Original Paper

Social and Emotional Learning: Meeting and Addressing Educator and Student Concerns While Providing Benefits for All Involved

Stefanie R. Sorbet[1] & Charles E. Notar[2]

[1] University of Central Arkansas, Dept. of Elementary, Literacy, & Special Education, Donaghey, Conway, AR, United States

[2] Jacksonville State University (Emeritus), College of Education and Professional Studies, Department of Secondary Education, Jacksonville, AL, United States

Abstract

Guided by the social-emotional learning framework, this article establishes and discusses the associations between students' perceptions of five core social emotional learning (SEL) competencies (i.e., responsible decision-making, social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills) and their effect on overall student learning and educational experiences. Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a foundation for safe and positive learning, and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life. Educators have many concerns regarding various social and emotional needs of the students they serve including absenteeism, behavior, student achievement, higher order thinking, problem solving and overall student mental health. SEL initiatives within the classroom prove to show results in: greater academic success, fewer behavioral issues, less emotional distress, positive social behavior, improved teacher-student relationships, less bullying, improved career readiness, increased graduation rates, decreased teacher stress, and an overall positive school climate.

Keywords

absenteeism, achievement, bullying, classroom management, higher-order thinking, social-emotional learning, behavior

1. Introduction

Today's schools are increasingly multicultural and multilingual with students from diverse social, religious, cultural and economic backgrounds. Educators and community agencies serve students with different motivations for engaging in learning, behaving positively, and performing academically. Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a foundation for safe and positive learning, and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life. SEL provides a way for educators to focus on teaching the whole student, and it can lead to greater insight into the struggles of individual students (PowerSchool, 2021).

Schools using a social and emotional learning (SEL) framework can foster an overall climate of inclusion, warmth, and respect, and promote the development of core social and emotional skills among both students and staff. Because bullying prevention is entirely congruent with SEL, it can be embedded in a school's SEL framework (Youth.gov, 2022).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) skill-building practices have traditionally focused on early childhood and elementary school students; however, students in middle school and high school still have a lot to gain from the integration of SEL practices into their education. Teachers and school leaders can create school climates that support students in developing the skills and mindsets that help them manage challenges that they encounter as teens and preteens (Gehlbach, 2020).

Pope and Miles (2022) have known for years that social, emotional, and cognitive processing are all neurologically intertwined and classroom curriculum and lessons affect not only students' academic trajectory, but also their social and emotional outcomes. This conclusion applies across income levels, ethnic and racial backgrounds, and geographic differences (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2014; Gray, Hope, & Matthews, 2018; Healey & Stroman, 2021; Osterman, 2000). Social and emotional learning is critical to students' long-term success in and out of school, and it calls for careful, sustained attention throughout the K-12 education (Bridgeland et al., 2013; DePaoli et al., 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015).

2. What Is Social-Emotional Learning

When Plato wrote about education in *The Republic*, he proposed a holistic curriculum that requires a balance of training in physical education, the arts, math, science, character, and moral judgment. He believed that preparing children to be responsible, productive, caring, and engaged citizens continues to be the goal of education today (Edutopia, 2011). Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a foundation for safe and positive learning, while incorporating a holistic curriculum which enhances students' ability to succeed.

Roger Weissberg and colleagues (2015) first identified a set of five core clusters of social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The *Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning* or CASEL defines social-emotional learning as something that children and adults need in order to understand and manage

emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (https://casel.org/what-is-sel/). Social and emotional learning includes lessons in emotional management, effective problem solving, and positive relationships. These three are all competencies that are essential for students. These skills provide students with the ability to understand and regulate their emotions while also understanding the emotions of others (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Casel, 2020).

Although SEL has been conceptualized in various ways, it can broadly be understood as the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). By engaging in social and emotional learning, students can gain social awareness which increases their empathy and causes students to come to understand people they encounter all come from diverse backgrounds. Students with increased social-emotional learning in elementary classrooms also have a tendency to have decreased behavioral concerns (Sorbet & Notar, 2020).

By incorporating social-emotional lessons with children, educators can increase students' abilities to make appropriate behavioral choices which may in turn improve the classroom community and behavior as a whole (Sorbet & Notar, 2020). Social-emotional learning is essential in regards to the success of students, teachers, and school environments (Usakli & Ekici, 2018).

Current data indicate that SEL programs are both feasible and effective in a variety of educational contexts in many countries around the world. SEL is a useful way to improve students' social and emotional skills, which are associated with several positive behavioral and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011) An SEL-focused school with clear structures provides opportunities for teachers to support students' SEL skill development for their students.

