

## CHAPTER 1

# Social and Emotional Learning

## *Past, Present, and Future*

Roger P. Weissberg, Joseph A. Durlak,  
Celene E. Domitrovich, and Thomas P. Gullotta

SEL is currently the zeitgeist in education. It has captured the imagination of academics, policy-makers, and practitioners alike in recent years. To many, SEL is the “missing piece” in the quest to provide effective education for all children and young people.

—NEIL HUMPHREY (2013, p. 1)

The time is right for the *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and Practice*. The past 20 years have witnessed an explosion of interest in social and emotional learning (SEL). Research reviews have documented the value of SEL programs. Schools, families, and communities are partnering to promote the positive development and academic success of children and youth across the globe. Federal, state, and local policies have been established to foster the social, emotional, and academic growth of young people.

In terms of research, there are now more than 500 evaluations of the various types of SEL programs. The largest part of this literature involves universal school-based programs that span a range of educational levels, from preschool through higher education (Conley, Chapter 13, this volume; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, & Ben, 2012). Although most evaluations have focused on school-based efforts, many programs extend beyond the school context, through parent training, in after-school programs, and in community-based organi-

zations (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). Although many SEL programs are universal in nature, in that they are intended for all youth, there have also been successful SEL efforts to target students who are experiencing different types of adjustment problems (Payton et al., 2008; in this volume, see Tolan, Nichols, & DuVal, Chapter 18; Wiley & Siperstein, Chapter 14).

In terms of practice, there are now SEL programs operating in thousands of schools across the United States and other countries around the world (Humphrey, 2013; Torrente, Alimchandani, & Aber, Chapter 37, this volume; Weare & Nind, 2011). Many teachers respond favorably to the possibility of providing SEL programming to their students, although they need administrative and policy support to do so effectively (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013; Merrell & Gueldner, 2010). Their efforts are enhanced when district and school leaders champion a vision, policies, professional learning communities, and supports for coordinated classroom, schoolwide, family, and community programming (Catalano,

Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Elias, O'Brien, & Weissberg, 2006; Mart, Weissberg, & Kendziora, Chapter 32, this volume; Weissberg & Kumpfer, 2003).

In terms of policy, in 2004, Illinois became the first state to develop preschool to high school SEL learning standards that provide a framework and guidance for what students should know and be able to do in the domain of social-emotional competence. Currently, all 50 states have preschool social and emotional development standards, and many states and some countries (e.g., Singapore) have integrated SEL into their student academic learning standards (Dusenbury et al., Chapter 35, this volume). National policies can also provide funding and guidelines to implement evidence-based SEL programming through (1) legislative initiatives, such as the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act ([www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hr850](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hr850)), and efforts to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; (2) Executive Branch initiatives aimed at enhancing SEL practice in educational and other key settings for children; and (3) science policy that addresses funding for SEL research and dissemination of findings (see, in this volume, Price, Chapter 8; Zaslow, Mackintosh, Mancoll, & Mandell, Chapter 36).

In summary, the achievements of the field have exceeded the expectations of those who introduced and defined SEL 20 years ago (Elias et al., 1997). However, there are many ways that SEL research, practice, and policy can be strengthened in the future.

### Goals of the *Handbook*

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Given these developments, the time is right for a comprehensive overview of the current SEL field and recommendations for the future. That is what the *Handbook* offers. More specifically, this *Handbook* has four major goals: (1) to offer critical, integrative, and up-to-date coverage of the state of SEL research, practice, and policy that can be used to develop and extend SEL efforts in school, community, and family settings; (2) to provide content relevant to those who wish to learn more about the research and practice literature regarding SEL, so that they may become more evidence-based in their

approach; (3) to discuss critical unresolved issues affecting SEL related to theory and research, assessment, implementation, professional development, funding, and policy; and, finally, (4) to provide recommendations and guidelines to shape the future agenda for SEL research, practice, and policy.

### Contents of This Chapter

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In this chapter, we provide the reader with a rationale, definition, and conceptual framework for SEL. We highlight the need to coordinate SEL with kindred approaches that promote positive school climates and cultures, and enhance students' intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Friedlaender, & Snyder, 2014; National Research Council, 2012). Then we summarize some of the major research findings that clarify the evidence base for SEL programs. Numerous findings from implementation science have confirmed that a critical factor affecting outcomes of interventions is the quality of program implementation that is obtained. Some of the major issues related to quality implementation of SEL are also discussed in this section. As a portent of the remainder of this volume, we next discuss some critical research, practice, and policy issues that need to be resolved in order to drive the field of SEL forward in the most efficient and effective manner. We end the chapter with an overview of the contents of this volume.

### SEL: Rationale, Definitions, and Frameworks

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#### The Need for SEL

Families, educators, and community members seek to raise and educate children who are knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and socially competent—on their way to becoming positive family members and neighbors, contributing citizens, and productive workers. Although different terms are used, most agree about the core purposes of education. We want to ensure that all students attain mastery in all academic subjects and become culturally literate, intellectually reflective, and lifelong learners. We also want to teach

young people to interact in socially skilled and respectful ways with their families, peers, and school staff and community members; to practice safe and healthy behaviors; and to develop work habits and dispositions for college, career, and life success (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013; Elias et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003; Schaps & Weissberg, 2015).

There is broad agreement that today's schools must offer more than academic instruction to prepare students for life and work (National Research Council, 2012). The life conditions of children have changed dramatically during the last century (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998; Weissberg, Walberg, O'Brien, & Kuster, 2003). Families face increased economic and social pressures. Children are exposed to an increasingly complex world through media and have unmediated access to information and social contacts through various technologies. In many communities, there is less support for and involvement in institutions that foster children's social-emotional development and character.

