

ISSAQUAH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Para Professional PD Bundle
Topic: Social and Emotional Learning
Length: 1 hour

TOPIC INTRO

In this bundle we will discover what Social and Emotional Learning is? How to foster it in afterschool programs, and understanding your role in teaching Social and Emotional Learning.

Bundle Resources

Article : SEL to the Core (15 minutes)

Article: Social and Emotional Development through quality afterschool programs (20 minutes)

Article: An Ideal Opportunity: the Role of Afterschool in social and emotional learning (15 Minutes)

YouTube:: Social and emotional Learning (10 Minutes)

YouTube Video
Click here
To watch

Article #1
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To Read

Article #2
Keep Scrolling
To Read

Article #3
Keep Scrolling
To Read

SEL to the Core:

BUILDING FROM FOUNDATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING



In 2015, NAA conducted an online survey to learn more about social and emotional learning (SEL) program practices and needs. Survey findings suggested that, while organizations and programs value SEL and many professionals implement SEL practice, many do not feel knowledgeable talking about SEL. Professionals requested additional SEL related resources—such as practice and activity ideas—and training. As the afterschool field continues to emphasize the importance of social and emotional development, it is essential that leaders and staff have resources to help them understand (1) their own social and emotional competencies to inform their practice and (2) how to provide opportunities that promote social and emotional competence building.

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about SEL & THIS GUIDE



The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) 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.”

This definition was used to frame the sections in this guide, as CASEL has defined SEL in a specific manner that is both evidence-based and field-tested.

As the definition states, SEL is a **process**. This guide lays out the **practices** that support effective SEL in afterschool programs. Effective SEL fosters the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills (**competencies**, for short) that adults and youth already have and will continue to develop through SEL.

Because there are multiple frameworks and practical resources available to support SEL, this guide does not adhere strictly to any one model. Rather, it reflects those competencies and practices that are widely accepted and included across different field resources.

While it is beyond the scope of this guide to detail each framework, background work examined the prevalent models to identify the competencies commonly included across frameworks. This guide can be used whether a program has adopted, is in the process of adopting, or has yet to consider a specific framework, model or program. Three clusters of competencies are emphasized in this guide:

The self: Self-awareness and understanding one’s identity, self-management including emotion and behavior regulation, persistence, goal-setting, and academic perseverance and mindsets.

Relationships with others: Recognizing emotions in others, empathy, perspective-taking, collaboration, communicating effectively, active listening, flexibility and adaptability.

Decision-making and leadership: Understanding cause and effect, understanding one’s values, and making responsible decisions.

This guide is designed as a supplement to the *NAA Core Knowledge and Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals (NAA CKCs)*, which present the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by out-of-school time (OST) professionals to provide high-quality youth development programming to support the learning and development of children and youth (NAA, 2011). Core knowledge refers to the expertise needed by professionals to work effectively with school-age children and youth; competencies refer to concrete, observable and achievable behaviors that establish standards of practice. The NAA CKCs include 10 content areas, referred to in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1



Core Knowledge & COMPETENCIES

for Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals



1 | CHILD/YOUTH GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Knows the typical benchmarks of growth and development and uses this knowledge to provide a program that meets the multiple needs of children and youth.



2 | LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS & CURRICULUM

Creates a high-quality learning environment and implements age-appropriate curricula and program activities.



3 | CHILD/YOUTH OBSERVATION & ASSESSMENT

Understands and applies observation and assessment techniques and tools to meet individual needs.



4 | INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH

Recognizes the importance of relationships and communication in quality practice. Implements guidance techniques and strategies to support children and youth in their development.



5 | YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Acts in partnership with children and youth to foster appropriate child and youth leadership and voice.



6 | CULTURAL COMPETENCY & RESPONSIVENESS

Actively promotes respect for cultural diversity and creates an inclusive, welcoming, and respectful environment that embraces diversity.



7 | FAMILY, SCHOOL, & COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Builds on respectful, reciprocal relationships across settings to promote optimal development for kids and families and to enhance quality.



8 | SAFETY & WELLNESS

Ensures the safety and wellness of children and youth by implementing prevention, preparedness, and health and safety practices.



9 | PROGRAM PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Supports staff in their development. Models healthy relationships, developmentally appropriate practice, and resource acquisition and use.



10 | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & LEADERSHIP

Acts ethically, is committed to continuous learning, and advocates for best practices and policies for children and youth.

Being intentional about SEL requires the attention of both leaders and staff. The guide includes eight field-tested, research and evidence-based practices for promoting SEL, with the most foundational organizational practices followed by programmatic practices (see Figure 2, below).

The section for each practice identifies who should be involved and is supported by the rationale, the aligned NAA CKCs content areas, and a sample of practical and actionable strategies. The who, why, and how are all included.



FIGURE 2

*SEL TO THE CORE
- EIGHT ESSENTIAL
PRACTICES THAT
SUPPORT SEL*

Why approach SEL practice this way? Because quality SEL is grounded in strong youth development.

START by getting grounded in youth development.

HOW: Become familiar with the NAA CKCs, available with self-assessment tools and free online training at naaweb.org/resources/core-competencies.

NOTE: SEL to the Core is designed for afterschool professionals and leaders who want to facilitate social and emotional learning intentionally. The rest of this guide builds on—and thus assumes—a solid understanding of and commitment to effective youth development practice.

See page 13 for the NAA CKCs Content Areas and SEL Practices Crosswalk.



GET IN TOUCH with Your Own Social and Emotional Competencies

one

WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: SEL begins with the adults. It is essential that staff understand and develop their own social and emotional competencies because of their influence on the overall environment. To be intentional, adults must be self-aware and work toward their own improvement, yet those efforts toward progress should not and cannot halt work with young people.

Adult social and emotional competencies and well-being are related to healthy relationships, effective program management, and the effective implementation of SEL. Relatedly, adult stress and burnout plays a role in their social and emotional competence. Working with youth can be an incredibly rewarding, albeit stressful job with many demands. Adults who are overly stressed may not be able to connect with youth or effectively promote social-emotional practice. To facilitate the most positive experiences for youth, it's important to remember the social and emotional health of adults working with them and on their behalf.

APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS: All of them! Adult social and emotional competence is foundational. This first practice is aligned with all 10 NAA CKCs content areas.



HOW:

- » Support adult social and emotional competence by building in **training** to develop knowledge of social and emotional competencies and the self-awareness necessary for this developmental journey. Emotional intelligence trainings, mindfulness-based professional development programs, and culturally responsive practice trainings have all been shown to increase adult social-emotional competence and cultural awareness. Leaders should provide staff with training in evidence-based approaches and ensure resources such as time and materials are available. Making training opportunities available enables staff to support each other, while learning and during implementation.
- » Adopt a **culture of coaching and feedback** that supports everyone's social and emotional development.

