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IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

A MASTER'S THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY  
ANNA APPICELLI

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

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APPROVED

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## Abstract

Social and emotional learning is an ever growing need in our schools. Research states that students are in more need of guidance in social skills than ever before. Providing students with an SEL program that helps them develop prosocial skills and the five competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making will not only help improve the negative behavior but will also improve the classroom atmosphere, teacher and peer relationships, and academics. This thesis highlights these three social and emotional curriculums the 4R's, Second Step, and Positive Action and examines what the research says about the impact on behavior and academics for each program. Having an SEL program in early childhood and elementary aged classrooms will lay the important foundations for all students to feel success throughout their academic career.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Teachers across the world are pressured with a greater responsibility than just teaching academics. A child's social and emotional development previously had been a function of the family (Martinson, 2016). We, as teachers, need to grasp the idea of developing the whole child and fight for a strong social and emotional program to be implementing within our schools. We are developers of children and we need to develop every child's ability to recognize and manage emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals, behave ethically and responsibly, and avoid negative behaviors.

When I became a teacher, I remember being taught the best ways to teach a child how to read or complete a math problem, but when I was in my first classroom position I quickly realized that I am not only in charge of their academics, I am in charge of a whole lot more. As a first year teacher, I began to struggle with behaviors, which in turn led to missing out on academics because of those behaviors. I quickly realized that what I was taught about teaching was not the reality. When I started to help my students develop their social and emotional skills, my classroom quickly became a safe place, a fun place, and a place where learning soared. Thinking about this reminds me that when I was in first grade, my first grade teacher poured her heart into making her students feel loved, welcomed, and smart. This is the kind of teacher I want to be but if I ignore the problems that are quickly arising in children's development of social and emotional skills, I will not be able to be this teacher to my students. We, as educators, need to be implementing a strong social and emotional learning (SEL) program so we can be the teacher that loves, welcomes, and makes all students feel smart.



Throughout this thesis, I will address the important factors about social and emotional learning. I will answer these research questions: What is social and emotional learning? Which SEL programs have the most benefits for improved academics achievement and behavior skills? How do we implement an SEL program?

I am a developer of children. Throughout the literature in this thesis I have gained a strong grip on the statement. My goal is to help each child where they are at so they can be the best they can be.

### **History of Social and Emotional Learning**

Social and emotional learning is deeply rooted in the history of American progressive education. Edward Thorndike, a progressive educator, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century advocated linking education with psychology (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). This struck John Dewey to introduce his techniques into the American education. His theory of constantly exposing children to group work for socialization purposes is education's modern way of saying collaboration, problem-based learning, group work or consensus.

The publication in 1995 of *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* by Daniel Goleman pushed for a greater focus on emotional skills in schools (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Some described this idea of emotional skills or intelligence as a fad or a corporate marketing scheme but CASEL and other SEL advocates embrace the book as justification for increased implementation of SEL in schools.

Social and emotional learning took hold and developed quickly throughout the years. In 2000, the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" was implemented. The National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) labeled the attributes of John Dewey's work to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills or character traits. In 1992 Marc Tucker, former NCEE

president, wrote the infamous “Dear Hillary” letter to the white house which paved a great path for workforce training to be molding into the American education (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Two years later that letter turned into the “No Child Left Behind Act”. A few years later, in 2007, the Head Start Act took precedent in helping get SEL in the schools. When the Common Core Standards Initiative came about in 2010, they intertwined SEL skills within the standards claiming that SEL and Common Core Standards are closely and intentionally linked together. As of late, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has strongly pushed for the SEL component to be included in all schools.

### **Key Terms**

Throughout this thesis, the terms “Social and Emotional Learning”, “CASEL”, “Five SEL Competences”, and “evidence-based”. These terms are important to identify and understand before the literature within this thesis.

“Social and Emotional Learning” is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Throughout this thesis social and emotional learning will be referred as SEL or just social emotional skills.

“CASEL” is the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. CASEL is an organization that heavily researches and writes about the importance of SEL and the programs that have been developed. They are an influential guide to navigating the SEL world. The “Five SEL Competences” were developed by CASEL in

order to clearly state and identify what SEL programs should address. The five competences will be stated later in the thesis.

“Evidence-Base” will be used within this thesis to adhere the importance of the background of SEL programs. Evidence-Based is the idea that occupational practices ought to be based on scientific evidence.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literature Search Procedures**

To locate the literature for this thesis, searches of Education Journals, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest Education database and EBSCO MegaFILE were conducted for publications from 1990-2019. This list was narrowed by only reviewing published empirical studies from peer-reviewed journals that focused on social and emotional learning and the impact of academic and behaviors found in journals that addressed the guiding questions. The key words that were used in these searches included “social emotional learning,” “impact of social skills,” “academic impact of SEL,” “behavior impact of SEL,” “SEL programs.” The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on social-emotional impact in three sections in this order: Social and Emotional Learning; SEL Programs; SEL Implications.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

