

Social and Emotional Learning Implementation with Latinx Learners Brief 5: Family Knowledge and Engagement

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About the Study

This brief is part of a five-part series that reports findings from research conducted by ACT in collaboration with Region One Education Service Center, a provider of educational services to over 430,000 students in South Texas who are primarily Latinx and from low-income communities. The research was funded by a NewSchools Venture Fund grant awarded to ACT's Center for Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning and ACT's Center for Equity in Learning. The overarching goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of factors related to social and emotional learning (SEL), including program efficacy, program implementation, and family engagement. This brief focuses on family engagement with SEL and includes results from surveys administered to two samples of parents/family members, one sample within Region One and one national sample. The goal of the study was to better understand parents' and family members' familiarity with and attitudes toward SEL for themselves and for their school-age children.

So What?

The current study examined attitudes toward SEL with a sample of families from Region One and a larger, geographically distributed sample of parents and families. Families believe developing SE skills is important for their students and themselves. Overall, participants reported they were "somewhat familiar" or "familiar" with the terms examined. However, compared to a larger sample of families outside of Region One, families within Region One had less familiarity with certain SELrelated terms and agreed more strongly with the statement that teaching parents and families about SEL can help improve student social and emotional development.

Now What?

Results show positive attitudes and perceptions of SEL from family members. These results are promising because positive attitudes increase the likelihood that family members are willing to participate in SEL programming. This collaboration between family members and educators can help to support the overarching goal of a comprehensive SEL program. SEL programming may be particularly beneficial for family members from Region One, because they reported lower familiarity with terms related to SEL and thus may have less background knowledge on SEL and how it can support their students' learning. Future research can continue to examine partnerships between educators and families to develop student SE skills, especially with families from historically underrepresented communities.



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Family Engagement with Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional (SE) skills can be defined as interpersonal, self-regulatory, and taskrelated behaviors that are important for adaption to and successful performance in educational and workplace settings (Casillas, Way, & Burrus, 2015). SE skills are related to important outcomes for students, such as positive behaviors and academic achievement, and can improve in response to social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions (e.g., Corcoran, Cheung, Kim, & Xie, 2018; Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Family members may play an important role in the development of their students' SE skills. For example, family members can model effective SE skills and create a positive and supportive environment to facilitate SE skill development. Additionally, a range of student outcomes are impacted by family engagement, such as academic, behavioral, social, and emotional outcomes (Brooks & Lambert, 2019). Given this impact, families can be a major asset to supporting the healthy development of youth, and bringing families together with educators can support the overarching goal of a comprehensive SEL program. However, few studies have directly examined family perceptions of SEL and knowledge of topics related to SEL.

Two recent studies have examined parent attitudes toward and perceptions of SEL. One study surveyed 2,026 parents of K–8 public school students, and the other surveyed 1,140 teachers, administrators, and parents (Hubbard, 2019; McGraw Hill Education and Morning Consult, 2018). In both studies, parents generally had positive views regarding SE skills and perceived benefits of SEL such as having a positive impact on academics and helping their children be more successful in the future. Hubbard (2019) found that parents thought that both the school and the home played a role in developing their child's SE skills. Specifically, they felt their children should primarily learn SE skills at home (95%), and school should reinforce this learning (92%). However, parents in this study were also concerned that SE skills being labeled or graded. McGraw Hill Education and Morning Consult (2018) found that most parents also reported that developing SE skills was important (77% for responsible decision-making, 72% for self-management, 69% for relationship skills, 68% for self-awareness, and 64% for social awareness). However, less than half of the parents in this study reported that they were somewhat or very familiar with SEL before taking the survey.

Taken together, recent surveys emphasize several important points regarding family perceptions about SEL. First, parents generally hold positive views about SEL and think SE skills are beneficial. Additionally, parents think that they play an important role in developing their children's SE skills. These results are promising because positive attitudes likely affect parents' willingness to participate in SEL. These results also point to several skills parents perceive as important for their students to develop, including responsible decision-making and self-management.

