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# Making the Case for Social and Emotional Learning and Service-Learning

Education Commission of the States

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# Making the Case for Social and Emotional Learning and Service-Learning



Collaborative for  
Academic, Social, and  
Emotional Learning



Education Commission  
of the States



Laboratory for  
Student Success



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## **Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides leadership for researchers, educators and policymakers to advance the science and practice of school-based social and emotional learning. CASEL works with researchers, program developers and educators to focus on program design, evaluation, educator preparation, policy and advocacy to establish social and emotional learning as an integral part of education from preschool through high school. For more information, visit [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org).



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The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is establishing a system of research, development and dissemination that connects schools, parents, community agencies, professional groups and higher education institutions. LSS aims to transform research-based knowledge into useful tools that can be readily integrated into the education reform process. Focused on the mid-Atlantic region, LSS is part of a national system of information exchange. For more information, visit <http://www.temple.edu/LSS/>.

## SYNOPSIS

This *ECS Issue Brief* provides an overview and description of both social and emotional learning (**SEL**) and service-learning (**S-L**) as tools to improve the lives and academic performance of students. It describes how the two practices are interrelated and the research evidence that supports the expanded use of both practices in the classroom. Also provided are descriptions of the essential elements required of successful SEL and S-L programs, examples of such successful programs that are in existence today, and a discussion of state activities and experiences. Lastly, the brief discusses a series of likely challenges that education leaders implementing SEL and S-L programs could face. The brief offers recommendations and advice for addressing such challenges and provides lists of available resources where more information can be found.

The brief represents the first step of a new partnership of three prominent national organizations – the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning** (CASEL), the **National Center for Learning and Citizenship** (NCLC), and the **Laboratory for Student Success** (LSS). This new partnership was formed to assist education leaders in integrating social and emotional learning and service-learning programs and policies into their states, districts and schools. The following brief is intended to be the first in a series of papers exploring aspects of both SEL and S-L. More information on this new partnership is available on the following Web sites ([www.ecs.org/clc](http://www.ecs.org/clc), [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org) and [www.temple.edu/lss/](http://www.temple.edu/lss/)).

## INTRODUCTION

“How many of you want your children to be knowledgeable?” asks Maurice Elias, professor of psychology at Rutgers University. Everyone in his conference audience of teachers and administrators naturally responds with affirmative nods. “How about responsible? Nonviolent? Drug free? Caring? Creative?” The questions at first seem absurd; people laugh when they hear the list. Of course, everyone wants all of those things. Who could possibly want less for the children in our homes and schools?

Then Elias pauses for a few seconds, looks around the room and speaks again. “Now, we don’t have time to do all of those things. We have to drop one of them. Which one will it be?” Now the smiles disappear as people silently wrestle with the need to choose. Their faces reflect the discomfort and anxiety they feel within. Clearly, there is no viable answer when all those qualities are essential. Yet, participants now recognize the question as one that is disturbingly familiar, as one that is asked all too frequently in public education.

No one should have to decide among those qualities. Academic knowledge is obviously indispensable, but so are the many social, emotional and behavioral skills that allow students to be successful in life. Still, many education leaders, under intense pressure to have students meet standards and perform well on high-stakes tests, feel compelled to make a choice that favors knowledge over other aspects of students’ development. And that situation, says Elias, is akin to deciding which organ to give up in the human body – the brain, heart, lungs or liver – when we need them all.

Through his simple questions, Elias reminds his audience that acquiring knowledge is, in and of itself, not sufficient to create a competent human being. Intelligence and knowledge have to be coupled with caring and compassion for healthy development. And caring and compassion can be developed alongside knowledge through school-based activities such as service-learning. He concludes by saying, “It doesn’t take much imagination to see what knowledge without caring looks like. If kids are smart but don’t have social skills, where will their smarts get them? We have to reach not only the minds of kids, but their hearts.”

