

## SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Produced by the  
Social Emotional Learning and Career Development  
International Research Network<sup>i</sup>

In 2018, xx countries launched a cross-cultural research program designed to support educator engagement in SEL.<sup>ii</sup> One important revelation from this research is that across the world there is tremendous variation in educator awareness and understanding of the nature and value of social emotional learning skills (SEL).<sup>iii</sup> The purpose of this Research Brief is to address an important concern that emerged among secondary school educators, namely, whether there is evidence to justify using valuable classroom instruction time for SEL activities.

While educators responding to our survey identified a number of important SEL skills, many educators from a number of the countries were unfamiliar with the term “Social Emotional Learning.” To date, the most popular SEL framework was proposed by the Center for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).<sup>iv</sup> According to CASEL, SEL skills can be organized around five domains: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL also provides a list of evidence-based SEL programs.

It seems reasonable to assume that most preschool and elementary educators will be more likely to integrate SEL activities into classroom instruction. In the course of conducting our research, some secondary education educators expressed concern that engaging in SEL activities would compete for time that would normally be used for teaching content.

While the secondary education educators identified a range of SEL skills that they deemed important for academic and life success, this Research Brief was designed to offer evidence regarding two concerns that were raised: (1) whether reducing time for teaching content may impact learning outcomes, and (2) whether SEL lessons would be better facilitated by educators with training in counseling or social work.

### Will Improving Social Emotional Learning Skills Improve Learning?

Educators deserve evidence that using valuable classroom time to

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engage in SEL activities will result in stronger content mastery. While it can be hard to imagine how improving SEL skills results in better standardized test scores, there is a body of evidence from multiple studies indicating that improving SEL skills results in better learning outcomes such as test scores and better life outcomes after secondary education.

- A large meta-analysis of 213 studies found that SEL provides academic, social, and emotional benefits to students in kindergarten through high school.<sup>v</sup> For learning outcomes, the study focused on math and reading achievement test scores or school grades in math and reading that were collected from school records (i.e., not student self-report). Those who participated in an SEL program showed an 11-percentile gain in achievement.
- Longitudinal research has also found that youth who developed SEL skills in adolescence were more likely as adults to be employed and satisfied with their work<sup>vi</sup> (Pinquart, Juang & Silbereisen, 2003).

In sum, there is strong evidence that taking time to invest in developing SEL skills in secondary education settings has tremendous benefits for students' academic and life success.

### **Should SEL Activities be Facilitated by Educators with Specialized Training in Counseling and Social Work?**

Many secondary education teachers believe that they do not possess the knowledge and competencies needed to facilitate SEL lessons. The evidence however demonstrates that the strongest effects of SEL activities on learning were found when classroom educators facilitated the lessons.

- The meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. found that when classroom educators facilitated SEL lessons yielded an average .34 effect size on academic performance (test scores and grades) while “non-school personnel” facilitated lessons yielded a nonsignificant effect of .12.<sup>vii</sup>


In sum, for improving academic outcomes, educator facilitated SEL activities were found to have nearly 3 times the impact over “non-school personnel” facilitated SEL activities.



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<sup>ii</sup> 15 countries completed a qualitative investigation of educator perceptions regarding the nature and value of SEL skills. For a description of the project see <https://bit.ly/2LrKXiQ>.

<sup>iii</sup> World Economic Forum (2015). *New Vision for Education: Fostering Social Emotional Learning Through Technology*. Boston, MA: Author. Available at <https://bit.ly/1pDcHlP>.

<sup>iv</sup> CASEL.org.

<sup>v</sup> Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 474–501.

<sup>vi</sup> Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen. (2003). Self-efficacy and successful school-to-work transition: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63(3), 329-346.

<sup>vii</sup> Durlak et al.