3. What Are the Five Components of Social-Emotional Learning?

Roger Weissberg and colleagues (2015) first identified a set of five core clusters of social and emotional competencies which were: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These competencies are thought to facilitate students' academic performance, positive social behaviors, and social relationships during the school years. It is also thought that these competencies reduce behavior problems and psychological distress while helping to prepare young people to succeed (Elias, 2014; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

The *Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning* or *CASEL* (https://casel.org/what-is-sel/), defines social-emotional learning as learning that both children and adults need in order to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Through creating lessons utilizing the *CASEL* wheel competencies including: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making, students gain self-awareness while also learning

97

how to best work with others in the classroom (Sorbet & Notar, 2020). The five components of social-emotional learning are shown in Figure 1: Social, emotional, and Academic Learning. Descriptions of each of the five components follows.
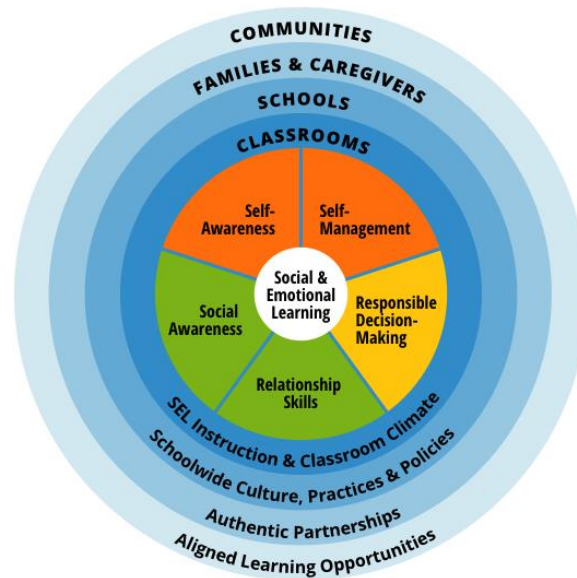
Figure 1. The CASEL wheel https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/

3.1 Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness is simply the ability to be aware of one's inner life -one's emotions, thoughts, behaviors, values, preferences, goals, strengths, challenges, attitudes, mindsets, and so forth- and how these elements impact behavior and choices across contexts (Greater Good in Education, 2022b) Self-awareness involves understanding one's own emotions, personal goals, and values. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations, having positive mindsets, and possessing a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism. High levels of self-awareness require the ability to recognize how thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected.

Self-Awareness gives us the ability to be able to identify and recognize emotions; have accurate self-perception; recognize our strengths, needs, and values, and understand our own self-efficacy (Research Implications, 2022).

Skills that develop self-awareness include:

- Identifying and analyzing one's emotions, and how they affect others
- Understanding the relationship between one's emotions, thoughts, values, and behaviors
- Integrating personal and social identities
- Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets
- Demonstrating honesty and integrity

- Examining prejudices and biases

- Experiencing self-efficacy

- Having a growth mindset

- Developing interests and a sense of purpose (Greater Good in Education, 2022b).

3.2 Self-management

Self-management is the ability to navigate and shift one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in a healthy way to make decisions and reach goals that benefit oneself and others (Greater Good in Education, 2022b). Self-awareness and self-management are two competencies that are closely linked. For example, being able to stop and calm down when one is upset (self-management), requires skills like recognizing and labeling the emotions and considering how they might be affecting one's behavior choices (self-awareness). (Greater Good in Education, 2022b).

Self-management requires skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate one's own emotions and behaviors. This includes the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, and persevere through challenges in order to achieve personal and educational goals. Self-Management includes impulse control and stress management; self-motivation and discipline; goal setting and organizational skills (Research Implications, 2022).

Self-management skills include:

- Regulating and expressing one's emotions thoughtfully

- Demonstrating perseverance and resilience to overcome obstacles

- Sustaining healthy boundaries

- Identifying and using stress management strategies

- Setting personal and collective goals

- Using planning and organizational skills

- Showing the courage to take initiative

- Demonstrating personal and collective agency

- Maintaining attention

- Using feedback constructively

- Practicing self-compassion (Greater Good in Education, 2022b, 2022c).

3.3 Social Awareness

Social awareness involves the ability to understand, empathize, and feel compassion for those with different backgrounds or cultures. It also involves understanding social norms for behavior and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports. Social Awareness: perspective taking; empathy; difference recognition; respect for others (Research Implications, 2022) *Social awareness* involves the ability to understand and empathize with others, particularly with people from different backgrounds than one's own (Greater Good in Education, 2022).

Skills that develop social awareness include:

- Identifying social cues (verbal, physical) to determine how others feel

- Taking others' perspectives
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- Understanding and expressing gratitude
- Recognizing strengths in others
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
- Seeking or offering support and help when needed (Greater Good in Education, 2022).

3.4 Relationship Skills

Relationship skills help students establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, and to act in accordance with social norms. These skills involve communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when it is needed. People with *"relationship skills"* have the ability to build positive relationships, especially with diverse individuals and groups, using a variety of methods such as active listening, and communication and conflict resolution skills. These skills also include the ability to resist pressure and to seek out and offer help (Greater Good in Education, 2022). Relationship Skills help us with communication, social engagement, and relationship building; working cooperatively; negotiation, refusal, and conflict management; help seeking (Research Implications, 2022).

Creating strong relationships between students and those charged with educating them therefore will require adults to acknowledge the long-standing harms caused by racism in schools. Bias and discrimination, both implicit and explicit, can easily lead to harmful in-school practices that erase students' cultural identities. Relationship building, however, must be done intentionally with the needs of students of color in mind and with a strength-based lens that recognizes and values the rich cultural and linguistic assets they bring to the classroom. (Ed Trust & MDRC, 2021).

