from district leaders from Cleveland to El Paso to Nashville—as well as from our former colleagues in Anchorage and Austin, who've continued participating in this learning community. For example, Minneapolis staff visited a high school in Chicago that has SEL embedded in its climate, not just its curriculum. The visit reinforced these educators' belief that the daily interactions staff have with students and one another are critical to student success.

Seek Sustainability

Build values and expectations central to how you understand social-emotional learning into the fabric of your school culture. Doing so will help you address another challenge: sustainability. SEL is too important to suffer the fate of being one more education fad. Using and acting on needs assessments, listening carefully to staff members, and implementing your program well can help ensure that any leader will have widespread buy-in for their district's approach to SEL.

Superintendents come and go, as our own careers demonstrate. But SEL needs to be a constant, the North Star that helps students master the skills and demonstrate the behaviors that will help them succeed in school—and in life. 🖼

[1]Belfield, C., Bowden, B., Klapp, A., Levin, H., Shand, R., & Zander, S. (2015). *The economic value of social and emotional learning.* New York: Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

[2]Each of us also had CASEL conduct an SEL engagement and readiness analysis in our new districts; this gave us a clearer recognition of our primary priorities and day-to-day implementation challenges.

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SEL: What the Research Says

Joseph L. Mahoney and Roger P. Weissberg

S upport for social-emotional learning (SEL) is strong and growing among teachers, administrators, parents, employers, and others concerned about preparing the next generation of students for success. This growing demand is complemented by a growing evidence base that strengthening students' SEL skills works.

Two major meta-analyses (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017) examined the influence of universal, school-based SEL programs on student outcomes in six domains: social and emotional skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behavior, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance. The meta-analyses evaluated studies from a total of 265 reports, and 222 of these reports differed across the two analyses. Therefore, although there is some overlap among the two analyses, each captures a different section of SEL outcome research.

The 2011 meta-analysis examined individual studies from 1955 to 2007 and included 213 school-based, universal SEL programs serving 270,034 K–12 students. All the studies followed a comparison group design and nearly half involved random assignment. Major findings included:

■ Students participating in SEL programs showed significantly more positive outcomes in all six areas compared to control students.

■ SEL programs enhance academic achievement. The higher academic performance of students who participated in an SEL program translated into an 11 percentile-point gain in achievement.

■ SEL programs that were implemented well and adhered to a combination of recommended practices–sequenced, active, focused, and explicit learning—were particularly likely to

promote positive outcomes.

The 2017 meta-analysis reviewed longitudinal-study research on 82 school-based, universal SEL programs serving 97,406 K–12 students. Again, the studies included comparison groups and over half followed a random assignment design. This review included more recent investigations (up to 2014) and research conducted outside of the United States. Many of the studies investigated follow-up effects, years later, of participation in SEL programming. Major findings include:

■ At follow-up, students who had participated in SEL programs continued to show significantly more positive outcomes in all six domains.

■ Academic benefits endure. The academic performance of SEL program participants translated into a 13 percentile-point gain in achievement at follow-up.

■ A small number of studies that included long-term follow-up through adolescence and young adulthood found that SEL program participants continued to show significantly better adjustment. More had graduated from high school and attended college; fewer had been arrested.

Implications and Future Directions

This outcome research on SEL programs suggests several implications and future directions. First, it will be critical to determine the best ways to scale up evidence-based SEL programming while maintaining its quality—and make a case for it. Pointing to long-term positive results from SEL programming and a strong return on investment for such initiatives—as these two meta-analyses and other research shows (Belfield et al., 2015)—can help district and school leaders make a compelling case for including SEL in strategic plans and budgets. Second, given the positive connections between participation in

Well-implemented SEL instruction translates into an 11–13 percentile-point gain in student academic achievement, according to these meta-analyses.

universal, school-based SEL programs and academic performance, expanding SEL programming in low-performing schools, especially, seems warranted.

Finally, districts themselves should conduct research and follow a model of continuous improvement to drive SEL program implementation. Areas where more research is needed include: how characteristics of the samples, like gender, race, and ethnicity, relate to program impacts; the role of adult SEL (as an outcome and a contributor to student outcomes); and the significance of continuous, integrated SEL from preK through young adulthood. ▣

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A Whole Child Umbrella

Social-emotional learning starts with a focus on the whole child.

David Griffith and Sean Slade

As social-emotional learning has gained prominence in K–12 education, some educators have wondered how ASCD's Whole Child approach intersects with this movement. In fact, the Whole Child approach encompasses and overarches the components of social-emotional learning, as well as other holistic education models, and as such can serve as a helpful "umbrella" framework for integrating such practices in schools.

ASCD's Whole Child approach is an effort to transition schools and systems from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and life success of all children. At its core, a Whole Child education is one in which students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. This holistic approach, based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, refocuses attention on each child's comprehensive and successful development to graduation and adulthood.

