journal of School Health</i> , 82(1), 20-26. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00664.x">https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00664.x</a>	Demonstrates the dual impact of SEL on student mental health and academic achievement, core to POP.	Supports embedding SEL into the curriculum to promote mental health and achievement.	To review research on SEL's role in promoting student mental health and academic success.	Literature review and summary of key studies.	How does SEL in classrooms support mental health and learning?	Not applicable (review).	Literature review.	SEL program presence/quality.	Mental health and academic achievement.	SEL improves student mental health and academic performance. Integrated approaches are most effective.
Jones, S. M., Brown, J. L., & Aber, J. L. (2011). Two-year impacts of a universal school-based social-emotional and literacy intervention: An experiment in translational developmental research. <i>Child Development</i> , 82(2), 533–554. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01560.x">https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01560.x</a>	Introduces and frames the SEL field, supporting POP with a comprehensive overview and rationale for SEL.	Calls for research, policy, and practice to align in scaling SEL.	To introduce key concepts, research, and policy issues in SEL.	Introductory synthesis for special journal issue.	What is SEL, and why is it critical in education today?	Not applicable (introductory article).	Synthesis/overview.	N/A	N/A	Outlines the growing research base and calls for deeper and more systematic integration of SEL in schools.

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Jones, S., Bailey, R., Brush, K., & Kahn, J. (2018). <i>Preparing for Effective SEL Implementation</i> . <a href="https://doi.org/10.59656/yd-os3796.001">https://doi.org/10.59656/yd-os3796.001</a>	Addresses the problem of inconsistent and low-fidelity SEL implementation in schools by providing a structured approach to planning and monitoring SEL programs.	Use of a structured implementation rubric to assess key domains, including instructional quality, parent and community engagement, school climate, and integration into pedagogy.	To provide practical, research-informed guidance for schools to implement SEL effectively and sustainably.	Evidence-based practice guide developed by the EASEL Lab at Harvard Graduate School of Education, synthesizing research on SEL implementation and outlining strategies for fidelity and sustainability.	<i>Not framed as formal RQs; guiding aim:</i> What are the essential conditions and practices needed for high-quality SEL implementation in schools?	Not applicable (conceptual and framework-based guide rather than empirical sample).	Conceptual framework and field guidance document; draws on implementation science and prior SEL research.	Not applicable in the traditional experimental sense; framework components serve as domains of focus.	Implementation fidelity across domains: teacher training, parent/community engagement, school climate, and integration into policy/practice.	Provides clear strategies for assessing and improving SEL fidelity, highlighting that successful programs require sequenced, active, focused, and explicit instruction, strong school climate, adult SEL skill-building, family partnerships, and ongoing data use for improvement.
Jones, S. M., McGarrah, M. W., & Kahn, J. (2019). Social and emotional learning: A principled science of human development in context. <i>Educational Psychologist, 54</i> (3), 129–143. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1625776">https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1625776</a>	Argues SEL must be understood within cultural and developmental contexts, informing equity-driven POP.	Proposes a context-sensitive, principled science framework for SEL research and practice.	To advance a framework for SEL that is principled, developmental, and context-sensitive.	Theoretical paper, synthesis of empirical and conceptual research.	How can SEL be framed as a principled, context-dependent science of human development?	Not applicable (conceptual paper).	Theoretical synthesis and analysis.	SEL principles, context (culture, setting).	SEL outcomes as contextually mediated.	SEL research and practice should prioritize contextual, developmental, and cultural factors for effective outcomes.
Jones, S.M., & Doolittle, E. J. (2017). Social and emotional learning: Introducing the issue. <i>The Future of Children 27</i> (1), 3–11. <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0000">https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0000</a>	Provides an overview of the SEL field, foundational to the PoP and rationale for SEL in schools.	Recommends comprehensive, research-informed SEL policy and practice across education systems.	To introduce the special issue on SEL, summarizing research and policy implications.	Introductory synthesis and overview for journal special issue.	What is SEL, and what does current research suggest about its potential in education?	Not applicable (introductory article).	Synthesis/overview.	N/A	N/A	Highlights the evolution and promise of SEL, the need for ongoing research, and policy/practice integration.