Strong relationships between adults and students must include: expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities. Importantly, these relationship-building actions must be done with an equity lens, one that supports positive racial, cultural, and ethnic identity development (Ed Trust & MDRC, 2021).

District and school leaders considering emphasizing relationships as a strategy to help students catch up and stay connected with school will have to make intentional and important decisions about structuring time for teachers and staff, investing in activities, training on building developmental relationships, and about how to most effectively group students. As school leaders consider what type of strategy could work best with their staff and students to build strong developmental relationships, they will have to make difficult decisions based on the specific circumstances. Students from all backgrounds and ages benefit from strong relationships (Ed Trust & MDRC, 2021).

Strong relationships provide a foundation for student engagement, belonging, and, ultimately, learning. The more high-quality relationships students have with their teachers, the better their engagement in

school. (Ed Trust & MDRC, 2021). The most important thing schools can do to foster these relationships is to have a culture that explicitly values adults nurturing relationships with students and providing teachers and school staff with the time, space, and occasions to interact repeatedly with individual students, especially those that seem less engaged (Ed Trust & MDRC, 2021).

Relationship skills include:

- Initiating contact with others and cultivating friendship
- Sharing one's thoughts and feelings (appropriately)
- Communicating effectively
- Developing positive relationships
- Demonstrating cultural humility
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- Resolving conflicts constructively
- Approaching relationships with positive presuppositions
- Resisting negative social pressure
- Resisting stereotypes
- Standing up for the rights of others
- Showing leadership in groups (Greater Good in Education, 2022).

Social awareness and relationship skills are closely linked. When students attempt to resolve a conflict between themselves and another peer, the process is made easier when both are able to empathize with each other (social awareness) (Greater Good in Education, 2022).

3.5 Responsible Decision-making

Responsible decision making is defined by the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL) as "the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms." Essentially, all aspects of a potential decision and its consequences must be considered before a choice is made. To make the most appropriate behavioral choices, students need to learn how to evaluate the situation, analyze their options, and consider the potential consequences of each of those options for themselves and others (Landmark School, 2022). Social-emotional learning focuses on responsible decision-making which helps all children make choices regarding their own personal behavior based on ethics and social norms within their own school and home environment (Sorbet & Notar, 2020). Responsible Decision-making includes the ability to identify problems and analyze situations as well as evaluating and reflecting on one's personal, social, and ethical responsibilities (Research Implications, 2022).

4. Responsible Decision-making Skills:

- Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness
- Learning how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts
- Making ethical decisions based upon mutual respect and appropriate culturally-relevant social norms
- Recognizing one's responsibility to behave ethically
- Identifying solutions for personal and social problems
- Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions
- Recognizing how critical thinking skills are used both inside and outside of school
- Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being
- Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts (Greater Good in Education, 2022d/e).

There are many benefits of responsible-decision making. Responsible decision-making is one of the five components that make up CASEL's model of SEL (www.casel.org). It means the ability to make caring and constructive choices about how to behave, based on consideration of ethical standards (i.e., "benefits and consequences for personal, social, and collective well-being") as well as relevant social norms and safety concerns. impacts (Greater Good in Education, 2022).

One such program titled *The Positive Action program*, was a SEL program designed to focus on these areas. Results from this program showed a 62% reduction in violence, a 51% reduction in bullying, and 46-73% reduction in the use of illicit substances. The program also saw a decrease in absenteeism, disciplinary referrals, and suspensions (Positive Action, 2020). Scores in reading and math also improved, showing that positive decision-making has an impact both in and outside the classroom (Positive Action, 2020). All of these benefits last beyond the school years and help reduce poverty and improve economic mobility (Positive Action, 2020). Up to 24% of those students improved their social behaviors, resulting in lower stress levels, and 22% fewer students had conduct problems (Positive Action, 2020).

Responsible decision-making involves learning how to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse settings. It requires the ability to consider ethical standards, safety concerns, accurate behavioral norms for risky behaviors, the health and well-being of self and others, and to make realistic evaluation of various actions' consequences.

5. Benefits of SEL

We know from research that attendance, behavior, course performance, and assessments are powerful indicators of whether a student is on track for graduation. We also know that SEL variables of motivation, self-regulation, and social connection are as or more important than cognitive ability for success in school and life (Buckle, 2022). These social and emotional skills are some of several short-term student outcomes that SEL programs promote (Durlak et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Sklad et al., 2012). Other benefits include: increased positive attitudes toward oneself, others, and tasks including enhanced

102

self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection and commitment to school, and a sense of purpose.

Research indicates that SEL lowers levels of emotional distress; disruptive behavior; and alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use. SEL is also an effective approach for addressing high school core elements such as safe learning environments, violence prevention activities, substance abuse prevention, behavioral, social, and emotional supports, mental health services, and early childhood SEL programs (Collaborative, 2003). Students are more successful in school and daily life when they know and can manage themselves, understand the perspectives of others and relate effectively with them, and make sound choices about personal and social decisions (Durlak et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Sklad et al., 2012).