“Social and emotional learning involves the processes of developing social and emotional competencies in children. SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful; social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker; and many different risky behaviors.” states Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional, Learning (CASEL, 2012). CASEL (2012) identifies five interrelated sets of cognitive, effective, and behavioral competencies: 1) Self-awareness: one’s ability to identify their own emotions and thoughts; 2) Self-management: one’s ability to regulated thoughts, behavior, and emotions in a variety of situations; 3) Social awareness: the ability to have perspective

and empathize with others of various backgrounds, and understand ethical/social norms, and recognize family, school, and community supports and resources; 4) Relationship skills: one's ability to develop and maintain relationships with others that are healthy and rewarding; 5) Responsible decision making: the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others. These five competencies are not only important to develop early on, but they are important to increase a child's ability to socialize with peers, other adults, and to help children's ability to be fully engaged in learning and benefit from educational instruction. Educators, policymakers, and parents recognize the importance of the five competencies and they recognize that they need to be taught to children. School-based SEL programs have proven to promote and enhance students' connection to school, positive behavior, and academic achievement through extensive research (CASEL, 2012). Some SEL programs teach social and emotional skills directly. Sometimes programs address various topics that have to do with substance abuse, violence, health, and character education. Other SEL approaches have specific curricular and instructional components that nurture safe, caring, engaging, and participatory learning environments that build student attachment to school, motivation to learn, and academic achievement (CASEL, 2012).

Two predictors are indicated for academic performance and social adjustment when implementing any SEL program. Those two indicators are the quality of teacher-student interactions and the instructional practices that are taking place within the classroom. (CASEL, 2012) SEL programs that train teachers to develop these qualities

can benefit students in so many ways. Teachers will learn to be more emotionally supportive and use positive discipline practices to enhance student skill development. When students are learning their social-emotional skills, it is important that they have opportunities to apply what they are learning and when teachers are providing that safe classroom environment, students will feel more comfortable in applying their new skills. If social and emotional learning is taking place in the classroom, students need to feel comfortable to use these skills school wide. Many SEL programs integrate systems beyond the classroom such as a practice that helps promote supportive and positive relationships among other teachers and students within the school and families. When systemic social, emotional, and academic learning becomes the primary structure for a district or school, the result is a school who is thriving in SEL (CASEL, 2012).

CASEL (2012) has examined the evidence of the impact of an SEL program and believes that a district can have its best improvements by developing the capacity to support a high-quality and evidence-based SEL program. When districts and schools adopt a systematic evidence-based SEL program, it establishes high expectations that support the belief that all children can learn with appropriate support. Stakeholders use strategies that are focused on the student's needs, interests, and developmentally appropriate all while keeping culturally and linguistically relevant. Teachers provide precise SEL instruction on the five competencies associated with SEL standards as well as opportunities of how to apply the learned SEL skill within daily interactions. (CASEL, 2012).

CASEL first shared a program review back in 2003 called *Safe and Sound: A Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning*

*Programs*. This new CASEL program *Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs* has preschool and elementary school SEL programs that they refer to as SElect programs. These SElect programs must be well-designed, classroom-based, evidence-based, offer training and other implementation support, address all five of the CASEL competencies, programming is multi-year, evidence of effectiveness (CASEL, 2012). The CASEL Guide (2012) also required an evaluation of each SElect program in a school setting with a preschool or elementary grade population (up to fifth grade). The programs must have data on student academic and social behavior not just on perceptions of growth. CASEL identified potential relevant classroom-based programs that are specifically designed for a wide range of students. When evaluations of the program had met the criteria, they asked the programs to send their materials. Graduate-level coders with extensive education and experience in social and emotional learning reviewed all program materials.

After the programs met the inclusion criteria, CASEL (2012) alphabetically rated the SElect programs and rated in main areas. The first set of ratings is for “Program Design and Implementation Support”: 1) Grade range covered; 2) Grade-by-grade sequence; 3) Average number of sessions per year; 4) Classroom approaches to teaching SEL: a) explicit SEL skills instruction, b) integration with academic curriculum areas, c) Teacher instructional practices; 5) Opportunities to practice social and emotional skills; 6) Contexts that promote and reinforce SEL: a) Classroom beyond the SEL program lessons, b) School-wide, c) Family, d) community; 6) Assessment tools for monitoring implementation and student behavior. The second set of ratings is for “Evidence of Effectiveness”: 1) Grade range covered, 2) Characteristics of sample, 3) Study Design, 4)

Evaluation outcomes: a) Improved academic performance, b) Improved positive social behavior, c) Reduced conduct problems, d) Reduced emotional distress. (CASEL, 2012)

CASEL (2012) states students benefit academically, socially, and behaviorally when planning teams from schools and districts oversee the selection and implementation of evidence-based social and emotional learning programs. When it comes to the impact, sustainability, and implementations of an evidence-based SEL program there are three key principles. The first one is that school and district teams should engage diverse stakeholders in the program selection process. The second key principle is to implement evidence-based SEL programs in the context of systemic district and schooling programs. This means that the team needs to assess the current SEL program, build systems that provide ongoing professional development, link SEL programs to student-centered instruction, and use data from SEL implementation to improve. Principle three is to consider local contextual factors to better understand your resources and challenges. Once your team has been identified and is ready to pick a program, use the resources that CASEL (2012) has provided. Always be willing to improve, monitor, and excel.

CASEL (2012) has put rigorous time and effort into developing this review of SEL programs. *Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs: Preschool and Elementary School Edition*, CASEL Guide 2013, is an important staple in the research being reported.

Today's schools are expected to do more than just academic instruction. Among the rapidly changing economy, social pressures, weakening community institutes (social and emotional skills and moral development), and easier access to media, teachers need to foster success in school and in life for all children, often with little to no resources.



Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, and Elias (2003) state that within every community, schools are serving an array of students with varied abilities and motivation for learning. Some students are successful, committed, and participate actively in academics and others struggle with engagement and academics. On top of those who are successful or not, there are large numbers of children with mental health needs and deficits in social-emotional competence. This, in turn, causes difficulty learning or disrupting of the educational experiences of their peers. Approximately 20% of young people experience mental health problems during the course of a year, yet 75% to 80% of these do not receive appropriate interventions. Given the demands for SEL in classrooms, many child advocates and researchers have proposed insignificant initiatives to address problems without an adequate understanding of the mission, priorities, and culture of schools. These insignificant efforts often are troublesome. Greenberg et al. (2003) say this because some forms of SEL are typically introduced in short, fragmented plans and they are introduced without the strong backing of support from the school's administration or strong leadership. Social emotional programs that are inadequately being implemented, coordinated, evaluated, and improved over time will likely have little to no impact on students and the program is unlikely to be sustained. SEL programming builds students' abilities to recognize/manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, set goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively through the cultural and developmental appropriateness that is applied in everyday learning situations. It also enhances students' connection to school through caring, engaging classroom and school practices (Greenberg et al., 2003). Learning social and emotional skills is similar to learning other academic skills. Children face complex

situations such as social relationships, academics, health, and citizenship that are constantly developing over time. Therefore, skills must be developed for navigating diverse contexts and handling challenges at each developmental level. This result is best accomplished through effective classroom instruction; student engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom; and broad student, parent, and community involvement in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Ideally, planned, ongoing, systematic, and coordinated SEL instruction should begin in preschool and continue through high school (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Social-emotional learning can have a positive effect on youth development. Greenberg et al. (2003) states that results of research on a multitude of 25 programs included improvements in interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, and academic achievement, as well as reductions in problem behaviors such as school misbehavior and truancy, alcohol and drug use, high-risk sexual behavior, violence, and aggression. A change in environmental organization and skill building were the two general strategies in most of the effective programs. All effective programs addressed a minimum of five SEL constructs stated by CASEL and the programs that were nine or more months produced better outcomes than short term interventions. The results of the 25-program study stressed the importance of implementing an SEL program that has structure manuals, guided activities, and that is consistent in program delivery.

In a world where mental health is growing at a rapid rate, SEL programs have such conclusions for helping mental health: (a) Multiyear programs are more likely to promote long lasting benefits; (b) SEL programs that focus on multiple domains (e.g., individual, school, and family) are more successful; (c) school climate should be a main

focus of intervention for school-age children; and (d) program success is enhanced by not only changing the children's behaviors but also the teacher and family behaviors, home and school relationships, and support from school and community for healthy, competent behavior.

Greenberg et al. (2003) report that SEL programming is linked to improving school attitudes, behavior, and academic achievement. Students' social-emotional competence promotes better academic performance. When students develop the five competencies, they are more self-aware and confident in their own abilities and students who are able to motivate themselves are able to set goals, manage stress, and are able to perform better. Students who are also making responsible decisions about their school work and use problem-solving and relationship skills are more likely to achieve more. Interpersonal, instructional, climate, and environmental supports that produce improved outcomes include the following: (a) partnering between teachers and families to encourage and reinforce learning commitment, engagement, and positive behavior; (b) safe and orderly school and classroom environments; (c) caring relationships between students and teachers that foster commitment and connection to school; (d) engaging teaching approaches such as cooperative learning and proactive classroom management; and (e) adult and peer norms that convey high expectations and support for high quality academic performance (Greenberg et al., 2003).

In summary of Greenberg et al. (2003), there is a solid and growing empirical base indicating that well-designed, well-implemented school-based prevention and youth development programming can positively influence a diverse array of social, health, and academic outcomes. Greenberg et al. (2003) and CASEL (2013) have very similar views

on the importance of Social and Emotional Learning within the classrooms and that has great value in the research that will be reported.

### **4R's Program**

Brown et al. (2010) explains the 4R's (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) as a school-based intervention in literacy development, conflict resolution, and intergroup understanding that trains and supports all teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade in how to integrate the teaching of social and emotional skills into the language arts curriculum. It is considered a universal intervention in that it targets and is implemented with the entire teacher and student population of a given school. Jones et al. (2010) states the 4R's Program consists of two components: (1) a social and emotional learning literacy-based curriculum that is spread out in 7-units and 21-25 lessons and (2) 25 hours of training alongside the coaching of teachers to support them in teaching the 4R's curriculum with a minimum of 12 contacts in one school year. Through the 4R's program, educators are taught how to use the superior children's literature as a catalyst for developing students' understanding and skills of handling anger, listening, assertiveness, cooperation, negotiation, mediation, building community, celebrating differences, and countering bias. By focusing on the students' conflicts, feelings, relationships, and community, the 4R's curriculum integrates the social and emotional learning into literacy instruction. The 4R's Program provides a pedagogical link between the teaching of conflict resolution and the teaching of fundamental academic skills, thereby capitalizing on their mutual influence on successful youth development (Brown et al., 2010, p. 5). The 4Rs Programs has several key features that promote the positive youth development: (a) the building of strong relationships between students, teachers,

and all staff; (b) the principles of inclusion, belonging, and diversity; (c) the establishment of positive social norms that emphasize individuals' contribution to and support of the classroom and school community while respecting each person's ideas and autonomy; (d) the development and maintenance of clear and consistent rules with appropriate and predictable mechanisms for control and limit setting in classrooms and schools overall; and (e) a focus on the learning and practicing of key developmentally appropriate and relevant skills through a variety of instructional techniques. Brown et al. (2010) state that the 4Rs Program aims to promote caring classroom environments by consistent and positive rules/norms, along with safe and secure environments that convey respect for student diversity, ideas, and autonomy.