People know all too well what smarts without social skills looks like in kids. It can look like individuals who are obsessed with their own success and status but are indifferent to the plight of others. It can look like youth who are unable to sustain employment because they cannot get along with their coworkers. It can look like the many young people who resort to an array of self-destructive behaviors because they are unable to

communicate their pain and grief and confusion to anyone else. It can look like two honors students from Columbine High School who methodically murdered 12 fellow students and an instructor before killing themselves.

How, then, is it possible for education leaders to move beyond this untenable dichotomy between knowledge on one hand, and social and emotional skills on the other? How can schools meet rigorous academic demands while nurturing students' social and emotional development? How can already overloaded staff be engaged in such an endeavor? Important answers to these critical questions can be found through the promotion of "social and emotional learning" and "service-learning" as two key education strategies. This issue brief – produced through a new partnership of the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning** (CASEL), the **National Center for Learning and Citizenship** (NCLC), and the **Laboratory for Student Success** (LSS) – explores these two strategies and offers some important recommendations and resources to address issues that education leaders should be prepared to confront.

## **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) AND SERVICE LEARNING (S-L)**

### ***What is Social and Emotional Learning?***

In the first national publication to describe the use of SEL in education (Elias et al., 1997), the authors define SEL as the process through which people learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors. Such skills are a critical component to the success of all schools.

Several national reports, developed by prominent organizations such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development Task Force and the Learning First Alliance, have recognized that "learning is possible only after students' social, emotional and physical needs have been met. When those needs are met, students are more likely to succeed in school" (CASEL, 2002).

Researchers also have found that "in meaningful and sustained learning, the intellect and emotion are inseparable. Brain research, for example, has demonstrated that . . . emotion [drives] attention, learning, memory and other important mental or intellectual activities" (McCombs, 2001). In other words, there can be no separation between emotions and learning, during school hours or at any other time.

Schools where SEL competencies are taught have been shown to foster student attachment to school and receptivity to learning, factors which are strongly linked to academic success (Blum, McNeely and Rinehart, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Implemented correctly, SEL can significantly counter the risk factors that give rise to a host of unhealthy behaviors, including substance abuse, violence and failure in school. At the same time, SEL can increase the capacity of all students to become "knowledgeable, responsible, caring, productive, nonviolent and contributing members of society" (Zins et al., 2001).

All SEL instruction is based upon the teaching of five core competencies. In its *Safe and Sound* guide (2003), the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines these five core competencies as:

**Self-Awareness:** Recognizing feelings as they occur; having a realistic assessment of one's own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.

**Social Awareness:** Sensing what others are feeling; being able to take their perspective; appreciating and interacting positively with diverse groups.

**Self-Management:** Handling emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand; delaying gratification to pursue goals; persevering in the face of setbacks.

**Relationship Skills:** Handling emotions in relationships effectively; establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; negotiating solutions to conflict; seeking help when needed.

**Responsible Decision Making:** Accurately assessing risks; making decisions based on a consideration of all relevant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of actions; respecting others; taking personal responsibility for one's decisions.

SEL can be integrated into schools in a number of ways. Most commonly, it is taught through a variety of curriculum-based programs. Some are centered on social skill development; others on conflict resolution or character education; and yet others on health issues or drug prevention or ethics. Their themes can vary a great deal, but they all have a common focus – to develop specific life skills associated with each of the core competencies.

There are a variety of other means for SEL integration that may be used as part of, or in conjunction with, a curriculum (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg and Walberg, 2003). For instance, instructors can:

- Work to create a safe and caring atmosphere characterized by high expectations, multiple opportunities for enforcement of SEL skills and closer relationships among students and teachers.
- Weave specific SEL themes and skills into their class content.
- Use cooperative learning or other forms of instruction that promote SEL, so that social and emotional skills and academic skills reinforce one another.

