**The Future of Education Depends on Social Emotional Learning: Here’s Why**

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Social and emotional abilities are said to be indicators of how well a person adjusts to his or her environment, adapts to change and, ultimately, how successful she or he will be in life. In fact, core development abilities such as conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness and agreeableness can be as or even more important than cognitive intelligence in determining future employment. Despite these competencies being related to consequential life outcomes, it can be challenging for educators to find effective ways to prioritize, teach and assess social and emotional skills.

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Developing these core life abilities through social and emotional learning (SEL) is critical to a child’s development, as it directly correlates to success and happiness as an adult. For many children, school is the only place where any deficiencies in these abilities can be addressed before they become active members of society.

Combining these skills with academic development creates high-quality learning experiences and environments that empower students to be more effective contributors in their classrooms today and in their workplaces and communities tomorrow.

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**Is SEL worth the investment?**

According to [“Ready to Lead,” a report for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)](http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead_FINAL.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) based on a national principal survey on how SEL can prepare children and transform schools, there is data to support the importance of embedding social and emotional development in schools. The report cites a 2011 meta-analysis that found that students who receive high-quality SEL instruction have achievement scores on average of 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction.

However, the benefits of SEL do not end at graduation. [A recent study from The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)](http://www.oecd.org/education/school/UPDATED%20Social%20and%20Emotional%20Skills%20-%20Well-being%2C%20connectedness%20and%20success.pdf%20%28website%29.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) looked at five primary social and emotional skills—open-mindedness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion and agreeableness—to determine which are the strongest indicators of success. The study revealed a lack of SEL regularly correlated with unfavorable outcomes such as an increased chance of unemployment, divorce, poor health, criminal behavior and imprisonment.

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To further justify the advantages of SEL, the report shared that advances in neuroscience imply developing SEL skills in kindergarten “can have long-term academic benefits on students’ reading and vocabulary, including in high poverty schools, suggesting that SEL may assist in closing achievement gaps.” It also stated, “researchers at Columbia University concluded that for every dollar a school spends on social-emotional learning programs, it sees an eleven dollar return on its investment,” indicating the investment in SEL is worthwhile.

The development of these skills has shown overall positive results, including better academic performance, improved attitudes, behaviors and relationships with peers, as well as deeper connection to school, fewer delinquent acts and reduced emotional distress (student depression, anxiety, stress and social withdrawal).

When it comes to translating those skills beyond the classroom, the OECD explains that subjective well-being can be defined as having a positive mental state; when reviewing the impact of SEL on adolescents, the results—which mirror findings from adult samples—indicate more ties between SEL skills and life satisfaction than between cognitive skills and life satisfaction by nearly 10 percent. Emotional stability appears to be the most relevant of the top SEL skills that correlate to life satisfaction, with consciousness and extraversion showing relevance in job and life satisfaction.

**This article is part of an upcoming Guide exploring Social Emotional Learning, sponsored by [Newsela](https://newsela.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). Thoughts and opinions expressed in this story are solely those of the writer. To learn more, please read our [Ethics Statement](https://www.edsurge.com/ethics-statement%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).**

**How do teachers feel about SEL?**

According to the CASEL report, [“Ready to Lead,”](http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ReadyToLead_FINAL.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) interest in and support for SEL are high among teachers and school administrators. Principals, specifically, are eager for the expertise, training and support necessary to effectively implement new programming. The survey findings state that while a majority of principals (97 percent) believe teaching SEL skills in school will improve student behavior, learning and development, only 35 percent report their school has developed a plan for teaching students social and emotional skills. What’s more, only 40 percent of principals anticipate it will improve academic performance, which is an indicator of the disconnect between SEL support and implementation.

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A United States national teacher survey called ["The Missing Piece"](https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/the-missing-piece.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), a report for CASEL, supports the idea that teachers widely endorse SEL. Ninety-five percent of those surveyed believe that SEL skills are teachable and that the curriculum can benefit students from all backgrounds.

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**When will SEL become a priority?**

Although the vast majority of education stakeholders agree SEL is important, it has remained on the sidelines while education leaders have instead focused on academics alone—as opposed to the development of the whole child.

Given the support that SEL has in the education community, it may just be a matter of time before it is widely adopted. Developing an emphasis on SEL in schools will lead to a more supportive space for students to freely share their creative ideas, shamelessly ask questions and learn academic concepts while building lifelong skills. The widespread advancement of SEL will require a gradual and grand shift in pedagogy. In the process, we can forge a more well-rounded education system to produce more socially responsible citizens who are better prepared to work together to build communities, nations and, ultimately, a better world.

Giancarlo has more than 20 years experience working in education technology in K-12 and university environments. He is currently SMART’s Global Education Strategist.