

# What Is Social-Emotional Learning?



## What SEL Is

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is taught in many schools, but it's hard to understand exactly what it is and what it looks like in the classroom.

SEL is:

- Maintaining cooperative relationships
- Making responsible decisions
- Managing strong emotions
- Communicating clearly and assertively
- Solving problems effectively
- Recognizing emotions in oneself and others
- Having empathy for others

## How SEL Is Taught in Classrooms

Children can build social-emotional skills in a variety of ways, including through the behavior they see modeled by the adults in their lives. But social-emotional learning can also be taught explicitly in the classroom, in much the same way math or reading is taught:

- Teachers explain a concept with words, pictures, video, audio, or a combination of these
- Students practice the concept with skill-building, group discussion, individual writing, or partner work
- Teachers continue reinforcing the concept throughout the week
- Teachers send information home for students to work on with their families
- Teachers check in with their students to make sure the concept is understood
- Teachers revisit the concept when necessary

## What SEL Is Not

Social-emotional learning is becoming part of the public consciousness, but there are some broad (and, in some cases, incorrect) definitions out there.

SEL is not:

- Replacing regular order and discipline
- The school taking on the role of the parent
- Suggesting that today's generation of kids is somehow broken
- Psychotherapy
- Taught at the expense of core academic subjects such as math, science, and literacy

### Think of It This Way

When second-grade teachers work with their students to practice reading, no one assumes it's because the students' parents aren't reading with them at home. They may or may not be; the point is, we all agree reading is a skill essential to kids' success and that they need a lot of practice, regardless of the setting.

# Why Does Building Social-Emotional Skills Matter?

## School Performance

- SEL can predict academic achievement.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it's a better predictor of school performance than IQ.<sup>2</sup>
- Students who participated in an SEL program experienced an 11 percentage point gain in academic achievement.<sup>3</sup>
- SEL may also help reduce delinquency and other challenging behaviors<sup>4</sup>, which can help keep students on track academically.
- Students who have stronger social-emotional skills are more likely to meet educational milestones, such as high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and postsecondary completion.<sup>5</sup> Schools that employ effective instructional practices and other services to improve students' social-emotional skills can increase the rate at which students earn high school and college degrees.<sup>6</sup>

## Economic Benefit

- The return on investment in social-emotional programming and practices is estimated to be worth roughly \$11 for every \$1 spent.<sup>7</sup>

## Life and Well-Being

- Supporting young people's SEL has long-lasting effects, including lowering rates of depression and anxiety.<sup>8</sup>
- SEL is associated with lower rates of risky behaviors, such as drug use and teen pregnancy, and with a decrease in dropout rates of between 5 and 12 percent.<sup>9</sup>

## Career and Workforce Achievement

- Careers that require the mastery of social-emotional skills have outpaced growth in all other occupations—and employers increasingly look for these skills in their employees.<sup>10</sup>
- 79 percent of employers overwhelmingly identify social-emotional skills as being the most important qualities needed for success—and at the same time, the hardest qualities to find in the labor force.<sup>11</sup>

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