Evidence, Policy, and Funding School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions

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Disclaimer

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Today’s presentation covers the following topics:

1. Background
2. SEL & ESSA
3. Evidence Review
4. Choosing Interventions
5. Measuring SEL
6. Summary
Key challenge: defining “social and emotional”

- Self-efficacy
- Self-awareness
- Grit
- Teamwork
- Growth mindset
- Emotion recognition
- Communication
- Responsible decision making
- Impulse control
- Resilience
- Relationship skills
- Self-management
We use the National Research Council (2012) framework

Grounded in research and not tied to a specific context

Includes two broad categories of competencies related to SEL

Intrapersonal
How students apply themselves in school and in other settings

Interpersonal
How students relate to other people

Wide range of competencies important to educators and researchers
Why should schools promote social and emotional competencies?

- These competencies are *malleable*
- These competencies predict later outcomes, *including* behavioral health outcomes
- Opportunities to develop these competencies are *inequitably distributed*
We assessed SEL popularity via the AEP

The American Educator Panels (AEP) consists of teachers and principals across the United States who have agreed to respond to periodic surveys on education issues.

- 2-4 online surveys per year
- Honorarium for each survey based on length
- Results by survey or over time
- Weighted to provide national estimates

Background
SEL & ESSA
Evidence Review
Choosing Interventions
Measuring SEL
Summary
Support for SEL is widespread, and most educators believe SEL can promote other outcomes.

- 7 in 10 principals nationally indicated that promotion of students’ SEL skills was a top priority.
- Teachers were more likely than principals to rate development of SEL skills as important.
- Most teachers and principals believe SEL will improve academic achievement, behavior, engagement, and climate.
- Large majorities of teachers and principals indicate that their schools measure SEL, but measurement strategies focus on school environment rather than student competencies.
Educators Used a Variety of SEL Strategies, from Classroom Activities to Community Outreach

Principal and Teacher Reports of SEL Practices, Programs, and Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Principals or Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrate SEL into curriculum and school activities**</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement SEL programs**</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use schoolwide behavior management programs**</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model appropriate behaviors**</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use restorative practices**</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
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Social and Emotional Learning and the Every Student Succeeds Act

1. Background
2. SEL & ESSA
3. Evidence Review
4. Choosing Interventions
5. Measuring SEL
6. Summary
ESSA requires the use of evidence-based interventions in schools

ESSA establishes the minimum level of evidence required for funding streams

Fall 2016 nonregulatory guidance provided additional details but is nonbinding

Evidence can relate to a wide range of student and school outcomes
ESSA addresses SEL in several ways

- Mandates performance indicators other than achievement in academic subject areas (i.e., Indicator of School Quality)
- Calls for a “well-rounded” program of instruction
- Allows Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to identify and implement strategies intended to strengthen academic programs and improve school conditions for student learning
- Includes regulations that support programs to improve skills outside the academic subject areas
ESSA does not explicitly reference SEL but provides opportunities

At least three ESSA funding streams can be leveraged to support SEL

- **Title I**: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged
- **Title II**: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders
- **Title IV**: 21st Century Schools
ESSA identifies four tiers of evidence

Tier I (strong)
At least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study (RCT)

Tier II (moderate)
At least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental design (QED)

Tier III (promising)
At least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study controlling for selection bias

Tier IV
High-quality research suggesting activity is likely to improve student or other relevant outcomes (and ongoing evaluation)
Non-regulatory guidance provides additional details on evidence

- Tier I (strong): Meets WWC standards without reservations or be of similar quality
- Tier II (moderate): Meets WWC standards with reservation or be of similar quality
- Tier III (promising): Sampling and/or analytic methods to reduce or account for differences between the intervention and comparison groups
- Additional guidance: Large sample size (350+ students) and/or multi-site study (2+ locales); can combine multiple studies to meet sampling guidance
States and districts will benefit from clear guidance on SEL under ESSA

Growing interest in SEL has led to proliferation of interventions
- Many are shared via newsletters, blogs
- Most descriptions of interventions lack clear information about evidence

Educators need to know which interventions have evidence
Evidence is required to access federal funds through ESSA
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Review

