

## Social Emotional Learning: Key to Career Readiness

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This manuscript is a literature review that addresses the significance of social emotional learning in regard to promoting career readiness by addressing the key components, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills that are critical to possess in order to be successful in the workforce. Social emotional learning (SEL) is the process by which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set strength-based goals demonstrate empathy, establish positive relationships, and make healthy choices. Social emotional learning is vital for career success, as it emphasizes the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that people need in order to be productive and efficient in their work setting including leadership, celebrating diversity, effective communication skills, accountability, assertiveness, conflict resolution, time and stress management, as well as motivation. This manuscript addresses the five SEL core competencies, the definition and importance of SEL, SEL learning standards, the SEL intrapersonal and interpersonal skills necessary for career success, guiding principles of SEL, as well as the significance of possessing soft skills in order to augment performance and foster success in the workplace.

Keywords: social and emotional learning, guiding principles, career readiness, career success, intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills

### INTRODUCTION

Social emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the process by which children and adults regulate emotions, set goals, demonstrate empathy, build healthy relationships, and make constructive choices (CASEL, 2019). Beyond the academics, students worldwide need to possess specific social emotional learning skills; both intrapersonal and interpersonal, in order to achieve success in their post-secondary endeavors. In today's global society, businesses are demanding higher intuition and responsiveness from their employees. Today many work settings require collaboration and relationship building not only within the office, but nation and worldwide (Committee for Children, 2018). The more one is able to build healthier relationships, possess cultural awareness, and are able to collaborate effectively are significantly more profitable (Committee for Children, 2018). Research has substantiated that students who possess critical social emotional learning skills experienced an increase of 11% point gain in academic achievement (CASEL, 2019). Students also experience a decrease in dropout rates, reduced classroom behavioral issues, teen pregnancy, mental health struggles, as well as delinquent behavior in that those who possess prosocial skills are more resilient, capable to overcome adversity, and persevere until they achieve their goals (CASEL, 2019). According to CASEL (2019), those students and employees who possess a high degree of self-awareness (are aware of impact on others), self-management (ability to regulate emotions and decrease impulsivity),

Further, social emotional learning has shown to promote a strong return on investment in that for every dollar invested there is a fiscal return of 11 dollars, therefore, the more money invested into social emotional learning will lead to an increased and more competitive economy and more financial

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success worldwide (CASEL, 2019). In order to transform our K-12 school systems to ensure that all students are learning, practicing, and mastering social emotional learning skills, we need to focus on reaching all students and promote equity and equality for all. Social emotional learning factors focus on education, employment, relationship building, collaboration, creating culturally responsive climates, providing students with leadership roles, as well as giving them the ability to problem solve in a proactive manner. Through integrating evidence based SEL practices and policies, implementing state SEL standards from PK-12, and developing SEL centers of excellence, P-12 students nationwide will be able to reap the benefits and enter the workforce feeling prepared and competent to make positive contributions.

### **SEL CORE COMPETENCIES**

According to research, those who possess highly developed social emotional skills experienced enhanced social interactions, increased ability to resolve conflict, and demonstrate greater concentration towards accomplishing tasks (Committee for Children, 2018). Thus, students who master these skills in school are more prepared for and successful in their respective jobs upon graduation. There are five core competencies that play a pivotal role in social emotional learning. In order for students and employees to experience school and workplace readiness and success, it is crucial for them to develop the following competencies:

#### **Self-Awareness**

Assessing one's feelings and behavior and recognizing the impact one has on others. A critical component of self-awareness is being able to identify emotions, as well as the triggers of them (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Self-awareness also involves assessing strengths and areas for growth and how each are interrelated (Weissberg, 2016).

#### **Self-Management**

Being able to control one's emotions, handle stress, and control impulses in order to delay gratification (Weissberg, 2016). Self-management enables others to persevere, overcome challenges, and manage emotions effectively (Gullone, Hughes, King, & Tone, 2010).

#### **Social Awareness**

Being able to see a myriad of perspectives and being able to empathize with those who may have similar or different viewpoints. This includes the ability to understand, empathize with, and show compassion for those who have differing beliefs (Weissberg, 2016).

#### **Relationship Skills**

Includes building cooperative relationships, creating connections, working through conflict, listening, negotiating, problem solving, communicating, and seeking help when needed (Weissberg, 2016).

#### **Responsible Decision Making**

Making healthy choices based upon ethical standards, morals, respect for others, as well as consequences of actions. These skills teach others about making healthy choices and weighing out advantages and disadvantages of actions (Weissberg, 2016).