In addition to classroom instruction, some schools utilize formal and informal educational activities—from assemblies, afterschool programs and counseling sessions to playground interactions and extracurricular activities—to help students develop their interpersonal and problem-solving skills. The establishment of partnerships between parents and teachers can also help to clarify expectations of students and provide additional support for student learning. Guidelines for establishing effective SEL programs and descriptions of effective programs in existence today are provided later in this brief.

### **What is Service-Learning?**

Students must do more than learn skills. They need regular opportunities to use such skills in real-life situations so that they are translated into behavior and action. And one of the surest paths between learning skills and living them is service-learning (S-L), a potent form of instruction that engages students in meaningful service activities in their schools and communities as part of their academic curriculum.

Although it builds upon the concept of community service, service-learning is far more structured, is integrated into the regular classroom curriculum, has more documented benefits and commands a more sustained involvement. Students involved in service-learning would not just clean debris from a riverbank one afternoon. They would, for example, collaborate with local scientists, measure pollution levels in the river over the course of several months, learn from their teacher how to make sophisticated calculations, and perhaps present their findings before the city council. In this and other examples of high-quality S-L efforts, students apply their academic knowledge to meet genuine community needs. They also have multiple opportunities to make decisions about their service



activities in conjunction with teachers and community members and to reflect upon the nature of their service experiences (Billig, 2000).

Service-learning is used to some extent in an estimated one-third of American schools, according to the most recent available data (Skinner and Chapman, 1999). It is effectively utilized in every kind of community, from small, rural districts to large urban ones. It can be utilized with virtually any subject and at any grade level to connect academic learning with real-life, practical applications. Service-learning also lends itself naturally to interdisciplinary approaches, since projects frequently call upon skills from several academic areas.

Perhaps one of service-learning's greatest assets is that it can meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population and of students with various skill and ability levels. As Maurice Elias says, "Every parent who sends a child into the schools wants that child to be perceived as an asset. The truth is that not every child is an academic asset, or an athletic asset, or a performance asset. But *every* child can be a service asset, and that's something that schools can help students to do."

### **What is the Relationship Between SEL and S-L?**

To some extent, social and emotional learning and service-learning have evolved independently of each other, with different sets of advocates, research studies and practitioners. Yet they have been formed from the same insights about healthy development in children, schools, and society and their interrelationships and mutual benefits are being increasingly recognized.



Both experience and research indicate that quality service-learning can build SEL competencies, while SEL can strengthen the ability of students to be capable service providers. When used together, their effects are enhanced and their impact can be more profound and long-lasting. For instance, service-learning researcher Shelley Billig (2000) has noted that the service experience in and of itself cannot reliably produce viable student outcomes; it can only have strong academic and personal impacts when there is deliberate integration with developmentally appropriate reflection activities. These activities, in turn, are built upon social and emotional skills such as problem solving and relationship-building with peers and adults.

On the other side of the equation, SEL researcher David Hawkins has said that SEL skills are most firmly established when they can be put into practice in a variety of real-life settings and situations – something that service-learning helps to accomplish. He writes that “students who perceive opportunities for involvement in prosocial activities, possess the skills for success, and are appropriately rewarded, are more likely to develop strong bonds to schooling and develop standards, beliefs and behaviors that lead to greater academic achievement and less antisocial behavior.”

Kathleen Beland, creative director for the Character Education Partnership in Washington, D.C., sums up the mutually beneficial relationship between SEL and S-L. “Social and emotional learning provides the skills that help children and youth to act according to core ethical values such as caring, respect, responsibility and honesty,” she states. “Service-learning provides the opportunities for children and youth to apply these skills and the values they represent.”

## **COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE SEL PROGRAMS**

Students who master the SEL competencies possess good communication skills, know how to have their needs met in healthy ways, have satisfying relationships with peers and adults, are able to solve conflicts and problems creatively and cooperatively, are genuinely concerned about others' welfare and feel confident about the future.