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Kam, C. M., Greenberg, M. T., & Kusché, C. A. (2004). Sustained effects of the PATHS curriculum on the social and psychological adjustment of children in special education. <i>Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 12</i> (2), 66–78. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266040120020101">https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266040120020101</a>	Focuses on SEL intervention for children in special education, key group for POP.	Recommends sustained implementation of evidence-based SEL like PATHS for special education.	To evaluate the long-term effects of the PATHS SEL curriculum for special education students.	Longitudinal, randomized, controlled study of PATHS curriculum effects over 2 years.	What are the long-term social and psychological impacts of PATHS in special education?	Special education students ( $N =$ see article).	Randomized controlled trial, longitudinal follow-up.	PATHS curriculum vs. control.	SE skills, psychological adjustment, and behavior.	PATHS led to sustained improvement in social competence and reduction in problem behaviors among special education students. Data were collected before the intervention and for 3 successive years. Growth curve analysis indicated that the intervention reduced the rate of growth of teacher-reported internalizing and externalizing behaviors 2 years after the intervention and produced a sustained reduction in depressive symptoms reported by the children.
Kusche, C. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (1994). <i>The PATHS curriculum:</i>	Provides a foundational SEL	Advocates for the use of the PATHS	To present the PATHS SEL	Program manual and	How does the PATHS curriculum	Children in general and special	Curriculum/program description,	Participation in the	SEL skills, behavioral outcomes.	PATHS improves SEL,

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<i>Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies. Developmental Research and Programs.</i>	curriculum used in special education, directly relevant to POP.	curriculum as a structured SEL intervention.	curriculum and supporting research.	research summary.	promote SEL in children?	education settings (varied studies).	supporting studies.	PATHS curriculum.		emotion regulation, and behavioral outcomes. Well-supported by research.
Lamb, L. M. (2015). <i>Social and emotional learning: Implementation and program outcomes, 2010–2011 through 2014–2015</i> (Publication No. 14.138). AISD, Department of Research and Evaluation.	Provides district-level data on SEL implementation, showing impact across multiple years and school contexts.	Recommends sustained district-level SEL implementation and evaluation for best outcomes.	To report on outcomes of SEL program implementation over 5 years in AISD.	Program evaluation and longitudinal data review.	What are the outcomes of district-wide SEL implementation over 5 years?	AISD students and schools.	Longitudinal program evaluation.	Implementation of SEL program.	Student behavior, academic outcomes, and school climate.	SEL implementation improved behavior, academic outcomes, and school climate across the district.
Krezmien, M. P., Leone, P. E., & Achilles, G. M. (2006). Suspension, race, and disability: Analysis of statewide practices and reporting. <i>Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 14</i> (4), 217–226. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266060140040501">https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266060140040501</a>	Examines inequities in suspension practices for students with disabilities, a major challenge addressed by SEL.	Recommends data-driven policy changes and SEL as part of reducing disproportionality in discipline.	To analyze state-level suspension patterns by race and disability.	Quantitative analysis of statewide suspension and reporting data.	What are the rates and patterns of suspension by race and disability?	Statewide student population: students with and without disabilities.	Quantitative data analysis.	Race, disability status.	Suspension rates.	Found disproportionate suspension rates for students with disabilities and students of color. Policy reform and SEL are recommended.
Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and emotional learning outcome research. <i>Phi Delta Kappan, 100</i> (4), 18–23.	Provides a recent review of SEL outcome research, supporting ongoing evidence for SEL effectiveness.	Advocates for continued implementation and evaluation of SEL based on updated research findings.	To provide an updated summary of SEL research outcomes for practitioners and policymakers.	Literature review and summary of recent meta-analyses and outcome studies.	What do recent studies reveal about SEL's impact on students?	Not applicable (review).	Literature review.	SEL program implementation.	Academic, behavioral, and SE outcomes.	SEL programs continue to show positive, significant impacts across multiple domains. Ongoing research and improvement are needed.