ACKNOWLEDGE Diverse Characteristics of the Community and Other Learning Contexts

WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: Contextually relevant and culturally competent practice means SEL will—and should—look different for each person. Cultural values and identity are directly connected to SEL. The relationship between cultural values and these types of skills is complex, as cultural values often influence which social and emotional skills are most important for individual youth (Walker, Olson, & Herman, 2017).

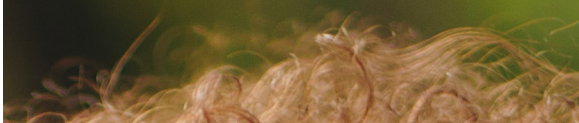
APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS: All of them! It is necessary to ensure all youth development and SEL practice is contextually relevant and culturally competent. NAA CKCs content area 6 specifically highlights cultural competency and responsiveness.



HOW:

- » To better understand the community and the learning context, **make an asset map or conduct a needs assessment.** Find out what youth, families, and community members need from a program that supports growth and development.
- » Have **open-ended staff discussions about cultural competence.** Ask:
 - *How do we function as a staff community? What is our program culture?*
 - *How can we support young people's cultural values and skills?*
 - *What are the strengths of our program? What is missing?*
 - *How can we use culture to strengthen our program?*
 - *What would it look like if we were welcoming to all youth, families and cultures?*
- » **Engage with families and community members in a way that reflects their values, acknowledges their lived experiences and works for them.** Foster relationships by building on mutual understanding and cultivating trust. To do so, forge bonds and understand their lived experiences. Culturally competent practices start with a foundation of (1) recognizing one's own cultural biases, (2) knowledge of youth cultural backgrounds, (3) awareness of the broader social, economic, and political context, (4) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies, and (5) a commitment to building caring communities.

ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN A WAY THAT REFLECTS THEIR VALUES, ACKNOWLEDGES THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES AND WORKS FOR THEM.



WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: While there are many ways to engage in SEL, intentionality and planning are key. SEL does not happen by accident. Prioritize SEL. Intentionally integrate it into daily practice. Ensure the organizational and program climate and culture are supportive of social and emotional growth and development.

APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS:

- 2:** Learning Environments and Curriculum
- 3:** Child/Youth Observation & Assessment
- 9:** Program Planning & Development
- 10:** Professional Development & Leadership



HOW:

- » **Focus time (and energy) on supporting social and emotional development.** SEL doesn't have to be—nor should it be—an add-on or something that detracts from other things. Though integration can be an effective method, ensure there is a level of intentionality to the SEL practice.
- » Make sure **SEL efforts are aligned with program, school, and community strategies, resources, and goals.** Consider meeting with the school principal and engaging stakeholders from other community initiatives to determine whether and how the program could support social and emotional development. Many districts, schools, and afterschool programs have goals that focus on and endeavors that align their SEL efforts, yet these efforts may not fully succeed as educators might use different language and operate within separate initiatives. Finding common ground and operationalizing alignment is critical (Partnership for Children and Youth, 2017).
- » **Adopt an approach, framework, program, or curriculum.** Plan for implementation or plan to identify teachable moments, such as those that might occur during program time, and determine strategies for capitalizing on those moments—supporting competence-building as it happens.
- » Ensure **appropriate time and resources are available for continuous staff development.** Providing training, integrating SEL-topics into staff meetings and providing resource materials for staff are critical supports.



four

BUILD in Coaching & Reflection for Continuous Improvement

WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: Effective coaching considers the humanness of program staff and creates safe spaces for adults to try new practices and reflect on their practices to determine for themselves what to do differently (Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS:

2: Learning Environments and Curriculum

4: Interactions with Children & Youth

9: Program Planning & Development

3: Child/Youth Observation & Assessment

5: Youth Engagement

10: Professional Development & Leadership



HOW:

- » Engage staff in **ongoing coaching**. The coach can be a supervisor, a peer or someone with specific knowledge to share. The coach should observe program and practice based on an agreed-upon focus. They should also observe youth-adult interactions, taking as many notes as possible, then plan time to review the notes and debrief using a coaching conversation tool. During the debrief, coaches should ask:
 - *Objective questions about directly observable data.*
 - *Reflective questions about reactions to the debrief.*
 - *Interpretive questions about creating meaning from the observable data.*
 - *Decisional questions about what to do next.*
- » **Provide staff time to reflect on their own social and emotional competence and practices.** Set goals and incorporate use of a self-reflection tool into daily programming. Develop individual and group action plans to work toward goals.
- » **Begin program activities by identifying or sharing goals.** Provide opportunities for youth to share what they have done or learned and encourage others to give feedback.
- » **Strive to help youth make connections between personal and program goals,** to see the alignment between the two.
- » **Engage youth in reflection,** which may happen in two ways: Routine reflection occurs at the end of a day or activity, while culminating reflection occurs at the end of a longer process.
 - *Pair-share with a peer to discuss something you learned.*
 - *Plus/Delta: Describes what worked well—plus—and what needs improvement—delta.*
 - *Apples and onions: Describe something sweet—apples—and something stinky—onions—that occurred during the activity.*
 - *Engage in a presentation or performance. (Culminating)*
 - *Create something tangible and discuss the process for creation. (Culminating)*
- » **Collect information in an ongoing manner and use it to drive decisions.** Include multiple stakeholders in data collection efforts—youth, families, program staff—and strive for various methods of data collection. Program observations, surveys, focus groups and administrative data can all inform continuous improvement efforts.

UNDERSTAND Social & Emotional Development So You Can Effectively Support Social and Emotional Growth

five

WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: Practices that promote building social and emotional competencies should be developmentally appropriate. Understanding which competencies are possible, appropriate for and relevant to the young people you work with is a critical first step in supporting SEL.

APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS:

1: Child & Youth Growth & Development
3: Child/Youth Observation & Assessment
5: Youth Engagement

2: Learning Environments and Curriculum
4: Interactions with Children & Youth
6: Cultural Competency & Responsiveness



HOW:

- » **Scaffold activities, providing just the right amount of support.** For example: When working with younger youth, focus on regulation, emotional processes, and social and interpersonal skills using a more didactic/instructional approach; older youth may need a more hands-on and interactive approach to skill-development (Jones et al., 2017).
- » **Sequence each activity with a clear and logical flow.** For a sequenced learning experience, take time to think through the skills needed and teach those skills first. Plan activities to build upon each other over the course of the program cycle.
- » **Develop activities that may be done in multiple ways** to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of all youth.
- » **Design activities and plan programming that is active and engaging.** Activities should be interactive and hands-on.
- » **Focus time** on competence development and explicitly target attitudes, beliefs, and skills.
- » **Embed competence-building into everyday practice.** Capitalize on teachable moments and recognize when young people demonstrate social and emotional skills effectively. Name emotions as they arise and discuss decision-making cause and effect. Engage in a process of modeling skills for youth, encouraging them to practice, providing feedback and ongoing coaching in the moment.
- » **Ensure programming is balanced** and competence-building activities extend over multiple sessions, with tangible outcomes (such as products and skills) that are meant to be shared with a variety of audiences.