6. Social and Emotional Learning and the Impact on School Concerns

To discover how SEL increases teacher effectiveness and student learning, we must first look at the many ways SEL can affect the school environment. There are many aspects of the school environment that affect student learning as well as teacher effectiveness. When we think about student learning, we must take into consideration all of the expectations that districts and schools have that work to suggest student learning is taking place. Districts must provide a safe place within schools so that students feel comfortable and so that their basic needs are being met. When students' basic needs are met, then learning can occur. Without the basic needs being met, a child cannot be expected to learn at the same levels as other children. In Maslow's *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943), humans were labeled with having five basic needs. Social and emotional learning can bridge that gap and provide the necessary tools for emotional regulation that students need for their basic needs to be met and to be successful.

Table 1a. School Concerns and Social-Emotional Learning Competencies (Sorbet, Notar 2022).

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies / School Concerns	Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills	Responsible Decision-Making
Absenteeism	X	X	X		X
Bullying	X	X	X	X	
Text Anxiety	X	X			
Behavior	X	X	X	X	X
Achievement	X	X			X

In Table 1a we can see the social and emotional learning competencies that the student may lack in conjunction with school concerns such as absenteeism, bullying, text anxiety, behavior, and achievement.

7. School Attendance and Participation Concerns

Recent trends in education have created a focus in districts and schools on improving their students' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, and many educators are aware of the impact these skills have on student success. As many districts roll out programs that tie into chronic absenteeism, academic performance, graduation rates, and college/career readiness, it's important to stay up to date on the latest research and findings when it comes to SEL.

While some students participate daily and enjoy coming to school, others are less engaged and less motivated. Preparing students for their future requires an education that not only teaches academics but prepares them to collaborate, problem-solve and cooperate with those around them (Payton et al., 2008). Social-emotional learning provides those skills and opportunities for students.

Attendance is a critical issue facing many schools, and with over 8 million students missing three or more weeks of school each year, it's important to stay aware and provide support to students who may be facing chronic absenteeism. Many factors that affect student attendance, such as homelessness and poverty, are slightly outside of a school's control, but a school or district can help lessen the stress on students by implementing SEL practices that improve relationships and that drive student engagement. Encouraging students to attend and engage in school despite their struggles at home can make a positive impact on one's life. (Hammer, 2019).

Absenteeism stressors for students and families include unemployment, inadequate technology and internet access, and food and housing insecurity. In addition, online and distance learning impacted many students' ability to form strong relationships with their teachers, feel connected to school, and engage in learning (Aperture Education, 2022).

Regardless of why a student is not in school it must be understood that without the student in school a student will not succeed. Chronic absenteeism is a problem that has only gotten worse because of the pandemic. Since March 2020, an estimated 3 million of the "most educationally marginalized students" nationwide have lost access to their education or have stopped attending school (Aperture Education, 2022).

Attendance rates have been used often to gauge student performance. Chronic absenteeism goes a step further by measuring the number of days a student misses as well as the number of students who miss 10% or more of the school year. Chronically absent students are at-risk of academic failure, dropping out, and even criminal behavior (Aperture Education, 2022). Schools are doing their best to tackle this problem including efforts where school staff reach out to every student on a regular and ongoing basis to check how they are doing. Other ideas for improving attendance include schools conducting door-to-door home visits, sometimes supported by members of the community like police officers, community-based organizations, and even social workers (Aperture Education, 2022).

104

SEL can help schools reduce chronic absenteeism and improve attendance rates. Much research shows lower absentee rates when students feel their school climate and culture is caring and supportive of them (Aperture Education, 2022). A supportive, culturally responsive learning environment can motivate students to attend and can act as a buffer against external factors that may cause absenteeism. When students feel they have strong connections with their teachers, they also tend to feel safe and valued at school, which can also decrease chronic absenteeism. (Aperture Education, 2022).

For attendance, the correlations peak in high school—perhaps because as kids grow up they have more control over their attendance. For grades, behavior, and assessments, however, the correlations with SEL peak in middle school. Not only is middle school a challenging time for kids socially and emotionally, it's also the time when students' social-emotional functioning is most closely linked to their academic performance (Buckle, 2022).

Panorama Education found that student attendance is most correlated with engagement, self-management, and self-efficacy. Additionally, one statistic even states that highly engaged students are *57 percent less likely* to be chronically absent in school than students who report low engagement (Hammer, 2019). SEL plays an integral role in fostering safe, caring, and supportive environments where all students feel accepted and can thrive (https://casel.org/what-is-sel).

8. School Relationship Concerns

SEL programs can play an integral role in improving school climate and culture, especially in schools with diverse student populations by creating safe, caring, and supportive environments where all students feel accepted and can thrive (Aperture Education, 2022). The concept of ethical decision-making and responsibility is closely tied to the other components of SEL. For example, to do the right thing by standing up to friends who are mistreating others, a student needs to be in touch with their own values (self-awareness) and be able to regulate conflicting emotions (self-management); they also need to be able to empathize with those affected (social awareness) and resist peer pressure to join in (relationship skills) impacts (Greater Good in Education, 2022).

Research has shown many benefits of SEL, such as improved student ability to recognize and manage emotions, deepened understanding of emotional perspectives of others, interpersonal situational management, as well as increased responsibility in decision-making. SEL also develops school connectedness and overall engagement, both of which are significant components when it comes to building relationships within a school (Usakli & Ekici, 2018).