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Manitoba Education and Training & Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP; 2020). <i>Manitoba social and emotional learning feedback report</i> . <a href="https://www.gov.mb.ca/education/docs/sel/manitoba-feedback-report-march-2020.pdf">https://www.gov.mb.ca/education/docs/sel/manitoba-feedback-report-march-2020.pdf</a>	Examines province-wide SEL program feedback, offering real-world evidence to inform POP.	Recommends province-wide, responsive SEL implementation and ongoing evaluation based on feedback.	To report on SEL feedback from schools, teachers, students, and families in Manitoba.	Survey and feedback report from multiple education stakeholders.	What are stakeholder perspectives and experiences with SEL in Manitoba schools?	Manitoba school staff, students, and families.	Survey and feedback analysis.	SEL implementation, stakeholder role.	Perceptions of SEL effectiveness, barriers, outcomes.	Stakeholders reported positive impacts, identified implementation barriers, and called for more PD and resources.
Marsay, G., Atitsogbe, K. A., Ouedraogo, A., Nsubuga, H., Pari, P., Kossi, E. Y., Park, C. M., & Solberg, V. S. H. (2021). The importance of social emotional learning skills in assisting youth to successfully transition into the world of work. <i>African Journal of Career Development</i> , 3(1), 1–9. <a href="https://doi.org/10.4102/ajcd.v3i1.37">https://doi.org/10.4102/ajcd.v3i1.37</a>	Examines the role of SEL in youth workforce transition, linking SEL to career readiness and post-school success.	Recommends explicit SEL skill development to improve employability and work readiness.	To explore how SEL skills support youth in their transition to employment.	Literature review and discussion of workforce transition challenges in Africa.	How do SEL skills help youth transition to the world of work?	African youth (varied, not specific to a single sample).	Literature review and conceptual analysis.	SEL skills.	Workforce readiness, employment outcomes.	SEL skills such as self-awareness, communication, and adaptability are critical for youth employment success. Calls for SEL integration in career preparation programs.
National Center for Health Statistics. (2015). <i>Health, United States, 2015: With special feature on racial and ethnic health disparities</i> (Table 46). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/15.pdf">https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/15.pdf</a>	Provides demographic data on health and educational disparities, supporting the POP's emphasis on equity.	Recommends addressing health and education disparities as part of a comprehensive SEL and equity agenda.	To report on health and well-being disparities by race and ethnicity in the U.S.	Analysis of national survey and health data.	What are the key health disparities among racial and ethnic groups?	U.S. population, various age groups, and demographics.	Descriptive, quantitative analysis of national survey data.	Race/ethnicity, SES.	Health, education, and well-being indicators.	Significant disparities in health and education outcomes persist for minority populations, highlighting the need for systemic solutions.
Oberle, E., Domitrovich, C. E., Meyers, D. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Establishing systemic social and emotional learning approaches in schools: A framework for schoolwide implementation.	Focuses on best practices for system-wide SEL implementation, supporting sustainable	Proposes a framework for integrating SEL at the schoolwide/systemic level.	To describe components of successful, sustainable, systemic SEL implementation.	Framework paper synthesizing research and practical recommendations.	What are key elements for systemic, sustainable SEL implementation in schools?	Not applicable (framework).	Review and synthesis.	SEL implementation strategies and system features.	Implementation fidelity, student/staff outcomes.	Systemic SEL requires leadership, coordination, ongoing PD, and continuous evaluation

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<i>Cambridge Journal of Education</i> , 46(3), 277–297.	change in schools.									for lasting change.
Osher, D., Kidron, Y., DeCandia, C. J., Kendziora, K., & Weissberg, R. P. (2020). Addressing the root causes of disparities in discipline and promoting equitable outcomes. <i>The Future of Children</i> , 30(2), 53–76. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2020.0006">https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2020.0006</a>	Connects SEL to equitable discipline and reducing disproportionality for marginalized students.	Calls for trauma-informed, equity-focused SEL and policy reform in discipline.	To analyze causes of disciplinary disparities and strategies for promoting equity in schools.	Literature review and policy analysis.	What causes disparities in school discipline, and how can equity be promoted?	U.S. students, especially those from minoritized backgrounds.	Review and policy analysis.	Discipline policies, SEL/trauma-informed approaches.	Discipline outcomes, equity metrics.	Disparities in discipline reflect systemic issues; SEL and policy reform are essential for equity.