1. Background
2. SEL & ESSA
3. Evidence Review
4. Choosing Interventions
5. Measuring SEL
6. Summary
Report provides guidance for SEL interventions under ESSA

Describes how ESSA addresses SEL

Identifies SEL interventions that meet ESSA evidence requirements

Discusses implications for educators’ and policymakers’ efforts to develop, select, and evaluate interventions
We asked two key questions to guide our approach

1. What SEL interventions have recently been evaluated in U.S.-based, K–12 public schools?

2. What SEL interventions have yielded evidence meeting ESSA Tiers I–III?
Identifying ESSA-eligible studies

Developed extensive string criteria to guide literary search, based on the NRC skills framework.

Conducted targeted search for branded SEL interventions identified through previous literature and correspondence with experts in the area.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>K-12 students at U.S. public schools</th>
<th>Universal interventions provided directly to students</th>
<th>ESSA Tiers I-III</th>
<th>Outcomes meeting What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards</th>
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**Background**

**SEL & ESSA**

**Evidence Review**

**Choosing Interventions**

**Measuring SEL**

**Summary**
Eligible studies addressed at least one of several outcomes:

**Intrapersonal competencies**
- Attention, concentration, emotional regulation, on-task behaviors, perseverance, self-efficacy

**Interpersonal competencies**
- Communication, hostile attribution bias, prosocial behaviors, social information processing/problem-solving

**Academic achievement**
- Standardized assessments on mathematics, reading, writing, and vocabulary

**Academic attainment**
- Attendance, completion of core courses, and graduation rates

**Disciplinary outcomes**
- Disciplinary code violations, disciplinary referrals, and suspensions

**Civic attitudes/behaviors**
- Beliefs in a moral order, interest in other countries and current events, tolerance of and empathy for others

**School climate/safety**
- Classroom supportiveness, exclusion, safety, student-teacher relationships, witnessing/perpetrating bullying
We used the non-regulatory guidance to categorize interventions

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<th>Tier</th>
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| • RCT meeting WWC standards without reservations  
  • Randomized trial  
  • Low attrition (liberal boundary)  
  • Large sample (350+ students)  
  • Multiple sites (2+ LEA, locality, or State)  
  • Populations and settings match real-world application | • QED meeting WWC standards with reservations  
  • Baseline equivalence of analytic sample  
  • Large sample (350+ students)  
  • Multiple sites (2+ LEA, locality, or State)  
  • Populations or settings match real-world application | • Includes a comparison group  
  • Sampling and/or analytic methods to address selection bias | • At least one statistically significant positive result  
  • No countervailing evidence |

Background
SEL & ESSA
Evidence Review
Choosing Interventions
Measuring SEL
Summary
Main Findings

- We identified 60 "evidence-based" SEL
- Interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies the most frequently addressed in EBPs
- Most interventions were evaluated in urban settings and validated with high-need populations
- A large majority of interventions were delivered by teachers
We identified 60 "evidence-based" SEL interventions.
Interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies were the most commonly affected outcomes.
Most interventions were evaluated in urban settings and validated with high-need populations.

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural
- Low SES
- Racial/ethnic minority

Evidence-based interventions

0 10 20 30 40 50 60

Background  SEL & ESSA  Evidence Review  Choosing Interventions  Measuring SEL  Summary
A large majority of interventions were delivered by teachers.
Most interventions involved curriculum, professional development, and implementation support.

- Implementation support
- Professional development
- Website
- Classroom curriculum
- Changing the learning environment
- Family/community involvement
- Applications outside the classroom
- Out-of-school time

Evidence-based interventions

Background | SEL & ESSA | Evidence Review | Choosing Interventions | Measuring SEL | Summary
Key findings

1. ESSA supports SEL instruction through several different funding streams.

2. Educators have many options for SEL interventions that meet ESSA evidence requirements.
   - More for elementary school (vs. middle and high)
   - More tested in urban schools (vs. suburban and rural)

3. Certain outcomes were more likely than others to be positively affected by interventions.
   - Most options for interpersonal competencies

4. Gathering and evaluating evidence is a resource-intensive process.
   - Practitioners will need support and guidance

Background

SEL & ESSA

Evidence Review

Choosing Interventions

Measuring SEL

Summary
What makes good evidence?