### **Behavior Impact**

Throughout the last few decades, science behind the development of children has made meaningful progress in understanding the trajectories children have towards social-emotional and academic outcomes. Within the same time, the designing, the implementing, and the rigorous assessment of school-based interventions has made a dramatic progression in to promote positive social-emotional development and/or academic achievement. (Jones, Brown, Aber, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE), (2010). Throughout the last few decades there has been an expansion of programs attentive on increasing children's social and emotional development in order to reduce the aggression or violence and encourage positive interaction with their peers. From prevention science, information has sprouted about the

effectiveness of these programs strategies at decreasing children's risk for future violent or aggressive behavior.

This study contributes to the school-based prevention of social-emotional, behavioral, and academic problems by reporting three-year longitudinal, experimental impacts of the innovative social-emotional learning and literacy development intervention (the 4Rs Program, "Reading, Writing, Respect and Resolution") on a cohort of 3rd grade children's social-emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning after three consecutive years of exposure to the intervention. Jones et al. (2010) report the effects of the 4Rs Program over three years using six repeated assessments in children's social-cognitive, social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The researcher questioned what the impact of the three-year study would be in children's social social-cognitive processes, social-emotional symptomatology, their aggressive and socially competent behavior, and academic functioning, controlling for key demographic covariates and if the impact is moderated by the demographic baseline covariates and moderated by the baseline behavioral risk of the students (Jones et al., 2010).

Over three consecutive years, 18 public schools in the New York City area took part in the study. One thousand one hundred and eighty-four children and 146 teachers were a part of the ongoing, longitudinal evaluations of a universal school-wide literacy and social-emotional learning prevention program. Nine schools were intervention schools and the other nine schools were the control group. (Jones et al., 2010). Teachers completed questionnaires rating each child in their language, literacy, and social competency skills as well as their ability to externalize problems. The students also filled out a questionnaire rating their own aggressive social-cognitions, pro-social-cognitions,

and internalizing symptoms. Data was collected from the children in small groups and all questions were read out loud by a research assistant while a second research assistant circulated to monitor children's placement of responses and to answer the children's questions.

Jones et al. (2010) state that the study is a three year study but this article they explain the results after two years of implementation: 1) Social Cognitive Processes and Social-Emotional diagnosis: children in 4Rs schools self-reported lower hostile attributional bias, a slowed rate of growth in social aggressiveness and a steeper rate of decline in depressive and ADHD symptoms compared to children in the control schools; 2) Aggressive and Socially Competent Behavior: Teachers in 4Rs schools reported children's aggressive behavior was slowing (compared to increases in control schools), and increases in social competence (compared to declines in control schools); 3) Academic Functioning: children identified by teachers at greatest behavioral risk at baseline showed greater improvements as a result of exposure to 4Rs in their math and reading achievement and in teacher reports of their academic skills. To date, the impacts of an integrated, social-emotional and literacy program provides clear evidence that this universal intervention has both broad impacts on social-cognitive processes and behaviors in the social-emotional domain, and targeted impacts in the academic domain. This study provides good evidence that universal school-based interventions, delivered to whole populations of children, can result in substantial impacts on children's developmental health and well-being. (Jones et al., 2010)

Children grow and develop their classroom experiences through many multitudes but a huge part of developing those positive experiences are the relationships that the

student develops with their teacher and their peers. Developing these relationships, constitutes the culture and climate of the classroom environment for all students. Teacher-student relationships need to work together to build the unique characteristics of children and teachers and the cultural norms, values, and practices they bring to the relationship and to the classroom. Together the relationships and characteristics contribute to the climate of the classroom (Brown et al., 2010) In the article “Improving Classroom Quality: Teacher Influences and Experimental Impacts of the 4Rs Program” researchers take a different approach at researching the 4Rs program. They present a study that evaluates the following questions: a) How do characteristics of teacher social–emotional functioning, including self-reports of emotional abilities and experiences of job-related burnout, forecast differences in the emotional, instructional, and organizational quality of third-grade public school classrooms? (b) What is the experimental impact of the 4Rs Program on the emotional, instructional, and organizational quality of classrooms controlling for teacher social–emotional functioning indicators? (c) Is the impact of the 4Rs Program on classroom quality moderated by teachers’ social–emotional functioning? (Brown et al., 2010)

Through Brown et al.’s (2010) prior research, the big thing that helps improve students' self-esteem, perceive cognitive competence, internal focus of control, mastery motivation, school satisfaction, academic achievement, and lower behavior is the simple aspect of a student's classroom environment. When a student walks into a classroom, they are not in charge of setting up the classroom environment, that is the teachers responsibility. Brown et al. (2010) state in their article that they want to bridge the gap in literature with how the classroom quality is influenced by aspects of the teachers’ own



social-emotional function. Teachers carry a lot of responsibility so taking a deeper look into a teacher's social emotional experiences, beliefs, and skills as potential sources of influence in child development. The research state that teachers' orientation towards their own professional development, their perceptions of their role in attending to students social-emotional needs, their interest and ability in forming close relationships with students, their experience of stress associated with individual student behavior and feeling of job burnout overall, their classroom management styles and strategies, and their skill in promoting reading comprehension, work analysis, and writing skills all could have in impact on the influence in students development of social and academic competence (Brown et al., 2010).

