



Sponsored by
xello

CONNECTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) TO CAREER SUCCESS

By Dr. Angela Smith, School of Education, North Carolina State University

Twenty-six years ago, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) first introduced the term “social emotional learning” (CASEL, 2021). SEL is defined today as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2021). SEL is gaining traction within schools, particularly as research demonstrates an increase in overall well-being and lifelong benefits (Taylor, R. D., et al, 2017). Fortunately, social-emotional skills and attributes can be learned, taught, and modeled as well as dexterously interwoven and prioritized in career and technical education (CTE) programs.

Foundations

The recent focus on SEL within academia has led to an increase in articles, literature reviews, and empirical studies on SEL in educational settings. A webinar offered by *Education Week* titled, “[Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Needs in the Pandemic](#),” highlighted a 2011 landmark meta-analysis study that captured the benefits of SEL and identified the value of incorporating it within schools. These benefits include: “student gains related to (1) social-emotional skills, (2) improved attitudes about self, others, and school, (3) positive classroom behavior, and (4) 11 percentile-point gain on standardized achievement tests.” (ACT webinar, 2020).

Research also clearly supports integrating SEL programs into career-development practices and student-learning plans. A meta-analysis of 213 programs found that integrating these programs into education reduced the risk of student failure and future career failure by improving academic goals, good citizenship attitudes and behaviors, and employability (Durlak, J. A., et al, 2011). In this article, employability is defined as a set of characteristics that include a person’s knowledge/academics, technical skills, communication skills, and aptitudes, as well as a person’s social-emotional skills, including attitude, interpersonal skills, problem-solving abilities, self-awareness, self-management, and leadership abilities.

Employers recognize the importance of SEL skills, and many now prioritize these skills when hiring. But they are often frustrated by the lack of such skills in the available workforce. One study that collected raw data from employer surveys found that 79% of employers ranked social-emotional skills as most important when asked to select among four skill sets: basic cognitive, higher-order cognitive, technical, and socio-emotional. (Cunningham, W. & Villasenor, P., 2016).

The data clearly indicates that employers seek out employees with SEL abilities to meet the needs of careers in the modern economy. Incorporating SEL into academic curricula offers students essential skills for future career success.

Promising Practices

Over the past few years, a variety of teacher-facing resources have been developed to advance student SEL skills, such as Xello's "An [Educator's Guide](#) to Developing Social-Emotional Learning Skills in K–12 Students." In addition, various school systems have begun trialing SEL programs in their career training curricula. These school-based programs have demonstrated student growth in social-emotional abilities, encouraging the expansion of SEL programs across the United States and around the globe. A number of promising SEL strategies are being implemented to support CTE students — some at the school, institution, or district level and others directly in CTE classrooms.

For example, SEL is embedded in Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) courses and modelled by those teachers and mentors as they connect and empower students to explore their interests, goals and skills. The innate focus on human and family development and relationships within FCS pushes SEL to the forefront of programs, and the comprehensive "[Body of Knowledge](#)" framework that is used by the FCS field provides a visual model that demonstrates the interlinking circles of personal well-being, family, and community and how they are nested in life development skills and "human ecosystems." The Family, Career and Community Leaders of America Career and Technical Student Organization extends this mindset through its cocurricular activities.

The Career Development program in the [Johnston County Public School system](#) of North Carolina is an exemplary example of SEL practices. The program follows the SEL NC CTE Curriculum Standards and offers tactical approaches and resources for SEL interventionists to choose curriculum for explicit SEL instruction. The district began a pilot program with [Panorama Education](#) at the beginning of the 2017 school year. This student-success platform utilizes academic, behavioral and SEL competencies as tools to observe and view the whole child. Johnson County used the Panorama Ed "[Portrait of a Graduate](#)" program to [identify and measure the SEL skills and traits](#) that the district believes students should embrace and exemplify when they graduate, and then develop K-12 curricula around promoting those skills and traits.

Great Oaks Career Campuses in Ohio also began using Panorama Education in 2021 when the district administered a student back to school survey that was designed to help counselors and staff get to know their students in a remote environment. The survey helped identify needs related to hunger, internet availability and other issues impacting students, and Great Oaks is planning to administer a second survey on "Social-Emotional Learning: Student Competency and Well Being Measures" which will include questions such as "Do you have enough food to eat?" and "Would you like to talk privately with a teacher, counselor, or other adult from your school about how you are doing or for extra support?"

Many CTE health sciences programs routinely include an SEL focus within their courses. As part of the Health Occupations program at Newburgh Enlarged City School District in New York, a "Mindful Monday" initiative has been incorporated that offers a check-in with students to prepare for the week and breakout sessions with activities, such as yoga, breathing exercises and discussion of student feelings. Self-reflection and positive affirmation are part of the program, and students have been encouraged to keep reflection journals. Simple activities, such as "Rate your day on a scale of 1-10," are incorporated during other days of the week to gauge students' emotional state if mind, which can have a significant impact on learning.

At Calhoun Area Career Center (CACC) in Michigan, counselors meet with students virtually in class to deliver mindfulness/self-care lessons and provide a lesson on developing health habits for virtual learning when students are struggling to attend courses and engage. The mindfulness/self-care training began when the Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement program was seeking a way to assist students who were learning about sensitive topics that trigger emotional responses. CACC also has conducted student-group book studies, such as utilizing the book *Make Your Bed*, by William H. McRaven, which focuses on 10 lessons to help students develop health coping strategies when faced with difficult life situations.