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ESSA requires the use of evidence-based interventions in schools

Reflects broader trend in federal and state policy to gather and use high-quality research to inform decision-making

Growing availability of resources (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)) support the efforts of educators and policymakers in identifying evidence-based interventions

Educators faced with a wide range of available interventions and unfiltered information from vendors and other sources

Consolidated resources that can facilitate evidence-informed decisions are especially valuable given policy requirements
Good evidence is more than a positive result.

- ESSA nonregulatory guidance and the What Works Clearinghouse standards provide indicators of evidence quality to consider.
- Ensure intervention fits local needs and the evidence is aligned with local context.
- Examine the totality of the evidence rather than using anecdotes or selective findings.

### Outcomes
- Sample
- Study Design
- Bias or Confound

Background  SEL & ESSA  Evidence Review  Choosing Interventions  Measuring SEL  Summary
The tier IV evidence standard provides opportunities to explore other interventions. Tier IV has two main requirements:

- Demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research suggesting activity is likely to improve outcomes and includes ongoing evaluation.
- Includes ongoing efforts to examine effects.

Useful when an LEA doesn't find a Tier I-III intervention meeting its needs.
Logic models have a common set of components

- **Resources**
  - “What do I need”

- **Activities**
  - “What do I do”

- **Outputs**
  - “What happens immediately”

- **Outcomes**
  - “What are my goals”

- **Problem Statement**
  - “What issue am I addressing”
Evaluating effects: Aim for at least Tier III evidence

Minimum requirements

Well-implemented correlational study compares students who received the intervention (a treatment group) with students who did not (a comparison group).

Evaluation support

Educators can seek support through local research organizations and online resources (report provides list of such resources)
**Consensus on how best to measure SEL competencies is lacking**

| Many important competencies not amenable to familiar, efficient testing approaches | Assessments are often developed in an uncoordinated and fragmented manner | Few existing assessments are widely known among educators | Information about the technical quality of these instruments is hard to find |
Each approach has strengths and limitations.
A Curated Assessment Database Approach

**Purpose**
Provide information about measures of:
- Higher-order cognitive competencies
- Interpersonal competencies
- Intrapersonal competencies

**Potential users**
Practitioners, policymakers and researchers

**Content**
Users have access to:
- Descriptive information
- Evaluative and use information
- Links to assessment materials, if available
## The Education Assessment Finder

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<th>Format</th>
<th>Online database curated by members of the SEL Assessment Work Group</th>
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| Key Features | • Searchable with side-by-side comparisons  
  • Evidence about technical quality  
  • Links to measures and relevant research, where available |
| Funders | Hewlett, Wallace, Raikes, Overdeck, and Einhorn Foundations |
Users of SEL assessments need to address several considerations

- **Format**: Each type of assessment has strengths and limitations; direct skills assessments are often the most appropriate but few of them have been developed.
- **Stakes**: No SEL assessments have been validated for high-stakes uses such as teacher evaluation or school accountability.
- **Equity and cultural relevance**: SEL assessments can suffer from bias or might be inappropriate for use in specific contexts; users should look for evidence of validity for the intended purposes and student population.

RAND, CASEL, and Transforming Education collaborated on a practitioner guide for SEL assessment use.
Resources from today’s presentation are available online.
Recommendations for the field

Incorporate measures of social and emotional competencies into needs assessments.

Use our report as starting point for seeking ESSA funding for SEL needs:
- Consider a variety of SEL programs/strategies when designing approaches to improve students’ social and emotional competencies.

Take advantage of Tier IV flexibility if needs cannot be met by interventions with stronger evidence.
Recommendations for the field

- Address local conditions to promote effective SEL implementation
- Use professional development and other supports to build educators’ capacity to gather and use evidence of intervention effectiveness
- Continue to improve measurement of social and emotional competencies
- Work with the U.S Dept of Ed on evidence tier requirements
Resources on SEL in schools

- **CASEL** - https://casel.org/in-action/
- **HARVARD EASEL** - https://easel.gse.harvard.edu/sel-analysis-project
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