However, less is known about whether parents want to improve their own SE skills and which SE skills parents perceive as important for their own development. Further, while these results show that parents are sometimes unfamiliar with the general concept of SEL, their familiarity with specific terms associated with SEL is less well understood. If parents want to develop certain skills in themselves or lack familiarity with SEL terms, they may need supports to learn more and develop their SE skills. As such, the current study aimed to further examine parent attitudes toward and familiarity with SEL by attempting to replicate previous survey results and

expanding on this work by asking parents to rate their own skill-development needs and familiarity with specific terms.

Current Study

Although family members play an important role in developing their children's SE skills, few studies have examined family attitudes toward and familiarity with SEL. The current study examined family attitudes toward SEL from two samples. Sample 1 was a subset of families from Region One who participated in an "SEL for Families" webinar series. Sample 2 was a larger sample of families unaffiliated with Region One.

The current study had three main goals. The first goal was to examine familiarity with specific terms related to SEL. The second goal was to compare ratings of the perceived importance of family members developing their own SE skills versus those of their students. The final goal was to examine family opinions about and attitudes toward SEL. In addition to these main goals, we were interested in examining any differences in familiarity with, perceived importance of, and opinions about SEL between the sample from Region One and the larger, national sample, which is potentially more representative of the U.S. population. We were interested in these comparisons because the sample from Region One is a relatively homogeneous sample of family members from historically underserved communities. As such, comparing responses from family members for Region One to responses from the larger sample of family members can have implications for equity and shed light on how to best serve families with similar demographics.

Participants

Sample 1

Family members who attended the first session of the four-part webinar series hosted by Region One ESC were invited to participate in a survey administered at the start of the webinar series. Of the 100 attendees, 97 responded to the survey, and 75 completed the survey entirely. Partial responses were included in the analyses. Participants received an Amazon gift card as compensation for their time and effort. Participants were mostly female (97.4%), and most reported that their race/ethnicity was Hispanic/Latinx (92.1%), with the remaining participants reporting that their race/ethnicity was White (7.9%). Additionally, most participants reported that their student was eligible for free/reduced lunch (97.3%).

Sample 2

To examine a larger, national sample of family members unaffiliated with Region One, we sent an email to 10,000 family members of students who recently took the ACT® test. Of those emailed, 542 responded to the survey, and 425 completed the survey entirely. Partial responses were included in the analyses. Participants received an Amazon gift card as compensation for their time and effort. Participants were 73.7% female. The majority of participants reported that their race/ethnicity was White (48.1%), with the remaining participants reporting that their race/ ethnicity was Black/African American (16.7%), Asian (11.3%), Hispanic/Latinx (10.3%), two or more races (4.2%), American Indian/Alaska Native (.7%), or other (.7%); the remaining 8.0% preferred not to respond. Less than half of the participants reported that their student was eligible for free/reduced lunch (31.2%). Participant income was as follows: less than \$24,000 (10.2%), \$24,000–\$36,000 (7.9%), \$36,000–\$50,000 (14.3%), \$50,000–\$60,000 (10.3%), \$60,000-\$80,000 (13.3%), \$80,000-\$100,000 (12.8%), \$100,000-\$120,000 (10.7%), \$120,000-\$150,000 (7.7%), more than \$150,000 (12.8%). Additionally, participants were from the Midwest (18.8%), Mountains/Plains (4.5%), Northwest (7.0%), Southeast (40.2%), Southwest (23.1%), and West (6.4%).

Method

Participants from both samples completed a survey that included 43 Likert-type items assessing participants' opinions about, valuation of, and familiarity with SEL. For the 11 familiarity questions shown in Table 1 on page 6, participants responded on a four-point scale (1 = not *familiar* and 4 = very *familiar*). For the 12 skill value questions shown in Table 2 on page 8, participants responded on a four-point scale (1 = not *important* and 4 = very *important*). For the 10 opinion questions shown in Table 3 on page 10, participants responded on a six-point scale (1 = strongly *disagree* and 6 = strongly *agree*). Participants were also asked two questions about their concerns regarding school closures. The response options for these questions were scored as follows: 3 = a great deal, 2 = somewhat, and 1 = not at all. The survey also included demographic items (gender, race/ethnicity, and eligibility for free/reduced lunch) and items assessing access to technology and internet availability. For Sample 1, all the questions were presented in both English and Spanish. For Sample 2, the questions were presented only in English.