Today's educators face the major challenge of educating an increasingly multicultural and multilingual group of students from racially, ethnically, and economically diverse backgrounds. Teachers, student-support staff, and community agencies serve students with different abilities and motivation for engaging in learning, behaving positively, and performing academically. It has been estimated that 40 to 60% of U.S. high school students—across urban, suburban, and rural schools—are chronically disengaged (Klem & Connell, 2004). According to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, large percentages of high school students engage in risky behaviors that jeopardize their futures (e.g., substance use, violence and bullying, unprotected sexual intercourse with multiple partners, and mental health difficulties). Furthermore, many students have social-emotional competence deficits that lower their academic performance and disrupt the educational experiences of their peers (Benson, 2006).

In response to these circumstances, schools have been inundated with well-intentioned prevention and youth development initiatives that address a variety of issues, including bullying, character, drugs,

delinquency, family life, health education, sex education, truancy, and violence, to name a few (Elias et al., Chapter 3, this volume). Unfortunately, these efforts are typically introduced as short-term, piecemeal pilot programs that are not well integrated into the academic mission of schools. Furthermore, without strong leadership from district and school leaders, there is rarely effective staff development and support for quality implementation. When programs are insufficiently coordinated, monitored, evaluated, and improved over time, they are less beneficial to students and not likely to be sustained.

In 1994, a group of educators, researchers, and child advocates met at the Fetzer Institute to discuss effective, coordinated strategies to enhance students' social-emotional competence, academic performance, health, and citizenship, and to prevent and reduce health, mental health, and behavior problems. The Fetzer Group introduced the term "social and emotional learning" as a conceptual framework to promote the social, emotional, and academic competence of young people and to coordinate school-family-community programming to address those educational goals (Elias et al., 1997). Meeting attendees also launched the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as an organization with the mission to help establish evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education (see [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)). For 21 years, CASEL has served as strategist, collaborator, convener, and supporter for individuals and organizations that prioritize promoting children's social-emotional development and academic performance. CASEL's mission is to help establish evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Its organizational goals are to advance the science of SEL, expand effective SEL practice, and improve federal and state policies that support broader implementation of evidence-based programming.

### What Is SEL?

CASEL aspires to establish a unifying preschool through high school framework based on a coordinated set of evidence-

based practices for enhancing the social-emotional-cognitive development and academic performance of all students (CASEL, in press; Meyers et al., in press; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). SEL programming involves implementing practices and policies that help children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can enhance personal development, establish satisfying interpersonal relationships, and lead to effective and ethical work and productivity. These include the competencies to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2012).

SEL involves fostering social and emotional competencies through explicit instruction and through student-centered learning approaches that help students engage in the learning process and develop analytical, communication, and collaborative skills (CASEL, 2012; Friedlaender et al., 2014). Through explicit instruction, social and emotional skills may be taught, modeled, practiced, and applied to diverse situations, so that young people and adults use them as part of their daily repertoires of behaviors. SEL programming also enhances students' social and emotional competence by establishing positive classroom/school cultures, climates, and conditions for learning that are safe, caring, cooperative, well managed, and participatory (Zins et al., 2004). Integrated systemic, schoolwide SEL programming takes place at the classroom and school levels, and through partnerships with families and community members (CASEL, in press; Meyers et al., in press). SEL includes universal programming for the entire student body and aligned early intervention and treatment supports for students at risk for or already experiencing social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; in this volume, see Bear, Whitcomb, Elias, & Blank, Chapter 30, and Wiley & Siperstein, Chapter 14).

#### A Framework for Advancing Systemic SEL in Education Setting

A variety of frameworks for SEL have emerged to describe parameters of systemic SEL programming (Jennings & Greenberg,

2009; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Meyers et al., in press; Zins et al., 2004). We present an updated framework in Figure 1.1 that highlights (1) five interrelated domains of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that provide a foundation to navigate school and life successfully; (2) short- and long-term attitudinal and behavioral outcomes resulting from evidence-based SEL programming; (3) coordinated classroom, school, family, and community strategies that enhance children's social-emotional development and academic performance; and (4) district, state, and federal policies and supports that foster quality SEL implementation and better student outcomes.

#### CASEL's Five Competence Domains

SEL programming enhances students' capacity to integrate cognition, affect, and behavior to deal effectively daily tasks and challenges (Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994). Like many kindred approaches, the CASEL domains include knowledge, skills, and attitudes that comprise intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence (National Research Council, 2012). These include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making:

1. Competence in the *self-awareness* domain involves understanding one's 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.
2. Competence in the *self-management* domain requires skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate 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.
3. Competence in the *social awareness* domain involves the ability to take the perspective of those with different backgrounds or cultures and to empathize and feel compassion. It also involves

