



SOCIAL



EMOTIONAL



CHARACTER



DEVELOPMENT



NEW JERSEY STATE BAR FOUNDATION



INTRODUCTION

CASEL [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning] describes the skills associated with social-emotional learning as both “fundamental for life effectiveness” and “a framework for school improvement.”

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Rates of teen depression have skyrocketed since 2011 as a result of increased use of smartphones. Troubling data emerged from two nationally representative surveys of US adolescents. These studies pointed to a rise in suicide deaths for those between the ages of 13 to 18 and linked these alarming statistics to the increased use of new electronic media.¹

Building caring and strong interpersonal relationships is a necessity in this technology-charged world. Furthermore, to thrive in the 21st century, students need more than traditional academic learning. They must be adept at collaboration, communication and problem-solving, which are some of the skills developed through social and emotional learning and character development. Unfortunately, it's becoming more and more difficult to find people with these skills. The issue has been documented widely by those in the human

resources industry. More than 60% of employers say applicants lack communication and interpersonal skills.² LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner pointed out that interpersonal skills are the biggest gap employers see in candidates' skill base.³

The leading organization dedicated to the advancement of social emotional character development (SECD) in the United States, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), has amassed an abundance of quantitative data making clear that SECD increases prosocial behaviors, provides the psychological stability important for children's overall well-being, and enhances the work skills needed for success in the post-secondary world.⁴ Fostering SECD in classrooms benefits educators as well. Teachers who have strong social skills are able to be more responsive to students' needs.⁵ And paying attention to the social emotional needs of these educators is vital if they are to stay in the profession. Currently, 40–50% of teachers will leave the classroom within their first 5 years because of the toll taken by their stressful role.⁶

When implemented with fidelity, a strong social emotional character development program fosters psychological safety, greater emotional intelligence and enhanced self-determination, which creates a solid foundation to support both students and teachers. People who feel secure in their environment (psychological safety), have harnessed a great capacity to relate to others (emotional intelligence) and who are intrinsically motivated to succeed

(self-determination) have the skills and resiliency to confront challenges that previous generations in a predigital society did not encounter.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

There is extensive research showing the necessity for educators to create “safe spaces” if children are to thrive in their learning environments.⁷ Schools that place a premium on fostering such safety will see the benefits by way of positive behaviors and academic growth.

Educators of all stripes have experienced how the distress that children come to school with gets in the way of functional social, emotional and cognitive development. The educator “in the trenches” can confirm what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pointed out in its seminal study on growing up in today's world: the majority of people experience at least one adverse childhood experience in their lifetime.⁸ For kids who come to school having been emotionally or physically abused, who will welcome them if not the educators responsible for more than academic learning?

Transitioning kids from their challenging personal lives to welcoming classrooms that emphasize self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible

decision-making can stem the dangerous march toward what the CDC found is the result of unchecked trauma over time—risky behaviors, physical disease and death at an early age.⁹

THE CASE FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

To manage one's emotions and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically is to live a life of great personal and professional success. Yes, general intelligence is a requisite for achievement, but without emotional intelligence, commonly referred to as EQ, one will not succeed.¹⁰

There is an organic connection between CASEL's five competencies and EQ, and there is a plethora of classroom strategies to leverage these skills to cultivate high EQ. Educators can promote kids' active listening to assist them in creating genuine two-way communication (relationships skills and social awareness). Encouraging students to build an emotional vocabulary will help them recognize their feelings (self-awareness) and allow them to effectively manage inappropriate or ill-timed behaviors (responsible decision-making).

It takes a concerted effort to foster EQ, since the current trend in education is to measure student achievement largely by one metric—academic performance. It behooves policymakers to heed the

¹ Twenge et al., “Increases in Depressive Symptoms.”

² White, “College Grads Can't Get Hired.”

³ Umoh, “The CEO of LinkedIn.”

⁴ Durlek et al., “Enhancing Social and Emotional Learning”; Taylor et al., “Promoting Positive Youth Development.”

⁵ Collie et al., “Social and Emotional Competence.”

⁶ Ingersoll, “Beginning Teacher Induction.”

⁷ Liew, “Effortful Control.”

⁸ Felitti et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction.”

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “About Adverse Childhood Experiences.”

¹⁰ Goleman, “What Makes a Leader?”

quantitative research data that show the correlation of emotional intelligence and academic success.¹¹ Educators in the field must forge ahead despite the accountability movement and make EQ a focus of their work.

CONSIDERING SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

People are, by nature, self-motivated; yet one's experiences and psychological needs can either impede or foster such motivation.¹² Self-determination theory (SDT) makes the case for three needs that are required for promoting intrinsic motivation—competence, relatedness and autonomy.¹³

Socially and emotionally rich classrooms that focus on the five SEL competencies promote confidence (social awareness), breed students' sense of connectedness to others in the school (relationship building) and foster students' feeling of autonomy as a result of more effective self-management and a greater level of responsible decision-making.

The research on motivation should be leveraged to inform the path to building healthy school and classroom cultures and to understand SECD's natural alignment with SDT. Educators must forthrightly consider how the five competencies will accommodate students' three psychological needs and give them the tools they deserve to embrace learning as a wonderful part of their lives.

IN SUMMARY

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation set out to provide educators with a set of concrete strategies to help them implement the five competencies CASEL prescribes as necessary for the development of strong SECD (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making). Skilled practitioners share their proven best practices in this *Social Emotional Character Development Guide*, which presents all of the necessary steps to be a successful SECD educator.

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¹¹ Parker et al., "Emotional Intelligence and Academic Success."

¹² Tarbetzky et al., "Social and Emotional Learning."

¹³ Ryan and Deci, "Self-Determination Theory."