### **FRAMEWORK FOR SEL**

The four predominant areas that comprise SEL are skills, context, development, and outcomes (Jones, Brush, Bailey, Brion-Meisels, McIntyre, Nelson, & Stickle (2017). There are three domains that SEL skills can be divided into including cognitive regulation (attention control / cognitive flexibility), emotional processes (emotional knowledge and regulation), and social / interpersonal skills (conflict

resolution and pro-social behaviors) (Jones et al., 2017). Research has substantiated that these domains are related to academic achievement in regard to grades, behavioral adjustment in terms of problem solving, as well as emotional well-being (Jones et al., 2017). SEL skills act as building blocks and help students build a strong foundation and core so that they can master abstract skills later on in life. Additionally, some skills are stage-salient in that they allow children to meet the expectations of a particular developmental setting (Jones et al., 2017). For instance, children early on need to develop cognitive regulation skills so as they grow, they possess the ability to cope with and figure out more complex and abstract problems independently, as this helps to foster accountability, empowerment, and leadership.

### **CORE SEL SKILLS**

There are various SEL skills that children and teenagers need to possess in order to be career ready post-secondary graduation. Some of the primary skills include cognitive regulation, emotional processes, and social / interpersonal skill (Jones et al, 2017). Each will be addressed in greater detail below.

#### **Cognitive Regulation**

This is a basic cognitive skill required to direct behavior towards goal achievement. It enables children to prioritize and sequence behavior. Cognitive regulation also allows students to engage in appropriate behavior such as raising a hand rather than shouting out. Cognitive regulation also allows children to make healthy decisions, problem solve, make conscious choices, which at times may override desires (Diamond & Lee, 2011). Cognitive regulation encompasses attention control, memory, and cognitive flexibility, which are all critical for career readiness (Jones et al., 2017) in that it prepares students to maintain focus, retain information, as well enables them to see issues from a myriad of perspectives.

#### **Emotional Processes**

Emotional regulation skills help children recognize, identify, express, and control their emotions, as well as help students become more mindful of others' feelings (Jones et al., 2017). Possessing emotion regulation skills enables students to increase their self-control, ability to reflect, as well as decreases impulsivity. These skills allow people to enhance their self-awareness, emotion identification, as well as promotes greater pro-social behavior such as friendship building, problem solving, perspective taking, and impulse control. Problem solving and impulse control are vital for career readiness, as these skills allow people to problem solve in a healthy and constructive manner, as well as empowers people to think before acting, as every action has a consequence. Children need to enhance their emotion regulation skills in order to be career ready so that they can be thoughtful, intentional, structured, and pragmatic; ultimately enhancing their efficiency and productivity in the work setting (Jones et al., 2017).

#### **Social and Interpersonal Skills**

These skills allow children to engage in perspective taking, enhance communication ability, and interact more positively with peers and colleagues. Social and interpersonal skills are imperative for collaboration, teamwork, consulting, resolving problems, and being able to work effectively with others who may have different mindsets or work styles and to still get the job done well. Problem solving and prosocial skills are critical to possess, as they enable people to negotiate problems and solve them in a collaborative manner, as well as allow others to interact and communicate with others in a respectful, open, and flexible manner in which everyone is heard and validated (Jones et al., 2017). Further, there are a variety of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that play an integral role in career success.

**INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS**

Intrapersonal skills are skills that occur within one's own mind and allows them to identify strengths, and weaknesses, as well as to foster growth and self-awareness. According to CASEL (2019), there are several intrapersonal skills that are significant for career readiness that will be addressed below.

**Adaptability**

The ability to demonstrate flexibility in a given situation and to change at a moment's notice, while remaining grounded and in control (CASEL, 2019).

**Self-Regulation**

The ability to control impulses, to be grounded, to maintain focus, and to think before acting, as well as to resist impulsivity. Self-regulation allows others to be proactive rather than reactive and consistently maintain control over behaviors (CASEL, 2019).

**Growth Mindset**

Emphasizes that skills are not fixed and can be enhanced via practice. There is a strong correlation between children's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Having a positive growth mindset encourages children to persevere, demonstrate resilience, and enhance motivation; knowing that via practice and exposure their skills will naturally improve. Having a growth mindset allows for identifying and building upon positive attributes in oneself and others and overcoming challenging situations with optimism (Jones et al., 2017).

