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# The Essential Connection Between a Safe and Secure School Climate and Students' Educational and Life Success

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***The Essential Connection between a  
Safe and Secure School Climate and  
Students' Educational and Life Success***

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**Based on work by  
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How Would You Like ***Your*** Children to be  
Treated in School?

How about your  
***Grandchildren?***

If You Had a Magic Wand, What Values Would You Wish Your Children Would Internalize Forever?

- Friendship
- Peace
- Wisdom
- Beauty
- Long Life
- Riches
- Popularity
- Family

# **CHALLENGES OUR YOUTH CARRY AROUND WITH THEM EACH DAY**

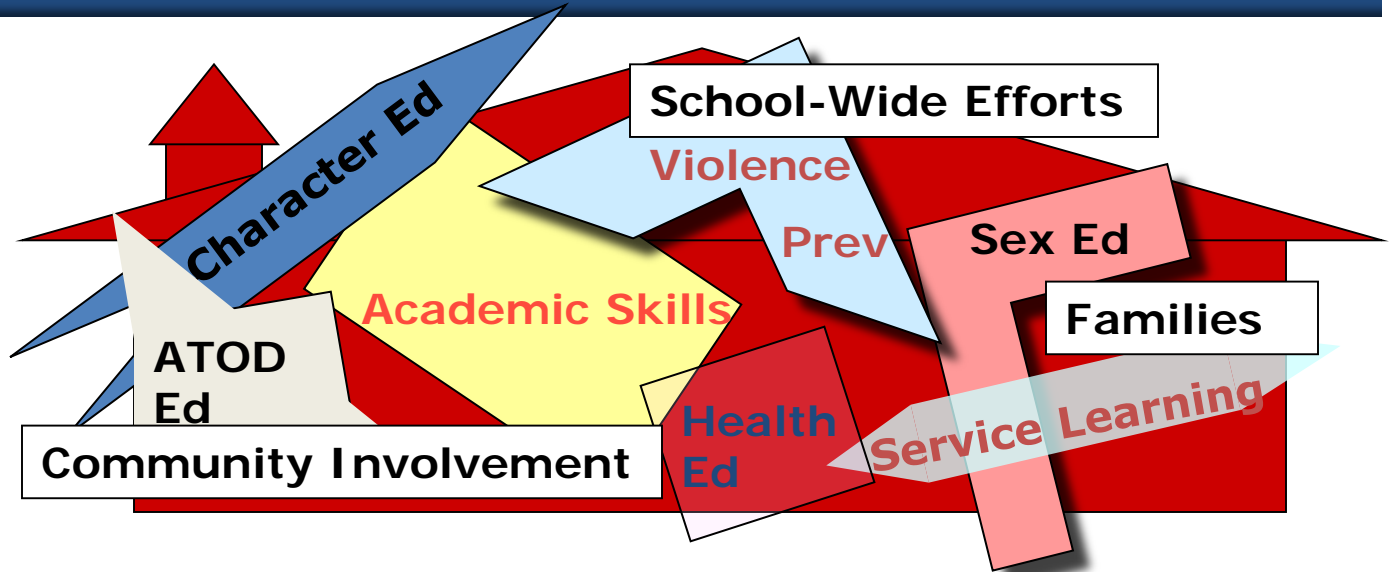
- **Increased pace of life**
- **Greater economic demands on parents**
- **Alterations in family composition and stability**
- **Breakdown of neighborhoods and extended families**
- **Weakening of community institutions**
- **Unraveling of parent-child bonds due to work, school demands, time, drugs, mental health, and economic burdens**
- **Climate of war, terror, and societal violence, bullying and intimidation**
- **Ongoing exposure to an array of digital media and pervasive advertising that encourage violence as a problem-solving tool and other health-damaging behaviors and unrealistic lifestyles**