ENGAGE IN A PROCESS OF MODELING SKILLS FOR YOUTH...

WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: Creating a physically and psychologically safe space—where youth are safe from violence, bullying, harassment and substance use—is essential to SEL. Only when young people feel safe and secure will they have the capacity to develop social and emotional skills.

APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS:

2: Learning Environments and Curriculum

5: Youth Engagement

7: Family, School & Community Relationships

10: Professional Development & Leadership

4: Interactions with Children & Youth

6: Cultural Competency & Responsiveness

8: Safety & Wellness



HOW:

- » **Develop and implement policies that promote and ensure the fair and equitable treatment of all youth.**
- » **Remember: Safety extends beyond the physical program space.** Consider how youth get to and from the program and establish a plan to ensure safety during transitions.
- » **Greet and call youth by name.** Position yourself so you can greet young people at the beginning of the session. Using their names is validation that they exist, are unique and are important.
- » **Make eye contact.** Use positive body language to let youth know you care and are interested in them.
- » **Get to know them.** Engage in brief conversation with at least a few different youth each day, making sure to connect with all each week. What are their names, interests and strengths? Where do they need support? What are their favorite colors, sports, hobbies, foods? Learning more about youth demonstrates that there is an adult who cares about them and enables staff to develop activities and programming that meets their needs.
- » **Nurture developing relationships to sustain them.** Check in with youth regularly, even informally, to let them know you care about them and about what happens in their lives.
- » **Check in at the start of an activity.** Ask youth how their day is going and to respond with a show of hands: thumbs up, thumbs down or in the middle. Observe their response—or if some youth don't respond. Use this to inform the day's approach.

**LEARNING MORE ABOUT YOUTH
DEMONSTRATES THAT THERE IS AN ADULT
WHO CARES ABOUT THEM...**

WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: Consider the many relationship types youth experience and observe during program, including the youth-staff duo, peer relationships, and relationships staff have with one another. It is crucial that staff support young people and each other.

APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS:

2: Learning Environments and Curriculum

5: Youth Engagement

7: Family, School & Community Relationships

4: Interactions with Children and Youth

6: Cultural Competency and Responsiveness



HOW:

- » **Staff language** is critical to developing positive relationships as young people learn from it (modeling) and make judgments about whether and how they can and will engage, based on what they hear. A warm tone of voice and respectful language are critical to support belonging and relationship-building.
- » **Learn more about young people** and use that knowledge to guide activities and program planning. This approach promotes youth engagement and fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion.
- » **Ask open-ended questions** and practice active listening by following up with questions that reflect what has been said and heard and show an interest in learning more. This demonstrates engaged and effective communication. Encourage youth to engage in similar discussions with each other.
- » **Consider the adult relationships to which youth are exposed.** Model positive relationships at all times, through language, nonverbal and body language, and actions.
- » **Use group work and discussions.** These strategies are critical for developing key social and emotional competencies such as active listening, effective communication, and collaboration. After each group activity, encourage youth to participate in discussion, reflecting on their group process—what worked, what didn't and strategies for the next group activity.
- » **Identify seemingly innocuous practices that may unintentionally promote exclusion and restructure them to promote inclusion.** An example is creating groups or teams. A situation where two team captains select teammates may make youth feel excluded, if they were not picked first or were picked last. Instead, use strategies that encourage sharing and bonding. Offer a question, such as, "Would you rather eat tacos or pizza?" Divide the youth into groups, based on the response. (*Bonus: This enables youth to get to know each other better and bond over shared interests.*)
- » **Empower young people and let them know you are their champion.** Offer authentic and specific praise and recognition, and make sure they know that they matter.
- » **Co-create group values** to promote positive behavior:
 - *Pre-select words that describe values (honesty, kindness) and print or write them on individual sheets of paper.*
 - *Divide youth into small groups. Have each group select the five values that mean the most to them.*
 - *Each group should eliminate three words, so only two remain.*
 - *Each group should then select one word.*

...CONTINUED

- *Bring everyone back together to discuss their process, the word they selected and what they mean as a larger group.*
- *Create a word cloud with the final words selected.*

» **Support belonging through a friendship or buddy bench:** A friendship or buddy bench is a special place for youth to sit when they want or need to talk with someone. This bench is often visually different and more appealing than other seating around the school; youth might paint the bench in a variety of fun and welcoming colors. The bench is often placed in a noticeable area during school and program time, to be used at any time, for any reason. The purpose is clear: When youth need to talk, they should take a seat and a peer will join them. If youth see someone sitting, they should recognize their need to talk and join them to lend an ear.

eight

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES for Voice, Choice & Leadership to Engage Youth in Learning & Development

WHO: Leadership and Staff

WHY: Providing youth opportunities to share their voices and make decisions serves multiple purposes. First, hearing from young people helps improve the program, ensuring that programming reflects their experience, wants and needs. Second, when youth share their voices and see change, they begin to learn their voices have value. Third, youth learn the critical skill of decision-making when given opportunities to make choices; they see the reality of cause and effect.

APPLICABLE NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS:

2: Learning Environments and Curriculum

4: Interactions with Children and Youth

5: Youth Engagement



HOW:

- » **Create a program youth council or board.** Engage youth of different ages in developmentally appropriate ways, while ensuring the group has representation of all youth served. Ask youth council members how they can best support the program. Young people have great ideas about activities to offer, ways to engage the community, and how to best support their peers' growth and development.
- » **Administer surveys and conduct focus groups with youth.** Adopt an open-door policy and ensure youth feel comfortable sharing their thoughts with program staff.
- » **Have youth help plan activities and programming and ensure there are multiple choices.** Make certain the choices are developmentally appropriate and authentic. Discuss choices and their impact.
- » **Design activities so youth have opportunities to lead, follow and be responsible.** Discuss and teach these skills and encourage reflection on the opportunities.
- » **Encourage youth to mentor others.** Older youth may pair with younger youth, more skilled youth may support peers who are novice, and random pairings may promote the development of new relationships.

NAA CKCs CONTENT AREAS & SEL PRACTICES CROSSWALK

NAA CORE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCY CONTENT AREAS

PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE SEL	1. CHILD/YOUTH GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT	2. LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM	3. CHILD/YOUTH OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT	4. INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH	5. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	6. CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND RESPONSIVENESS	7. FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS	8. SAFETY AND WELLNESS	9. PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT	10. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP
GET IN TOUCH with Your Own SE Competencies	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
ACKNOWLEDGE Diverse Characteristics of the Community & Other Learning Contexts	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
PLAN for SEL		★	★						★	★
BUILD in Coaching & Reflection for Continuous Improvement		★	★		★				★	★
UNDERSTAND Social & Emotional Development So You Can Effectively Support Social & Emotional Growth	★	★	★	★	★	★				
CREATE a Safe & Supportive Environment That is Warm & Welcoming		★		★	★	★	★	★		★
SUPPORT Belonging & Positive Relationships		★		★	★	★	★			
PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES for Voice, Choice & Leadership to Engage Youth in Learning & Development		★		★	★					

SEL to the CORE: **methods**



The search process for research- and field-based resources referenced in this guide began with a scan of the field, including peer-reviewed and published literature as well as “grey literature” emphasizing social and emotional competence and the specific and actionable practices that promote social and emotional learning and development. Additional sources were reviewed based on recommendations from experts in the field. The resource base was expanded by searching for additional resources using relevant terms in search engines such as Google Scholar, PsycINFO, JSTOR and ERIC. Sources were chosen for review based on recent publication dates and the content of the resource; namely, that practices to support SEL were the resource focus. Once resources were selected, the AIR team reviewed the materials to identify the SEL practices. Next, the team synthesized practices across resources to determine commonalities and synergies. Finally, the team completed a comprehensive crosswalk of the practices with the NAA CKCs content areas, identified logical connections, and developed strategies to support implementation of each practice.