For this study, Brown et at. (2010) employed a school-randomized controlled design to examine two sets of influences on classroom quality. They carried out the following: (a) examined whether teacher social–emotional functioning (perceptions of emotional ability, burnout) forecasts differences in the quality of third-grade classrooms; (b) tested the experimental impact of a school-based social–emotional learning and literacy intervention on the quality of classroom processes, controlling for teacher social–emotional functioning; and (c) examined whether intervention impacts on classroom quality are moderated by these teacher-related factors.

Nine schools participated in the intervention and nine schools were the control group for the three-year longitudinal study of a universal, schoolwide literacy and social-emotional learning prevention program (4Rs). The recruitment process was meaningful to the outcomes because Brown et al. (2010) did not want many limitations to their findings. Prior to the randomization process of picking from many schools that applied to be a part

of the study, they employed a pairwise matching procedure to ensure demographic similarity of intervention and control groups. Also included was a measure that incorporated a number of dimensions such as principal leadership style, openness of communication, administrative or teacher buy-in, administrative and staff stability, number and degree of other programs, demands on teacher time, and amount of professional development as well as overall ratings of readiness. The teachers need to be observed as well by a trained, unbiased member of the research team. They identified classrooms of intervention and controls were kept secret from them to ensure unbiased ratings and observers had to follow strict guidelines such as observation time, length, and lesson.

Classroom climate was assessed using the CLASS observation instrument. The measure assessed three primary domains that have their own subscales. 1) Emotional Support: a) positive climates, b) negative climate, c) teacher sensitivity, d) regard to student perspectives; 2) Classroom Organization: a) behavior management, b) productivity, c) instruction learning formats; 3) Instructional Support: a) concept development, b) quality of feedback. All of the domains and subscales were ranked on scales from 1-7.

As we look at results from the “Improving Classroom Quality: Teacher Influences and Experimental Impacts of the 4Rs Program” article the researchers unexpectedly found that teachers' experiences of job-related burnout were not related to differences in the quality of classroom environment. As expected though, teachers' perceptions of their own emotional abilities, at the beginning of the year, were positive and strongly related to their ability to an environment of high quality by the end of the school year. (Brown et al., 2010) The CLASS indicated positive effects of teachers perceived emotional abilities

on classroom instructional support and classroom organization but not on emotional support. In the end, the findings indicate that at the end of one school year, the quality of classroom social processes as rated by independent observers blind to the intervention status of the schools was significantly higher in 4Rs schools compared with control schools, even after controlling for a limited set of classroom characteristics and indicators of teacher social–emotional functioning. Importantly, neither of the teacher factors, including perceived emotional ability, moderated the impact of intervention on overall classroom quality, suggesting that the effects of 4Rs intervention are robust at least across this targeted set of teacher social–emotional functioning indicators (Brown et al., 2010). The significant 4Rs intervention had a huge impact on levels of classroom support and classroom instructional support but not in classroom organization. The 4Rs program is proving to have great success within the classroom. Ultimately, the program's theory of change includes encouraging the teachers to adapt, find utility in, and practice using the concepts of the 4R's program within their own lives so that it can be consistently delivered and the greater social-emotional learning opportunities can be supported and practiced in real life situations. Teachers' beliefs, willingness, and ability to apply specific classroom intervention models may influence the effectiveness and quality and quantity of the program implementation. When teachers fully grasp, and implement the 4R's principles and strategies, they are able to establish the expectations and classroom norms for behaviors so that children will adopt those skills and behaviors.

“Theoretically, SEL programs foster social and emotionally intelligent youth through improving children's social and emotional skills, defined in the present study as the ability to manage emotions and develop meaningful friendships, as well as fostering

emotional support, defined in the present study as safe and caring learning environments” (Portnow, Downer, Brown, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE), 2015, p. 1). Portnow et al. (2015) are uncertain which component, social and emotional skills or emotional support, is more important to children, or if both components are equally important. Through the implementation of the integrated SEL and literacy program 4R’s: Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution and the video-based coaching program called MyTeachingPartner (MTP), Portnow et al. (2015) believe that the programs should achieve reductions in aggressive and antisocial behavior. Reductions should be improving both of the social and emotional skills and fostering emotionally supportive classrooms. Within this study the researchers evaluate the effectiveness of the 4R’s + MTP programs and answer these two questions: 1) Is it through an improvement in children's social-emotional skills, an improvement in emotional support, or some combinations of both mechanisms? 2) Do these mechanisms operate differently for children who began the school year displaying elevated levels of aggressive behavior? (Portnow et al., 2015) This study took place in 6 different New York City public schools with 18 being regular education classrooms, 3 special education classrooms, 10 inclusion classrooms and 4 dual language classrooms. Two 4R’s coaches were split between the 35 classroom teachers for the coaching and extra curriculum support.

“MTP is an innovative approach to supporting curriculum implementation that unites the ideas of providing ongoing, personalized feedback and support to teachers and embedding these implementation supports within a validated framework that emphasizes the importance of teacher-student interactions to ensure effectiveness of curricula. The

premise of MTP is that professional development for teachers can improve the implementation of curricula through provision of extensive opportunities for individualized feedback and support for effectiveness in one's own instruction, implementation, and interactions with students.” (Portnow et al., 2015, p. 2) With MTP being an important feature within this study, every two weeks teachers must record a lesson of them teaching to their coach. Their assigned coach will review, edit, and write feedback (called prompts) and post it to the teachers' private website. Teachers will then review the feedback and respond to the prompts they were given. This refocus' the teachers focus on specific aspects of their behavior towards students and how the students respond. The teachers are required to do eight MTP coaching cycles throughout the academic year.