According to CASEL's *Safe and Sound* guide, an effective SEL program consists of the following:

### CASEL Guidelines for Effective SEL Programming

1. Incorporate approaches that are based on sound theories of child development and on scientific research.
2. Apply learning to everyday situations and teach children to apply SEL skills and ethical values in daily life.
3. Use diverse teaching methods to engage students in creating a classroom atmosphere where caring, responsibility and a commitment to learning thrive.
4. Offer developmentally appropriate classroom instruction, including clearly specified learning objectives for each grade level from preschool through high school. Also, emphasize respect for diversity.
5. Help schools coordinate and unify programs that are often fragmented.
6. Build social and emotional skills that in turn encourage classroom participation, positive interactions with teachers, and good study habits.
7. Involve school staff, students, parents and community members in applying and modeling SEL-related skills in the home, school and community.
8. Ensure high-quality program implementation by addressing key factors such as leadership, adequate time and resources, and the inclusion of stakeholders in the planning process.
9. Offer well-planned professional development and support for all school personnel.
10. Conduct a needs assessment to establish a good fit between the SEL program and school concerns and continue with data gathering to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

### Examples of Effective SEL programs

SEL itself has a rich base in scientific research. In addition, many individual programs have credible research demonstrating their effectiveness. Below are descriptions of three SEL programs with accompanying outcome information:

**Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP).** Using a curriculum that teaches several core skills, this program is one of the largest school-based violence prevention programs in the country. The core skills include communicating and listening, cooperating, expressing feelings and dealing with anger; resolving conflicts, appreciating diversity, and countering bias. An evaluation of 5,000 participants in grades 2-6 found significant declines in hostility and aggression, and substantial advances in prosocial behavior. Students' scores in reading and math on standardized tests also increased dramatically.

**Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Curriculum.** A comprehensive prevention program for elementary students in kindergarten through 5th grade, PATHS is designed to improve social, emotional and academic abilities. Regular classroom instructors teach PATHS with initial support from project staff. Detailed lessons, taught throughout the course of each academic year, focus on essential developmental skills in emotional literacy, positive peer relations and problem solving. Parents are also involved in reinforcing the lessons that children are learning in school. Four studies – two involving regular classroom students and two involving special needs students – have shown an increase in social and emotional competencies, a decrease in aggression and depression, and an improvement in cognitive abilities related to school success.

**Check & Connect.** Implemented with elementary, middle and high school students who have attendance problems and are at risk for educational failure, this program utilizes mentors who work with students and parents over an extended period of time. The mentors regularly check on students' educational progress and intervene as appropriate to maintain students' commitment to school and learning. Mentors do not replace established relationships in children's lives, but collaborate with other adults in supporting students' educational success. Several studies have shown significantly improved attendance and graduation rates among Check & Connect students.



## COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMS

Service-learning efforts can look very different from class to class, school to school and state to state. The imagination of teachers and students, the need for certain academic outcomes, the issues facing communities, the availability of community partners – all these and other variables can give form to class content and projects.

Still, as different as programs and projects may be, the basic elements of high-quality service-learning efforts remain essentially the same throughout the country. A group of respected practitioners, under the auspices of the National Service-Learning Cooperative (1999), established a list of these elements. Because both S-L and SEL are strongly based upon action research in the schools, this list is similar to CASEL's guidelines for effective SEL programming. It includes:

- Using regular assessments and evaluation
- Ensuring culturally appropriate and engaging instruction
- Developing projects that have clear educational goals and meet genuine community needs
- Involving students in selecting, designing, implementing and evaluating service projects
- Using community partnerships that provide a real-world context for service, and that foster communication and interaction
- Providing opportunities for students to reflect upon their service experiences
- Providing opportunities to celebrate service work.

High-quality service-learning practice has yielded a variety of promising results. In addition to long-term commitments to civic engagement (Youniss, McClellan and Yates, 1997; Yates and Youniss, 1997), students in service-learning programs have shown a decrease in destructive behaviors such as those leading to premature sexuality or criminal activity (Melchior, 1999; Allen et al. 1997), improved relationships with peers and adults (Stephens, 1995; Morgan and Streb, 1999) and better preparedness for employment (Berkas, 1997).