# **ATTAINABLE SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS**

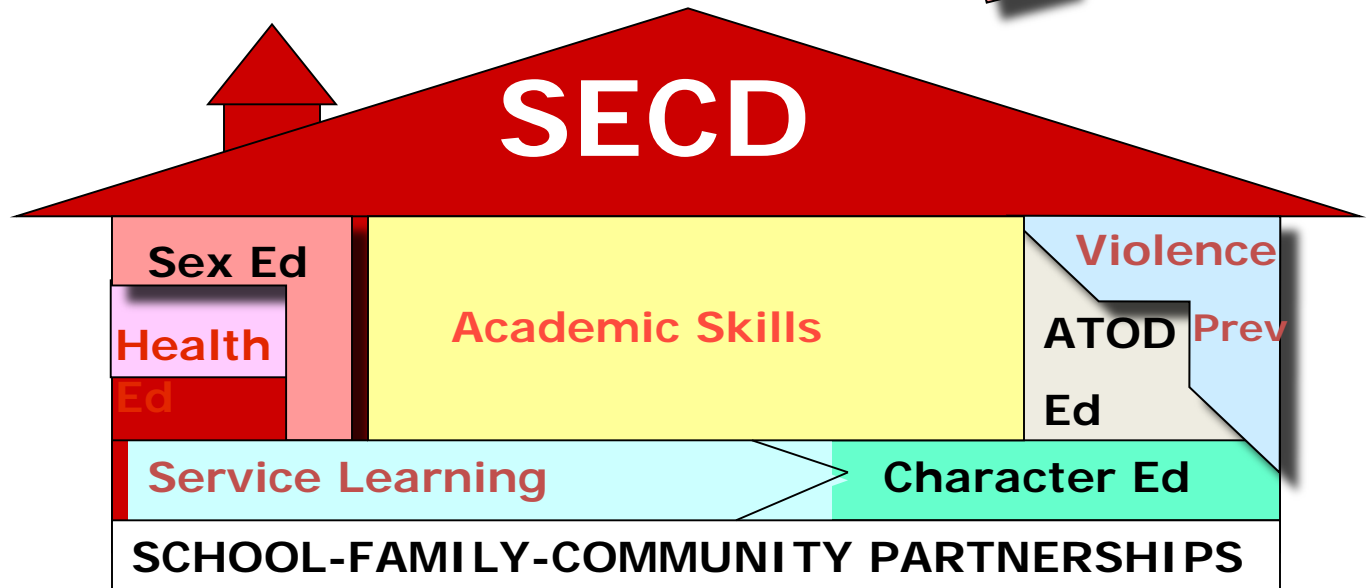
- When we open our doors for children to come into our schools, we have a special responsibility to educate them in mind, heart, body, and spirit/ethics. We have no choice but to do all four of these.
- Students who are smart but not healthy, caring, or ethical are dangers to society, not cherished sources of high test scores.
- Our children cannot learn, and our teachers cannot teach, in schools that are unsafe, unsupportive, uncaring, uncivil or lacking in intellectual challenge. These are the ultimate sources of security to children and in ways that are more lasting than metal detectors.

# Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD): A Coordinated Framework Provides Synergy

Programs  
without a  
Common  
Framework



A Common  
Framework  
Provides  
Synergy



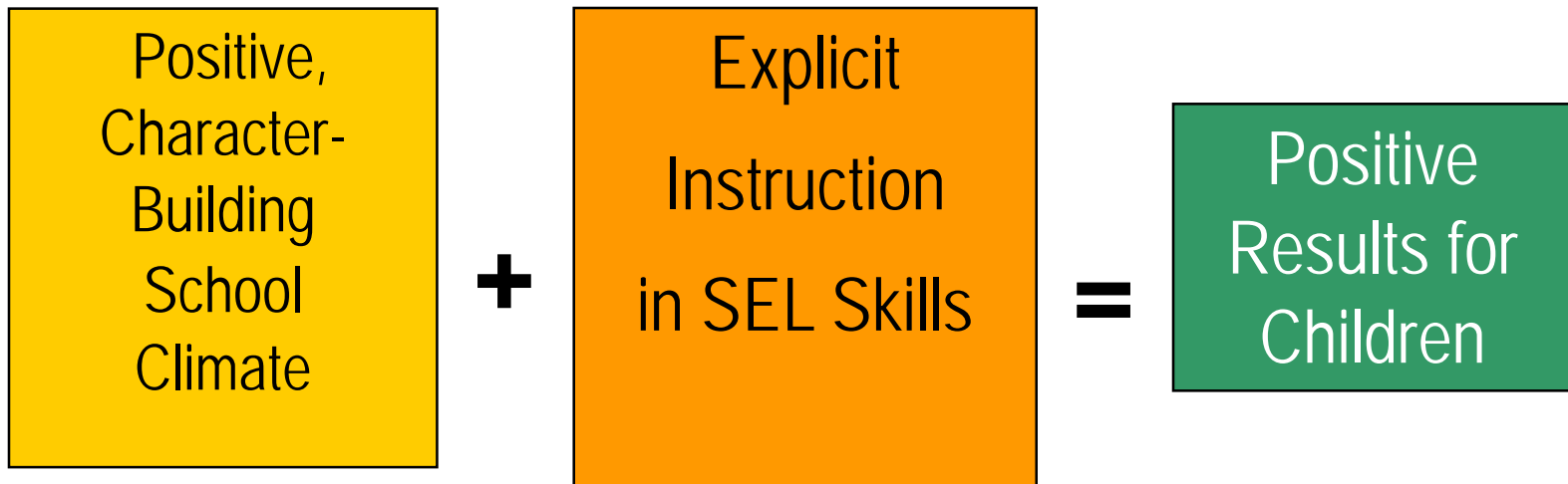
# What is Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD)?

