

THE ADVOCATE



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When X = Student Activities, Social and Emotional Learning Becomes Integral to the Equation

BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

As educators do their best to groom college- and career-savvy students, expectations for 21st-century readiness continue to evolve. New Common Core standards provide a framework for shaping curriculum, and many education advocates now demand that we look beyond traditional requirements in reading, math, and science. In addition to academics, social and emotional learning (SEL) is gaining ground as an essential factor in the education equation.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a national organization dedicated to making evidence-based SEL an integral part of education. Through research and teamwork with education stakeholders, CASEL has identified five core competencies related to healthy social and emotional development: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Studies have found that these factors are not only critical to an individual's emotional well-being but also have a positive impact on academic learning.¹ When SEL is embedded into the core curriculum for multiple years, it can promote positive behaviors, improve student attitudes, and increase academic performance by 11 percent.² The inclusion of yet another competency can seem daunting. Fortunately, student activities are a practical forum for easily incorporating SEL into schools.

In 2011, CASEL launched the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI). The goal of the initiative is to support systemic SEL implementation in districts across the country. Dr. Pamela Randall-Garner, senior staff advisor for CDI, believes that SEL is critical to the →

Social and Emotional Competencies + Project-Based Learning

Student Success



Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL),
*Social and Emotional Learning
Core Competencies*

CASEL has identified five competencies for social and emotional learning.

SELF-AWARENESS

The ability to accurately recognize emotions and their influence on behavior.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to empathize with others and understand social and ethical norms for behavior.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The ability to maintain healthy, rewarding relationships with others.

RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING

The ability to make constructive, respectful choices about behavior and social interactions.



education of all children. “As adults, we use these core competencies every day to be successful in relationships, in work, and in life,” she said. “These skills are as important as math and other academics in supporting successful students who are college and career ready.”

The Metropolitan Nashville Public School District in Tennessee is one of eight large urban districts currently partnering with CASEL on CDI. A district-wide directive targeting school improvement in 10 key areas had Nashville administrators looking for tools to support reform. The combination of a CASEL-based SEL program with project-based learning is providing a common-sense solution. Administrators view SEL as an important factor in empowering students to have a voice and take increased responsibility for their choices, both in and out of the classroom. “We are finding that the integration of SEL strategies and project-based learning is a perfect marriage,” said Randall-Garner. “Students need all five competencies to work on a team, identify issues they want to affect, show empathy, and address conflicts.”

The Importance of the Middle School and High School Years

In his 30-plus years as a teacher, activities director, and principal, John Glimco has witnessed the many benefits of SEL. In 2004, Glimco had a front row seat as Illinois became the first state in the nation to adopt and implement freestanding K–12 SEL standards. Currently, most states have SEL standards for preschools, but few

have formalized these standards for the critical adolescent years. “As students progress through middle school and high school, they find themselves in an ever-changing environment with new norms, new faces, and new social and academic challenges,” said Glimco. Social and emotional learning is imperative as students work to develop a strong identity and develop skills for real-life challenges. He recommends a transition plan that stresses SEL by focusing on school orientation, personalized invitations for activity involvement, and methods for monitoring student engagement.

While the value of social and emotional learning is intuitive to many educators, it often takes a backseat during the teen years. “Elementary teachers usually understand that social and emotional development leads to a more functional classroom, but in the upper grades, we can lose that perspective as the focus turns to academics,” said Micah Jacobson, co-founder of the Boomerang Project, home to innovative student orientation and transition programs. “The point of education at all levels is to create socially and emotionally healthy kids who become fully functional adults. When we consciously put SEL into secondary schools, we are helping to produce ‘whole’ students who will contribute to the kind of society we all want to live in.”

Student Activities Support SEL

The Boomerang Project’s flagship programs, Link Crew and Where Everybody Belongs (WEB), have helped millions of students make a successful leap into middle schools and high schools all across the country. Buoyed by the belief that students can help other students succeed, peer mentors from upper classes serve as role models for students entering their first year of middle-level or high school. The mentors add to new-student success by offering support and guidance throughout the entire first year. While adult coordinators provide structure and training, the programs are student led. Student leaders develop social competencies as they interact with peers and support incoming students. “With these programs, kids aren’t just talking about leading, they are actually doing it,” Jacobson said. “We can discuss compassion and cooperation, but it’s hard to understand without practice. With student activities, we can intentionally reach out to kids who aren’t typically involved as leaders. We can provide the structure, instruction, and opportunities to practice the social and emotional skills that are important for everyone.”

Jacobson believes that student-driven, school-based, adult-supervised activities like WEB and Link Crew are an ideal venue for the development of social and emotional skills. “Activities are the secret sauce of American education,” he said. “Student activities are where our students learn things like teamwork, entrepreneurship, and how to thrive when they leave the school system.” He points out that extra- and cocurricular activities integrate many pieces of the comprehensive vision of what it takes for young people to thrive.