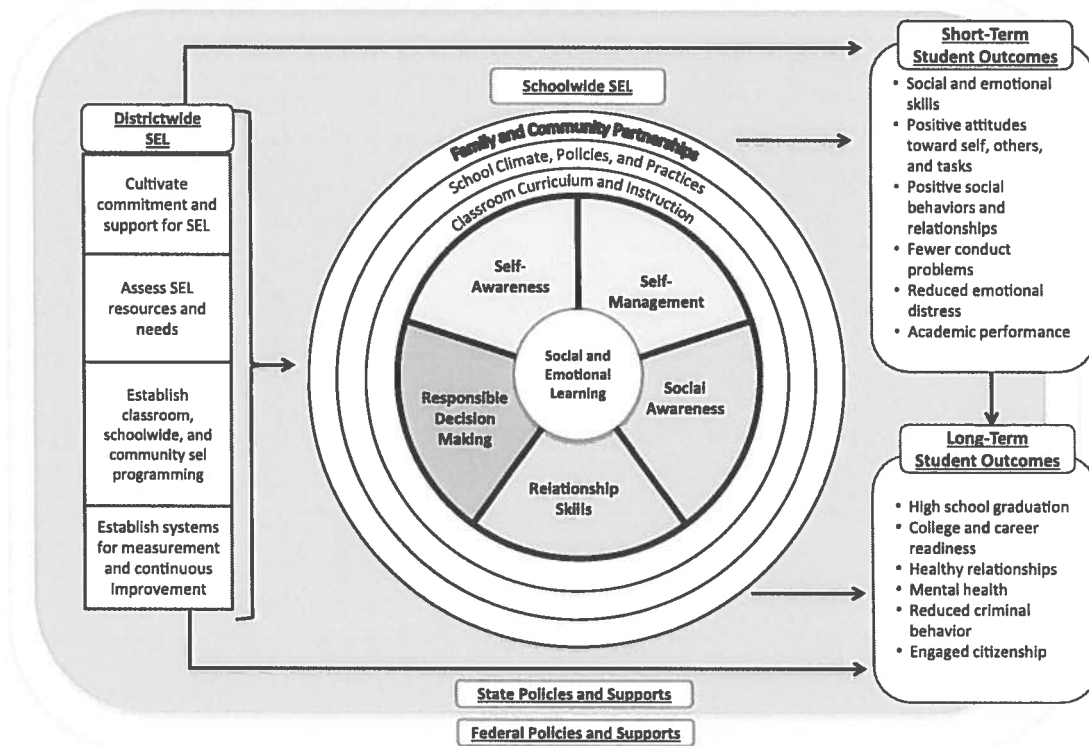


FIGURE 1.1. A conceptual model of systematic SEL in educational settings.

- understanding social norms for behavior and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports.
4. *Relationship skills* provide children with the tools they need to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, and to act in accordance with social norms. Competence in this domain involves communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when it is needed.
  5. Finally, *responsible decision making* is a competency domain that requires the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse settings. Competence in this domain requires the ability to consider ethical standards, safety concerns, accurate behavioral norms for risky behaviors, to make realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and to take the health and well-being of self and others into consideration.

CASEL's inclusion of the word "learning" in the term "social and emotional learning" was purposeful and designed to reflect the fact that the acquisition of the skills and attitudes within the five competency domains is a process and schools are one of the primary places where this learning process takes place. Effective SEL approaches to promote social-emotional competencies often incorporate four elements represented by the acronym SAFE: (1) *Sequenced*: connected and coordinated set of activities to foster skills development; (2) *Active*: active forms of learning to help students master new skills; (3) *Focused*: a component that emphasizes developing personal and social skills; and (4) *Explicit*: targeting specific social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2010, 2011).

#### *Short- and Long-Term Student Attitudinal and Behavioral Outcomes*

Students are more successful in school and daily life when they (1) know themselves and can manage themselves, (2) take the perspectives of others and relate effectively with them, and (3) make sound choices

about personal and social decisions. These social and emotional skills are one of several short-term student outcomes that SEL programs promote (depicted on the right side of Figure 1.1). Other benefits include (1) more positive attitudes toward oneself, others, and tasks including enhanced self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection and commitment to school, and sense of purpose; (2) more positive social behaviors and relationships with peers and adults; (3) reduced conduct problems and risk-taking behavior; (4) decreased emotional distress; and (5) improved test scores, grades, and attendance (Durlak et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Sklad et al., 2012). In the long run, greater social and emotional competence can increase the likelihood of high school graduation, readiness for postsecondary education, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, reduced criminal behavior, and engaged citizenship (e.g., Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2008).

#### *Systemic Schoolwide SEL Programming*

Figure 1.1 highlights that students' social, emotional, and academic competencies are enhanced through coordinated classroom, school, family, and community strategies.

At the *classroom level*, SEL combines developmentally and culturally appropriate classroom instruction with ongoing formal and infused opportunities to build and reinforce students' social-emotional competence and positive behavior (in this volume, see Bierman & Motamedi, Chapter 9; Hecht & Shin, Chapter 4; Jagers et al., Chapter 11; Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, Chapter 10; Williamson, Modecki, & Guerra, Chapter 12). Promoting social and emotional development for all students in classrooms involves teaching and modeling social and emotional skills, providing opportunities for students to practice and hone those skills, and giving them an opportunity to apply these skills in various situations.

One of the most prevalent SEL approaches involves training teachers to deliver explicit lessons that teach social and emotional skills, then finding opportunities for students to reinforce their use throughout the day. Another curricular approach embeds SEL instruction into content areas such as

English language arts, social studies, or math (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Merrell & Gueldner, 2010; Yoder, 2013; Zins et al., 2004).

Teachers can also naturally foster skills in students through their interpersonal and student-centered instructional interactions throughout the school day. Adult-student interactions support SEL when they result in positive student-teacher relationships, enable teachers to model social-emotional competencies for students, and promote student engagement (Williford & Sanger Wolcott, Chapter 15, this volume). Teacher practices that provide students with emotional support and create opportunities for students' voice, autonomy, and mastery experiences promote student engagement in the educational process. These pedagogical approaches emphasize changing adult practices and the ways in which students interact with one another and their environment in an effort to promote student skills development.