9. School Behavior Concerns

When respectful behavior is set as an expectation in the classroom, instead of only being integrated periodically throughout the year, students can focus on academics rather than social interactions. If students are required and encouraged to participate in daily social-emotional lessons, they form healthier relationships with both their teachers and peers (Sorbet & Notar, 2022). Educators are tasked with the

105

job to provide curriculum and content knowledge as well as manage a classroom of learners while moving students ahead one grade level at best throughout the school year. Students who are invested in their learning community may exhibit fewer behavioral concerns in the classroom. Students who are skilled with social and emotional regulation may also be less likely to exhibit behavioral issues.

Through incorporating social and emotional learning within a classroom setting, the teacher can create a healthier learning environment while also strengthening social and emotional competencies. Gregory and Fergus (2017) believed that this practice leads to improving teachers' abilities in delivering instruction to their students. As students' basic and social and emotional needs are met, behavior in the classroom improves, and student learning may increase.

Extensive research has shown that SEL fosters a positive school climate and culture and promotes prosocial behaviors such as kindness, empathy, sharing, and compassion (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004; Pellegrino, & Hilton. (Eds.). (2012).

10. Social Emotional Learning and Teacher Effectiveness

In order for us to really understand how social and emotional learning impacts teacher effectiveness we must look at not only the content knowledge, planning and preparation of lessons but also the overall classroom environment that the teacher designs for their students. Social-emotional learning is directly impacted by the organization and design set forth by the teacher of that classroom. A positive classroom climate consists of structures and expectations that the teacher establishes and communicates to their students in an effort to keep them safe, engaged, and on-task while minimizing misbehavior.

In *Table 1b. Teacher's concerns and Social-Emotional Learning*, the areas of social emotional learning competencies that the student may lack in conjunction with the teacher's concerns during the day to day instructional process are shown. Such areas include higher order thinking, critical thinking, methods of instruction, classroom management, behavior and achievement.

Table 1b. Teacher's Concerns and Social-Emotional Learning Competencies (Sorbet, Notar 2022)

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies Teacher's Concerns	Self Awareness	Self Management	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills	Responsible Decision Making
Classroom Management	X	X	X	X	X
Behavior	X	X	X	X	X

Achievement	X	X			X
Higher Order Thinking	X	X	X		
Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving	X	X	X	X	X
Methods of Instruction	X	X	X	X	X
Active Listening and Class Discussions	X	X	X	X	X
Student Mental Health	X	X	X	X	X

11. Classroom Management Concerns

Classroom management has been a primary concern of teachers ever since we can remember. Excellent classroom managers are teachers who understand their own needs as well as the needs of their students. In order for teachers to be effective educators, they must get to know their students, their background, what motivates them, and what they need in order to best understand them. Through establishing a positive classroom environment, teachers can work to encourage and motivate students by promoting self-discipline while utilizing social-emotional learning (Sorbet & Notar, 2020).

Teachers in today's classrooms are called to meet the needs of their students. Through organization, creation of procedures and rules, fostering intrinsic motivation in students, providing engaging lessons, organizing information and paying careful attention to the manner in which instruction is delivered while adjusting along the way, teachers can do just that. Well-planned and thoughtfully organized classrooms constructed with a foundation of support, allow teachers to provide a variety of meaningful learning experiences for students to be successful. Teachers must accept feedback and engage in self-reflection in order to best adjust lessons and management techniques throughout the school year (Sorbet & Notar, 2020).

As teachers meet the needs of their students, their own teacher needs can be. As intrinsic motivation is encouraged in young people within the classroom, so is intrinsic motivation developed in the teacher as well. The teacher grows in their profession as they meet the needs of their students and support the students as they grow. This reciprocal growth process enhances learning and fosters the motivation to continue striving for excellence both in learning and instruction of the whole child socially and emotionally as well as academically (Sorbet & Notar, 2020).

Harry Wong has stated that within the first two weeks of school we are not to teach subjects, but we are to teach procedures (2009). Procedures and routines are the foundation of classroom management. Procedures and routines in a school and in the classroom provide the environment for learning to take place (Lester et al., 2017). These routines, which create and maintain classroom order and save valuable instructional time, are a main concern for most educators (Lester et al., 2017). Effective teachers with established routines, spend a great deal of time planning prior to the start of each new school year, and report having fewer discipline issues paving the way for good instruction (Lester et al., 2017). Routines and procedures also significantly impact teacher retention rates in relation to remaining in the profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Students with increased social emotional learning in elementary classrooms tend to have decreased behavioral concerns. Becoming socially aware increases empathy and allows students to understand that people all come from diverse backgrounds. Children need social and emotional learning in order to be able to manage their own emotions and develop empathy and friendships within the classroom setting in order for the classroom culture to be one of positivity, community, and friendship (https://casel.org/what-is-sel/). By incorporating social-emotional lessons with children, the teacher can increase students' abilities to make appropriate behavioral choices which may in turn improve the classroom community and behavior as a whole (Sorbet & Notar, 2020).

12. Classroom Behavior Concerns

According to a study from CASEL, when students grow their SEL skills, many educators see improved classroom behavior. Student behavior is most correlated with self-management, social awareness, and teacher-student relationships (Hammer, 2019). Mutual respect of teachers and students is important to keep the class's productive learning and disciplined environment. Institutions or teachers should reward students based on their behavior during class and overall interaction with their teachers and fellow mates. Teachers should be strict with this strategy because a noisy, disturbed, or undisciplined class cannot promote productive learning (Chloe, 2021).