The search process for this guide was designed to be comprehensive; however, the knowledge base is rich, diverse, and ever-changing, and any search process has limitations. As such, the included resources represent an effort to provide a range of practices. The exclusion of any given source is not intended to imply its lack of value to the field. Similarly, the inclusion of a source does not represent any evaluation of its methodologies or findings.



RESOURCES SELECTED FOR REVIEW AND INCLUSION IN THIS GUIDE

Competencies

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Supporting Social and Emotional Development Through Quality Afterschool Programs

Research to Practice in the Afterschool and Expanded Learning Field

This first brief in our series focuses on how afterschool programs contribute to the development of social and emotional competencies in young people. In practice, we see how high-quality programs can help participants learn, grow, and develop. But what does the research say? How can we prove it? We chose to focus our first brief on this important topic because there has been a growing recognition that afterschool programs can and do facilitate the social and emotional development of young people. Despite the recent attention this topic has received, efforts to define and measure social and emotional competencies in afterschool settings are still emerging. This brief provides an overview of work done to date both in afterschool and school-based settings to define social and emotional learning, shares recent research on how afterschool programs contribute to the development of these competencies, and, finally, offers some next step recommendations to both practitioners and researchers.

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

is pleased to release this first brief in our series *Beyond the Bell: Research to Practice in the Afterschool and Expanded Learning Field*.

A core mission of the Afterschool and Expanded Learning team at AIR is to be both consumers and producers of rigorous research and to share with the field what we learn. It is essential that research findings reach the practitioners who can make use of them to inform their program improvement efforts. In that spirit, we are releasing a series of research to practice briefs designed to make research on the afterschool and expanded learning field accessible and easy to understand. Practitioners help young people grow and learn every day. Researchers study this work to understand how it helps youth, families, and communities. These briefs are designed to connect the dots so that we can learn from one another.

Measuring and Defining Social and Emotional Skills

During the past 20 years, the afterschool field has been held accountable in varying ways—first, on our ability to provide safe places for young people to spend time while their parents work; then, on our success in helping to improve participants' academic achievement as a supplement to the school day.¹ Today, measuring success in afterschool programs is more nuanced and has been influenced by an increased recognition that the social and emotional competencies youth develop while in afterschool programs are also critical to their success in school and life.² The heightened focus on social and emotional skills is also growing in formal education settings, and, as a result, researchers across the country and around the globe are grappling with how to measure social and emotional competencies in a world that prizes easily quantifiable indicators.³ The challenge for the afterschool field is that social and emotional competencies are not universally agreed upon, and their measurement is both complicated and controversial. In many ways, practitioners trying to identify how their program improves young people's

HOW are afterschool programs applying the CASEL framework?

One organization putting social and emotional learning into practice in afterschool settings is [Wings for Kids](#). This afterschool program has an intentional program model that incorporates the five core competency clusters through a comprehensive five-day-a-week program. Learn more about their program model at http://www.wingsforkids.org/program_model.

social and emotional competence suffer from an embarrassment of riches. That is, there are myriad definitions for social and emotional competencies as well as a growing number of researchers developing tools to measure them. In some cases, the varying frameworks present the same social and emotional competencies in different ways, and, in other cases, they are overlapping or not at all the same. In the end, practitioners are left to determine which framework best matches their interventions and programs. In an effort to help clarify the language confusion, we have highlighted some of the most prevalent frameworks here. In the callout boxes, we present practical examples of how afterschool programs are using the specified framework and resources to learn more.

Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Social and emotional learning competencies are defined as the cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies necessary for a young person to be successful in school, work, and life. The [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#),⁴ an organization focusing on the implementation of strategies to improve social and emotional competencies, has developed a framework that identifies five competency clusters as critical for young people's success. These competency clusters are:

- **Self-awareness**—the ability to understand one's emotions and how they influence behavior
- **Self-management**—the ability to calm one's self down when upset, to set goals and work toward them, and to manage and control emotions
- **Social awareness**—the ability to recognize what is appropriate in certain settings and empathize with others
- **Responsible decision making**—the ability to make decisions that take into account social standards, consequences, and context
- **Relationship skills**—the ability to communicate well, to listen and respond appropriately, and to negotiate conflict

CASEL and other advocates for social and emotional learning contend that these competencies can be taught either through explicit stand-alone curricula (e.g., Second Step, PATHS) or through school- and classroomwide interventions that integrate social and emotional learning strategies into every aspect of the school day (e.g., Responsive Classroom, Caring School Community).⁵ Afterschool settings can incorporate social and emotional learning into programs in much the same way—either through explicit curricula or in the ways we organized and set norms for our groups.

Noncognitive Skills/Factors

Another umbrella term that is used to describe a wide variety of skills is *noncognitive factors*. Originally coined by economist James Heckman,⁶ researchers at The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) brought this thinking to educational contexts when they released a [literature review](#)⁷ focused on how noncognitive factors contribute to academic success.⁸ They deliberately chose the word *factors* to make the distinction that it is not only skills but also attitudes, behaviors, and strategies that young people need to improve their academic success. CCSR's report breaks noncognitive factors into five key areas, many of which are included in one or more of the other frameworks listed here: (1) academic behaviors, (2) academic perseverance, (3) academic mind-sets, (4) learning strategies, and (5) social skills. Since releasing the literature review, CCSR has developed a survey for schools that measures the noncognitive factors described in their report. Afterschool programs often support noncognitive factors through programming that is explicitly aligned with school-day learning and targets the improvement of competencies that influence school-related behaviors.

21st Century Skills

Another term often used in the afterschool field is *21st century skills*. These skills are defined by the [National Research Council](#)⁹ and the [Partnership for 21st Century Learning \(P21\)](#)¹⁰ as those needed for young people to be successful in work, life, and citizenship. P21 has developed a [framework](#) for 21st century skills that breaks them into four overarching categories:

- **Content knowledge and 21st century themes**—knowledge of specific academic content areas as well as knowledge of interdisciplinary issues such as global and environmental awareness, ethics, and civic literacy. This set of skills, along with the information, media, and technology skills, sets this framework apart from the others.
- **Life and career skills**—the ability to be adaptable, take on leadership roles, show initiative, develop social skills, and be productive.
- **Learning and innovation skills**—communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration.
- **Information, media, and technology skills**—again, these skills set this framework apart from the others by emphasizing computer and media literacy.

