

Parents and Caregivers Support Social and Emotional Learning at Home and in Schools

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Social and emotional (SE) skills are interpersonal, self-regulatory, and task-related behaviors that are important for adaptation to and successful performance across all domains of life, including education and workplace settings (Casillas et al., 2015). Family engagement affects the development of these important skills (Brooks & Lambert, 2019). As such, parents and caregivers¹ are viewed as an integral part of social and emotional learning (SEL). For instance, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) includes families and caregivers as part of their model of SEL (2023).

Given the importance of family involvement, a growing number of studies have examined the perceptions of family members toward SEL. For example, studies have found that parents support teaching students SE skills in schools (Committee for Children, 2022; Daley et al., 2002; Horowitz, 2022; National PTA, 2022). Additionally, parents perceive SEL positively (Committee for Children, 2022; Murano et al., 2022) and think SE skills are important to develop (Daley et al., 2021). These positive perceptions suggest that caregivers are generally supportive of SEL.

To examine this support more directly, the current study surveyed caregivers of high school students. We focused on three main questions. First, do caregivers think SE skills are important? Second, in what contexts do caregivers support the teaching of SE skills? Third, do caregivers support schools' financial investment in SEL?

To address our questions, we surveyed a group of caregivers of students taking the ACT® test. We informed the caregivers that the survey pertained to student skills, was voluntary, and was not incentivized. The survey was sent to a random sample of 29,865 caregivers of ACT test takers from the July 16, 2022, national ACT test administration. Among the 891 caregivers who began the survey, 479 respondents completed at least one block of the survey, and 373 completed the entire survey. Of the respondents, 80.7% were female, 16.4% were male, and 2.9% preferred not to respond; 39.7% identified as White, 23.6% identified as Black/African American, 9.9% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 13.1% identified as Asian, 2.1% identified as two or more races, and 9.4% chose not to respond. The average age of caregivers was 47.64 years (standard deviation = 7.2). Caregivers were also asked to report their political affiliation, and 31.9% selected Democrat, 14.5% selected Republican, 18.8% selected independent, and 34.9% preferred not to respond. Partial responses were included in the analyses below.

¹ From this point forward, we use the term caregivers to refer to any individuals responsible for students' care, including parents, other family members, and guardians.

Caregiver Perceptions About Importance of Social and Emotional Skills

Previous surveys with parents and caregivers indicate high levels of support for SE skills (Daley et al., 2021; Murano et al., 2022). However, in these cases, caregivers responded to skill names (e.g., Maintaining Composure) and definitions. In contrast, the current study asked caregivers to rate the importance of short descriptions of behaviors associated with SE skills (e.g., interacting well with peers). Specifically, they were asked to rate how important they thought each behavior was for student success at school on a 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important) scale. Table 1 shows the percentage of caregivers who rated each description as at least somewhat important to student success (i.e., moderately important, very important, extremely important). Consistent with previous findings, at least 97% of caregivers rated each of these behaviors as important. These results conceptually replicate previous findings, providing converging evidence of caregiver perceptions of the importance of SE skills.

Table 1. Percentage of Caregivers who Rated Behaviors Associated with Social and Emotional Skills as Important

Behavior: <i>My child's ability to...</i>	Social and Emotional Skill Associated With the Behavior	Percentage Who Said the Behavior Is Important
Manage their emotions appropriately	Maintaining Composure	99%
Interact well with their peers	Getting Along With Others	99%
Set goals and plan	Sustaining Effort	100%
Be open to people from different cultures	Keeping an Open Mind	97%
Generate new ideas and solve problems	Keeping an Open Mind	99%
Participate in social settings	Social Connection	98%