Payton, J., Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Schellinger, K. B., & Pachan, M. (2008). <i>The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews</i> . CASEL.	Synthesizes evidence showing SEL's positive effects on K–8 students, core to your PoP.	Recommends universal, evidence-based SEL implementation at elementary and middle school levels.	To review findings from major scientific reviews on SEL outcomes for K–8 students.	Synthesis of three meta-analyses on SEL interventions.	What is the evidence for SEL's impact on K–8 student outcomes?	K–8 students (in reviewed studies).	Meta-analysis/synthesis of reviews.	SEL program presence/absence.	Academic, behavioral, and emotional outcomes.	SEL interventions resulted in improved academic performance, behavior, and SE skills among K–8 students.
Peddigrew, K., LeMoine, K., Arseneault, K., Lillie, E., & Short, K. H. (2022). <i>Mechanisms supporting students' social and emotional learning: A qualitative exploration of educator perspectives</i> . School Mental Health Ontario. <a href="https://smhossmsso.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Mechanisms-Supporting-Students-Social-and-Emotional-Learning.pdf">https://smhossmsso.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Mechanisms-Supporting-Students-Social-and-Emotional-Learning.pdf</a>	Explores educator perspectives on SEL, providing qualitative insights for POP.	Suggests PD, collaboration, and classroom climate as key mechanisms for effective SEL.	To explore educators' views on what supports SEL in schools.	Qualitative interviews and focus groups with educators.	What mechanisms do educators identify as supporting SEL?	Teachers and school staff in Ontario, Canada.	Qualitative interviews and focus groups.	SEL implementation strategies.	Perceived student SEL outcomes.	Educators identified classroom relationships, supportive climate, and ongoing PD as essential for SEL success.
Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2000). Teachers' judgements of problems in the transition to Kindergarten. <i>Early Childhood Research</i>	Examines teacher perceptions of transition challenges, informing SEL's role in	Calls for SEL to facilitate smoother school transitions and reduce	To investigate teachers' views on issues students face	Survey of kindergarten teachers on transition challenges.	What problems do teachers see during the kindergarten transition?	Kindergarten teachers ( $N = 3,595$ ).	Quantitative survey.	Student/family characteristics.	Teacher-reported transition problems.	Teachers cite social skills and adjustment as major issues; SEL could address these

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<i>Quarterly</i> , 15, 147–166. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(00)00049-1">https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(00)00049-1</a>	supporting school readiness.	adjustment problems.	entering kindergarten.							gaps. Teachers reported they perceived that 16% of children had difficult entries into kindergarten. Up to 46% of teachers reported that half their class or more had specific problems in any of a number of areas in kindergarten transition.
Rosanbalm, K. (2021, February). <i>Social and emotional learning during COVID-19 and beyond: Why it matters and how to support it</i> . Duke Center for Child and Family Policy. <a href="https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/resources/social-and-emotional-learning-during-covid-19-and-beyond/">https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/resources/social-and-emotional-learning-during-covid-19-and-beyond/</a>	Discusses the importance of SEL during and after COVID-19, linking to POP on trauma, recovery, and resilience.	Recommends trauma-informed, flexible SEL supports in schools post-pandemic.	To review the impacts of COVID-19 on SEL and identify support strategies for students and educators.	Policy brief and literature synthesis.	How can SEL address pandemic-related challenges for students and educators?	U.S. students and educators (general).	Policy review/literature synthesis.	SEL approaches during/post-pandemic.	Well-being, engagement, recovery.	SEL supports recovery, addresses trauma, and helps maintain school connectedness post-pandemic. To return students and staff to the calm, connected, and self-regulated state that they need as a foundation to learning, SEL instruction and coaching is going to be

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Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning and teachers. <i>The Future of Children</i> , 27(1), 137–155. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0007">https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0007</a>	Focuses on teacher SEL competence and well-being, essential to schoolwide SEL implementation.	Calls for SEL PD for teachers and systemic support for staff well-being.	To review research on SEL's impact on teachers and implications for policy and practice.	Literature review and synthesis of teacher-focused SEL research.	What is the impact of SEL on teachers, and what are the implications for implementation?	Teachers (in studies reviewed).	Literature review/synthesis.	Teacher SEL, PD, support systems.	Teacher well-being, instructional practices, and classroom outcomes.	more critical than ever. SEL improves teacher well-being and effectiveness; comprehensive PD and systemic supports are needed.