San Juan College, a two-year higher education institution in New Mexico, administers a number of activities for occupational therapy assistants, including personality assessments, body language trainings and contextualized applications of emotional intelligence. Regular feedback collected from students indicates the SEL actions are appreciated and valued. Students are asked to take the [True Colors](#) assessment and complete their personality profile to support understanding of different personalities and promote increased communication, collaboration, and teamwork. Faculty use the True Colors profiles to help establish and diversify teams for group projects and class projects and to help structure assignments and activities to meet the needs of the various personality types. For example, a student with the "brightest" color of orange enjoys competition, spontaneity and movement, so an in-class activity could be designed incorporating these factors to engage this student.

SEL support can come from outside the school walls, too; think creatively. Washington Township Schools in Indianapolis includes unique mindfulness practices for its high school homeroom classes through an informal relationship with a nurse from the Indiana University Health system, who is also a parent. The practices relate to relevant topics occurring each month, such as testing, holidays, school breaks and other stress-inducing events. Also consider external organizations that offer intentional strategies that provide SEL-related support, such as student voice and choice. [Girls Make Beats](#) is an organization that empowers girls by expanding the female presence of music producers, DJs and audio engineers. Its mission – to provide young female students career role models and mentorship – directly addresses issues of inclusion, access, equity and diversity which can help students see themselves within the careers they are pursuing.

Getting Started

Administrators, teachers, counselors and career professionals interested in infusing SEL curriculum and competencies at their school are encouraged to review the resources offered in this article. To begin, review the CASEL SEL competencies to improve understanding in the key principles that translate to student success throughout life.

Self-awareness is a core competency within the model. As career development facilitators and others introduce SEL principles, it is essential to pause and reflect upon one's own SEL core competencies and the ways each facilitator demonstrates the SEL skills in practice within the community. Facilitators serve as role models and guides to learning SEL skills, and SEL interventionists and CTE professionals can play a pivotal role in the school and community by teaching and practicing SEL skills in staff meetings, trainings, and curriculum enhancements.

Following are a few suggestions for applying and incorporating SEL principles into CTE programming and for promoting student growth throughout their academic journey:

- **Self-awareness and Assessment:** Survey students to determine the level of access that they feel they have to career and SEL development material and activities, such as guideposts and quality ILPs, and to ascertain how well their own social-emotional skills are developed regarding motivation, self-efficacy, self-awareness, resilience, stress, etc.
- **Collaborate to Create ILP:** Invite learners and parents to team up with teachers to create goal-oriented and self-regulatory ILPs that develop employability and social-emotional traits.
- **Develop a Multifaceted Plan:** Develop multifaceted ILPs that include setting specific intra-disciplinary educational objectives, conducting research, collaborating with other learners, critically weighing information, and using social-emotional skills to problem-solve and persist through setbacks.
- **Practice Presentation and Peer-Feedback:** Students may be encouraged to present their work to student-colleagues for review. Students will learn how to present their work as well as how to accept and give peer-feedback.
- **Track Progress:** Motivate students to track their own progress on SEL and related skills and traits by offering a self-assessment rubric, such as the one created by [Edutopia](#).
- **Progress not Perfection:** Provide opportunities for students to explore, test new ideas and make mistakes. Students may learn social-emotional skills from these experiences and, in the process, build their capacity for resiliency.
- **Creating Connection:** Build community by sharing SEL skills with teachers, staff, family members, partners, and others in the school and community.
- **Observe and Learn SEL from Others:** Read biographies or autobiographies of people in interesting vocations and careers to discover how they identified and developed their technical and social-emotional skills, set goals, dealt with setbacks and failure, collaborated with others, and used critical thinking. Additionally, identify partnerships in the learner community and connect students to these resources.
- **Empower Student Voices:** It is imperative to provide space for students to practice and share their unique perspectives in order to create opportunities for students to share their worldview and authentic experiences.

There are many skills that young people need to develop to succeed in the workplace, including strong social and emotional abilities. Teachers, administrators, and social-emotional learning interventionists play a key role in modeling and infusing SEL skills into the learning community. Ultimately, infusing SEL skills into the CTE curriculum helps support a solid foundation for a variety of career paths and gives students skills needed to thrive throughout life.

RESOURCES

Armstrong, Thomas. (2006). *The Best Schools: How Human Development Research Should Inform Educational Practice*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 58235th edition, 139.

Committee for Children. CASEL. (2016). "Why Social and Emotional Learning and Employability Skills Should Be Prioritized in Education." Retrieved from <https://www.cfchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/policy-advocacy/sel-employability-brief.pdf>

Cunningham, W. & Villasenor, P. (2016). Employer Voices, Employer Demands, and Implications for Public Skills Development Policy Connecting the Labor and Education Sectors, World Bank Group. Retrieved from <https://www.cfchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/what-is-sel/docs/world-bank-group.pdf>.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Society for Research in Child Development: Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.

Fischer, K. (2013). "The Employment Mismatch." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Employment-Mismatch/137625>.

LEADFCS. Framework for Family & Consumer Sciences. Retrieved from <http://www.leadfcsed.org/career-pathways-through-fcs.html>.

Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects. *Child development*, 88(4), 1156–1171. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12864>.

Weblinks related to SEL:
Harmony Social & Emotional Learning
<https://www.harmonysel.org/>

The Goldie Hawn Foundation: MindUP For
<https://mindup.org/>

Capturing Kids Hearts
<https://www.capturingkidshearts.org/>

Collaborative Classroom: Caring School Community Program
<https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/programs/caring-school-community/>

7 Mindsets
<https://7mindsets.com/>

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports
<https://www.pbis.org>