Portnow et al. (2015) collected data from an array of methods: a) Hostile attribution bias and aggressive interpersonal strategies, b) Teacher-reports of aggression and conduct problem behaviors, c) Child-reported aggression, and d) Emotional support. Through collecting and analyzing data, Portnow et al. (2015) found that within the intervention group teacher-reported aggressive and antisocial behavior were significantly less. “Another finding that was not expected was that a reduction in aggressive interpersonal strategies alone predicted less child-reported aggression over the course of the year. Such exploration of the mechanisms by which SEL programs may lead to reductions in children's aggressive and antisocial behavior have the potential to identify key components of complex universal interventions, and in this case, suggest that targeting both emotional support and social emotional skills are key elements of ensuring

the positive benefits of 4Rs+MTP and perhaps other SEL interventions.” (Portnow et al., 2015, p. 4)

**Academic impact.** Educators and policymakers continually search for effective strategies to improve the opportunities for learning and positive social-emotional development offered to children in schools. While the connection between academic and social development is being increasingly acknowledged, most whole-school reform efforts focus primarily on either academic outcomes or social-emotional outcomes with only a few initiatives targeting both sets of outcomes. Berg, Torrente, Aber, Jones, Brown, and Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE), (2010) are the researchers behind the article “Using administrative data to evaluate impacts in a school-randomized trial of the 4Rs Program”.

The study done by Berg et al. (2010) aimed to estimate the impact of a social-learning and literacy development intervention (4Rs) on highly policy-relevant academic achievement outcomes using administrative data on children from multiple cohorts. In addition, it attempted to discuss the ways in which whole-school analyses using administrative data can complement cohort-specific analysis and inform efforts to improve the experiences of children in schools. Berg et al. (2010) asked: 1) What is the impact of the 4Rs program on the academic achievement (i.e., math and reading scaled scores and performance levels on the math and language arts exams) of children in 1st to 5th grades, adjusting for a set of individual and school level covariates? 2) Do the impacts of 4Rs vary as a function of child grade (cohort), race/ethnicity, gender, and free/reduced price lunch? They used the 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect and Resolution) because it is a “dual focus” whole school universal intervention designed to

promote literacy development and social-emotional learning. For this study, the researchers used the data and analysis of a study that took place in low-income neighborhoods in four boroughs of New York City, using a school-randomized trial of 18 elementary schools (9 intervention, 9 control). Students from 1st grade to 5th grade participated in the study. Administrative data for all children in the 18 schools participating in the 4Rs experimental evaluation was obtained from the New York City Department of Education. Data used in these analyses include individual students scaled scores and performance levels on the math and language arts exams, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch, race/ethnicity, gender, annual attendance and suspensions rates, and school and classroom size.

Berg et al. (2010) found that between-school variations on the math and language arts standardized achievement tests, there was a significant difference from baseline for all cohorts. The researchers stated that approximately 90% of the variance in achievement scores can be attributed to variation between children, while 10% is due to differences between schools. That being said, the 4R's program has an impact on academic achievement and the academic success from implementing the 4R's program was growth depending on the student and not what school they are in (Berg et al., 2010).

### **Second Step Program**

SEL programs that teach emotion recognition, emotion expression or communication, and emotion regulation skills would allow children to better identify and understand social cues in ways that help them avoid making negative behavior choices and reacting aggressively to unclear social situations. Top, Liew, and Luo (2016) state that character development programs often aim to influence academic motivation and

aspirations, academic achievement, prosocial behavior, bonding to school, prosocial and democratic values, conflict-resolution skills, moral-reasoning maturity, responsibility, respect, self-efficacy, self-control, self-esteem, social skills, and trust in, and respect for teachers (Top et al., 2016). The Second Step curriculum is considered a social-emotional learning and character development curriculum that was developed in order to improve children's social and emotional competence along with preventing their aggression and violence. Second Step is a comprehensive, classroom-based curriculum aimed at instructing skills in the areas of empathy, perspective taking, problem solving, self-control or self-regulation, and anger management or emotion regulation for preschool through 8th grade (Top et al., 2016). Low, Smolkowski, Cook, and Desfosses (2019) explain that Second Step aim to improve academic and life success by using explicit and implicit learning strategies that promote grave social-emotional and executive functioning skills (e.g., emotion regulation and working memory). Specifically, they say that the logic model that backs Second Step proposes that explicit instruction, opportunities to practice, and reinforcement of social-emotional skills are intended to improve problem solving and skills for learning and, ultimately, academic achievement (Low et al., 2019). Second Step curriculum is a grade specific program that allows teachers to deliver instruction that is developmentally appropriate to their students. Teachers are given the program contents that include well laid out lesson cards, posters for learned skills, DVD that enhance skills, brain builder games that increase persevering and practicing of skills, and a binder of materials to help guide instruction, reinforce skills, activities for learning cards, and letters to families. Throughout the program, there are four complete units with twenty two lessons spread across the following topics: unit



one: skills for learning, unit two: empathy, unit three: emotion management, and unit four; problem solving. The twenty-five to forty minute lessons should be implemented as a part of their normal day to day classroom routines (Low et al., 2019).