At the *school level*, SEL strategies typically come in the form of policies, practices, or structures related to climate and student support services (Meyers et al., in press). Safe and positive school climates and cultures positively affect academic, behavioral, and mental health outcomes for students (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). There are various schoolwide activities and policies that promote positive school environments, such as establishing a team to address the building climate and developing clear norms, values, and expectations for students and staff members. Fair and equitable discipline policies and bullying prevention practices that provide opportunities for students to resolve conflicts and repair damaged relationships while fostering relationship skills and responsible decision making are more likely to result in enduring skills and attitude change than purely behavioral methods that rely on reward or punishment to influence student behavior (Bear et al., Chapter 30, this volume). School leaders can organize activities that build positive relationships and a sense of community among students through structures such as regularly scheduled morning meetings or advisories that provide students with opportunities to connect with each other.

Educators' social-emotional competence and pedagogical skills influence classroom and school climate and culture, as well as the impact of SAFE SEL programming on student behavior. High-quality educator preparation and inservice professional learning related to SEL should include elements such as the theoretical knowledge and pedagogical strategies essential to teaching SEL, the development of teachers' and administrators' personal and social competencies, and ongoing supportive feedback from colleagues and administrators (in this volume, see Jennings & Frank, Chapter 28; Patti, Senge, Madrazo, & Stern, Chapter 29; Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, Chapter 27; Williford & Sanger Wolcott, Chapter 15).

An important component of schoolwide SEL involves integration into multi-tiered systems of support. The services provided to students by professionals such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists should align with universal efforts in the classroom and building. Often through small-group work, student support professionals reinforce and supplement classroom-based instruction for students who need early intervention or more intensive treatment. When these individuals are familiar with the social and emotional content and instructional practices teachers are using in classrooms, they can incorporate them with their own work with students.

*Family and community partnerships* can strengthen the impact of school approaches extending learning into the home and neighborhood. Community members and organizations can support classroom and school efforts, especially by providing students with additional opportunities to refine and apply various SEL skills (Catalano et al., 2004). School-family-community relationships characterized by equality, shared goals, and meaningful roles for families and community partners enhance student SEL (in this volume, see Fagan, Hawkins, & Shapiro, Chapter 31; Garbacz, Swanger-Gagné, & Sheridan, Chapter 16).

After-school activities also provide opportunities for students to connect with supportive adults and peers (Gullotta, Chapter 17, this volume). They are a great venue to help youth develop and apply new skills and personal talents. Research has shown that after-

school programs that devote time to student social and emotional development can significantly enhance student self-perceptions, bonding to school, positive social behaviors, school grades and achievement test scores, while reducing problem behaviors (Durlak et al., 2010).

It is evident from the contents of this book that there are many different settings or systems other than school in which SEL can be fostered in children and youth or the adults who support them. SEL begins in early childhood, so family and early childcare settings are important setting for SEL (Bierman & Motamedi, Chapter 9, this volume). At the other end of the education spectrum, higher education settings also have the potential to promote SEL in students (Conley, Chapter 13, this volume). Children and youth who engage in risky behavior often exhibit deficits in social and emotional skills, so systems that serve these populations (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health providers) are also potential settings for SEL.

#### *District, State, and Federal Support*

The left box in Figure 1.1 indicates that classroom and schoolwide SEL programming are most likely to be successfully implemented and sustained when they are aligned with district priorities and have the support of district administrators, school boards, and educator unions (Mart et al., Chapter 32, this volume). District leaders can champion policies, practices, and supports for systemic SEL programming by (1) partnering with stakeholders to cultivate commitment for SEL and fostering organizational supports and professional learning communities for SEL implementation; (2) auditing current district resources and needs, and building from effective programming that is already underway; (3) supporting coordinated classroom, schoolwide, and community SEL programming; and (4) establishing assessment systems for continuous improvement of practice (CASEL, in press; Mart et al., Chapter 32, this volume). CASEL is currently partnering with eight large urban districts (Anchorage, Austin, Chicago, Cleveland, Nashville, Oakland, Sacramento, and Washoe County [Nevada]) on preschool to high school systemwide SEL (CASEL, in press; Mart et al., Chapter 32,

this volume; Wright, Lamont, Wandersman, Osher, & Gordon, Chapter 33, this volume). A third-party evaluation by the American Institutes for Research based on 3 years of implementation indicates that districts and schools have had considerable success in implementing evidence-based SEL programming and aligning SEL with other programs and diverse district priorities (Osher, Friedman, & Kendziora, 2014).

Federal and state policies and supports play critical roles in fostering evidence-based district, school, and classroom SEL programming (see Figure 1.1). One of the key ways that states can advance quality SEL programming is to establish SEL standards for students (Dusenbury et al., Chapter 35, this volume). Learning standards specify what students should know and be able to do as a result of educational instruction. Well-written and well-implemented standards communicate priorities to school staff members, families, and students. When they provide clear goals and developmental benchmarks, standards can help shape impactful educational planning, especially if those plans include implementation of evidence-based curricula, quality professional learning for educators, and assessment that helps teachers monitor students' progress toward goals. Illinois provides a groundbreaking model for freestanding preschool to high school SEL standards. Illinois students are expected to be working toward three SEL goals: (1) develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success; (2) use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and (3) demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (for a complete set of standards, benchmarks, and grade-level performance descriptors, see [www.isbe.net/ils/social\\_emotional/standards.htm](http://www.isbe.net/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm)). Dusenbury and colleagues (Chapter 35, this volume) describe results from a 50-state scan of SEL standards and provide guidelines for the design of high-quality SEL standards that could be adopted across states, districts, and schools.