Educators must foster a caring and inclusive space for productive dialogue. SEL helps in creating a climate of mutual respect. Students need to know that their opinions will be respected, even when they differ from those of their teachers or peers. Strengthen student-teacher relationships and peer relationships by providing formal and informal opportunities for students and teachers to get to know one another. Teachers can start to build trust and buy-in by offering frequent icebreakers, check-in questions, and "reverse office hours" where teachers sign up students for one-on-one meetings. Educators can also integrate more peer collaboration activities, model and practice positive classroom communication and conflict resolution strategies, and regularly check in with students who may feel marginalized. A climate of trust and care will help when conflicts do arise, and certain practices such as restorative justice and peacemaking circles offer structured ways to engage in dialogue and resolve problems (Pope &Miles, 2022).

108

Students participating in SEL programs showed significantly more positive outcomes with respect to enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behavior, and academic performance, and significantly lower levels of conduct problems and emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011).

Behavioral problems can impede achievement. Behavioral infractions in the class can lead to missed school time, while also sabotaging student performance and their education. Furthermore, acting inappropriately due to poor impulse control can damage the relationships a student has with their peers and teachers, negatively impacting their attitudes towards school in the long-term. SEL students are overall less aggressive and less disruptive in school, as well as being less likely to have behavior and substance abuse problems before the age of 25 (Education Lifeskills, 2019).

13. Student Achievement Concern

SEL can increase student achievement and promote prosocial behaviors such as kindness, empathy, sharing, and compassion. In addition to improving school climate and culture, SEL also increases student achievement, engages students in learning, gets them excited about school, and reduces depression and stress. These are all factors critical to student attendance (Aperture Education, 2022). This, in turn, can reduce chronic absences. In addition, SEL can increase student achievement and promote prosocial behaviors such as kindness, empathy, sharing, and compassion. SEL programs also can engage students in learning, get them excited about school, and reduce depression and stress — all factors critical to student attendance. Aperture Education. (2022). SEL improves achievement by an average of 11 percentile points (Durlak et al., 2011). Weissberg states SEL improved test scores, grades, and attendance (2016).

Compared to kids with low SEL, kids with high SEL are twice as likely to have above-average grades, 60 percent less likely to have one or more behavior incidents over the course of a year, and half as likely to be chronically absent (Buckle, 2022). The relationships between SEL skills and attendance, behavior, and course performance are not entirely constant and can change across elementary, middle, and high school (Buckle, 2022).

14. Critical Thinking Concern

SEL increases higher order thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving. Higher order thinking is a skill that can be taught and improved upon through practice (Cummins, 2020). It is hard to imagine a teacher or school leader who is not aware of the importance of teaching higher-order thinking skills to prepare students (Collins, 2014). To ensure our students get the opportunity to acquire higher order thinking skills, we must create higher-order thinking opportunities within the classroom (Cummins, 2020). Assignments and assessments that require critical thinking are associated with increased student achievement. The SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making all play a major part in the development of higher order thinking.

Higher-order thinking skills go beyond basic observation of facts and memorization. They are what we are talking about when we want our students to be evaluative, creative and innovative. Critical thinking is also a higher-order thinking skill. The term "critical thinking" means making reasoned judgments (Beyer, 1995) Brookhart (2010) identifies definitions of higher-order thinking as falling into three categories: (1) those that define higher-order thinking in terms of *transfer*, (2) those that define it in terms of *critical thinking*, and (3) those that define it in terms of *problem solving.*

15. Problem-solving Concern

To develop problem-solving strategies, teachers should stress both the correct method of accomplishing a task and the correct answer. In this way, students can learn to identify whether they need to select an alternative method if the first method has proven unsuccessful (Thomas & Thorne, 2009). Teachers should also teach students different methods for solving a problem and encourage students to consider alternative problem-solving methods if a particular strategy proves unrewarding. It is helpful for teachers and parents to model different problem-solving methods for everyday problems that arise from time to time (Thomas & Thorne, 2009).

Problem-solving skills can help reduce reactive bullying, help students who are bullied or witness bullying to use a process to make good decisions, and even help students generate more options for how to handle the situation (Doces, 2022). One of the essential teaching strategies a teacher or an instructor should follow is problem-based learning. They should prepare a list of problem-based open-ended questions before a class and ask the class to solve them in groups or teams. This technique helps in developing and improving the transferable and teamwork skills of students, respectively (Chloe, 2021). Encourage students to use alternative methods to solve problems as well as offer them different problem-solving methods (Cox, 2019).

16. Active Listening and Discussion Concerns

Active listening goes beyond just listening. Active listening means being attentive to what someone else is saying. The goal of active listening is to understand the feelings and views of the person. Active listening involves listening with all senses. As well as giving full attention to the speaker, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'seen' to be listening - otherwise the speaker may conclude that what they are talking about is uninteresting to the listener.

