



November 13, 2020

Dear Members of the President-elect Transition Team:

On behalf of the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) and Committee for Children (CFC), we would like to offer our heartfelt support as well as both our organizations' full commitment and expertise to advancing President-Elect Biden's education plan. We applaud the plan's attention to social emotional learning (SEL), including communication, socio-emotional literacy, critical thinking, decision making, and leadership. These are essential skills for success in school, in work, and in life, and for more than 20 years our two organizations have been dedicated to advancing SEL through education.

Research clearly shows that social and emotional skills can be taught, and schools and districts across the country are now adopting systemic approaches that embed SEL in classroom practices ([Mahoney, et al., 2020](#)). Thanks to decades of research, including meta-analyses with longitudinal studies, we know that evidence-based approaches to SEL lead to wide-ranging, desired impacts for students, in academics, prosocial behavior and empathy, discipline and reduced anxiety ([Taylor, et al., 2017](#)). Further, analysis of costs and benefits suggests that the average return on investment for six evidence-based programs is 11 to 1, meaning for every dollar invested, there is an \$11 return ([Belfield, et al., 2015](#)).

CASEL is the nation's leading research, practice, and policy organization dedicated to developing academic, social, and emotional competence in all students. CASEL defined SEL more than two decades ago, and since then has supported districts and schools across the country to identify and implement evidence-based approaches to SEL to ensure that all students receive high quality education in SEL, preschool through high school. In addition, CASEL has a Collaborating States Initiative (CSI) that supports SEL in state level education systems in more than 40 states. CASEL is committed to ensuring that SEL is a priority in every school nationwide.

CFC is a global nonprofit, founded in 1979, dedicated to fostering the safety and well-being of children through education and advocacy. CFC is the world's largest provider of research-based educational programs that promote social-emotional skills and prevent bullying and sexual abuse. The organization's curricula reach more than 16.5 million children in 30,000 schools around the world. As you proceed with setting federal education policy priorities for FY2022 and beyond, our organizations offer our recommendations and this brief overview of advances that are locally driven and supported by Republicans, Democrats, educators, and business leaders alike.

What Can the President-Elect do to Support Student-Worker Outcomes via SEL?

- 1. Reimagine our education system as guided by the stakeholders who know these issues best: young people, educators, parents, and community leaders.**

This past year has been one like no other and a bellwether on our collective need to prioritize the mental health and safety of future generations. Young Americans of all creeds, races, and ethnicities have been impacted by school closings and job losses due to the coronavirus pandemic along with racial violence and school shootings. The effects have been disproportionately felt by Black and Latinx families, first-generation families, and those who are in proximity to poverty and health



disparities. Therefore, it is critical that the federal government support state and local efforts to elevate the collective voice and wisdom of historically and systemically underrepresented stakeholders and the educators who support them with evidence-based SEL strategies that centralize equity throughout education and workforce policies so that all Americans can get back to school and work with confidence and with empathy for one another.

2. Ensure that all schools have adequate resources to expand evidenced-based SEL to help support students’ mental health needs and their social and emotional development.

SEL is the process by which young people and adults build skills to understand and manage emotions, work toward positive goals, feel and demonstrate empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships. No one specific program or strategy works for all groups or communities, but the demand for universal SEL has greatly increased. The increases follow a recognition that mental health needs have increased and that we must educate the whole child to ensure students graduate ready for college, career, and civic responsibilities.

Communities need support identifying and implementing SEL programs shown to be effective or to have promising, evidence-based outcomes. Establishing a baseline for different-sized programs is important. The administration should continue to utilize supports such as the Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and it should continue to fund efforts through the Education Innovation and Research grant program. Identifying and funding programs that support the whole child and allow effective programs to expand will be key to turning the corner and supporting schools as they manage education during and eventually after the pandemic, dealing with student and adult trauma throughout.

3. Expand access to career and technical education which incorporates SEL.

Successful careers are built on solid personal and interpersonal skills commonly known as *employability skills*, which can be taught. The administration can build on the [Employability Skills Framework](#) advanced by the Department of Education and support career and technical education programs that empower students to practice and master skills and develop attributes aligned with competencies such as self-confidence, goal setting, empathy, teamwork, analyzing situations, and taking responsibility. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V or Perkins CTE), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) all provide opportunities for states to develop a coherent education to workforce pipeline. Accelerating those opportunities by integrating SEL into apprenticeship programs, public-works and service programs, re-entry programs, and educator training programs will promote adoption of the skills that employers demand and that in turn will accelerate economic benefits.

4. Support high-quality K-12 schools and teacher supports.

ESSA, passed in 2015, provides a framework to allow funds to be used for training educators on building SEL skills. This funding can support districts of all kinds. For example, Anchorage, Atlanta, Austin, Cleveland, Chicago, El Paso, Nashville, Oakland, Sacramento, Oakland, and Washoe County



all implement systemic SEL across all schools. The need for new and existing educators to adopt these skills and strategies has only grown since ESSA’s passage. Funding streams such as ESSA’s Title II, Part A to support high-quality teachers, principals and other school leaders, Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, and support for afterschool and summer learning programs through the Nita M Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers program are just some examples where robust increases could help advance local evidence-based initiatives to improve educators’ ability to integrate SEL into their lessons. ESSA offers support for wraparound health care and nutrition services, before- and after-school programs, adult education classes, and other services by significantly expanding the community school model. Expanded funding under these streams, as well as for educator professional learning that purposefully integrates SEL, can also promote culturally responsive teaching and trauma-informed approaches that improve school safety and encourage diversity within the educator workforce.

5. Integrate SEL into School-based Accountability.

As schools rethink accountability, the Department of Education and stakeholders in Congress must consider evidence-based SEL as part of performance-based assessment. Analysis from as early as 2011 shows K-12 SEL programming improving positive attitudes and social behaviors, reduction of conduct problems and emotional distress, and enhancement of academic performance – including an 11-percentile point improvement in academic performance relative to students in comparison groups (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). What gets counted is what gets taught. SEL is no different. Therefore, we encourage states to develop evidence-based, continuous-improvement approaches that rely on multiple and holistic assessment measures that guide social, emotional, and academic instruction for better student achievement.

Our organizations know that students can be taught the skills necessary to make them successful in the classroom, the workplace, and as good citizens, through evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. More and more business leaders cite social and emotional skills alongside technical savvy or subject-matter mastery in their recruitment criteria.

We understand this is a busy period for the Transition Team, and we look forward to serving as a resource in the coming weeks. We would be happy to meet virtually with your staff to talk through our organizations’ work and additional ideas we believe will ultimately contribute to the success of our nation’s children and families. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

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