Glimco agrees that student activities can connect many of the characteristics that education experts have in mind when they talk about 21st-century development. “The new Common Core standards emphasize critical thinking and the application of skills toward solving real-life challenges,” he said. “All of these can be connected to the SEL core competencies. When we view activities beyond the surface level—as more than an event, dance, or end product—they become an extension of the classroom.” Key SEL characteristics and Common Core standards can both be applied. With student activities, Glimco cautions that it can be easy to get caught up in a perceived end goal, but doing so will result in a missed opportunity. Instead, educators should utilize the entire activities’

“The point of education at all levels is to create socially and emotionally healthy kids who become fully functional adults. When we consciously put SEL into secondary schools, we are helping to produce ‘whole’ students who will contribute to the kind of society we all want to live in.”

process to deliberately promote SEL. “Activities provide our students with countless opportunities to make decisions responsibly with adult support and in a safe manner that can promote growth,” he said. “The student council member must gather information from multiple sources to represent various perspectives. The swim-team athlete learns how individual decisions impact the team as a whole. The Future Business Leader of America learns about accountability. Whether or not the team wins the meet or the dance is a success is inconsequential in comparison to the greater life lessons learned through participation.”

While stakeholders are beginning to understand the critical need for SEL in education, the biggest benefits can only be realized when social and emotional learning becomes an integral part of the school community. Randall-Garner explains that through the CDI program, CASEL members were reminded of the importance of adults as role models. Educators might be doing a great job of promoting SEL in the classroom, but students are also influenced by behaviors they see during activities, in the hallways, and in the cafeteria. Because of this, the adults in the building need to be on a parallel track with their students, learning social and emotional skills at an adult level so they can effectively model these skills. “For SEL to have the most impact, it must be made a part of the school’s culture, not just in the classroom, but in interactions throughout the school,” she said. “Adults need to understand that they are a work in progress just like their students. Every communication with a bus driver, cafeteria worker, student, or parent can be seen as a teachable moment.”

At Pleasantdale Middle School in Burr Ridge, IL, where Glimco is the principal, a 40-year art teacher exemplifies SEL in action. Glimco explains that the art club is a popular after-school destination. “The teacher consistently models SEL through her own actions,” he said. “She encourages collaboration and social awareness. She teaches students that they can be a critic or a supporter as long as they are respectful. She demonstrates SEL on a daily

basis and encourages social and emotional growth among all of her students. This is why she is still teaching after 40 years and why students are anxious to visit her classroom.”

As a former principal, Randall-Garner understands the time constraints and pressures faced by educators who are asked to implement additional standards, but she encourages them to embrace the relevance of social and emotional learning. “When administrators and their staff are intentional about the integration of social and emotional learning, our educators are able to see it as part of the whole—a common-sense strategy that applies to the essential skills their students need for school, work, and life.” ●

TO LEARN MORE about CASEL’s five key competencies and the incorporation of SEL into our schools, view this video from Edutopia, a4sa.org/SEL-video.

TO LEARN MORE about CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative, visit casel.org/collaborating-districts.

FOR A COMPREHENSIVE LIST of SEL-related resources and research, visit the National School Climate Center at a4sa.org/SchoolClimate.

TO REVIEW Illinois’ SEL Learning Standards, visit a4sa.org/IL-SEL.

FIND OUT HOW the Boomerang Project’s innovative peer-mentoring programs help thousands of students transition into middle school and high school each year at boomerangproject.com.

1. J.E. Zins, R.P. Weissberg, M.C. Wang, and H.J. Walberg, eds., *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2004).
2. J.A. Durlak, R.P. Weissberg, A.B. Dymnicki, R.D. Taylor, and D.B. Schellinger, “The Impact of Enhancing Students’ Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions,” *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 405-32.

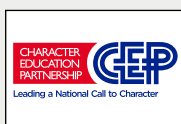
SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING RESOURCES a4sa.org/resources



CASEL Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) strives to make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education. The organization provides research, programs, and resources that support the integration of SEL into schools.



CHARACTER COUNTS An initiative of the Josephson Institute, Character Counts! Center for Youth Ethics supports character education through basic values that can be used to advance curricular and behavioral goals. The six values are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.



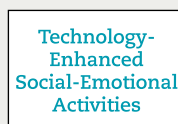
CHARACTER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP This nonprofit organization is a national advocate for character education. CEP defines character education practices, provides professional development tools, and hosts an annual conference.



ILLINOIS SEL STANDARDS In 2004, Illinois was the first state to adopt K-12 SEL standards. The CASEL framework serves as a guide for the state’s fully-aligned SEL standards.