**Optimism**

Seeing things through a positive lens, being able to reframe negative situations into positive ones, and maintaining a sense of hope and promise for the future (Umoh, 2017). Optimism includes having an expectancy that you can do certain things. Those who are more optimistic put more effort into being the best that they can be (Umoh, 2017).

**Leadership**

Being able to delegate tasks, motivate, inspire, and empower others, as well as to act as a visionary and be able to visualize and set future goals (CASEL, 2019).

**Time and Stress Management**

Having the ability to manage time in order to reduce stress and feelings of being overwhelmed. Working to enhance efficiency and productivity in a time sensitive manner (CASEL, 2019).

**Creativity**

Being innovative and being able to think outside of the box in order to resolve problems and create ideas and solutions in a unique manner (CASEL, 2019).

**Resilience**

Being able to overcome adversity, persevere, and not allow challenges or problems to define who we are or prevent people from reaching their fullest potential. Resilience is critical for career success, as it promotes motivation, encouragement, follow through, and tenacity (CASEL, 2019).

**Character**

Represents a set of skills and values that enables kids to demonstrate citizenship, respect, and responsibility (Jones et al., 2017). Character dictates how we think, feel, and act. It emphasizes being

conscientious, working to one's potential, diligence, and self-control (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Having sound character promotes ethical and moral behavior, as well as fosters perseverance and goal achievement.

### **INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

Interpersonal skills are those skills that allow us to interact with others effectively. There are several interpersonal skills relevant to career readiness, which will be addressed in more detail below.

#### **Communication and Active Listening**

Communication involves talking to, expressing feelings and ideas, being receptive to others' ideologies, as well as validating and substantiating what others are saying. We communicate non-verbally 80% of the time, so our verbal statements and non-verbal cues need to be congruent in order to express our message impactfully. It is imperative to possess active listening skills in order to hear, reflect, and understand our own and others' perspectives and viewpoints (Janowiak, 2015).

#### **Conscientiousness**

Being conscientious is an important skill for career readiness, as it reflects diligence, work ethic, and working intentionally to get a job done effectively and efficiently (CASEL, 2019).

#### **Accountability**

Accountability involves taking ownership and responsibility for behaviors rather than deflecting and blaming others for one's choices. Accountability also promotes reflective practice in that one takes responsibility for one's strengths, as well as areas of improvement and takes necessary steps to make improvements (CASEL, 2019).

#### **Problem Solving / Conflict Resolution**

Problem solving and conflict resolution entails working collaboratively with others to brainstorm, identify, and determine solutions in order to achieve a win-win outcome. Problem solving is essential for career readiness and success in that problems arise and people need to possess skills that allow them to resolve issues in a peaceful and cooperative manner (Janowiak, 2015).

#### **Empathy**

Taking on another's feelings and being able to feel the emotions they are experiencing. Empathy goes deeper than compassion, which includes sharing a feeling, sorrow, or concern for another. Empathy is putting oneself in another's shoes and feeling the emotion as if it was one's own. Teaching empathy is critical for career success, as it has shown to enhance productivity, innovation, collaboration, and problem solving (Brower, 2019). Empathy allows those to understand the needs of the people around them, helps to raise one's awareness on how their behavior impacts others, improves understanding of non-verbal cues, as well as has shown to augment leadership and conflict resolution. (Janowiak, 2015).

#### **Motivation**

Entails helping to inspire others to identify and build upon strengths in order to achieve goals and promote efficiency. (Committee for Children, 2019).

### **SEL LEARNING STANDARDS**

In relation to standards set for core academic subjects, social emotional learning standards act as a blueprint for instruction and work to highlight goals and benchmarks for each student, as well as outline what they should know and be able to accomplish. Learning standards act as learning goals and

competencies that students can work towards achieving in order to reach their fullest potential (CASEL, 2019). By setting learning standards, stakeholders can strategically create a climate that promotes SEL and the critical intrapersonal and interpersonal skills students need to be successful. According to Jones et al., (2017), effective SEL programs and learning standards reflect the acronym SAFE including sequenced activities that lead to formulating skills, active forms of learning that are experiential in nature, focus on enhancing social and emotional skills, as well as possessing a targeted set of specific skills that promote career readiness.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