Discussion is a tool to be used in the classroom. Discussion in classrooms makes learning more interactive and helps students develop skills that cannot be taught in a traditional lecture format. Large group discussion is not a perfect teaching strategy and neither is small group discussion, but there are things educators can do to improve the practical usage of discussion in the classroom. Implementing classroom discussions during a class has many benefits. Classroom discussion increases students' interests and engagement, provides instructors with feedback, promotes preparation, develops students' speaking skills, and controls the classroom environment (GradeHub, 2015).

110

17. SEL and Student Mental Health

School can be a stressful time for any student, at any age. Changes in one's own personality and perspective, as well as a shift in our own social positioning can manifest in many negative ways. Mental health issues like depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal are on the rise, specifically in teenagers and most especially in teenage girls. SEL programs also can engage students in learning, get them excited about school, and reduce depression and stress which are the factors impacting student attendance (Aperture Education, 2022).

Students engaged in social & emotional learning show fewer occurrences of these problems across the board. This is due in part to self-management skills like planning, improved attention spans, and the ability to control their own impulses and reflect on their own thoughts. Given how mental health can greatly affect our self-esteem as well as our ability to devote more attention to a task, it should be no surprise these changes can lead to better academic achievement (Education Lifeskills, 2019). Children need lessons in social-emotional learning so that they are able to manage their own emotions and develop friendships within the classroom setting in order for the classroom culture to be one of positivity, community, and friendship (https://casel.org/what-is-sel/).

18. Conclusion

In conclusion, social and emotional learning initiatives within the classroom improve academic success, teacher-student relationships, and provide an overall positive climate not just within the classroom but throughout the entire school. School administrators and teachers all have concerns regarding various needs of their students including absenteeism, behavior, student achievement, higher order thinking, problem solving and overall student mental health. SEL provides practice in the five competency areas and these skills are vital for children and adults to be able to manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Students engaged in social and emotional learning experiences within educational settings tend to have decreased worry and social stress, improved academic performance, and positive school experiences.

References

Aperture Education. (2020). *Reduce chronic absenteeism with SEL*. Retrieved from Reduce Chronic Absenteeism with SEL - Social and Emotional Learning - Aperture Education.

Aperture Education. (2022, February). Chronic absenteeism: A national crisis. *Kappan*, *103*(5), 8-12.

Beyer, B. K. (1995). *Critical thinking*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Kappa Delta Educational Foundation.

Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M., & Hariharan, A. (2013). *The missing piece: A national teacher survey on how social and emotional learning can empower children and transform schools*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates for CASEL.

Brookhart, S. (2010), *How to Assess Higher Order Thinking Skills in Your Classroom*. ASCD. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/Publications/Books/Overview/How-to-Assess-Higher-Order-Thinking-Skills-in-Your-Classroom.aspx

Buckle, J. (2022). *Are Stronger SEL Skills Linked to Better Attendance, Behavior, and Grades*? Retrieved (2022, February 2) Are Stronger SEL Skills Linked to Better Attendance, Behavior, and Grades? (panoramaed.com)

CASEL. (2020, August 1). *Advancing Social and Emotional*. Retrieved from www.casel.org Casal. (2011, October 6). *Social and emotional learning: A short history*. Retrieved from https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history.

CASEL. (2022). *Fundamentals of SEL*. Retrieved May 14, 2022, from https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/

Chloe, D. (2021, September 11). *The complete list of teaching methods and strategies*. Retrieved from The Complete List of Teaching Methods and Strategies - MTS Blog (mytutorsource.com)

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2003). *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Student Benefits: Implications for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Core Elements.* Retrieved February 1, 2022, from ED505369.pdf

Collins, R. (2014, August, 29). Skills for the 21st Century: Teaching higher-order thinking. *Curriculum & Leadership Journal*, *12*(14). Retrieved from Curriculum & Leadership Journal | Articles

Cox, J. (2019, October 15). *Teaching strategies that enhance higher-order thinking.* Retrieved from Teaching Strategies that Enhance Higher-Order Thinking - TeachHUB

Cummins, K. (2020, June 21). *Higher order thinking skills for students and teachers.* Retrieved from Higher order thinking skills for students and teachers — Innovative Teaching Ideas

DePaoli, J. L., Atwell, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2017). *Ready to lead: A national principal survey on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates for CASEL.

Doces, M. (2022). *Social emotional learning and bullying prevention*. Retrieved (2022, February 8) from Slide 1 (www.k12.wa.us)

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. *Child development*, *82*(1), 405-432. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x

Education Trust and MDRC. (2021, March). *Announcements.* Retrieved from https://www.mdrc.org/news/announcement/education-trust-and-mdrc-publish-briefs-district-and-school-leaders-address

Edutopia. (2011). Retrieved from https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history#:~:text=An%20Ancient%20Concept,%2C%20character%2C%20and%20moral%20judgment

112

Elias, M. J. (2014). Social-emotional skills can boost Common Core implementation. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(3), 58-62. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721714557455

Farrington, C. A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T. S., Johnson, D. W., & Beechum, N. O. (2012). *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance: A Critical Literature Review*. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *95*, 148-162. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.95.1.148

Gehlbach, H., & Chuter, C. (2020, August 24). *Conceptualizing the core of "Social Emotional Learning"*. https://doi.org/10.35542/osf.io/8ft9h