### **Behavior Impact**

Understanding, regulating emotions, problem solving, and prosocial behaviors are all social-emotional skills that have been identified as a notable predictor of children being successful in school. If schools implement an SEL program, they are providing young children with a variety of skills that would help them increase the following: a) emotional processes, b) emotional management or regulation; c) prosocial skills such as conflict resolution, problem solving, or character education; d) skills for learning, such as how to focus, follow directions, listen, and ask for help; e) behavioral skills; and f) cognitive skills that would help improve working memory, attention executive function, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility (Low et al., 2019). The researchers look at the implications of the social-emotional curriculum called Second Step Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum. Low et al. (2019) state that Second Step is one of the most widely adopted SEL programs in the United States and the primary focus of the current study. Although the Second Step program is not new, the Committee for Children revised the program in 2012 to integrate Skills for Learning, targeting attention, inhibitory control, and working memory.

Low et al. (2019) state the purpose of this study was to use a range of measures to examine the developmental trajectories, to test the overall impact of Second Step in two years, and to examine the potential differential response to the program based on the

pretest as well as grade level and student sex. The two-year impact of Second Step included sixty-one elementary schools that were randomly assigned to either the early start (treatment group) or the delayed start (control group). The teachers that participated in the treatment group were provided two brief training sessions: The Second Step curriculum (1 hr.) and Proactive Classroom Management (PCM; 3 hr.). Teachers that were new to the schools in year two of implementation also received this training before the school year started. “The PCM training would help reinforce: (a) positive greetings at the door to set the stage for reinforcement; (b) teaching, modeling and reinforcing expected behaviors; (c) providing opportunities to respond; (d) utilizing effective cues to regain attention; and (e) strategically and intentionally establishing relationships with all students. The selected strategies were based on prior research demonstrating their efficacy to improve classroom behavior and student engagement.” (Low et al., 2019, p. 420)

While implementing the curriculum, the treatment teachers were asked to complete weekly ratings for their adherence to the curriculum. Teachers also completed a series of tests on their students to help collect data for the researchers. 1) online surveys of student behavior with fall assessments collected four to eight weeks into the school year to allow teachers to become familiar with their students. Spring assessments were collected before the last two weeks of the school year. 2) Devereux Student Strengths Assessment – Second Step Edition. This 36-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale assesses the social-emotional competencies: skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, problem solving, and social-emotional composite. The DESSA scale from which the Second Step edition was derived has been shown to have acceptable

reliability and validity. 3) Teachers also completed the Strengths Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a brief behavior rating scale for 3- to 16-year-olds that assesses functioning in five domains: peer problems, hyperactivity, conduct problems, prosocial and emotional symptoms. 4) Behavior Observation System is aimed at capturing on-task behavior and disruptive behavior. 5) The oral reading fluency (R-CBM) was administered individually as a short passage read for one minute and scored as correct words read per minute and the math calculation (M-CBM) was group administered and scored as the number of digits correct per minute in 8-min (Low et al., 2019).

After the two-year study was completed, Low et al. (2019) examined and analyzed the data that was collected. The highest shared pattern between intervention school was that the students showed growth within the school year but then fell back to baseline scores at the start of year two. The teachers reported an improvement in emotion management, behavior conduct, relationships with peers, and skills for learning during the first year. However, in the fall, the student's new teachers reported similar levels in baseline and same levels of increase again by the spring. This result shows consistency within other educational outcomes, such as student's skills diminish between school years, such as the well-established summer reading setback. The results are also consistent with research suggesting that some social skills do not generalize across time and different settings. A third hypothesis suggests that students spent Year 1 with one teacher and group of peers, enjoyed their summer in very different and relatively uncontrolled environments, and returned to new teachers and groups of peers in Year 2, which brought a different set of behavioral expectations and social norms.

“Students in Second Step schools outperformed students in control schools on SDQ measures of emotional symptoms and hyper-activity, regardless of pretest levels. Condition effects were statistically significant and larger for students who began with poorer pretest scores for SDQ peer problems and DESSA social-emotional composite (including skills for learning and emotion management and problem solving).” (Low et al., 2019, p. 429)

The fourth edition of the Second Step program offers schools a viable approach to enhancing social-emotional competencies, such as skills for learning and emotion management as well as reduced negative affect and overactive behaviors. In practice, Second Step appears most beneficial to those students with relative skill deficits (i.e., exhibiting symptoms), operating as a more effective intervention tool than a prevention program (Low et al., 2019, p. 431).

Maintaining friendships and building social competence are a few of the critical developmental challenges for children. When the development of these areas is navigated appropriately, it promotes and enhances success in other pivotal areas of a child's life such as academics, family, occupational, and overall life satisfaction. (Hart et al., 2009) Stakeholders in schools now have partial responsibility for the socialization and healthy development of children, they need to promote the prosocial and help prevent the antisocial development in their students. Teachers and stakeholders in the schools can do this by implementing a research based SEL program that is associated with improving test scores, behaviors, and all around attitude towards themselves and others. Hart et al. (2009) developed a study that would show the positive outcomes of an SEL program called Second Step: A Violence Prevention Program. Going into this study, Hart et al.

(2009) had these questions about their study: by only providing the Impulse Control and Problem Solving Unit (Unit two) will students demonstrate an increase in knowledge of social-emotional skills and will those same students show a greater demonstration of social-emotional skill compared to those in the control group?