According to Peart (2019), social emotional learning is vital for career success. Employees who are willing and motivated to learn, demonstrate resilience and agility (flexibility), are able to collaborate, communicate verbally and in written form effectively, demonstrate empathy, are creative, possess leadership skills, problem solve and negotiate effectively, and are technologically driven experience greater performance in the workplace (Peart, 2019). In order for employees to reach their fullest potential employees need to be able to manage their negative emotions and view a situation in various ways, practice mindfulness in order to stay in the present, be cognizant of communication styles and verbiage used, demonstrate empathy and experience another's feelings, identify one's stressors, and display resilience; overcoming adversity and becoming stronger as a result of working through challenges (Stahl, 2018). In order to promote a positive school climate and integrate initiatives to help students maximize their academic prowess and gain momentum towards growth, SEL guiding principles need to be integrated to promote student success. The first principle focuses on creating. Stakeholders are encouraged to create an inclusive, rigorous, and safe climate for students to share, exchange ideas, make mistakes, collaborate, problem solve, learn, and grow. The second principle focuses on integrating; incorporating SEL skills into instruction whenever possible. Giving students leadership roles, opportunities to collaborate, problem solve, communicate, motivate, manage stress, regulate emotions, resolve conflict, demonstrate optimism, and perspective taking is paramount for student success. The third principle involves communicating. Students need to learn how to actively listen, respond appropriately, validate, demonstrate understanding, and express themselves in an open and appropriate manner. The fourth principle highlights instruction; in order for students to grasp the concepts they need to be instructed as to how to apply concepts learned in a concrete manner. Counselors and educators need to set expectations, model ideal behavior, provide opportunities for students to practice skills learned via role play, dyad work, or small group experiences, as well as encourage students to engage in reflective practice and identifying strengths and weaknesses, as well as what could be done differently in the future in order to elicit more positive outcomes. Providing students with teachable moments is critical for student success; asking them what they learned and how they have become more informed and aware is imminent in order to promote growth. The fifth principle addresses empowerment. Students need to feel in control, empowered, and inspired to work towards self-actualization, build upon their existing skills, and make necessary improvements in order to enhance feelings of competence, ability, and become the best version of themselves in school, as well as when they enter into the competitive and dynamic workforce.

### **EFFECTIVE SEL PROGRAMS**

There are a myriad of SEL programs that can be incorporated into the school setting in order to promote career readiness and success. In order to maximize effectiveness, these programs occur within supportive contexts, build upon adult competencies (problem solving, leadership, accountability), focus on building partnerships with families and the outside community via sending home newsletters, having workshops for parents, providing resources, having community career nights and opportunities for collaboration; including internships and externships, target and focus on promoting prosocial behaviors and skills, set goals, as well as incorporate SAFE elements (Jones et al.,

2017). There are several evidenced based SEL programs that can be implemented in the school setting in order to foster SEL skills early on. The sooner students can build upon and enhance their skills; the more successful they will be later on in life. Several of these programs will be addressed below.

#### **The 4 R's Program**

This program is P-5 grade specific and focuses on reading, writing, respect, and resolution. It integrates SEL and language arts via children's literature. There are 35 lessons and 7 units. One lesson should be delivered per week by the teacher or school counselor. The books help students understand their own culture, as well as teaches them about other cultures and mindsets in order to foster enlightenment, celebrate diversity, and build relationship skills. Schools that have implemented this program have shown gains in social competence, reading and math scores, a reduction in aggression, bias, depressive symptoms and an improvement in classroom climate in regard to enhanced student attention, comfort, engagement, and conceptualization of ideas being addressed (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010).

#### **Caring School Community (CSC)**

This is a program geared towards K-6<sup>th</sup> grade that focuses on building classroom and school community, while reinforcing SEL skills. CSC is a school wide program that focuses on class meetings, having buddies, home activities, as well as schoolwide community building activities. The program has 35 lessons that focus on class goals, building social skills, problem solving, and decision making. There are class meetings that allow students to complete activities related to the theme being addressed, as well as a buddy program that works to foster relationships between students of various ages, activities to promote parent and family engagement, as well as schoolwide activities that focus on inclusivity and responsibility amongst students. The program emphasizes interpersonal skills, cognitive regulation, emotional processes, interpersonal skills, and character (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2019).

#### **Character First**

This is a K-12 program that emphasizes character education and emphasizes positive social values and character that are imperative to citizenship, building social skills, communication, and collaboration. There are 20-character traits and separate lessons for each grade level. Typically, there is one trait that is focused on per month including attentiveness, courage, determination, diligence, enthusiasm, flexibility, honesty, patience, respect, responsibility, and self-control. The focus of the program is on cognitive regulation, emotional processes, interpersonal skills, character building, and growth mindset (Jones et al., 2017).