Results

Familiarity with SEL Terms

We first examined family member familiarity with terms related to SEL. A series of questions asked, "How familiar are you with the term" and then included one of 11 terms. We report effect sizes as Hedges' *g* values, which can be interpreted in the same manner as the Cohen's *d* metric, but the computation applies a correction for small sample sizes. Cohen's (1992) effect-size interpretation guidelines state that for standardized mean differences, an effect of .20 can be considered small, an effect of .50 can be considered medium, and an effect of .80 can be considered large. We also report the 95% confidence intervals for each effect. When the confidence interval includes zero, there is no statistically significant difference.

As stated above, one goal in the current study was to examine the extent to which responses varied between the two samples of participants. We found that responses differed between the two samples on most of the questions asking about familiarity. As such, Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and the magnitude of the difference between participants from the two samples.

Family members were somewhat familiar with terms related to SEL (a maximum value of 4 indicated a response of *very familiar*, with 3 indicating *familiar* and 2 indicating *somewhat familiar*). Additionally, participants from Sample 1 reported lower familiarity with several terms compared to those from Sample 2. When all 11 terms were combined, average familiarity was also lower for Sample 1 than Sample 2: t(564) = -7.69, p < .001, g = -0.93, CI = -1.17, -0.68. Further, some variability was observed in familiarity across terms. Family members from both samples tended to be less familiar with the terms *trauma-informed practices* and *culturally affirming practices* than the other terms.

	Sample 1 M	Sample 1 SD	Sample 2 M	Sample 2 SD	Standardized mean difference (<i>g</i>)
Social and emotional skills	2.44	.88	3.21	.82	-0.93 (-1.17, -0.69)
Social and emotional learning	2.34	.76	2.58	1.0	25 (-0.49, -0.01)
Growth mindset	2.28	.75	2.85	.96	61 (-0.085, -0.37)
Mindfulness	2.39	.83	3.21	.80	-1.02 (-1.27, -0.78)
Optimism	2.78	.80	3.45	.72	−.92 (−1.16, −0.68)
Cooperation	2.86	.74	3.58	.62	−1.12 (−1.37, −0.88)
Stress management	2.65	.78	3.41	.75	-1.00 (-1.25, -0.76)
School climate	2.34	.94	3.08	.89	83 (-1.07, -0.59)
Whole child approach	2.33	.85	2.39	1.11	06 (-0.29, 0.18)
Trauma-informed practices	1.80	.85	2.07	1.08	26 (-0.49, -0.02)
Culturally-affirming practices	1.74	.82	2.28	1.06	52 (-0.76, -0.29)
Average familiarity across 11 terms	2.36	.61	2.92	.61	−.93 (−1.17, −0.68)

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Standardized Mean Differences for Familiarity

 Ratings

Note. N = 80 for Region One sample (Sample 1) and N = 486 for sample outside of Region One (Sample 2). Effects are reported in the direction of the Region One group. Response scale: 1 = *not familiar* and 4 = *very familiar*.

Social and Emotional Skills for Self and Student

Next, we were interested in responses to the items assessing the perceived importance of developing each of six SE skills. These skills come from ACT's Behavioral Skills Framework, which is a part of the Holistic Framework (Camara, O'Connor, Mattern, & Hanson, 2015). For the definition of each skill, see the box on the right. These items measured the extent to which family members agreed that developing each skill was important. None of these items differed significantly between the two samples. As such, we combined descriptive statistics across samples. Table 2 reports means, standard deviations, and the magnitude of the difference between the perceived importance of developing each skill for their students and that of developing each skill for themselves. Effects are reported in the direction of the rating for the

respondents themselves and include the 95% confidence interval.

Family members generally agreed that developing each skill was important (a maximum value of 4 indicated a response of *very important*). Additionally, family members generally agreed it was less important for themselves to develop each skill than for their students, although these differences were small. When all six skills were combined to create an average score for the individual and the student, rated importance was lower for the respondents themselves than for their students: t(546) = -2.11, p = .035, g =-0.06, CI = -0.12, -0.004.