ASCD's Whole Child work aims to promote schools, systems, and policies that help educate students "who are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically active, artistically engaged, prepared for economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling."[1] Among other support resources, ASCD has developed a school-focused needs-assessment tool (www.ascd.org/whole-child) based on the Whole Child framework, which encompasses the five tenets and 50 related indicators. It also provides support to a network of Whole Child-focused schools and administers an annual Vision in Action Award to schools that have made significant progress in living out the principles of Whole Child education.

We believe that the Whole Child approach is the best organizing framework to provide the essential competencies and capacities for

A common framework can help provide clear goals and understanding about what is needed to advance student learning and well-being beyond current metrics.

a well-rounded, supportive education. Whether the focus is student health and well-being, social and emotional support, active engagement and relationship building, or academic and cognitive growth, the content, methodology, and mindset necessary can be most effectively developed through the Whole Child paradigm.

Finding Common Ground

While Whole Child is an all-encompassing concept, there is an amazingly wide-ranging lexicon of terms to describe the many facets that comprise the approach. This varying terminology can be at times confusing to the public and distracting to educators, but we believe there is plenty of common ground—and an essential starting point for understanding. Jonathan Cohen, president emeritus of the National School Climate Center, has made the important point that "whatever label is used" for a particular holistic learning model, the first goal should be to educate the whole child, and the second goal should be to support the "whole village—school, parents, guardians—working together."

Educators must constantly keep in mind what their schools and systems are trying to achieve via education and what tools and approaches they need to achieve it. For ASCD, what schools should be trying to achieve via education is the development of students who are well-rounded,

An Education Reform Lexicon

What follows are shorthand definitions of key terms in integrative education reform, as defined by organizations such as ASCD, Character.org, CASEL, NSCC, and P21.

School Climate: The "quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes and structures" is the NSCC's definition of school climate.

Social-Emotional Learning: The "process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions," is the definition of SEL according to CASEL.

Character Education: The phrase "an educational movement that supports the social, emotional, and ethical development of students" articulates Character.org's use of this term.

21st Century Skills: Abilities that enable students to "actively engage in their education and directly apply their content knowledge through collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity," is how P21 defines this term.

Whole Child: ASCD's Whole Child approach is an effort "to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children."

engaged, and equipped to take on complex challenges—in short, a graduate who is college-, career-, and citizenship-ready.

A number of national organizations have been instrumental in promoting more holistic visions of K–12 education and supporting progress toward their goals. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21), Character.org, the National School Climate Center (NSCC), the Coalition of Community Schools (CSS), and the Aspen Institute have all done outstanding work by addressing specific Whole Child elements that foster meaningful student growth, innovative and supportive learning environments, personal development, and community engagement. Common threads connect such terms as *whole child*, *character education*, *social-emotional learning*, *school climate*, and *21st century skills*. Certainly, all these terms establish that myriad factors—both inside and out of the academic environment—promote a student's long-term development and success. And yet, despite widespread agreement among educators on this vocabulary's importance in a child's overall educational experience, a persistent challenge exists to determining how best to incorporate these principles into the overall school setting and the curriculum.

How do we best incorporate and implement a focus on the whole child when state and federal policies and accountability measures often impede progress toward that ideal? One way is to ensure that the mission of each school is defined, articulated, and broadcast to all stakeholders, staff, students, families, and communities.
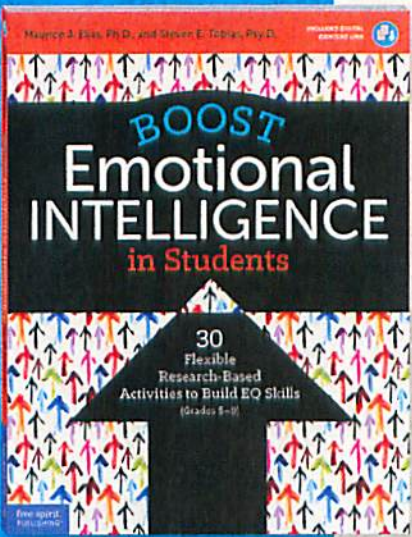
Beyond Conventional Metrics

Roger Weissberg, board vice chair and chief knowledge officer for CASEL, has neatly summarized the approaches to working with the overlapping definitions: "There are some people who are 'splitters' and some who are 'lumpers.' Lumpers look for commonalities and try to connect them and find synergies. Splitters look for differences and say what's unique about an approach."

Whatever the terminology or categorizations, there are no right or wrong nor preferred terms. Nevertheless, bringing a shared language to this Tower of Babel about student supports and services would help immensely in clarifying the confusion among parents, policymakers, and the public. Indeed, a common framework can help provide clear goals and understanding about what is needed to advance student learning and well-being beyond current metrics. The Whole Child approach is that unifying concept. **EL**

[1]ASCD. (2007). The learning compact redefined: A call to action. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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