### Examples of Effective Service-Learning Programs

There are literally thousands of examples of successful service-learning programs that have or are taking place throughout this country. They span grades, subjects and locations, and demonstrate that students of all ages – from pre-kindergarten through college – can contribute meaningfully to their communities. Below are three brief examples of service-learning programs. Although impressive, they are not unusual. Service-learning continually unveils the enormous and too-often untapped potential of students who can contribute meaningfully to their communities when given an opportunity.

**Helping the Homeless.** As part of a mental health unit called “Dealing with Major Family Changes,” 4th and 5th grade students at Sullivan Elementary School in North Adams, Massachusetts, decided to study homelessness to address issues raised in their classrooms, where some of the students lived at a nearby homeless shelter. As a result of their research, students decided to form a partnership with the homeless shelter. Through a small grant, the students were able to prepare care packages for children in the shelter. Students also initiated several home-improvement projects for the shelter, including a mural, a sandbox and perennial gardens. Students gave presentations about their work at an open house at their school, a local service-learning conference and to high school students who were considering a similar project.

**Rotational Work Program.** At Crook County High School in Prineville, Oregon, special education students – including those with developmental delays and behavioral problems – have been part of an innovative partnership between the school and eight natural-resource agencies. The students, under supervision of an adult team leader, spend three hours every morning involved in hands-on service experiences. They have built trails and fences in local parks and wilderness areas, restored wetland habitat, planted flowers to beautify the

community and tested local water quality. When part of their community was flooded, they cleaned houses for elderly and disabled residents. The students also organized and conducted a tutoring program to help special education students in elementary school with reading and math. As a result of these projects, the students have not only experienced improved academic outcomes, but have learned skills in teamwork, conflict resolution and anger management.

**Teens Against Teen Pregnancy Public Service Campaign.** Eighth-grade students in a language arts class at River Bluff Middle School in Stoughton, Wisconsin, decided to create public service announcements (PSAs) to raise peer and public awareness. The students wrote, designed and participated in the production of a public service campaign for television and print. Their PSA for television titled “Who Will Be Next?” was aired statewide during Teen Pregnancy Prevention month. The students recruited a number of community partners, including television stations, a design and advertising firm, and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, to assist with the project. The television and print pieces won first-place honors in a national contest sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

## STATE EXPERIENCES WITH SEL AND SERVICE-LEARNING

Several state departments of education have made the use of SEL and service-learning a priority in their work with districts. The **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)** regularly conducts trainings for principals, curriculum directors and other educational leaders, weaving SEL and service-learning into the training content. In terms of service-learning, the state awards Learn and Serve grants, maintains a specialist in service-learning and publishes results from efforts around the state.

The **New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)** has coordinated between character education and service-learning to strengthen both initiatives, and has used them as part of overall school reform efforts in several larger districts. State conferences highlight service-learning as a vehicle for character education, and district leaders know that they can use state aid for character education in support of service-learning. NJDOE staff members also talk about SEL providing a sound research-driven basis for character education.

Phil Brown, consultant to NJDOE, suggests that education leaders interested in combining SEL and S-L consider several questions, including: What SEL skills need to be learned at each grade level; how the teaching of SEL skills fits in with the state’s core curriculum standards; how parents can be involved; how a planned program fits in the context of other school reform efforts; and how the teaching of SEL and service-learning will be coordinated between classes, grades and schools.

The **Iowa Department of Education (IDOE)** sponsors the “Success4” initiative, which is an umbrella structure that supports the social, emotional, intellectual and behavioral development of young people through partnerships linking students, families, schools and communities. The umbrella includes Safe and Drug-Free Schools, special education, early childhood education, service-learning, social and emotional development, programs for at-risk youth, community education and character education.

The IDOE provides schools with technical assistance and guidance in developing content, developing a program evaluation process and fostering professional development and parent engagement. The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development, an organization that brings together representatives of all the state agencies serving youth, is also very active in building collaboration between schools and communities.