Opinions on SEL Programming

We were also interested in family member opinions and beliefs regarding SEL. We examined opinions regarding who was most responsible for teaching SE skills, how to most effectively improve students' SE skills, whether SE skills could be assessed and taught, and whether funding should be dedicated to SEL. We were interested in these comparisons based on previous survey research indicating that parents thought that they had a primary role in teaching SE skills to their students and were concerned about assessing SE skills objectively.

How a student's actions demonstrate . . .

Acting Honestly: Personal values, adherence to ethical and moral standards of behavior, and humility

Getting Along With Others: Collaboration, empathy, helpfulness, trust, and trustworthiness

Keeping an Open Mind: Creativity, inquisitiveness, flexibility, open-mindedness, and embracing diversity

Maintaining Composure: Stress management, emotional regulation, a positive response to setbacks, and poise

Social Connection: Assertiveness, influence, optimism, and enthusiasm

Sustaining Effort: Diligence, effort, organization, self-control, and compliance with the rules

Responses were generally similar across Samples 1 and 2 except for two of the questions. Family members from Sample 1 agreed slightly less that it is the job of social institutions (for example, religious institutions) to teach SE skills (M = 3.63, SD = 1.24) than family members from Sample 2 (M = 3.98, SD = 1.17, t(536) = -2.41, p = .016, g = -0.30, CI = -0.53, -0.06). Additionally, family members from Sample 1 agreed slightly more that teaching parents and families about SE skills would lead to improved social and emotional skills in students (M = 5.32, SD = .81) than family members from Sample 2 (M = 5.06, SD = .95, t(536) = 2.27, p = .023, g = 0.28, CI = 0.04, 0.52). None of the remaining items differed significantly. As such, we combined descriptive statistics across the samples and report item-level descriptive statistics in Table 3.

For each item, family members tended to show some level of agreement with each statement (responses of 4 [somewhat agree], 5 [agree], and 6 [strongly agree] show agreement). The first three questions asked families who they perceived as most responsible for teaching SE skills. Consistent with prior work (Hubbard, 2019), family members reported strong agreement that teaching SE skills is the job of parents rather than teachers: t(537) = 16.03, p < .001, g = 0.83, CI = 0.72, 0.94. Additionally, family members reported strong agreement that it is the parents' job, rather than that of social institutions, to teach SE skills: t(537) = 20.03, p < .001, g = 1.05, CI = 0.94, 1.18. Further, family members reported strong agreement that it is the schools' job, rather than that of social institutions, to teach SE skills: t(537) = 6.32, p < .001, g = 0.26, CI = 0.18, 0.35.

ltem	Ratings for self <i>M</i>	Ratings for self SD	Ratings for student <i>M</i>	Ratings for student <i>SD</i>	Standardized mean difference (<i>g</i>)
Please indicate how important it is for YOU / YOUR STUDENT(S) to develop Acting Honestly	3.78	.52	3.80	.51	-0.04 (-0.11, 0.03)
Please indicate how important it is for YOU / YOUR STUDENT(S)to develop Getting Along With Others	3.65	.59	3.68	.58	-0.05 (-0.12, 0.02)
Please indicate how important it is for YOU/ YOUR STUDENT(S) to develop Keeping an Open Mind	3.61	.60	3.67	.59	-0.10 (-0.18, -0.03)
Please indicate how important it is for YOU / YOUR STUDENT(S)to develop Maintaining Composure	3.64	.59	3.69	.57	-0.09 (-0.16, -0.02)
Please indicate how important it is for YOU / YOUR STUDENT(S)to develop Social Connection	3.42	.69	3.51	.68	-0.13 (-0.20, -0.06)
Please indicate how important it is for YOU / YOUR STUDENT(S)to develop Sustaining Effort	3.66	.61	3.73	.55	-0.12 (-0.20, -0.04)
Average across all 6 SE Skills	3.63	.46	3.66	.48	06 (-0.12, -0.004)

Note. N = 547. Response scale: 1 = not *important* and 4 = very *important*. Effects are reported in the direction of the ratings for the respondents themselves.