Over the past few years, SEL has gained significant traction in federal policy (Zaslow et al., Chapter 36, this volume). Members of Congress from both parties have introduced

or support pending legislation that supports SEL. Also, the U.S. Department of Education has incorporated SEL in recent rounds of Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation competitive grants. Some legislative initiatives focus on universal SEL approaches, with the goal of promoting positive behaviors and reducing negative behaviors in all students. For example, recently, Congressman Tim Ryan introduced bipartisan legislation (H.R. 850: Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2015) that provides training for teachers and principals in SEL programming. That Act defines SEL programming as

Classroom instruction and schoolwide activities and initiatives that (a) integrate social and emotional learning with academic achievement; (b) provide systematic instruction whereby social and emotional skills are taught, modeled, practiced, and applied so that students use them as part of their daily behavior; (c) teach students to apply social and emotional skills to prevent specific problem behaviors such as substance use, violence, bullying, and school failure, and to promote positive behaviors in class, school, and community activities; and (d) establish safe and caring learning environments that foster student participation, engagement, and connection to learning and school. ([www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hr850](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hr850))

Ideally, this language will be incorporated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and other policies the House and Senate adopt. Aligned federal, state, and district policies increase the likelihood that quality programming will be broadly implemented in schools and classrooms.

#### *Systemic, Coordinated Education Is Vital*

This framework shows that SEL programming occurs in a multilevel ecological system of contexts and relationships. A key challenge for SEL researchers, educators, policymakers, and funders involves synthesizing research from many disciplines, distilling the essentials from diverse programs and policies, and putting the pieces together in districtwide and schoolwide systemic SEL programming.

SEL inhabits a world of kindred educational approaches that aspire to promote



children's social-emotional-cognitive competence and enhance the environmental conditions and contexts that influence their learning and development (Brown, Corrigan, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012; Catalano et al., 2004; Elias et al., Chapter 3, this volume; Farrington et al., 2012; Gilman, Huebner, & Furlong, 2009; Goleman, 2005; National Research Council, 2012; Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). A sampling of approaches that address intrapersonal and interpersonal competence promotion includes character education, deeper learning, emotional intelligence, grit, habits of mind, health promotion, mindsets, noncognitive, project-based learning, prosocial education, positive behavior supports, positive youth development, school climate, student-centered learning, 21st-century skills, and whole-child education.

Unfortunately, most programs are introduced into schools as a succession of fragmented fads, isolated from other programs, and the school becomes a hodgepodge of prevention and youth development initiatives, with little direction, coordination, sustainability, or impact (Shriver & Weissberg, 1996). From the perspective of district and school educators, it is critical to establish infrastructures, strategies, and processes to integrate programming effectively to enhance students' social, emotional, and academic growth.

CASEL contends that the strongest benefit for children will come from looking for commonalities and coordinating programs in the context of systemic district and school-wide programming (CASEL, in press; Elias et al., Chapter 3, this volume; Meyers et al., in press). Planned, ongoing, systematic SEL includes the following core features: (1) developing a shared vision for SEL that prioritizes the promotion of social, emotional, and academic learning for all students; (2) identifying existing strengths and supports for SEL and building from those strengths; (3) establishing central office and school infrastructures and resources that provide ongoing professional learning, including how to build SEL awareness, enhance adult social-emotional competence, and cultivate effective SEL instructional practices; (4) establishing SEL standards for students that guide a scope and sequence for SEL programming; (5) adopting and aligning evidence-

based programs that will support social and emotional skills development in classrooms and throughout the school community; (6) integrating SEL and the development of classroom/school climate and culture into all school goals, priorities, initiatives, programs, and strategies; and (7) using a cycle of inquiry to improve SEL practice and student outcomes. Finally, assessments of consumer perspectives, program implementation, child outcomes, school and district resources, new state and federal policies, and scientific advances should continuously be reviewed to improve programs and aid decision making about their future course.

The SEL framework integrates powerfully with student-centered learning practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Friedlaender et al., 2014). In summary, SEL is strengths-based and offers developmentally informed guidance about the social, emotional, and academic competencies that educated students should master. It values students' thoughts, feelings, and voice, highlighting that students can contribute positively to their schools and communities. SEL involves personalization of the education process and engaging pedagogies and relevant curricula that offer opportunities for deeper learning and connection to the world beyond school. Creating a positive school culture and climate, and using authentic assessments that evaluate and inform teaching and learning, are core elements of quality SEL programming. It is critical that SEL coordinate with educational and child development movements that address these priorities.

### Evidence for SEL Interventions

A body of correlational and longitudinal research indicates that social and emotional competencies are positively related to good adjustment outcomes and negatively related to a variety of problems (e.g., Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Moffitt et al., 2011). There is also evidence from a variety of reviews that SEL interventions produce positive attitudinal and behavioral effects. Instead of discussing the research evidence for specific programs (which is done in several chapters of this *Handbook*), we discuss the results of several influential publications that have

brought SEL into prominence and summarize the research regarding its effectiveness as a school-based intervention.

The first of these was *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs* (CASEL, 2003). This publication was the first comprehensive survey of existing school-based SEL programs that explained how SEL can be easily accommodated into (1) the academic mission of schools, (2) efforts to promote healthy behaviors and prevent high-risk behaviors, (3) comprehensive school reform, and (4) the creation of family and school partnerships. The 2003 guide provided educators with practical information on the procedural aspects and outcomes of various programs to help them in selecting the most appropriate programs for their particular setting. *Safe and Sound* became a popular source of information and was downloaded over 150,000 times from the CASEL website. CASEL recently published *2013 Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs—Preschool and Elementary School Edition*. As the title indicates, it focuses on successful preschool and elementary programs (up through grade 5). The *2013 Guide* highlights 25 programs (seven at the preschool and 18 at the elementary level) that satisfied more rigorous research criteria than those used in the 2003 publication. A guide for the later school years will be released in 2015.