- a set of **skills and dispositions/essential life habits**
- that can be **built developmentally** if we do so with intentionality, focus, and continuity, and
- **schools are the place** where most children can be reached systematically,
- because the same set of skills and habits ultimately **mediate academic, civic, and workplace success**
- and it relates to moral and performance character!



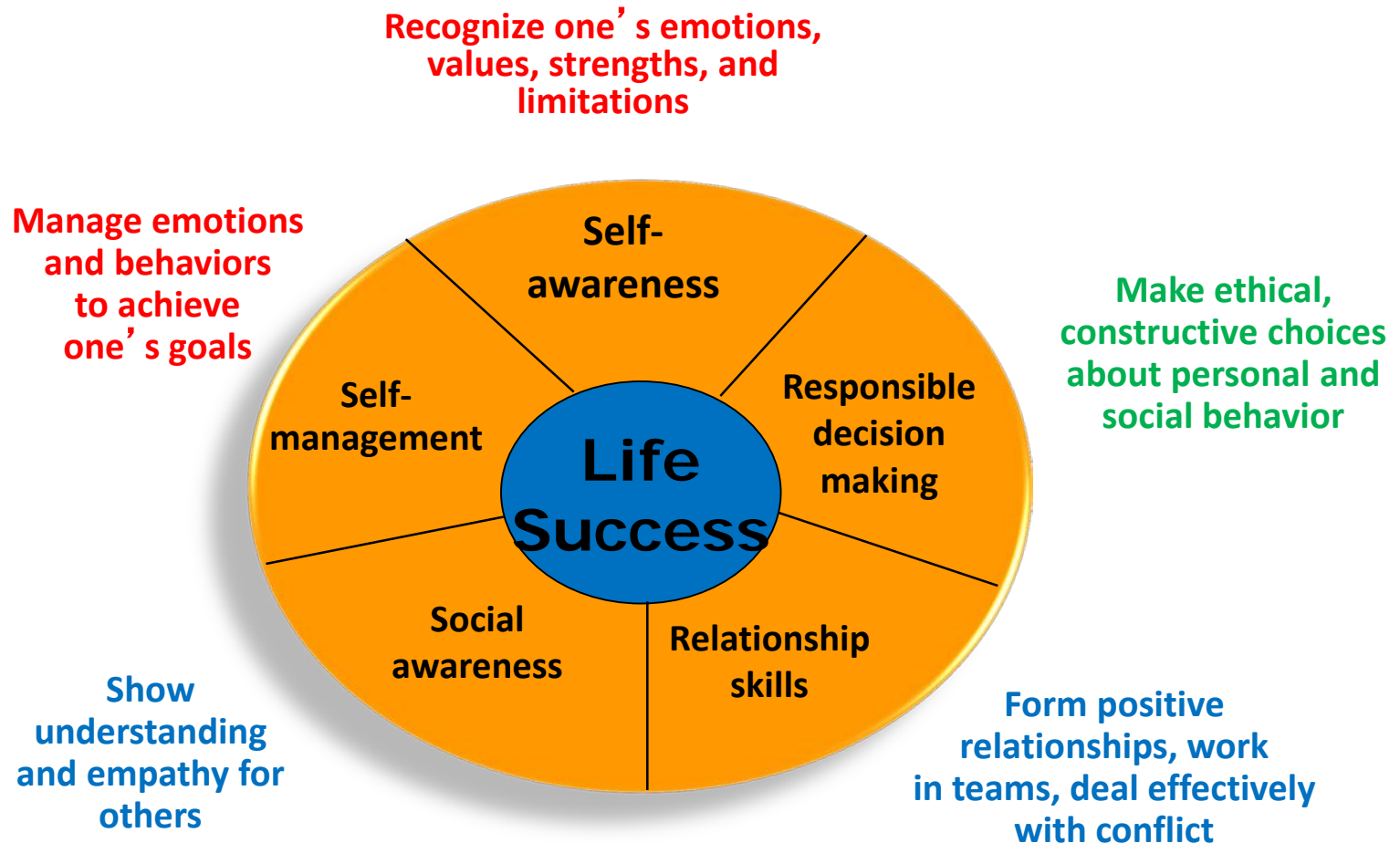
# How Does SECD Work?