HOW can afterschool programs address noncognitive factors?

In a recent [guide](#), Public Profit offers 16 strategies to promote noncognitive skills in youth development programs.

HOW do afterschool programs work to improve 21st century skills?

Boston After School and Beyond has developed its own version of the 21st century skills framework. Called the ACT (for Achieve, Connect, Thrive) Skills Framework, it highlights the skills young people need to be successful across every aspect of their lives. See the framework at http://bostonbeyond.org/initiatives/act_framework/.

HOW are afterschool programs supporting grit, self-control, and a growth mind-set?

The Afterschool Corporation's [ExpandED](#) program is a full-day model that partners a school and a community provider to create a comprehensive set of academic and enrichment experiences for youth. The program targets improved growth mind-set as one of its key outcomes.

Afterschool programs that focus on the development of these skills are often some of the more comprehensive and holistic programs that focus on arts, sports, academics, life skills, and career development.

Mind-Sets

During the past two to three years, there has been an increasing focus on a subset of social and emotional competencies that are related to academic achievement. These competencies, supported by the research of Carol Dweck¹¹ and Angela Duckworth,¹² focus on the *mind-sets* of youth and how changes in mind-sets can influence improvement in academic achievement. In particular, these competencies include:

- **Grit**—the ability to sustain interest in and persist toward long-term goals
- **Self-control**—the ability to regulate behaviors and emotions
- **Growth mind-set**—the belief that ability can change and comes from hard work and persistence

Similar to noncognitive skills, afterschool programs focused more explicitly on alignment with the school day and academic support are often the most likely to target the development of grit, self-control, and mind-set.

This list is not exhaustive. In fact, many other terms are used, including *character*, *soft skills*, and *life skills*. Other institutions, from [National Public Radio](#)¹³ to [Every Hour Counts](#)¹⁴ to the [Asia Society](#),¹⁵ have also presented ways to sort through this complex lexicon and find ways to define and categorize the various competencies that are increasingly being recognized as critical for youth success in school and life. Our goal here was to define some of the most commonly used terms in the afterschool field and highlight the need to break down the language barrier that is limiting the field's ability to describe the skills, attitudes, and behaviors being addressed in afterschool and expanded learning programs.

Do Afterschool Programs Contribute to Social and Emotional Development?

The short answer is yes, they do, for youth who participate regularly in high-quality programs.¹⁶ The caveat is that evidence is somewhat limited. Relatively few studies have rigorously examined the impact of afterschool programs on the social and emotional competencies outlined in the frameworks presented earlier. In the early 2000s, a handful of studies explored the connection between participation in out-of-school-time activities and improved social competencies. These studies found that

consistent participation led to improvements in peer relationships, sense of self-worth, altruism, and prosocial behavior and decreased problem behavior. These studies looked at traditional school-based afterschool extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports, tutoring, and honor society.¹⁷ Although promising, these studies were limited in their scope and the types of programs they studied. Then in 2007, Durlak and Weissberg released their seminal meta-analysis that examined the connection between developing personal and social skills in afterschool settings and a range of outcomes, including academic achievement. They found that afterschool programs employing what they dubbed the S.A.F.E. features (for sequenced, active, focused, and explicit) had significant benefits for youth on a wide range of outcomes, including:

- Feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem
- School bonding (positive feelings and attitudes toward school)
- Positive social behaviors

Since that report, only a handful of researchers have explored the connection between participation in high-quality afterschool programs and social and emotional outcomes. In particular, researchers at the School of Education at the University of California at Irvine have conducted several studies showing that **high levels of participation in programs are associated with improved social and behavioral outcomes, including gains in peer-to-peer social skills, prosocial behavior, engagement, intrinsic motivation, concentrated effort, and positive states of mind.**¹⁸ Similarly, researchers from the Youth Development Research Project at the University of Illinois have done extensive work to examine the process of how youth develop social and emotional skills in youth programs. Through this work, they have found that **youth report building skills in motivation and effort from participating in youth programs**—in particular, youth voluntarily engage in challenging work in youth programs, are committed to completing the work, and therefore put in the effort and make the connection between hard work and results. Youth then learn these behaviors and can engage in strategic thinking and persistent behavior outside the youth program.¹⁹

However, all of the aforementioned studies have shown that changes in social and emotional skills and competencies do not happen with just any program or at any level of participation. Rather, **quality of programming** and **level of participation** are two key factors that matter for producing outcomes for youth. In programs that were high quality, young people were more likely to see positive outcomes.²⁰ Likewise, youth who participated at high levels were more likely to experience changes than those who participated at low levels.²¹

WHAT do S.A.F.E. programs look like?

- **Sequenced**—program employs a sequenced set of activities to achieve skill objectives.
- **Active**—program uses active forms of learning.
- **Focused**—program has at least one component focused on developing personal or social skills.
- **Explicit**—program targets specific personal or social skills.

ADDITIONAL Resources

This topic, social and emotional development and how to measure it, is being discussed and addressed by dozens of organizations in the formal education and afterschool and expanded learning fields. The following are a few additional resources that may be helpful in sorting through this complicated topic:

- The Afterschool Corporation recently published [Social and Emotional Learning: A Resource Guide and New Approach to Measurement in Expanded Schools](#),²⁷ which contain links to a wide range of resources on defining and measuring these types of skills.
- The Asia Society and Professional Examination Services created [A Rosetta Stone for Noncognitive Skills: Understanding, Assessing, and Enhancing Noncognitive Skills in Primary and Secondary Education](#),²⁸ which provides a framework for understanding noncognitive skills as well as information on how to assess them.

Evaluations of individual programs or program models have also found connections between participation and development of social and emotional competencies. For example, the longitudinal 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development found that young people who participated in 4-H over time were two times more likely to be civically engaged and four times more likely to be active in their communities than those who did not participate.²² Likewise, a study of the AfterZone system in Providence, Rhode Island, found that youth who participated in the program demonstrated a better ability to interact with their peers than nonparticipants.²³ The study also found that youth who were highly engaged in programming had greater social and emotional benefits than those who did not feel engaged. Specifically, participants who felt a stronger sense of belonging in the program, felt more connected to the adults in the program, and found the program fun thought more about their future, had better social skills, and demonstrated more positive behavior than their less engaged peers.

Where Does the Practice Community Go From Here?