The next three questions asked about ways to improve SE skills in students. Again, family members reported strong agreement that teaching SE skills to parents and families, rather than teaching them to educators (t(537) = 3.91, p < .001, g = 0.13, CI = 0.07, .19) or improving school climate (t(537) = 3.78, p < .001, g = 0.15, CI = 0.07, 0.22), would lead to improved SE skills in students. Agreement was similar for teaching educators versus improving school climate: t(537) = .59, p = .556, g = 0.02, CI = -0.04, 0.09.

The remaining questions asked about the feasibility of and funding for assessing and teaching SE skills. Family members reported strong agreement that it is more possible to teach SE skills than it is to assess them: t(537) = 3.23, p < .001, g = .024, CI = 0.16, 0.32. However, agreement was similar regarding whether districts should invest in interventions or assessments for SE skills: t(537) = 1.63, p = .105, g = 0.04, CI = -0.01, 0.10.

Concerns About School Closure

Given that this survey was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, we were interested in respondents' perceptions of the impact of school closures. To examine these perceptions, we asked family members how concerned they were that the school closures would negatively impact their students' academic preparation and SE skill development. The response options for

these question were scored as follows: 3 = a great deal, 2 = somewhat, and 1 = not at all. Responses were similar for Sample 1 and Sample 2 for both questions. As such, we combined responses across the samples. Family members from both samples were similarly concerned about the impact on academic preparation (M = 2.19, SD = .75) and the development of SE skills (M = 2.22, SD = .73, t(499) = 1.17, p = .244, g = -0.04, CI = -0.11, 0.03). In sum, all respondents—regardless of their geographic location—were concerned about the impact of school closures on their students.

Item	М	SD
It is the job of parents to teach social and emotional skills.	5.10	1.02
It is the job of the schools to teach social and emotional skills.	4.23	1.08
It is the job of social institutions (example: religious institutions) to teach social and emotional skills.	3.93	1.19
Teaching parents and families about social and emotional skills will lead to improved social and emotional skills in students.	5.10	.94
Teaching educators about social and emotional skills will lead to improved social and emotional skills in students.	4.98	.94
An improved school climate will lead to improved social and emotional skills in students.	4.96	.99
It is possible to assess social and emotional skills.	4.68	.94
It is possible to teach social and emotional skills.	4.90	.89
School districts should make financial investments in assessments of social and emotional skills.	4.42	1.23
School districts should make financial investments in interventions for social and emotional skills.	4.47	1.17

 Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Opinion Items Across Samples

Note. N = 538. Response scale: 1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree.

Implications and Conclusions

The current study had three main goals, and the first goal was to expand beyond prior work and examine familiarity with specific terms related to SEL. Overall, participants reported they were somewhat familiar or familiar with the terms examined. Additionally, reported familiarity for both samples was somewhat lower for *trauma-informed practices* and *culturally affirming practices* than for other terms. One plausible explanation for this pattern of findings is that terms that were given lower familiarity ratings have been introduced more recently than those that received higher familiarity ratings, such as *cooperation*. Future research can investigate this possibility directly.

The second goal of this study was to further expand on prior work by comparing family member perceptions of developing SE skills in themselves versus their students. Family members believed it was important for both themselves and their students to develop each of the SE skills examined. However, they thought it was slightly more important for their students to develop

these skills than for themselves. Nevertheless, they agreed that programming focused on teaching families about SE skills would in turn lead to improved skills in students. These results suggest that families generally see value in improving their own SE skills and think these improvements will translate to their students.

The third goal of this study was to examine family opinions and attitudes about SEL. Several results of the current survey align with previous research examining parent attitudes toward SEL. In particular, family members reported greater agreement with the statement that teaching SEL was the job of parents than with the statement that it was the job of schools. They also anticipated that SEL programming for families would lead to greater growth in their students' SE skills than would SEL programming for teachers. Nevertheless, average agreement was high for all questions related to teaching and developing SE skills. That is, family members generally agreed with statements saying that teaching SEL was the job of parents, the job of schools, and the job of social institutions. While families expressed concern that school closures could affect SE skill development, they also expressed a belief that SE skills could still be developed at home. As such, families may view parents, schools, and social institutions as all playing important roles in the development of their students' SE skills.