Success4 looks different in different places. Some districts may focus on increasing parent involvement or refining schoolwide discipline systems. Others may focus on conflict resolution, character education or youth involvement. Once the districts do well with implementation in one focus area, they then use the critical elements to guide them to a new focus area. More than half of Iowa’s districts have committed to this process and have received funding from the state.

## *What States Are Doing to Integrate SEL and Service-Learning Into Standards*

Social and emotional learning and service-learning not only foster students' overall ability to learn, they also prepare them for the specific demands of academic standards. In many states, standards-based tests require a deep understanding of real-life issues, as well as practical applications of knowledge. The tests are not just multiple choice, but ask for short answers and longer essay writing so that students can demonstrate knowledge across content areas (Kress, Norris, Elias, Siegle and Reissman, 2002).

A number of states include SEL competencies as part of their standards. Increasingly, schools and state departments of education are concerned that students show mastery of skills that will make them successful in life and not just on tests. In **New Jersey**, for example, several sections of the current Core Curriculum Content Standards, including Social Studies/Civic Education and Workplace Readiness, reflect a number of social and emotional skills, including communication, tolerance and decisionmaking. The revised Health and Physical Education standards, now pending before the State Board of Education, feature "Personal, Interpersonal and Life Skills." Those skills include "social and emotional health" and "developing leadership and character." The complete New Jersey standards can be viewed online at the state department of education Web site, [www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education).

Social and emotional competencies are similarly woven throughout the **Wisconsin** state standards, which can be accessed online at [www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/standards/](http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/standards/). In addition to the state academic standards, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has introduced a "Standards of the Heart" program, which emphasizes the importance of developing positive values and relationships, engaging students' minds and providing meaningful service. While participation of schools is voluntary, more than 140 schools are presently committed to this program, which uses SEL competencies as part of schooling.

According to Linda Miller of the **Iowa** Department of Education, "In terms of standards, we at the Department of Education believe that there is a body of skill development that is necessary and goes beyond academic knowledge. Schools can have standards around social and emotional development just as they have standards for academic areas. It's critical for kids to be competent in life and for schools to be involved in developing those qualities." Miller concludes that, "To focus solely on instruction is clearly a temptation, but the truth is that in order to close the achievement gap, schools must know their learners and address social-emotional, as well as cognitive needs."

## **CHALLENGES, RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOURCES**

Introducing and implementing SEL and service-learning is no small task. It involves altering schools in a very fundamental way, not just instituting small, superficial changes. As with the introduction of any far-reaching effort, change is never a smooth and linear path. Education leaders must have a clear vision of expected outcomes and be able to communicate not only the vision, but ways to deal with the obstacles that inevitably appear. Below are some common challenges facing education leaders, along with recommendations to address these challenges and suggested resources for further information. Recommendations are based upon research and the experience of several individuals interviewed for this publication – Maurice Elias, Sheldon Berman, Paula Papponi, Roger Weissberg and Terry Pickeral.

### *Challenge: Fragmentation of Existing Initiatives*

**The Issue:** Often, the problem is not a lack of SEL and S-L efforts, but too many different efforts in violence prevention, character education, pregnancy prevention, etc. that lack coordination.

**Recommendation:** Administrators – as well as an advisory group of teachers, parents, students and other community members – may need to engage in a detailed self-study of the

school system. Participants can look at all the ways that they might be using SEL and service-learning, and reflect upon the gaps and overlaps. Later, they can engage in a dialogue about how the pieces fit together at each grade level, across grade levels and between schools. They can look at process and policy. Existing policy may not recognize the kinds of learning that are represented by SEL and service-learning, and hence may not allow for resources, scheduling, planning time, ongoing training, interdisciplinary approaches and other sustaining features.

In any event, education leaders have a crucial role to play in transforming a district. Sustained, persistent leadership is essential for any SEL and service-learning initiative to succeed. Leaders are needed to provide focus and to continually communicate the importance of the program to faculty, board members and community members.