**SECD is an evidence-based strategy that integrates the intellectual, emotional, and social facets of learning. It works through two related approaches:**



**Source:** *SEL and Academics: Research Brief*, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2007.

# What Skills are Needed for Success in School and Life/Participatory Competencies?



# Benefits of SECD

## Good Science Links SECD to the Following Student Gains:



- Social-emotional skills
- Improved attitudes about self, others, and school
- Positive classroom behavior
- 10-11 percentile-point gains on standardized achievement tests

## And Reduced Risks for Failure:

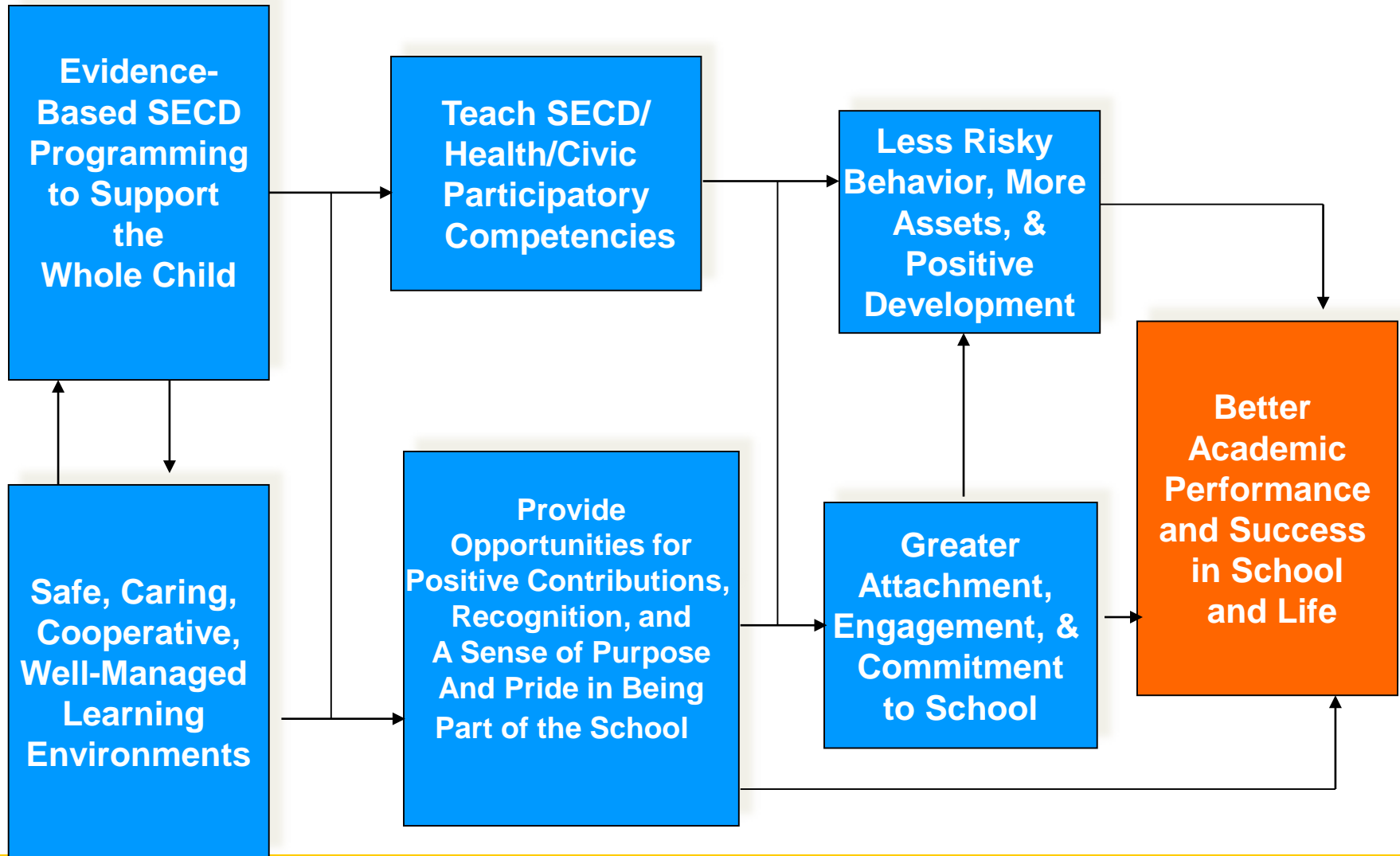


- Conduct problems
- Aggressive behavior
- Emotional distress

**Source:** Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Child Development*. (available at [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)) and M. Berkowitz & M. Bier, *What works in character education*. (Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership, 2006) (available at [www.characterandcitizenship.org](http://www.characterandcitizenship.org).)

# Paths to Success in School and in Life:

Success Requires a Confluence of SECD and Classroom and School Environment



# THE MANDATE WE CARRY FORWARD

- There are many dimensions to safety and all of them are equally important.
- Our children need to be partners in creating safe, civil, caring schools.
- As a matter of public health, as well as education, we must invest in safe and civil schools through SECD.
- What children need from us is to prepare them for the tests of life, not a life of tests.

## **Summary of Research Evidence on the Impact of School Climate/Belonging on Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying, and Academics**

“There is ... powerful evidence that school climate affects students’ self-esteem and self-concept. School climate also colors school-based risk-prevention efforts. Effective risk-prevention and health-promotion efforts are correlated with a nurturing school climate. It also promotes academic achievement. As a result of these findings, fostering socially, emotionally, and physically safer schools has become a primary focus of the U.S. Department of Justice and virtually all state education departments.” (Cohen, 2006, p. 212-213.)