There is indeed evidence that afterschool programs have had an impact on developing participants' social and emotional competencies. However, in this brief we outline research that has an important commonality; **high-quality programs** and **regular and high youth participation** are critical conditions for skill building. The research clearly points to several key features of afterschool programs that contribute to improved social and emotional outcomes. Given these key features, afterschool programs may want to engage in some or all of the following:

- Provide professional development for staff on how to make program activities S.A.F.E. (i.e., sequenced, active, focused, and explicit).
- Participate in existing quality improvement activities, or advocate for additional funding related to quality improvement—and then use that funding to create strong quality assessment and improvement practices.
- Conduct regular youth satisfaction surveys to gauge how engaged youth feel in the program. If engagement is low, implement strategies to foster a sense of belonging and fun in the program.
- Bolster youth participation (research has shown that duration, particularly for elementary age youth, needs to be between 30–40 days per year²⁴) by identifying what youth like and do not like about the program and making changes to match their needs and interests.

- Identify which skills, of the many listed in the frameworks earlier, the program targets. Make choices. Think about program activities. Decide on what few key social and emotional competencies the program truly targets and measure those—not the universe of social and emotional skills that exist. This is not an easy step, but it will hopefully get easier as more researchers develop and disseminate tools to measure social and emotional competencies.

Where Does the Research Community Go From Here?

Everyone is talking about social and emotional competencies, but not enough people are studying their development in afterschool programs in a rigorous way so that we can know which kinds of programs and practices are most effective. Given that, we see three key next steps for the research community to move the field forward:

1. **Collect new, current evidence.** The limited number of recent studies focused explicitly on how afterschool programs improve social and emotional skills suggest a need for a follow-up to the Durlak and Weissberg study that measures impact over the past decade. Although Vandell and others have begun this next generation of research, not enough has been done to examine the impact the wide variety of innovative programs are having on social and emotional skills over the decade since that meta-analysis was first released. In those intervening years, afterschool funders and individual programs have invested huge amounts of funding and time into quality improvement activities.²⁵ Given evidence linking quality to outcomes, the time has come to conduct a new generation of research that examines how potentially higher quality programs are contributing to social and emotional competencies.
2. **Improve the tools for measuring competencies.** There is also a need for stronger validated measures of social and emotional skills and clear guidance on how to use them. Surveys used in formal education settings to measure social and emotional outcomes are not necessarily suitable to afterschool settings. Formal and informal educators and facilitators differ in their methods of instruction and implementation, intended outcomes, and definition of social and emotional development. So, although several tools are available for use in school-based settings, very few exist that are explicitly designed and are appropriate for use in afterschool settings. A recent compendium, *From Soft Skills to Hard Data*, canvassed the field and identified 10 rigorously validated tools

ADDITIONAL Resources

- The University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development hosts a [social and emotional learning series](#)²⁹ with links to articles, blogs, and resources on the topic.
- The Susan Crown Exchange has launched their [Social and Emotional Learning Challenge](#),³⁰ which brings together high-quality youth programs that target social and emotional learning in teens with researchers to identify what program practices support the development of social and emotional development. The result will be a social and emotional learning field guide due out at the end of 2015.
- Child Trends released [Workforce Connections: Key “Soft Skills” That Foster Youth Workforce Success: Toward A Consensus Across Fields](#), a report that identifies the research-based skills that young people need to be successful in the workplace.

that measure social and emotional outcomes.²⁶ Of those 10, only four are free and available for programs to use. All have limited to moderate evidence of validity and mixed evidence of reliability, and only a handful have been tested in afterschool settings.

3. Help afterschool programs better use the data they collect.

Afterschool programs use the handful of existing surveys to collect information about their participants, often not knowing exactly how to implement them or what to do with the data once they collect them. The field would benefit from a follow-up guide to *From Soft Skills to Hard Data* that outlines what programs should do once they have selected a measure—how to identify the skills the program actually targets and select an appropriate measure, accurately collect data on those skills, and report out on the data in a clear and responsible way.

If researchers can take these three steps as practitioners are simultaneously engaging in professional development, better identifying their targeted competencies, and growing quality improvement practices, the field will emerge in a stronger place in another decade to report on progress in supporting the development of social and emotional competencies in afterschool programs.

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About Beyond the Bell

Today's afterschool and expanded learning programs provide enriching activities that support academic, social, emotional, artistic, and physical growth. Research shows that these programs work best when they are high quality and evidence based. *Beyond the Bell: A Toolkit for Creating Effective Afterschool and Expanded Learning Programs* (4th Edition) takes the guesswork out of designing, implementing, and evaluating your program by translating the latest research into accessible information and tools. Whether you are a program leader or staff member, whether you are new to the field of afterschool and expanded learning or a seasoned veteran, whether you want to fine-tune a successful program or design a new one from the ground up—*Beyond the Bell* can help you provide enriching programming that supports youth development.

An Ideal Opportunity: The Role of Afterschool in Social and Emotional Learning

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Ensuring all children and youth thrive as they move through school and into their adult lives requires that they have the opportunity to develop the skills and competencies that will help them land their first job, navigate and overcome the challenges they will face, keep positive relationships, and make good decisions. While families are central to this, others who interact with students can play a supporting role. For instance, a bipartisan report by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution recommended a holistic approach to education, promoting both academics and skills such as working well with others, self-management, and responsible decision-making.¹

Social and emotional learning or SEL is the most common terminology to encompass these skills and competencies (See “*What is SEL*” on pg. 3). In recent years, use of the term has grown exponentially—ballooning from 107 media mentions in 2010 to close to 1,500 in 2017—and it is often boiled down to the acronym SEL.² Although easier to use, these three simple letters represent a complex host of skills and competencies that form the foundation from which children and youth can learn and grow into the adults they aspire to be. Afterschool and summer learning programs, which have long been places for positive youth development, are helping students cultivate their social and emotional skills and competencies. Programs are providing caring and supportive mentors, creating a safe space where students can explore new interest areas and build confidence in their abilities, showing students how to reach consensus and work collaboratively, and providing meaningful ways for students to engage in the program.

“When I started, I remember being told that the parents will raise them and we will teach them... We’ve come a long way now in understanding that child rearing begins at home, but that it has to be complemented every step of the way and that all of the institutions along the development[al] pathway have to be involved... I think we are making that progress, but it’s terribly complicated and we have to learn and grow and be flexible along the way.”

— Dr. James Comer, professor of child psychiatry at the Yale University Child Study Center and member of the Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.