NATIONAL SCHOOL CLIMATE CENTER NSCC’s goal is to promote a safe, supportive environment that nurtures social and emotional, ethical, and academic skills. The organization provides guidelines and services to help schools integrate social and emotional learning with academic instruction.



TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED SEL ACTIVITIES This Web site describes technology-based activities that facilitate social and emotional learning. The focus of the activities is on enhancing SEL, but many can also be connected with content standards related to language arts, visual arts, oral communication, and media literacy.

A California Family Affirms the Positive Impact of Activities

FOR TODD AND LAURA ARROWSMITH, extensive careers in the field of education have provided firsthand knowledge about the value of student activities in promoting student growth and positive school climate. But it is in their role as parents that the Arrowsmiths have witnessed their most personal and powerful vision of activities in action.

Currently, the Arrowsmiths are educators at West Ranch High School in Stevenson Ranch, CA. Todd is the school's director of activities and has served as a member of the California Association of Directors of Activities (CADA) for 18 years. Laura is a history teacher and a former school, district, and county teacher of the year.

At West Ranch, the Associated Student Body (ASB) allows students to shine as board members, class officers, or on small teams of commissioners in key areas like athletics, fine arts, recognition, and publicity. Laura believes that activities support the development of life skills through integrative, hands-on applications that aren't always practical in the classroom. "With ASB activities, everything is project based. The students have specific responsibilities but also do a lot of brainstorming," she said. "They learn to work as a team and solve problems when issues arise. The skills they are developing—entrepreneurship, initiative, social and emotional competence—are important in the classroom, but also apply to family and career."

Student activities have also been essential in developing a positive school climate. ASB members support the school and community in a variety of ways and provide an affirmative presence at all campus events. Rather than being a place to serve time until the bell rings, the school is transformed into a cohesive community defined by respect, increased student



Laura, Tyler, Scotty, and Todd Arrowsmith are champions for student activities.

engagement, and improved academics. "Student activities are the life-blood of a school," said Todd. "Student involvement establishes a school's reputation in the community and brings a sense of pride for all stakeholders."

The Arrowsmiths' sons, Tyler and Scotty, also appreciate the benefits of activity participation. Tyler, who has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, is currently a junior at West Ranch, where he serves as a commissioner on the ASB's media-tech team. His parents explain that Tyler's involvement in student activities has given him the confidence and leadership skills to succeed. Tyler's service includes responsibility for the sound system at every school-based activity, spirit rally, and sporting event. "Any time anyone at the school needs to be heard, Tyler is there," said Laura. "Recently, the assistant principal actively sought Tyler's help to work through a tech-related problem." She explains that for Tyler, as a student and aspiring engineer, all of these experiences are affirming and help to prepare him for success in the classroom and for life after high school.

Todd shares her opinion that student activities fuel experiences that groom students for future success. "The growth I have seen in Tyler during the three years he has been involved in student activities is mind-blowing," he said. "Recently, Tyler was in charge of a Lego robotics competition attended by more than 1,000 people. With very little help from adult mentors, he planned, organized, and ran the competition to perfection. He received many accolades from adults in attendance. None of this would have been possible without his involvement in student activities." ●

TO LEARN MORE about activities at West Ranch, visit a4sa.org/WestRanchASB.

TO LEARN MORE about student activities in California, visit cada1.org.



Tyler Arrowsmith gained valuable leadership skills by organizing a robotics competition.

"Student involvement establishes a school's reputation in the community and brings a sense of pride for all stakeholders."

Friendship Programs Support Social and Emotional Learning

AS STAKEHOLDERS SEEK to redefine education in the 21st century, social and emotional learning (SEL) is taking its rightful place as an essential element in the education equation.

Best Buddies Middle School and High School programs are peer-mentoring initiatives that rely on the power of friendship to help kids develop social and emotional competencies. In today's schools, students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often attend school with peers without IDD. Although the students walk the same hallways, students with IDD might have fewer interactions with others and are often left out of activities. Best Buddies remedies this situation by matching pairs of students, one with IDD and one without, in a one-to-one friendship. As a result, both students experience growth.

David M. Quilleon, senior vice president of major gifts, mission, and operations at Best Buddies International explains why these programs are so important. "Students with IDD often have a hard time making friends. Many end up going through middle school and high school lonely, isolated, rejected, and even bullied. Best Buddies bridges that social gap by matching them with a peer volunteer. The positive effects of a Best Buddies friendship are many. Some students experience going to the movies or celebrating a birthday with a friend for the very first time. Other students improve communication and computer skills. Still others secure meaningful jobs. Whatever the outcome, the impact is undeniable. Best Buddies is reshaping our communities, changing attitudes, and creating a powerful movement toward the acceptance and inclusion of people with IDD," said Quilleon.