**HIB is a school organizational/values problem that requires strong policy and follow-up for prevention and response. It can be addressed effectively.**

From Cohen, J. (2006). Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education: Creating a Climate for Learning, Participation in Democracy, and Well-Being. *Harvard Educational Review*, 76 (2), 201-237.

# DSACS Data on Bully-Climate- Voice Connection

- **Data from Years 3 and 4 of the DSACS project, the first years in which we collected anonymous data on students' perception of bullying.**
- **We examined the relationship between the degree of bullying in school and the extent to which students felt they were being given useful strategies to handle bullying, and their perception of the school climate. The overall data set represents 115 schools and 48 districts, and 48,000 students, across the full range of DFG' s in NJ, across the entire state geographically.**
- **Across all data sets for both years, for disadvantaged schools vs. others, and for elementary, middle, and high schools, the findings were remarkably consistent.**

# Key Findings

- Bullying is related to the climate of the school and is most strongly and significantly related to the **respect that students feel in the school**, especially among their peers.
- Where there is a respectful environment, bullying is less likely to exist in schools.



# Key Findings

- The extent to which students feel they are truly learning strategies to cope with HIB in their schools is most strongly related to the:
  - extent to which they perceive teachers as being *caring and supportive to students and to one-another*, and secondarily to
  - extent to which students feel they are *involved in shaping their school environment in positive ways*.
- Students appear to find HIB prevention and intervention messages valuable when staff members are seen as genuinely caring and when students are engaged in the school.

