

# The Importance of Employability Skills: How and Why Educators Should Teach These Skills

U.S. competitiveness in the global economy depends on a workforce that has acquired both the technical knowledge needed for specific occupations and the “employability skills” required for all jobs.

## The Employability Skills Gap

In a recent Business Roundtable/Change the Equation survey, **98 percent of CEOs reported they have problems “finding candidates with the competencies and training to fill open positions”—at all skill levels.**<sup>1</sup>

Numerous surveys of employers indicate that while applicants may be technically proficient, they don’t have the skills needed to be productive members of the organization. In particular, studies show that since 1980, almost all the job growth in the United States has been in occupations that require high social skills.<sup>2</sup>

According to surveys and research, the **skills most needed** by employers (but largely absent in applicants) **are these: communication, decision making, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, and creativity and innovation.** Employers want to hire and retain employees who have the ability to think critically and work effectively with others.

Self-motivation, time management, communication, problem solving, and relationship building—**some common aspects of social and emotional learning (SEL)**—are the skills needed for 21st-century jobs. Research shows that the skills taught in SEL curricula have wide-ranging benefits that affect a young person’s success in school, career, and life.<sup>3–6</sup> In addition, **SEL programs benefit the economy** and can pay for themselves many times over.<sup>7</sup>

The National Network of Business and Industry Associations, which represents employers from major economic sectors, has created a roadmap for employers, potential employees, and educators that identifies fundamental skills for employability. **These common employability skills provide the foundation for linking the fundamentals to be taught in educational settings to success in career and business productivity.**<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, a recent World Economic Forum report found that **SEL is being insufficiently prioritized in educational policy** development.<sup>9</sup>

### WHAT ARE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS?

The U.S. Department of Education defines employability skills as “general skills that are necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors.”<sup>10</sup>

### WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning defines SEL as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”<sup>11</sup>

## Recommendations to Address the Employability Skills Gap

To better prioritize SEL and employability skills, policy makers should:

- Include SEL and employability skills language in legislation, such as the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and in support for educator professional development
- Prioritize funding for teaching research-based SEL curricula in preschool, elementary and secondary school, and career and technical colleges and universities
- Identify reliable SEL measurements related to career and technical education and workforce success

- Work with the business community to identify the skills and competencies needed in a changing job market and ensure that these foundational skills are being taught in schools

### WHO WE ARE

**Committee for Children (CFC)** is a global nonprofit dedicated to fostering the safety and well-being of children through social and emotional learning and development. CFC is the world's largest provider of research-based educational programs that promote social and emotional skills and prevent bullying and sexual abuse.

**CASEL** is the nation's leading organization advancing the development of academic, social, and emotional competence for all students. Their mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school.

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