Zins and colleagues (2004) highlighted through detailed research examples how SEL programming promotes students' academic success. This book was particularly important in that its appearance coincided with national attention that focused on the often poor academic performance of many students in the United States. Contributions to the Zins and colleagues volume reinforced the notion that SEL is one possibility for improving students' academic development.

More recently, a large-scale meta-analysis of 213 studies involving over 270,000 students confirmed that SEL produces significant positive effects in six different aspects of adjustment (Durlak et al., 2011). These outcomes included improvements in academic performance, SEL skills, prosocial behaviors, and attitudes toward self and others (e.g., self-esteem, bonding to school), as well as reductions in conduct problems

and emotional distress (e.g., anxiety, and depression). Furthermore, the magnitude of the effect sizes achieved in these areas (from 0.22 to 0.57 depending on the outcome) were comparable to or higher than those reported in meta-analyses of other well-established psychosocial interventions for youth. Overall, these findings indicated that SEL interventions should be considered an effective evidence-based approach for schoolchildren.

Several other findings that emerged from the Durlak and colleagues (2011) meta-analysis either supported the results of prior individual studies or spoke to important questions regarding the conduct of SEL programs. For instance, programs were effective regardless of their geographical setting (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural), or the ethnic composition of the student body. Teachers were more successful when conducting programs than were outside staff members who entered the school to administer programs. This indicated that SEL interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practice.

Furthermore, the quality of implementation varied across the reviewed programs and had an influential effect on outcomes. For example, student findings were compared for those participating in well-implemented versus poorly implemented programs. The former group of students' improvement in academic performance was *twice as high* as that of the latter group; and they showed *reductions* in emotional distress and levels of conduct problems that were *up to twice* the reduction shown by those in poorly implemented program. These results confirm other findings that the level of implementation obtained has an important bearing on program outcomes. In other words, we should not think of SEL programs as being effective; it is well-implemented SEL programs that are effective (Durlak, Chapter 26, this volume). It should be noted that a subsequent meta-analysis by an international group of researchers on a more select sample of universal, school-based SEL programs has replicated the positive effects on the six student outcome areas listed earlier (Sklad et al., 2012).

In summary, this brief overview of SEL research yields several important conclusions. Research findings have established that well-implemented SEL programs are

an evidence-based approach that not only improves students' academic, behavioral, and personal adjustment but also prevents some important negative outcomes. SEL programs have been effective for preschool through high school students (and also for college students, see Conley, Chapter 13, this volume) across a range of locations and student populations, and can be effectively delivered by teachers provided that they receive sufficient training, consultation, and support (in this volume, see Jennings & Frank, Chapter 28; Patti et al., Chapter 29; Schonert-Reichl et al., Chapter 27; Williford & Sanger Wolcott, Chapter 15). In other words, SEL programming should be considered a viable option in any educational context for enhancing students' psychological, academic, and social functioning.

### An Agenda for the Future of SEL

In this section, we suggest an agenda for future work in SEL that blends prior accomplishments and some of the suggestions and recommendations offered in various chapters of this *Handbook*. Space does not permit a comprehensive discussion of all relevant issues, so we focus our discussion around two central questions:

1. How can we improve the quality of evidence in support of SEL programs?
2. How can we scale-up evidence-based programs to reach as many students as possible?

#### Improving the Quality of SEL

Although many SEL programs have been successful, we need more research to identify the active ingredients and core components of successful programs. The theories and logic models behind most successful SEL programs focus on two important elements of interventions: (1) features of the environmental context (e.g., the classroom or school climate, teacher practices, the creation of family or community partnerships) and (2) the specific competencies that are targeted for interventions in one or more of the five SEL competence domains (Brackett, Elbertson, & Rivers, Chapter 2, this volume). It is essential to confirm which

environmental features and which student competencies constitute the active ingredients of successful programs for different age groups. The active ingredients of interventions are what power the intervention and account for the obtained changes in participants. Although a few research groups have conducted mediational analyses to examine the active ingredients of their interventions (see Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, Chapter 10, this volume), the results are not always clear cut and require replication in multiple contexts.

Discovering the active ingredients of different SEL programs can go far in creating more effective and efficient interventions because this information provides guidance in terms of (1) which program aspects should be maintained as is, and which can be eliminated, reduced, or modified to suit different school situations, (2) which are the most important pieces of interventions that educators should learn to deliver and emphasize when conducting programs, and (3) what to measure in terms of program theory, implementation, and program outcomes.

Another important set of considerations focuses on the ethnic and cultural background of students (Hecht & Shin, Chapter 4, this volume). Although research has indicated that SEL interventions can be effective with diverse ethnic and cultural groups, we do not know how, or whether, modifications can make current programs more effective for different subgroups. We also can benefit from cross-cultural research studies. Some SEL programs developed in the United States have been successfully transported into other countries, but original SEL interventions are also present in other countries (Humphrey, 2013). Moreover, the educational systems of many countries around the world are conducive to promoting many SEL-related skills (Torrente et al., Chapter 37, this volume), and it is important to learn how different cultural and societal contexts influence program impact.