#### **Lions Quest**

Is a P-12 program that focuses on social emotional learning, character education, bullying prevention, and anti-substance usage in order to promote student success. The program's P-5 Lions Quest Skills for Growing has 36 lessons across 6 units. As the students go up in grade level lesson concepts and activities become more comprehensive and require enhanced critical thinking in regard to cooperation, caring, and concern for others. Each lesson is approximately 30 minutes over a span of 36 weeks. The areas of focus are on self-discipline, responsibility, good judgement, and respect for all. The program integrates cognitive regulation, emotional processes, interpersonal skills, character, and mindset. There have shown to be gains in self-efficacy, self-assertion, self-confidence, reduction in substance usage, and less bullying incidences reported (Drolet, Arcand, Ducharme, & Leblanc, 2013).

## **DISCUSSION**

There is a substantial amount of research that has demonstrated the profound impact social emotional learning intrapersonal and interpersonal skills have on both academic and workplace success. Social and emotional learning is a comprehensive framework that emphasizes the imperative social and emotional skills necessary for all people to be academically, socially / emotionally, and vocationally successful. (CASEL, 2019). According to the Committee of Children (2019) and CASEL (2019) those who are knowledgeable and able to build trusting relationships, able to regulate emotions, possess empathy, are able to collaborate and communicate effectively, demonstrate an uncanny ability to manage time and stress, possess an ability to listen actively, resolve conflict proactively, as well as appreciate diversity experience enhanced grades, as well as increased job performance and satisfaction in the workplace. Social emotional learning supports the pillars of academic achievement, accountability and career success by teaching people about goal setting, communication skills, teamwork, problem solving, as well as empathy and relatability, which are critical in order to foster open and healthy relationships in school and in the workplace. Relationships and relationship building are fundamental aspects of social emotional learning, as they enable us to amplify our collaborative skills, as well as teamwork which are integral to school and workplace success. In today's globally competitive society, we are rarely working in isolation and instead are working in conjunction with others to complete tasks masterfully. Companies that are most successful have employees who possess a high degree of emotional intelligence in that they are able to understand, connect to, communicate with, possess insight and intuition, and have a willingness to work to their fullest potential in order to get a job done well (Committee for Children, 2019). Therefore, it is paramount for PK-12 schools to integrate social emotional learning into their curricula. Counselors are strongly encouraged to work with teachers on addressing social emotional learning skills in their lesson plans, to use small group work in order to enhance collaboration and communication, as well as to facilitate individual, small group, and classroom counseling sessions addressing SEL skills (time and stress management, emotion regulation, anger management, conflict resolution, communication, diversity, collaboration, accountability, and leadership) so that students have exposure to these skills that elicit career readiness and success. In order to prepare our students to become transformational employees, it is essential to provide them with opportunities to enhance their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, as well as to create a school climate that is inclusive, engaging, celebratory, culturally responsive, peaceful, and provide students with opportunities to take on leadership roles, resolve conflict, demonstrate accountability, promote optimism, and foster empowerment so that all students possess the fundamental skills to be successful academically and professionally.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social emotional learning epitomizes and encompasses the fundamental skills students need to possess in order to excel academically, behaviorally, socially, emotionally, and professionally. There has been substantial research conducted on the efficacy of SEL and the research has continuously substantiated the positive impact SEL has on student academic, personal, social, familial, and career outcomes. As a result of the positive impact SEL has on student performance, parents and schools nationwide are encouraged to integrate SEL practices and programs into their curricula in order to teach, reiterate, and reinforce the critical intrapersonal and interpersonal students need to possess in order to be successful in school and in life. Students who experience feelings of empowerment, are able to assert themselves, communicate effectively, demonstrate accountability, engage in reflective practice, manage time and stress, display leadership abilities, possess optimism, zest, charisma, and resilience are better equipped to problem solve, deal with challenges, cope, overcome adversity, collaborate, demonstrate compassion and empathy, and learn from mistakes; further perpetuating growth, awareness, and efficiency. as parents, educators, leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents it is imperative that



we enlighten and teach students about the importance of social emotional learning, as well as provide students with ample opportunities to practice and apply skills obtained in order to help them amplify, augment, and maximize their self-worth, self-concept, competency, abilities, and self-fulfilling prophecy; if you believe you can achieve anything you set your mind to in school and in life.

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