More Opportunities to Develop Social and Emotional Skills and Competencies are Needed

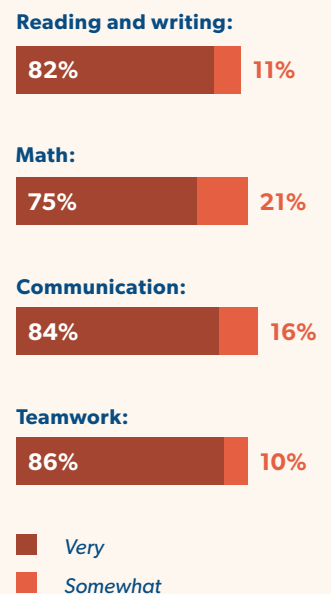
Academics alone are not enough for students’ future success

While employers are looking for employees who possess applied academic skills, such as fundamental reading, writing, and math skills, they also are in search of employees who are able to communicate effectively, work well in teams, make good decisions, and apply other social and emotional skills and competencies. In a survey of Business Roundtable member companies, companies reported that an applicant’s communication and teamwork skills were just as relevant to their company as their basic reading, writing, and math skills (See Chart 1).³ A World Bank report reviewing 27 studies measuring employer skills preferences across dozens of countries found that social and emotional skills and competencies were among the skills that were highest in demand, more so than technical skills.⁴

Schools recognize the importance of social and emotional learning, but barriers to implementation exist

Although teachers and principals are strong proponents of social and emotional learning for their students, schools struggle with the implementation of SEL practices during the school day. In a national survey of more than 600 pre-kindergarten through 12th grade teachers, nearly all reported that they believed social and emotional learning is important for their students’ experience in school (93 percent).⁵ Similarly, a national survey of close to 900 public school principals found that 99 percent believed that an increased focus on SEL would have a major benefit on promoting a positive school climate, and 83 percent considered it very important for schools to promote social and emotional competencies in students.⁶ Both teachers and principals overwhelmingly believe that a greater focus on SEL would have a positive effect on students’ success in school, work, and life (See Chart 2).⁷

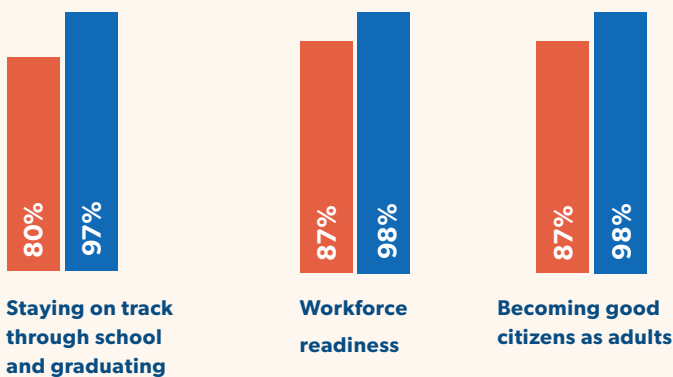
Chart 1: How relevant are the following to current job openings in your company?



At the same time, a number of challenges exist to implement SEL practices during the school day, including lack of sufficient time focused on building social and emotional skills, training for teachers and administrators, and integration of social and emotional skills into educational practices.⁸ Both teachers and principals recognize these challenges. Approximately 8 in 10 teachers (81 percent) report that finding time is a challenge for schools trying to implement SEL practices and 3 in 4 (73 percent) say that a lack of training and knowledge on teaching social and emotional skills is a challenge for implementing SEL in their classroom.⁹ Echoing teachers' sentiments, principals report that challenges regarding implementing SEL practices in their school include teachers not having enough time (71 percent) and teachers needing more training (60 percent).¹⁰ A strong majority of principals (59 percent) also reported that a lack of funding dedicated to social and emotional learning was a challenge.

Chart 2: Percentage that believe a greater focus on SEL would have a positive effect on:

■ Teachers
■ Principals



What is SEL?

Education leaders are recognizing that student development is strongest when academics and social and emotional learning work together. There are multiple points of view on the skills and competencies that fit underneath social and emotional learning, but significant overlap can be found. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), an organization dedicated to advancing the evidence base, practical strategies, and implementation of SEL, 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.”

CASEL’s framework classifies SEL competencies into five areas: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship skills.

The American Institutes for Research assembled other popular frameworks—including “21st century skills,” “mindsets,” and “non-cognitive factors”—noting that many of them have overlapping, if not equivalent, competencies. For instance, around the ability to regulate one’s emotions, CASEL’s framework includes *self-management*, while a mind-set framework includes *self-control*. Relating to the ability to communicate and build relationships, CASEL’s framework includes *relationship skills*, the non-cognitive factors’ framework includes *social skills*, and the 21st century skills’ framework includes *learning and innovation skills*—of which communication and collaboration are a part. These examples show that while there are various definitions, overall, there is broad agreement on what social and emotional skills and competencies encompass.

Sources: CASEL, *What is SEL*; American Institutes for Research, *Supporting Social and Emotional Development Through Quality Afterschool Programs*

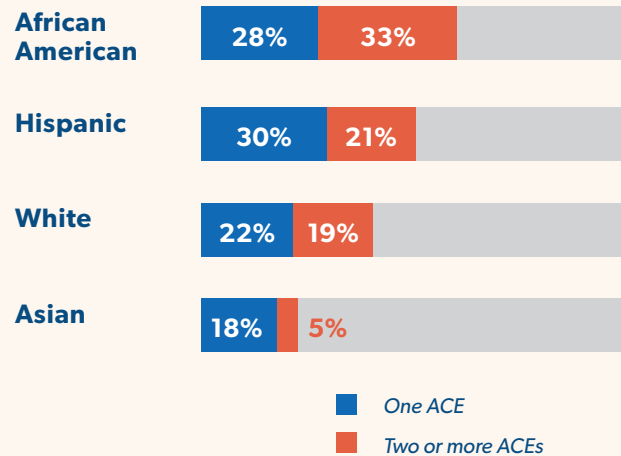
Too many children and youth today have faced a traumatic experience, placing them at higher risk for negative health and education outcomes

Close to half of children in the U.S. (45 percent) have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). ACEs are experiences—for instance witnessing or being a victim of violence in the home or community, living with someone who is mentally ill or struggling with drug or alcohol abuse, or having a parent or guardian who died—that could have negative and lasting effects on one’s health and wellbeing.¹¹ One in 10 children has experienced three or more ACEs, placing them in a higher risk category for negative mental and physical health outcomes. All children can be impacted by ACEs, however, there are ethnic and racial disparities that arise when looking across populations; African American and Hispanic children are the most likely to experience at least one ACE, and the most likely to experience two or more ACEs (See Chart 3). The experience of ACEs can have social and emotional consequences too. Children ages 6-17 with at least one ACE are less likely to be curious and interested in learning new things, be able to stay calm and in control when faced with a challenge, and be able to focus and complete tasks they have started, than are peers with zero ACEs.¹² But social and emotional skills and competencies can also help youth manage stressful, traumatic experiences, acting as protective factors for those who have experienced ACEs.