Scientific fields cannot progress very far in the absence of good measurement of critical constructs. Progress in SEL can be made in terms of both the breadth and types of assessment that are routinely conducted. In terms of breadth, it is important to investigate as many outcomes as possible in order to learn how different programs can help stu-

dents. Reviews indicate that SEL interventions can increase students' self-confidence and self-esteem, improve their attitudes toward school and education, and increase their prosocial behaviors (e.g., cooperation and helpfulness with others), and their academic performance in terms of both grades and test scores. Interventions can also reduce problem behaviors such as aggression and levels of emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012). However, not every program can be expected to produce the same degree of change in each of these areas, and in many cases we have no information on how some programs affect participants in several of the previously described areas. Furthermore, as noted by Greenberg, Katz, and Klein (Chapter 6, this volume), it is also a good idea to assess key biomarkers of physical health because it is likely that some SEL interventions might obtain important effects in this area.

In terms of developing new types of assessments, it is critically important to have measures of the many different abilities that comprise the five SEL domains. Although a few tools are currently available (in this volume, see Denham, Chapter 19; Elliott, Frey, & Davies, Chapter 20; Marzano, Chapter 22; McKown, Chapter 21), the field needs to develop additional valid assessment strategies that encompass the full range of skills and attitudes. Assessment of multiple social-emotional competencies would help to determine which types of interventions would be most beneficial for which students, and for monitoring students' progress over time in order to make adjustment in the type or pacing of programming, and to judge how well an intervention promotes its targeted skills. Moreover, it would be very helpful if valid, easy-to-use assessment tools could be developed in the regular school context, that is, those that can be competently administered and interpreted by school staff members and do not require extensive time (in this volume, see Denham, Chapter 19; Redding & Walberg, Chapter 25).

Additional issues that need more research attention include how program duration relates to different outcomes, and, in general, the long-term impact of SEL programs. How long should a program be for students at different educational levels, and what initial skills sets would achieve posi-

tive effects across different outcome areas? Some researchers suggest that brief social psychological interventions that target students' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs can yield large gains in achievement and reduce achievement gaps years later (Yeager & Walton, 2011). Although it is logical to assume that longer programs produce better results, the data on this matter are not clear. Meta-analytic reviews have reported positive results at follow-up for student outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012), but follow-up studies are in the minority. Given the need for cost-effective options, future research should clarify the differential impacts that short-term programs and multiyear interventions produce.

In the final analysis, we do not expect research to produce a short list of a few environmental conditions and skills that are universally effective in all situations. Rather, further research should be directed toward seeking answers to this question: What particular environmental conditions, combined with the promotion of which particular skill sets, are responsible for students at different educational levels and from different cultural backgrounds achieving which types of desirable outcomes in both the short and long term?

### Going to Scale with Evidence-Based SEL Interventions

Promoting the widespread use of evidence-based approaches has become an important topic in fields such as medicine, education, and mental health treatment and prevention. Unfortunately, in each of these areas, there is a wide gap between research and practice in the sense that evidence-based programs may be applied far more broadly than they currently are. The same goes for SEL programs.

Several authors use the term "dissemination" to refer to the spread of evidence-based programs, but it is more helpful and thorough to employ Rogers's (2003) diffusion model, which has been very influential in helping us understand the processes by which an evidence-based program eventually becomes more widely used and accepted. According to Rogers, diffusion occurs as a result of five separate but related stages. The first stage of diffusion is "dissemination,"

which refers to communicating accurate and helpful information to potential users about the program. The second stage, “adoption,” occurs when others decide to try out a program. The third stage is “implementation,” which refers to conducting the program in a high-quality manner to provide a fair test of the program’s ability to produce changes. The fourth stage, “evaluation,” involves examining how well the new program achieved its intended goals. Finally, the fifth stage is “sustainability,” which means that the program (if successful) now becomes a routine feature of the adopting organization’s procedures. Each of these stages needs to be accomplished effectively to reach the final goal relating to widespread use, but problems often arise in the successful execution of each of these phases. For example, potential users may not receive or pay sufficient attention to useful information about new programs. They may choose to adopt the wrong (e.g., ill-fitting or ineffective) program for their setting, or fail to adopt a program that might be helpful. School staff may encounter serious difficulties or limitations in program implementation, or fail to evaluate the new program carefully to discern its true benefits. In some cases, new programs have not been sustained because of administrative, political, or financial reasons, even when evaluations have indicated their value in the new setting.

There are several ways to make progress by strengthening work in the different stages of program diffusion, and one common theme that runs across all of these potentially positive contributions is the value of collaboration with relevant stakeholders. Collaboration becomes important in the dissemination and adoption phase because of the potential value of asking educators what information would be most useful to them in terms of learning about SEL programs, deciding whether or not to adopt one for their school, and how they would most like to receive this information. Historically, experts have commonly thought they have the answers to important questions and have developed communications about scientific discoveries in ways they see fit. In terms of promoting SEL initiatives, it seems far better to ask educators what they need to know and respond accordingly. What information would help them to learn about the value of

SEL programs and decide about using them? What concerns might they have about such programs? What is standing in the way of their school adopting programs and coordinating their use? Gathering such information systematically and across a diverse sample of educators would generate ideas about how to enhance work on the dissemination of information and program adoption.

Collaboration remains critically important in the next three stages of diffusion: implementation, evaluation, and sustainability (CASEL, in press; Meyers et al., in press). Durlak (Chapter 26, this volume) discusses these stages in more detail, but here it should be emphasized that quality implementation of SEL programs requires that professional development services be provided collaboratively by outside consultants and school professionals with SEL experience and expertise. Moreover, this needed training and technical assistance is best offered through a genuine collaboration, so that relevant stakeholders (e.g., educators, families, and students) have meaningful input into decisions about how the proposed program fits their needs and values, how it might have to be modified to achieve its ends, and how they will work together as a learning community to implement, evaluate, continuously improve, and sustain programming.