Gillen-O'Neel, C., & Fuligni, A. (2014). A longitudinal study of school belonging and academic motivation across high school. *Child Development*, *84*(2), 678-692. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01862.x

GradeHub. (2015, February 15). *The five advantages of teaching with discussions*. Retrieved from http://higheredprofessor.com/2015/02/16/five-advantages-teaching-discussions/

Gray, D. L., Hope, E. C., & Matthews, J. S. (2018). Black and belonging at school: A case for interpersonal, instructional, and institutional opportunity structures. *Educational Psychologist*, *53*(2), 97-113. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1421466

Greater Good in Education. (2022). *SEL for students: Social awareness and relationship skills*. Retrieved from SEL for Students: Social Awareness and Relationship Skills | Greater Good In Education (berkeley.edu)

Greater Good in Education. (2022b). *SEL for adults: Self-awareness and self-management*. Retrieved from SEL for Adults: Self-Awareness and Self-Management | Greater Good In Education (berkeley.edu)

Greater Good in Education. (2022c/d). *SEL for students: Ethical decision-making and social responsibility*. Retrieved from SEL for Students: Ethical Decision-Making and Social Responsibility | Greater Good In Education (berkeley.edu)

Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *Future of Children*, *27*(1), 117-136. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0006

Hammer, B. (2019, January 14). *The impact of social and emotional learning on key student outcomes*. Retrieved from The Impact of Social and Emotional Learning on Key Student Outcomes | Edmentum Blog

Healey, K., & Stroman, C. (2021). *Structures for belonging: A synthesis of research on belonging — Supportive learning environments*. Student Experience Research Network.

Landmark School. (2022). *Responsible decision making (Social Emotional Learning)*. Retrieved from https://www.landmarkoutreach.org/strategies/responsible-decision-making/

Lester, R. R., Allanson, P. E., & Notar, C. E. (2017). Routines are the foundation of classroom management. *Education*, *137*(4), 421-435. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102020-3.00047-4

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *In Psychological Review*, *50*(4), 430-437. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Murry, B. P. (2002a) The new teacher's complete sourcebook: Grades K-4. *Scholastic*.

Murray, B. (2002b, January 1). 30 Classroom procedures to head off behavior problems | Scholastic.com. *Scholastic Teachers*.

Osterman, K. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*(3), 323-367. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543070003323

Payton, J., Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Schellinger, K. B., & Pachan, M. (2008). The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews. *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. Retrieved January 25, 2021, from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505370.pdf.

Pellegrino, J. W., & Hilton, M. L. (Eds.). (2012). *Education for life and work: Developing transferable knowledge and skills in the 21st century*. Committee 011 Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills. National Research Council of the National Academies.

Pope, D. C., & Miles, S. (2022, January 24). A caring climate that promotes belonging and engagement. of *Kappan*, *103*(5), 8-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217221079972

Positive Action. (2020). *Responsible decision making: An introductory guide*. Retrieved from https://www.positiveaction.net/blog/responsible-decision-making

PowerSchool. (2021, November 12). *Supporting teachers' social and emotional learning needs*. Retrieved from https://www.powerschool.com/blog/supporting-teachers-social-and-emotional-learning-needs/

Research Implications for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Core Elements. (2022). *Social and emotional learning (SEL) and student benefits: Implications for the safe schools/healthy students core elements*. Retrieved (2022, February 18) from ED505369.pdf

Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning and teachers. *The Future of Children, 27*(1). https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0007

Sklad, M., Diekstra, R., Ritter, M.D., Ben, J., & Gravesteijn, C. (2012). Effectiveness of school-based universal social, emotional, and behavioral programs: Do they enhance students' development in the area of skill, behavior, and adjustment? *Psychology in the Schools*, *49*(9), 892-909. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21641

Smith, T. M., & Ingersoll, R. M. ((2004, September). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, *41*(3), 681-714. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041003681

Sorbet, S. R., & Notar, C. E. (2020). Motivating and meeting students' diverse needs with positive classroom design and social-emotional learning. *World Journal of Educational Research*, *7*(3), 107-120. https://doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v7n3p107

Thomas, A., & Thorne, G. (2009). *How to increase higher order thinking.* Metarie, LA: Center for Development and Learning, http://www.readingrockets.org/article/34655

Thomas, A. (2022). *30 Strategies for enhancing higher order thinking*. Retrieved (2022, February 4) from 30strategies.pdf (ueatexas.com)

Weissberg, R. (2016, February 15). *Why social and emotional learning is essential for students: Learn more about the critical role that social and emotional learning plays in promoting student success*. Retrieved from Why Social and Emotional Learning Is Essential for Students | Edutopia.

Weissberg, R. P., & Cascarino, J. (2013, October 1). *Academic learning + Social-Emotional learning = National priority.* https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171309500203

Weissberg, R .P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 3-19). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2009). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher*. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications.

Usakli, H., & Ekici, K. (2018). Program on multiple trajectories of social-emotional and misconduct behaviors. *Prevention Science*, *18*, 214-224.

Youth.gov. (2022). *Social and Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention.* Retrieved (2022, February 6) from Social and Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention | Youth.gov.

Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say*? New York: Teachers College Press.