Why Social and Emotional Learning Matters

The foundation for healthy and positive development is the possession of strong social and emotional skills and competencies that help youth do well academically, maintain positive relationships, be physically and mentally healthy, and become civically engaged.¹³ Participation in evidence-based programs that take a social and emotional learning approach is linked to positive outcomes, including improved behavior in school and academic performance, lowered emotional distress, and improved self-perception and attitudes toward school, teachers, and others.¹⁴ A 2017 study published in the *Journal of Child Development* reviewing the effect of SEL interventions involving close to 100,000 kindergarten through high school students found both short- and long-term benefits of involvement in SEL programs. Students involved in SEL programs showed gains in their social and emotional competencies, including empathy and teamwork; were less likely than students without SEL interventions to use drugs, report emotional distress, and have conduct problems; and demonstrated improvements in academic performance, including increased high school and graduation rates.¹⁵

Chart 3: Percentage of children with ACEs



The Afterschool Connection

Research also points to afterschool and summer learning programs as ideal settings to help students build their social and emotional skills and competencies. Afterschool and summer learning programs are where students can connect to positive adult mentors, feel safe to try new things, and have the opportunity to acquire new skills and develop mastery in an area. In a study conducted by the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, afterschool leaders were more likely than education leaders to say that social and emotional learning was central to their mission.¹⁶ Common principles of quality programs applying a social and emotional learning approach include providing a safe and positive environment, fostering positive relationships between children and adults, offering age-appropriate activities that work on skill development, and ensuring that offerings are relevant and engaging to students.¹⁷ When programs target their students' social and emotional skills, students see positive gains in their attitudes toward peers and school, as well as in their performance at school.¹⁸ Below are a few ways afterschool programs support student social emotional development.

Taking an intentional, integrated approach to building students' social and emotional skills and competencies

Afterschool and summer learning programs are approaching social and emotional learning in a range of ways. However, when programs are able to align social and emotional learning with their mission and intentionally design activities to grow students' social and emotional skills and competencies, this explicit focus supports the implementation and sustainability of social and emotional learning within the program.¹⁹ **WINGS for Kids' (WINGS)** mission is to, "equip at-risk kids with the social and emotional skills to succeed in school, stay in school, and thrive in life." Currently located in Charleston, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Atlanta, Georgia, WINGS centers its program around social and emotional learning by taking a three-fold approach. It promotes a culture and climate that is encouraging and fun, emphasizes the importance of positive relationships between staff and students, and employs a SEL curriculum that helps staff reinforce social and emotional learning objectives consistently and continuously throughout the program. Preliminary findings of an ongoing randomized control study found that WINGS students improved their relationship with teachers and behavior in class.²⁰

Prioritizing staff training and development

Staff are instrumental in delivering quality programming, since they help foster an open and encouraging environment, establish positive relationships with students, and serve as mentors. **Girls on the Run (GOTR)** has served 1.5 million girls through 200 councils located in all 50 states, plus D.C., providing a supportive environment in which girls run with their friends and coaches while learning, practicing, and applying social and emotional skills and competencies. GOTR prioritizes training its staff and coaches, designing a National Coach Training, which incorporates a blended model of online and in-person elements, facilitated locally by council leaders who have attended a train-the-trainer workshop. GOTR headquarters also provides local councils with coach support and site evaluation tools to aid in their local assessment of program quality. A 2016 evaluation by the University of Minnesota found almost all girls surveyed reported that they learned critical life skills through GOTR (97 percent), which included the ability to manage emotions, resolve conflict, help others, and make intentional decisions.

Social and emotional learning and a trauma-informed approach

There is strong alignment between creating an environment that is conducive to social and emotional learning and a trauma-informed approach, as evidenced by program examples in this issue brief. For example, The Possibility Project's programming begins with providing students with a safe space to address the trauma and conflict in their lives and reinforces that the program is a community where each person's voice is valued and support of one another is critical. Students tackle issues affecting their lives, working together to lead community action projects, reflecting the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) six principles of a trauma-informed approach:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice and choice
6. Cultural, historical, and gender issues

See SAMHSA's principles of a trauma-informed approach at: <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>

Providing relevant and engaging project-based opportunities

Creating authentic, experiential learning opportunities helps promote student engagement and buy-in, while also giving students the chance to address an issue they care about, form relationships with their peers, reflect on and think critically about a topic of concern, listen and communicate well, and identify solutions. For example, the **Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley** in Milford, New Hampshire, established the YES (youth empowerment service) team. Comprised of middle schoolers, the YES team reached consensus that they wanted youth to be more involved in reducing opioid overdoses in the state after a weekend retreat discussing issues affecting them. Students designed an action plan to focus on drug and alcohol prevention and mental health awareness, which included hosting a Youth Summit in mid-April 2018. Students worked together to plan the event, creating the summit's agenda, sending out invitations to the event, and co-facilitating sessions at the summit. At the **McKinley Afterschool Program**, a part of the Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Center in New York, students were asked to create a campaign centered around an issue in their community. The program's STEP team chose educating their community about gun violence and has since held community performances to raise awareness of gun violence, created an anti-gun violence campaign documentary, and led a virtual town hall with students from across the U.S. to discuss the prevalence of gun violence and solutions to stop it.

Promoting youth agency and voice

Afterschool and summer learning programs have the flexibility and adaptability that provide students the opportunity to find their voice and gain the confidence in themselves to take ownership of the experience and lead. Through the arts, **The Possibility Project (TPP)** in New York, New York, concentrates on leadership, community action and responsibility, and positive future outcomes. Students create, produce, and perform original theatrical musical based on their lived experiences while collaborating, learning to resolve conflict, setting goals, managing time, and prioritizing responsibilities. In addition to performing in an off-Broadway show for their friends, family, and community, students take on a community action project, tackling issues of their choice to see their ability to affect change. For instance, students produced a short documentary featuring interviews with undocumented young people discussing how it feels to live as an undocumented individual in the U.S. An external evaluation found that students in the program performed better in conflict resolution and providing emotional support than their peers not in the program. Of students interviewed, more than 9 in 10 said the program taught them to develop openness to diversity and empathy for other perspectives (94 percent) and self-acceptance and confidence (91 percent).



Conclusion

There is broad agreement that social and emotional skills and competencies are important for children and youth, and that, in addition to families, there is a responsibility among education and community stakeholders to support social emotional development. In a 2017 poll, more than 8 in 10 Americans said that it was “extremely” or “very” important for schools to help students, “learn skills like being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems,”²¹ and parents have said that helping develop students’ critical thinking and reasoning abilities is one of their top three priorities for schools.²² Devoting time and resources to implement social and emotional learning is also a smart investment—Columbia University found that every \$1 invested in SEL programming produced an \$11 return.²³ Together with families and schools, afterschool and summer learning programs can work to ensure that all children and youth are given the supports they need to build their social and emotional skills and competencies, paving a clear pathway to a healthy and fulfilling future.

Additional Reading

- ▶ [Navigating SEL from the Inside Out](#) (Jones, S., et.al., 2017)
- ▶ [Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time Settings](#) (Jones, S., Bailey, R., Brush, K., & Kahn, J., 2017)
- ▶ [Kernels of Practice for SEL: Low-Cost, Low-Burden Strategies](#) (Jones, S., Bailey, R., Brush, K., & Kahn, J., 2018)
- ▶ [The Future of Children: Social and Emotional Learning](#) (Princeton University & The Brookings Institution, 2017)
- ▶ [Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review](#) (RAND Corporation, 2017)

For more information, visit The Wallace Foundation’s [Social and Emotional Learning Webpage](#) or the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s [Social and Emotional Learning Collection](#).



Endnotes

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