In addition to aligning with previous parent surveys, the current study also aligns with Region One educators' perceptions of how families perceive the importance of SEL (see **Brief 4** in this series). The study in question surveyed educators and administrators from Region One in South Texas regarding their perceptions of their schools' readiness for SEL implementation. Respondents were asked a variety of questions, including open-ended questions about what they needed to further SEL implementation. A top theme that emerged across these openended responses was the need to include and/or collaborate with parents and the broader school community. The results of the present study underscore the perceived importance of including parents in SEL implementation.

Although participants in the current study generally agreed it was possible to teach and assess SE skills, they rated the possibility of teaching these skills more highly than the possibility of assessing them. This finding aligns with past research showing that parents report concerns about objectively measuring SE skills (Hubbard, 2019). This concern points to the potential need to include SE assessment information in programming for parents, because measuring student SE skills is an essential component of monitoring and improving such skills. For an accessible overview of how SE skills are measured, please see this **blog post**.

In addition to these primary goals, we were interested in examining similarities and differences in the responses to these questions from family members from Region One and those outside of Region One. Region One is a unique community in South Texas along the United States-Mexico border. According to Region One ESC statistics, 96% of students are Hispanic, 85% are considered economically disadvantaged, and 38% English learners. Accordingly, most respondents in Sample 1 were Hispanic, and most had students who were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. In contrast, the parents from Sample 2 were geographically dispersed throughout the country and reported various races/ethnicities; in addition, less than a third had a student eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. As such, comparing the responses from Sample 1 families to the responses from Sample 2 families can have implications for equity and shed light on how to best serve families with similar demographics.

In general, we found many similarities in the responses from each sample. Family members across both samples agreed that it was important for both themselves and their students to

develop each SE skill examined. They were also similarly concerned about the impact of school closures on the development of SE skills and academics. Responses were also similar for many of the opinion and attitude questions, with two exceptions. For the statement that it is the job of social institutions to teach SE skills, the agreement was slightly lower for family members from Region One than for those from outside of Region One. For the statement that teaching parents and families about SE skills will improve SE skills in students, the agreement was slightly higher for family members from Region 1 than for those from outside Region One. Additionally, familiarity was rated lower by family members from Region One than by those from outside of Region One. This result suggests these families may have less background knowledge about SEL than families in Sample 2, and could benefit from additional programming on SEL.

Taken together, these results suggest families see value in SEL and think developing SE skills is important for themselves and their students. Providing SEL programming for families may help increase familiarity with important terminology. Families also play an important role in developing their students' SE skills, so programming that supports family SE skills may also lead to greater SE skill development for students. These results highlight the importance of including families in systematic approaches to SEL in order to create positive conditions for learning and SE skill development.

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About NewSchools Venture Fund

NewSchools Venture Fund is a nonprofit venture philanthropy that invests in promising teams of educators and entrepreneurs with the vision and skills to reimagine learning. We help them accomplish their missions to achieve outstanding results for the students, educators and schools they serve. We are committed to helping students finish high school prepared and inspired to achieve their most ambitious dreams and plans. Through our investing, management assistance, network building and thought leadership, NewSchools helps to reimagine PreK-12 education. For more information, visit www.newschools.org

About Region One Education Service Center

The Region One Education Service Center is part of a state-wide system of 20 regional education service centers created in 1965 by the 59th Texas Legislature to assist school districts across the state. Originally slated to work with school districts as a media center, the role of the education service center has expanded to work alongside school districts to carry out the three main objectives as stipulated in the TEC §8.002: to assist school districts in improving student performance in each region of the system; enable school districts to operate more efficiently and economically; and implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or commissioner. Located in South Texas on the United States/Mexico border, Region One ESC serves 38 school districts and 10 charter school systems in the eight county areas of Brooks County, Cameron County, Hidalgo County, Jim Hogg County, Starr County, Webb County, Willacy County, and Zapata County. For more information, visit www.esc1.net/domain/3