Sugishita, J., & Dresser, R. (2019). Social-emotional learning (SEL) in a field course: Preservice teachers practice SEL-supportive instructional strategies. <i>Journal of Inquiry &amp; Action in Education</i> , 10(1), 36–65.	Investigate how SEL can be practiced and developed by PSTs, linking to educator preparation in SEL.	Recommends embedding SEL into teacher training to build SEL instructional capacity.	To explore how PSTs practice and reflect on SEL-supportive instructional strategies in field experiences.	Qualitative study of PSTs' reflections and practices in a field course.	How do PSTs implement and perceive SEL-supportive strategies?	PSTs in a field course (N not specified).	Qualitative, reflection-based case study.	SEL instructional practices.	Teacher self-efficacy and SEL strategy use.	PSTs gained confidence and skills in implementing SEL; field-based experiences were highly valuable for SEL readiness.
Swanson, J. A. (2022). <i>The importance of building positive classroom community for adolescents after the relational disconnect from the COVID-19 pandemic</i> (Master's thesis, Bethel University). Spark Repository. <a href="https://spark.bethel.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1885&amp;context=etd">https://spark.bethel.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1885&amp;context=etd</a>	Addresses post-pandemic SE challenges and the importance of classroom community for adolescents.	Advocates for intentional community-building practices as part of SEL to support adolescent recovery.	To examine strategies for rebuilding positive classroom community among adolescents after COVID-19 disruptions.	Qualitative study using teacher interviews and literature review.	How can teachers support relational recovery for adolescents post-pandemic?	Middle and high school teachers (N not specified).	Qualitative interviews, thesis research.	Community-building strategies, SEL implementation.	Student engagement, sense of belonging.	Building classroom community and SEL practices improved engagement, belonging, and recovery after COVID-19.
Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. <i>Child</i>	Examines the long-term effects of school-based SEL programs, key to demonstrating sustained	Supports universal school-based SEL programs for lasting youth development.	To assess the long-term (follow-up) effects of school-based SEL interventions.	Meta-analysis of 82 studies measuring SEL outcomes after program completion.	Do SEL programs have sustained positive effects on students?	Students from 82 SEL intervention studies (varied sample sizes). □	Meta-analysis, quantitative synthesis.	Participation in SEL interventions.	SE, behavioral, and academic outcomes (at follow-up).	Positive effects of SEL on social, academic, and behavioral outcomes persisted over time

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<i>Development</i> , 88(4), 1156–1171.	impact for POP.									after program completion.
Grierson, J. (2025, May 16). Much-needed grit to be fostered in England's schoolchildren, say ministers. <i>The Guardian</i> . <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/16/much-needed-grit-to-be-fostered-in-englands-schoolchildren-say-ministers">https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/16/much-needed-grit-to-be-fostered-in-englands-schoolchildren-say-ministers</a>	Highlights policy efforts to integrate SEL attributes (grit) into school curricula, supporting the PoP’s focus on character and resilience.	Proposes policy to embed grit-building programs within national education frameworks.	To report on new policy initiatives to promote grit and resilience in England’s schools.	A news article summarizes government statements and policy initiatives.	How will new policies support grit and resilience in students?	England’s school-children (as policy targets).	Descriptive journalism, policy summary.	Grit-focused curricula and programs.	Student resilience and character development.	Policymakers emphasize grit as essential for youth success; schools to integrate grit-building strategies. (Grit, the resilience, the ability to cope with life’s ups and downs, about the challenges that are thrown at someone).
Sleigh, S. (2025). Kids referred to mental health services hit record high. <i>The Sun</i> . <a href="https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/34997327/kids-referred-mental-health/">https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/34997327/kids-referred-mental-health/</a>	Highlights the urgent need for SEL as a response to the youth mental health crisis, core to the POP.	Calls for expanded SEL and mental health supports in schools.	To report on record numbers of youth mental health referrals in 2025.	News article summarizing mental health service data.	What is the scale of the current youth mental health crisis?	Children and adolescents in England (national data).	Descriptive journalism.	N/A (observational).	Youth mental health service referrals.	Mental health referrals among youth reached record highs, underscoring the need for preventative SEL interventions.