# The High School Study

- 21 high schools in 2008-9, 13,593 students in the sample; all SES levels included
- Bullying correlates between  $-.72$  and  $-.89$  with the following climate indicators:
  - Student Respect Friendliness and Belonging
  - Students Shaping Their Environment
  - Support and Care By and Among Staff
  - Student Approval
  - Student Perceptions Of Utility Of Learning
  - Teacher Approval (How much teachers like the school)
  - Overall Climate (Average of 16 variables)

# School Climate and NJ H.S. Violence and Vandalism Data (EVVRS)

We looked at the relationship of school climate to overall count of incidents on EVVRS for 08-09 (EVVRS-TOT), incidents of violence (EVVRS-VIOL), vandalism (EVVRS-VAND), substance abuse (EVVRS- ABUSE), and weapons possession (EVVRS-WEAP):

- Overall Climate  $r = -.44$  (TOT),  $-.41$  (VIOL)
- Students Shaping Environment  $r = -.48$  (TOT),  $-.43$  (VIOL)
- Teacher Approval/Liking of School  $r = -.44$  (TOT),  $-.45$  (VIOL),  $-.65$  (ABUSE)
- Student Pride in School  $r = -.62$  (TOT),  $-.58$  (VIOL),  $-.41$  (ABUSE)
- Support and Care By and Among Staff  
 $r = -.41$  (ABUSE)

# Successful 21st Century Schools Understand and Emphasize That:

*Systematic, comprehensive, and effective approaches to school-wide SECD and a safe, challenging, caring, supportive, and healthy climate are essential components of all students' academic and life success.*



# Key Recommendations to Guide Policy

- Every school should undertake a systematic **assessment of staff and student perceptions of school climate**, including school safety/bullying and student engagement/participation/voice, at least once every two years and use that feedback in a staff-wide data review for systematic improvement of SECD competencies and school climate in schools that have a clear sense of meaning and purpose. (In Middle and High Schools, students should be involved in the data review and planning process.)

# Key Recommendations to Guide Policy

- Each student should receive a minimum of **one-half hour of explicit instruction per week in skills related to social-emotional and character development (SECD)** as part of a comprehensive prek-12 scope and sequence (see Anchorage, Alaska, public schools for an example of such a framework, as well Appendix C of CASEL's *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*).
- Every teacher, student support services provider, and administrator should have **demonstrated competence** in implementing evidence-based SECD programming and positive climate promotion at the classroom and/or school level (as appropriate).

# Key Recommendations to Guide Policy

- Schools require implementation support systems for long-term sustainability of effective innovations— this involves infrastructure, collaboration with others doing this work, and a commitment to deep understanding of how SECD, climate, and academics fit together

# Research Confirms Long-Held Good Sense

- *To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.* -- Theodore Roosevelt
- *We are going to ask our children not just to talk but to act, serve, and live in accordance with a set of higher values and with a buoyant optimism.*-- R. Sargent Shriver
- *If we ignore the practical need that students have for skills that will enable them to participate fully in our society, they will be unable to compete for jobs or understand what is expected of them in order to participate as informed citizens in our democracy.*– Boykin & Noguera
- *Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.* -- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



# **Small Steps Toward a Great Journey:**

How Shall We Proceed to Get to Where We  
Know We Must Go?