Collaboration is also critical with federal, state, and local policymakers, decision makers, and funders (in this volume, see Price, Chapter 8; Zaslow et al., Chapter 36). In addition to documenting that SEL benefits children, it is also important to make the economic case for SEL (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, Chapter 7, this volume). A recent study indicates that it is possible to apply benefit–cost analysis to SEL programming, and that these interventions offer high economic returns as economic investments (Belfield et al., 2014).

In summary, diverse stakeholders must work together to support the broader implementation of systemic, evidence-based SEL programming. These stakeholders include educators, family members, researchers, program developers, policymakers, funders, and advocates. Each has an important role to play in order to meld theory, research, practice, and policy together so that they work synergistically to achieve valued goals.

### The Potential of Technology

Various technologies such as computers, websites, mobile applications, videoconferencing, and social media have the potential to increase the receptivity and wider use of SEL interventions (Stern, Harding, Holzer, & Elbertson, Chapter 34, this volume). We encourage others to evaluate how various technologies can best be used in the service of SEL. For example, websites can present and periodically update information on new SEL research, practice, and policies. Technology can also play a major role in training and coaching teachers through the use of virtual classroom realities, and interactive Web programs can be created to help teachers overcome the challenges related to effective program implementation (Stern et al., Chapter 34, this volume). Video conferencing can be an economical way to allow those conducting the same programs in different geographical areas to share their experiences and offer creative solutions to practical problems.

Technology also offers opportunities for real-time assessments related to the need for SEL skills, the course of program implementation, the monitoring of student progress over time, and end-of-program evaluations of desired outcomes. Readers can think of other innovative ways to use technological applications. The potential is vast; technology makes it possible (in practice, not just in theory) to reach large numbers of people instantly and simultaneously.

### Overview of the Current Volume

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This volume includes contributions by leading interdisciplinary researchers and practitioners who were carefully chosen in terms of their expertise in theory, research, practice, or policy. There are four main sections. In addition to this introductory chapter, Part I contains seven foundational chapters that cover issues related to theory and the relationship between SEL and matters such as diversity, neuroscience, physical health, and financing. Part II contains 10 chapters that focus on specific settings for SEL intervention (e.g., preschool through higher education, after-school activities, or justice-related institutions) or on particular aspects of SEL

work (e.g., student–teacher relationships, school–family partnerships, or interventions for students with disabilities).

The chapters in Part II follow a standard format. Authors of each chapter provide an overview of theory and research relevant to their particular topic and categorize programs they review into three categories: What Works, What Is Promising, and What Does Not Work. These authors were asked to use the following general criteria for placing a program into one of these categories. “What Works” is defined as three or more successful trials of an intervention based on evaluations that are reasonably well controlled. “What Is Promising” refers to programs for which there are less than three successful trials. “What Does Not Work” is defined as evidence from evaluations that indicate an intervention has failed to achieve its intended impact. This last category refers to situations in which programs have been evaluated but have not achieved their intended goals. It does not refer to situations in which an SEL program has not been subjected to evaluation; in this case, data are missing to judge program impact. This three-category evaluative system is not perfect, but it does provide a consistent frame of reference across different research areas and a general snapshot of the evidence that exists to support different types of SEL programs. We feel such a perspective is very useful to potential consumers and to those who want a critical perspective on the impact of current programs in different areas.

Part III includes seven groundbreaking chapters on SEL assessment. Because what gets assessed gets addressed in education and the human services, it is critically important to establish SEL assessments that are scientifically sound, developmentally appropriate, feasible to administer and score, affordable, and actionable. Denham (Chapter 19, this volume) offers a developmental framework for preschool to high school SEL assessment and points out that tools can be used for screening, formative, interim, and summative functions. Currently, teacher, parent, and student self-report measures of social behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of climate dominate the SEL assessment landscape. Although these approaches are informative, they have drawbacks due to issues such as social desirability and response bias.

A critical priority for SEL includes creating a battery of preschool to high school performance and observational assessment tools that evaluate the social-emotional skills of students and provide guidance on ways to improve them. Part III chapters on assessment include innovative perspectives on ways to assess and improve students' social competence and conditions for learning, performance assessments of students' social-emotional comprehension and skills, and formative assessment strategies to measure and enhance students' social-emotional competence. Other chapters focus on organizational readiness and practice assessments that can help school teams continuously assess current SEL practice, plan improvement, monitor implementation, and make adjustments to strengthen programming. Together, these chapters provide the next decade's road map for developing SEL assessments—a priority that many believe is the most important one for the field.

Finally, Part IV contains chapters on various topics such as professional development (for teachers, administrators, and student support personnel) and policy and dissemination issues (e.g., implementation, learning standards, SEL practices for schoolwide development efforts and attempts at school improvement, taking programs to scale, technology, federal policy, and international initiatives). We are pleased to have this volume include distinguished contributors whose comments at the beginning of this volume are contained in the form of a Foreword written by Linda Darling-Hammond and an Introduction by Timothy Shriver and Jennifer Buffett, and an Afterword at the end of the volume that includes commentaries by James Comer and Daniel Goleman.

## Conclusion

In the 3-year journey leading to the publication of the *Handbook* intended for researchers, practitioners, program developers, and policymakers, our understanding of SEL has been shaped by the new developments in this exciting and promising area of helping young people and adults learn to live healthier lives. For all that has been accomplished, so much more remains unfinished. It is our hope that this volume inspires readers to

engage in activities related to SEL research, practice, or policy, and challenges them to push the frontiers of knowledge beyond the boundaries that exist today.

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