"Social opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities have traditionally been under-recognized and under-valued. By fostering social, emotional, and leadership skills, Best Buddies programs empower individuals with intellectual disabilities. Equally as important, the school programs instill the importance of inclusion in a new generation of young adults. Through their exposure in Best Buddies, our volunteers learn about the abilities of individuals with IDD and become lifelong advocates for them. Our peer buddies quickly find that they are an important gateway and that by simply introducing their buddies to other friends, they can make a world of difference—both in the buddy's school and social experience and in raising awareness about IDD among the rest of the student population." ●

TO LEARN MORE about Best Buddies, visit bestbuddies.org.

WATCH A VIDEO celebrating 25 years of Best Buddies' friendships at a4sa.org/BestBuddies.



RSVP: The Power of the Student Voice in Enriching School Climate

RAISING STUDENT VOICE AND PARTICIPATION (RSVP) is a student engagement program developed by the National Association of Student Councils (NASC) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). RSVP encourages students to use the power of their voices to identify concerns and to develop action-oriented solutions. Administrators who make the time to support this initiative are discovering that RSVP nurtures a positive school climate.

RSVP calls for student council leaders at middle-level and high schools to plan and facilitate a series of summits designed to engage the entire student body. In the summits, students are invited to talk about issues that matter to them. After the issues are identified, a student-led leadership team develops a civic action plan.

Jeff Sherrill, associate director of NASC, explains that RSVP personalizes the school experience for each student. Students who have never been asked for their opinions now have the opportunity to share their views. Sherrill stresses that support from the school administrator is essential. "The principal has to buy into the value of the students' voices and be willing to commit time and resources to the program," he said. "Showing students that they can speak up and be heard without being berated is empowering to them. Once kids find their voices, it improves relationships and builds a cooperative environment that benefits the whole school."

In addition, it is important that all action plans are reviewed with the principal in advance. This sets students up for success by ensuring that all projects are safe and in line with the school's learning objectives.

Joseph Moylan, principal at Oconomowoc (WI) High School, found that the RSVP program was so beneficial in addressing needs that he now uses key concepts from it on a regular basis. When he is faced with an issue that would benefit from student intervention, he pitches it to a student leadership team. The team uses the RSVP summit format to discuss and propose solutions.

Administrators have also found that RSVP is an effective forum for addressing not only on-campus concerns but important issues in the community and the rest of the world. Topics addressed by students have included cyberbullying, cafeteria choices, and teen pregnancy.

Sherrill believes that administrators can use RSVP to create a culture of social inclusion. "It's powerful when students are allowed to use their voices to impact not only their school but issues that carry over into the community and even globally," he said. "RSVP helps send the message that everyone should have a voice, not just in the classroom, but in life." ●

TO LEARN MORE about the NASC's RSVP program, visit nasc.us/rsvp.



Innovative Science Program Falls Prey to Budget Cuts

AT NORTHEAST HIGH SCHOOL in Philadelphia, PA, budget shortages have forced administrators to discontinue a groundbreaking science program with a 50-year history of cultivating student success. The program's demise is indicative of fiscal challenges that continue to plague school districts across the country and often result in the loss of important extra- and cocurricular activities.

In addition to debate, dance, and Science Olympiad, the Space Research Center program (SPARC) was one of dozens of programs dropped from the Northeast roster. Established in 1963, the program was physics teacher Robert



Apollo Training Capsule provided by NASA

A. G. Montgomery's winning attempt to increase his students' interest in science through innovative, hands-on activities. The program gave rise to Northeast's Medical, Engineering, and Aerospace magnet program, which still exists, and inspired generations of students to study engineering, robotics, and computer science.

Realizing the value of the program in helping their students develop the skills to shine, teachers kept the program alive in recent years through volunteer service, but their efforts were unable to compensate for lack of funding. School administrators, teachers, students, and parents believe in the value of SPARC and are campaigning for additional sources of funding to return the program to their school. ●

READ MORE a4sa.org/Northeast-SPARC.

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These innovative, user-friendly web platforms allow you to reach beyond budget constraints and connect with new sources of financial support.

Integrated into eBay's familiar buying and selling platform, eBay Giving Works allows people to support important causes. Sellers can donate a portion of their sales, and buyers can shop while supporting their favorite nonprofit organizations.

GivingWorks.ebay.com

Public school teachers post classroom project requests online, and donors select the project and dollar amount of their choice.

DonorsChoose.org

Bring your creative project to life by creating momentum and rallying people around your idea. Projects funded include films, games, music, art, design, and technology.

Kickstarter.com

Create a stunning online fundraising page with compelling images and video to raise money for your favorite cause, and have fun in the process!

CrowdRise.com

Find support for any school-related project, event, or program by leveraging social media and viral marketing to raise small contributions from a large pool of people.

EdBacker.com

Fund student clubs, trips, school supplies, and more by using simple, powerful tools while showcasing your hard work and passion.

Piggybackr.com

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