# You Cannot Effectively Advocate for What You Do Not Show: The Courage of your Character Convictions

*"Don't let what you  
cannot do interfere  
with what you can do."*

*John Wooden*

*"The children are waiting."*

*Ted Sizer*



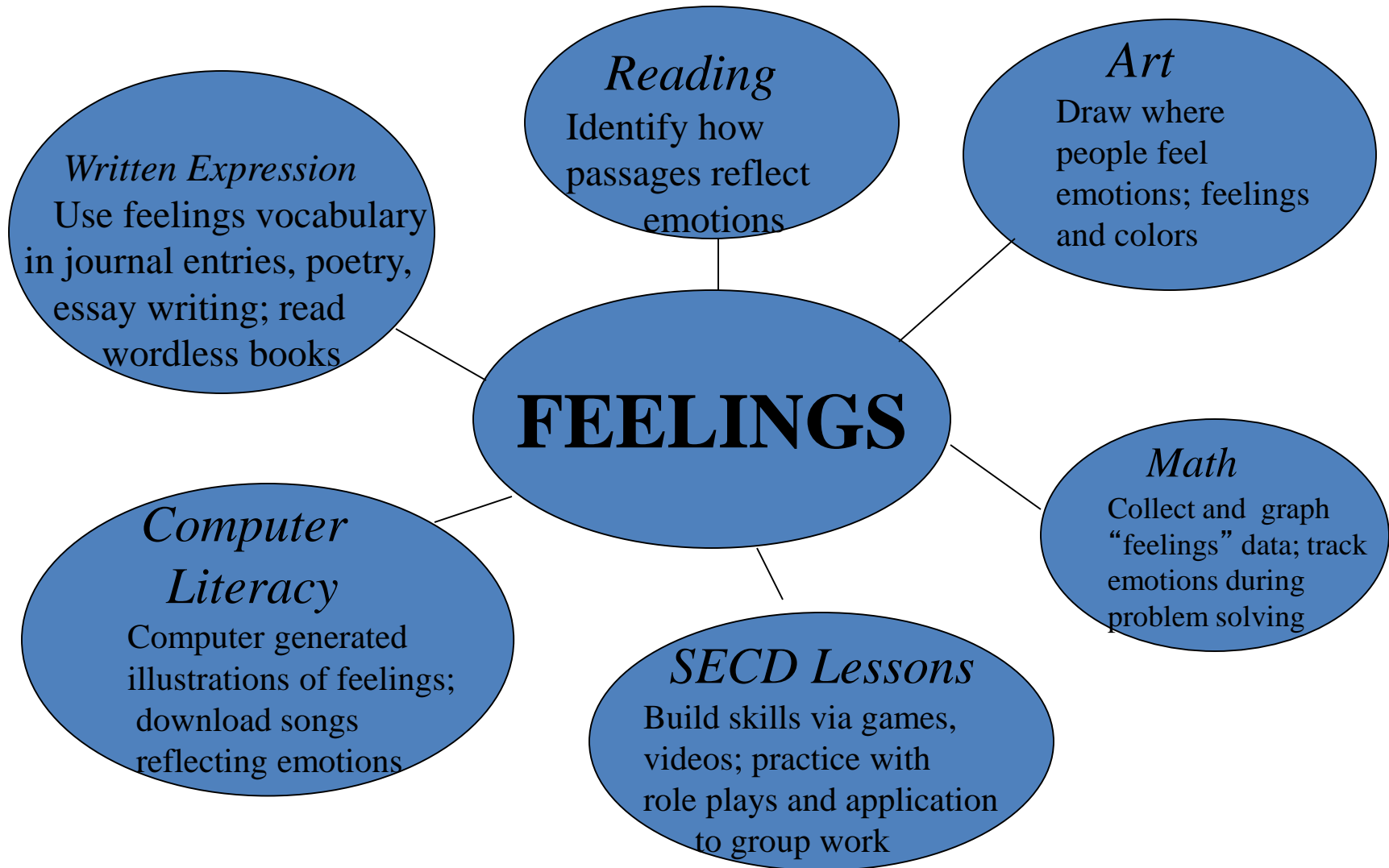
# Essential Programmatic Steps

- Increasing Youth Voice, Engagement, Genuine Participation
- Integrating SECD Skills/Character Themes into Academic Instruction