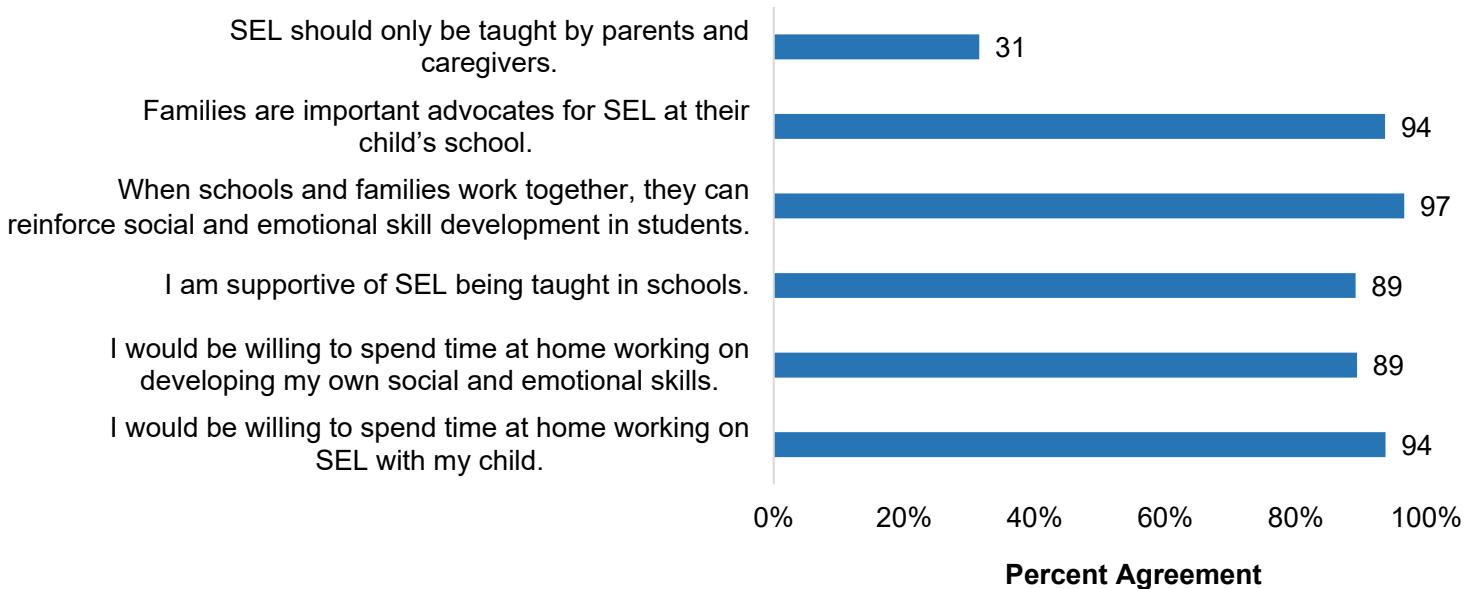
Note. The table shows the percentage of caregivers who indicated each behavior as moderately important, very important, or extremely important.

Caregiver Perceptions About Appropriate Contexts in Which to Teach Social and Emotional Skills

Next, we asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement on a six-point scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) with statements describing various contexts in which SE skills can be taught to encourage skill development (e.g., at home or at school). Specifically, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with eight statements on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) scale. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who reported some level of agreement (i.e., somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) with each statement. As this figure shows, most caregivers are willing to spend time at home working on SEL with their child and to develop their own SE skills. Most caregivers are also supportive of schools teaching SEL and school/family partnerships to teach SEL. Additionally, caregivers view families as playing an important role in SEL. In sharp contrast to how other statements were rated, most caregivers **disagree** that SEL should only be taught by parents and families. Taken

together, these results indicate that caregivers generally support developing students' SE skills at home and in schools. These results are also consistent with the growing emphasis on school-family partnerships in developing student SE skills in the field of SEL (Albright et al., 2011; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007).