### Resources:

The new publication *Building Learning Communities with Character* (Novick, Kress and Elias, 2002) gives building administrators a step-by-step guide to integrate efforts that are now disparate elements. The second chapter of *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* (Elias, Zins, Weissberg et al., 1997) is entitled “Reflecting on Your Current Practices” and also provides a self-assessment for looking at existing activities and determining next steps. Both the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) can provide samples of model policies. The National Service-Learning Partnership is in the process of publishing a *Service-Learning Policy Toolkit* that discusses the process of policy development and contains specific examples of policies from districts and states.

### Challenge: Concern About Academic Standards and Threatening Existing Academic Status

#### The Issue:

Because of the demands of academic standards and accountability, many education leaders believe that the use of SEL and S-L will diminish their schools’ capacity to meet academic goals. They fear that unless all instructional energies are focused upon test preparation, students will be ill-equipped to meet standards. In high-performing schools, there is concern that students’ test scores may be adversely affected by the introduction of SEL and/or S-L. In low-performing schools, there may be a fear that time devoted to SEL and S-L is perceived by parents, school board members and others as time off task.

#### Recommendation:

Research clearly shows that in schools where SEL is treated as a regular part of the curriculum rather than as something extraneous to it, students are better prepared to learn. Schools where SEL competencies are taught have been shown to foster student attachment to school and increased receptivity to learning, factors strongly linked to academic success (Blum, McNeely and Rinehart, 2002; Osterman, 2000).

An analysis of 165 studies (Wilson et al., 2001) found that programs using SEL extensively had improved outcomes for dropout prevention and school attendance. Several national reports, developed by prominent organizations, such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development Task Force and the Learning First Alliance, have recognized that “learning is possible only after students’ social, emotional and physical needs have been met. When those needs are met, students are more likely to succeed in school” (CASEL, 2002).

Education leaders need to review the research evidence that indicate the close connection between the development of SEL and S-L competencies and improved academic performance. Teachers and administrators may want to visit sites with quality SEL and service-learning programs in operation to learn first-hand how these efforts have positively transformed academics as well as school culture. It may be helpful to start with those teachers who are interested, and let them build a record of success that can be shared with other teachers. It is also important to note that in high-performing schools, SEL and S-L act to develop leadership skills in students. When framed this way, parents become strong supporters of these programs.

### Resources:

CASEL's *Safe and Sound* guide evaluates and gives detailed descriptions of 81 multiyear, evidence-based SEL programs to assist education leaders in selecting the most appropriate options. The CASEL Web site, [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org), also has a section on "Research Initiatives" that are focused on academic outcomes. For service-learning, education leaders can contact the Learning In Deed Research Network, based at RMC Research in Denver ([www.rmcdenver.com](http://www.rmcdenver.com)). The Network has compiled descriptions and summaries of the best research pertaining to all aspects of service-learning, including the link between service-learning, academic success and standards. A resource that explores this topic extensively is the *Service-Learning and Standards Toolkit* (Fredericks, 2001), published by the Education Commission of the States.

In addition, at least four statewide studies have made a direct linkage between student achievement and participation in service-learning:

- In a study that involved thousands of students in California (Weiler, LaGoy, Crane and Rovner, 1998), students in more than half the schools with high-quality service-learning efforts showed moderate to strong gains on achievement tests in language arts and/or reading.
- In Michigan, students who participated in service-learning scored higher than their peers on state tests in mathematics and reading comprehension (Billig, 2000).
- A large-scale study in Indiana found that service-learning students had higher scores on state assessments in English and mathematics (Civic Literacy Project, 2000).
- In Florida, service-learning students showed general improvement in grades and classroom tests (Follman, 1998).

### Challenge: Teacher Overload

#### Issue:

Teachers are already struggling to meet all their numerous responsibilities. Incorporating service-learning and SEL seems to require time that teachers do not have.