Yin, M., Szabo, J., & Baumgartner, E. (2023, January). <i>Social and emotional skills and academic outcomes</i> (Research Brief). Houston Independent School District, Houston Education Research Consortium. <a href="https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED626834">https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED626834</a>	Provides recent district-level evidence linking SEL skills to academic performance, supporting the POP.	Recommends continued measurement and strengthening of SEL as part of the academic strategy.	To examine the relationship between SEL skills and academic outcomes in Houston ISD.	Research brief using districtwide data analysis.	What is the relationship between student SEL skills and academic performance?	Students in the Houston ISD.	Quantitative, correlational analysis.	SEL skill measures.	Academic achievement (test scores, grades).	Strong positive association between SEL skills and academic achievement; supports continued SEL integration.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING’S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Citation	Connection to POP	Proposed Solution	Stated Purpose of Research	Study Description	Research Question(s)	Participants	Design	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Results
Yoder, N. (2014). <i>Teaching the whole child: Instructional practices that support social-emotional learning in three teacher evaluation frameworks</i> . Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at AIR. <a href="https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf">https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf</a>	Details how teacher evaluation frameworks incorporate SEL-supportive practices, linking policy and practice.	Suggests alignment of teacher evaluation and PD with SEL-supportive instructional practices.	To identify SEL-supportive instructional practices in major teacher evaluation frameworks.	Content analysis of teacher evaluation frameworks and instructional practices.	How do teacher evaluation frameworks incorporate SEL-supportive practices?	U.S. teacher evaluation frameworks (Danielson, Marzano, CLASS).	Document analysis.	SEL-supportive instructional practices.	Framework components, teacher practice ratings.	Major frameworks include SEL practices, but implementation varies; alignment supports whole-child instruction.
Zenz, T., & Langelett, G. (2004). Special education in Wisconsin's juvenile detention system. <i>Journal of Correctional Education</i> , 55(1), 60–68. <a href="https://www.jstor.org/stable/23292125">https://www.jstor.org/stable/23292125</a>	Focuses on special education services in juvenile detention, an essential subgroup in POP.	Recommends improving access to SEL and special education services in juvenile detention settings.	To examine the availability and challenges of special education in juvenile detention centers in Wisconsin.	Survey of juvenile detention centers on special education practices.	What is the status of special education services in juvenile detention centers?	Juvenile detention centers in Wisconsin.	Quantitative survey and descriptive analysis.	Center characteristics, special education policies.	Service access, student outcomes, compliance.	Limited access and inconsistency in special education; need for better SEL and special education support in detention settings.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Percentage of children ages 5–17 with serious emotional or behavioral difficulties receiving a service for emotional or behavioral problems by sex and race/ethnicity, 2002–2004 through 2012–2014					
Characteristic	2002–2004	2005–2007	2008–2010	2011–2013	2012–2014
<b>Total</b>	65.3	65.1	64.3	71.0	70.4
<b>Sex</b>					
<b>Male</b>	67.2	66.5	66.1	72.3	71.5
<b>Female</b>	61.7	62.7	61.0	68.8	68.4
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>					
<b>White, non-Hispanic</b>	71.0	68.9	67.0	73.5	71.0
<b>Black, non-Hispanic</b>	52.2	56.1	61.6	65.2	66.0
<b>Hispanic</b>	52.6	58.5	55.5	65.4	69.2
<b>Males</b>					
<b>White, non-Hispanic</b>	72.3	70.3	68.6	74.9	70.8
<b>Black, non-Hispanic</b>	57.5	61.0	65.2	66.6	70.3
<b>Hispanic</b>	55.9	58.4	57.5	65.8	71.1
<b>Females</b>					
<b>White, non-Hispanic</b>	68.8	66.5	64.3	70.9	71.4
<b>Black, non-Hispanic</b>	40.8	47.1	54.3	63.0	59.3
<b>Hispanic</b>	45.8	58.6	52.3	64.6	65.8

NOTE: This measure of emotional or behavioral difficulties of children is based on parental responses to the following question in the SDQ: “Overall, do you think that (child) has any difficulties in one or more of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behavior, or being able to get along with other people?” Response choices were (1) “no”; (2) “yes, minor difficulties”; (3) “yes, definite difficulties”; or (4) “yes, severe difficulties.” Children with serious emotional or behavioral difficulties are defined as those whose parents responded “yes, definite” or “yes, severe.” Receiving a service includes current use of special education for emotional or behavioral problems, parent contact with a general doctor during the past 12 months about the child's emotional or behavioral problems, or parent contact with a mental health professional during the past 12 months about the child.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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