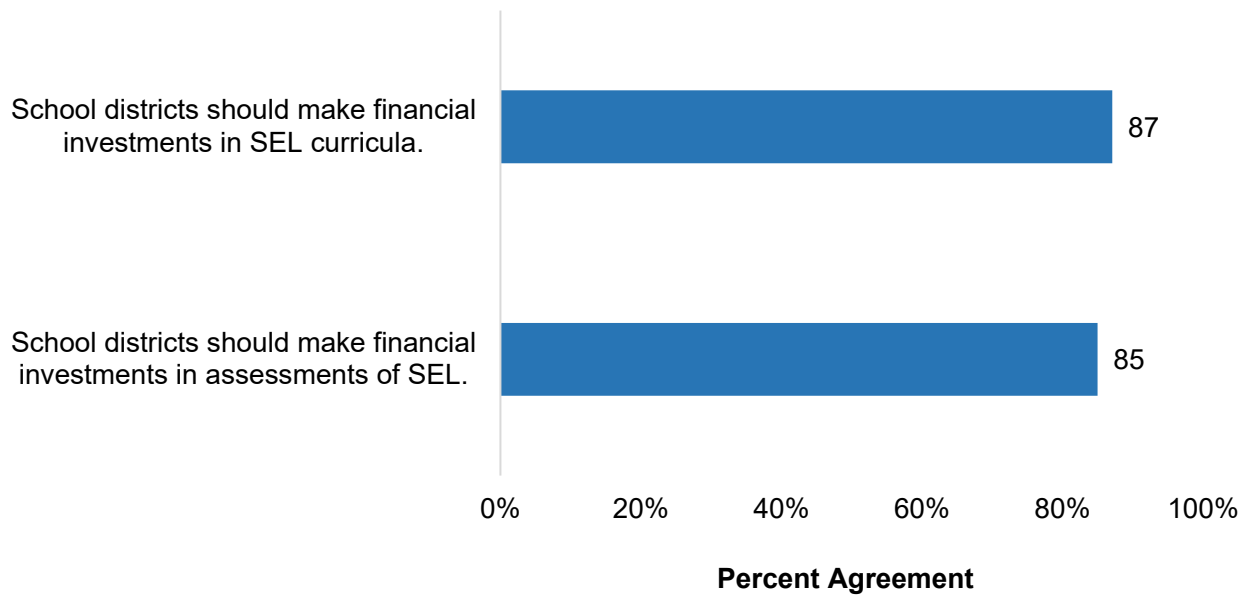
Figure 1. Caregiver Support for Various Contexts for Teaching Social and Emotional Skills



Note. The figure shows the percentage of individuals who indicated they somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with each statement.

Caregiver Support for Schools' Financial Investment in Social and Emotional Learning

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (on the same six-point scale as above) with statements about schools financially investing in SEL. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who reported some level of agreement (i.e., somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) with financial investments in SEL assessments and curricula. At least 85% of caregivers are supportive of their school districts making a financial investment in SEL, consistent with prior research (Daley et al., 2021).

Figure 2. Caregiver Agreement With a Financial Investment in Social and Emotional Learning

Note. The figure shows the percentage of individuals who indicated they somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with each item.

Findings from the current study converge with previous surveys showing positive perceptions of caregivers towards SEL. Replicating past research, caregivers rated descriptions of behaviors associated with SE skills as important. In addition, the current study adds to previous research by showing caregivers are most supportive of a collaborative approach that involves both families and schools in developing children's SE skills. Further, caregivers support a financial investment in SEL by school districts. However, caregivers who responded to the survey likely differed in several ways from those who did not complete the survey. As such, caution is warranted when generalizing from these results to all caregivers of ACT test takers.

Taken together, these results show that caregivers are invested in being a part of developing their child's SE skills in collaboration with schools. Further research is needed to understand the specifics of how caregivers envision this partnership with schools. In particular, it is important to learn what skills caregivers feel comfortable teaching their children and what types of resources and supports they want from schools and other external sources (e.g., community-based organizations). This research can help support effective school-family partnerships to develop student SE skills.

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