#### Recommendation:

Service-learning initially requires a considerable investment of time to rewrite curriculum, establish community partnerships and interact with students in a different way. Employing an SEL curriculum or other practice also takes time. It is important, however, to consider that an up-front investment in staff development time can actually end up *saving* teachers time in the long run. Both SEL and service-learning programs, for example, have had notable success as means of effective classroom management.

If teachers are spending less time on discipline issues and more time focused on content, their teaching time is far better utilized. Both SEL and service-learning have strong links to academic success, so their use can also assist teachers in helping students to improve academically and meet standards. Moreover, since both SEL and service-learning encourage respectful and caring interactions between students and teachers and improve classroom and school climate, teachers may also experience their work as far less stressful and more enjoyable and rewarding.

**Resources:**

The new publication *Building School Success on Social and Emotional Learning* (Zins, Weissburg and Walberg, 2003), the result of a collaborative effort between the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) and CASEL, gives numerous examples of how SEL can lessen the burden on teachers by improving academic functioning and classroom management. Other credible sources of information are teachers and administrators who have used SEL programming and service-learning. They can help their peers understand the time and cost effectiveness involved in using these strategies and paint a vivid picture of how their classrooms, schools and communities have changed as a result of SEL and S-L implementation. Service-learning and character education staff at state departments of education may be helpful in identifying teachers and educational leaders who are familiar with service-learning and SEL.

### ***Challenge: Inclusion of SEL and Service-Learning with Education Reform***

**The Issue:**

With so much national focus on comprehensive school reform, education leaders will not be interested in SEL or service-learning unless they see a direct connection between them and school reform efforts.

**Recommendation:**

Because they serve as unifying elements between courses, grades and programs and can be used with all students, both SEL and service-learning are essential ingredients of truly comprehensive school reform. They are aspects of curriculum and instruction that potentially touch all students and serve as vehicles to ensure that no child is left behind. If education leaders view SEL and S-L as essential contributors to the achievement of a range of educational goals, then they will become a priority for planning time and staff development activities. As SEL and service-learning preparation build teacher competence and ongoing communication, they foster students' academic and life skills. Building those skills is the ultimate intent of education reform.

**Resources:**

A number of written resources address this issue. CASEL's *Safe and Sound* guide, in the chapter on "Social and Emotional Learning: Background and Theory," explores how SEL relates to comprehensive school reform. NCLC and the Education Commission of the States have produced an issue paper on "*Service-Learning: An Administrator's Guide for Improving Schools and Connecting with the Community*," (Berman, Bailey, Collins et al. 2000), which features superintendents discussing school reform and other related topics. The American Youth Policy Forum recently published *Finding Common Ground* (Pearson, 2002), which explores the alignment of educational reform programs and service-learning. A new resource is the CASEL-sponsored publication, *EQ + IQ = Best Leadership Practices for Caring and Successful Schools* (Elias, Arnold, Hussey, 2003). This book contains specific descriptions by administrators of how they brought SEL into their schools without sacrificing academic goals.

## CONCLUSION

Schools are not only charged with producing knowledgeable students, but with helping young people to address the many opportunities and challenges of life. Not only our communities but our very democracy depends upon students who possess a broad range of academic, social and emotional skills – upon youth who are competent workers, committed citizens, and caring friends and family members. Far from distracting from the essential goals of education, social and emotional learning and service-learning are both powerful means of achieving those goals.

SEL and service-learning, often regarded as separate entities, can now be understood as two complementary and connected means for promoting positive youth development. SEL is instrumental in cultivating life skills that students need to establish productive relationships, make sound decisions, communicate effectively and meet needs in healthy ways. Service-learning helps students to apply and solidify those skills while performing needed community service.

By honoring students' needs for social and emotional development – which include young-people's need to contribute to their world in a meaningful and honored way – school leaders can do far more than enhance academic achievement. They can ensure that young people become caring, competent and contributing members of society.

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