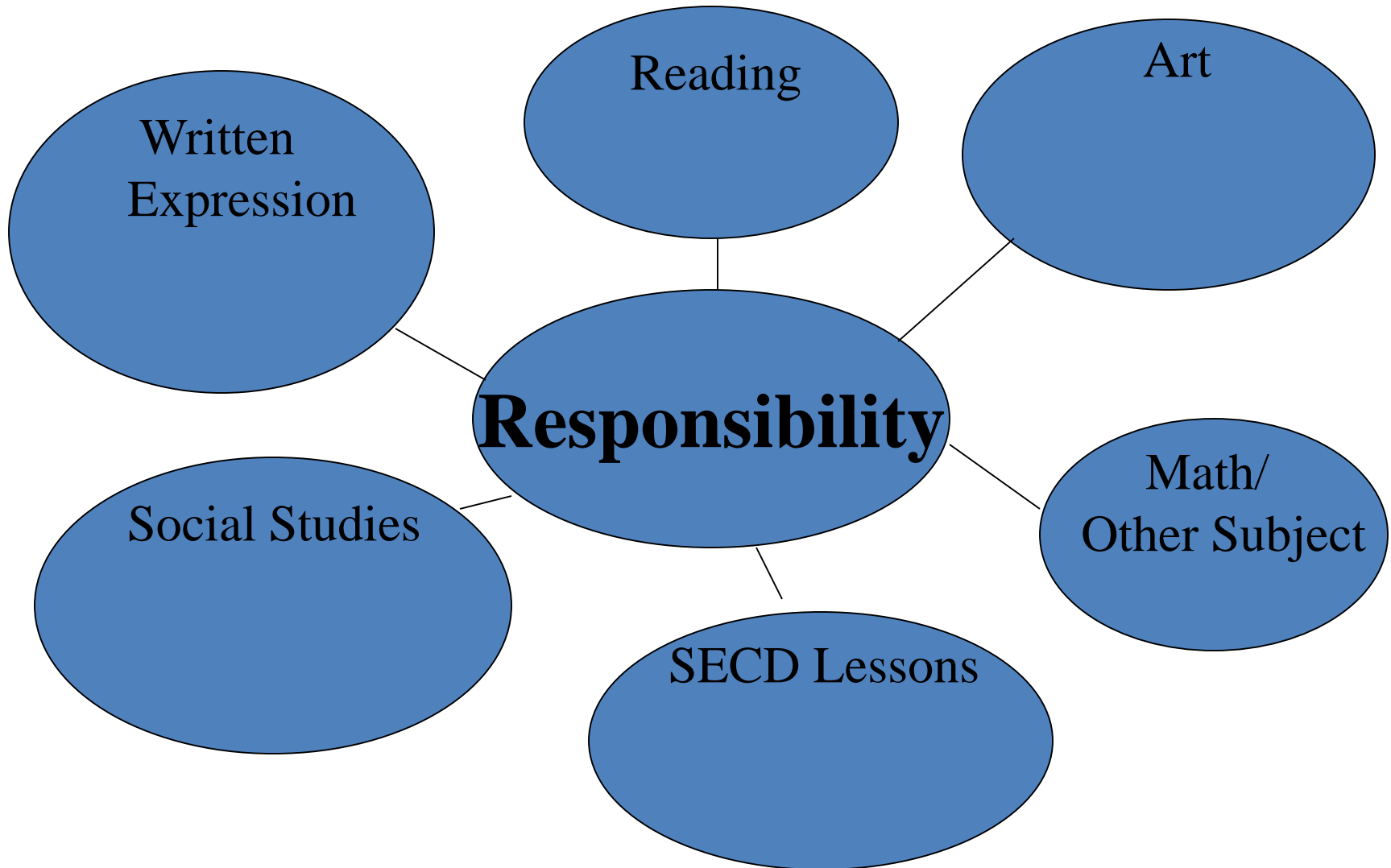
# Best Practices for Fostering Youth Engagement and Building Students' SECD

- **Meaningful, Participatory Student Government**
- ***Service Learning-- Lions-Quest International***
- **Feedback/Sharing Opportunities**
- **Open Forums for School Problem Solving**
- **Staff/Student Committee Involvement**
- **Having a Voice/Diversity Monitoring**
- **Buddies, Mentors, and Tutors**
- **Opportunities for Reflection**
- ***Opportunities for Identifying and Developing one's Laws of Life***

# Integration of SECD into Lessons



# Integration of SECD into Lessons: Fill in the Blanks



# Values-Linked Goal-setting Contracts

- Step-by-step exercise to help youth identify a goal and make effective plans for goal achievement
- A promise people make to themselves
- Includes a “buddy” for mutual accountability/responsibility

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*Laws of Life Contract*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to live my life by the law of \_\_\_\_\_

Over the next few months, I plan to live out my Law of Life by accomplishing these specific goals:

Goal 1: \_\_\_\_\_

In order to achieve this goal, I will go through the following steps:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I plan to have achieved this goal by \_\_\_\_\_

Problems I might face in reaching my goal:	How I plan to solve them:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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