This study took place in southern California with two elementary schools. Within the schools only third and fourth graders participated and these classrooms were divided into two groups; intervention group and the control group (business as usual group). The intervention students were only taught unit two of the Second Step program because the researchers were wanting to see if only one unit had an impact. The goals of unit two include decreasing children's impulsive and aggressive behavior through three strategies: (a) calming down, (b) problem solving, and (c) behavioral- skills training (Hart et al., 2009). Every student who participated in the study had to take the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step (KASS). The KASS is a self-report measure developed by the authors of the Second Step curriculum to assess knowledge in social-emotional skills. The KASS consists of several problem situations and related social-emotional skills knowledge questions presented to students that they respond to in writing. It is designed to be utilized in a pre-and post-test format. The teacher was usually present and occasionally participated in the sessions but was not the one doing the instruction. Once the unit was completed, the post-test was administered to the third graders one week after the final lesson of unit two and a month after for the fourth graders (Hart et al., 2009).

The researchers found interesting data in both the third-grade classrooms and the fourth-grade classrooms. Hart et al. (2009) found that in both third and fourth grade, the students that were a part of the intervention group, showed a significant difference on the

pre-and post-tests. In third grade, there was a significant difference in social skills knowledge between the control and intervention groups while controlling for the initial scores on the pretest measure, thus supporting the second hypothesis. In fourth grade, the results indicated there was not a significant difference between the intervention and control groups after controlling for the pre-test KASS scores; thus, the hypothesis of the second research question was not supported. Results indicated significant increases in knowledge for students in the intervention groups. Additionally, when compared to the third-grade control students, the third-grade students exposed to the intervention unit of Second Step, demonstrated significantly more increases in social-emotional skills knowledge. However, this was not the case for the fourth-grade students. Hart et al. (2009) stated that this may be because of the time gap in administering the post-test that maybe there was natural growth that happened during that time. While some results support the hypothesis and others don't, the researchers say that it may be because of some limitations. The facilitators of the curriculum being taught were not naturally present in the classrooms and may have caused laps in reinforcement of skills. The overall take way from this study is that the intervention groups did demonstrate knowledge growth related to social-emotional skills proving that teaching only one unit of Second Step is more beneficial than teaching nothing (Hart et al., 2009).

Social and emotional issues are also at the heart of many problems that plague schools and communities. When teachers feel their energy and job satisfaction to be undermined by constant behavior problems, it's time to identify with the research. Frey and Sylvester (1997) state the research indicates that by providing intervention programs

to teachers and students, it can be effective in addressing the attitudes and social-cognitive deficits that contribute to aggressive and high-risk behavior.

Frey and Sylvester (1997) paired twelve urban and suburban schools in Western Washington state together to form adequate control and experimental groups for the study. Specifically, from each school, second and third grade students were the target participant. Students were taught the whole Second Step program by their classroom teachers. Frey and Sylvester (1997) picked Second Step to be taught in the study because the Second Step program attempts to foster students' emotional understanding, perspective taking, social problem solving, impulse control, and anger management.

While the students were being taught the program by their classroom teachers, they were being observed by trained coders that were blind to the school's assignment (control or experimental). The thing this study has that stands out is the observations took place not only in the classroom but in the lunchroom and on the playground. This plays an important role in seeing students in different atmospheres while having different triggers to behaviors. The observers were looking at physical aggression, hostile/aggressive comments, and prosocial behavior (i.e. helping, sharing, cooperating with others). Observations were done in the fall before the program was taught and in the spring one week after the program was fully taught (Frey & Sylvester, 1997).

After the Second Step was fully taught to the experimental groups and data was collected, the results showed very positive things. The research concluded that the Second Step curriculum leads to moderate decreases in aggression and increases in neutral and prosocial behavior in school. These changes assume greater significance when compared to those in the control schools. Without the Second Step curriculum,

student behavior worsened, becoming more physically and verbally aggressive over the school year. Frey and Sylvester (1997) suggest that teachers and class climate also undergo positive changes during program participation. Positive class climates foster student attachment to school, motivation to learn, and academic performance.

There have been several recent studies that describe the importance of early childhood social and emotional skills and executive functioning to longitudinal outcomes of child development, including social adjustment and academic performance in kindergarten and elementary school, and even longer term school attainment and adult functioning. Upshur, Heyman, and Wenz-Gross (2017) state that social-emotional (SE) skills are often defined by understanding and identifying emotions, perspective taking and ability to show empathy, interpreting social cues correctly, appropriately regulating emotions, and problem solving in a social setting. Executive functioning (EF) skills in young children are typically defined by underlying behavioral regulation and cognitive attributes that include attention and attention shifting, working memory, and inhibitory control. These two skills have recently been grouped together under the term self-regulation (Upshur et al., 2017).

The main goal of this study was to investigate potential efficacy of the curriculum on the proximal outcomes of EF and SE among at risk preschool children. The data reported focused on these two hypotheses: during the preschool year children who receive the instruction for SSEL will have higher EF skills and SE skill than children who are not receiving the curriculum (Upshur et al., 2017).

This study was conducted in 18 Head Start classrooms and 13 community preschool classrooms. Based on site demographics, each site was randomly placed into



one of the 16 intervention classrooms or one of the 15 control (curriculum as usual classrooms). The teachers that were implementing the SSEL curriculum were asked to implement the curriculum within their daily routines and to integrate activities with their other curriculum requirements. They also had to be observed and go through observer feedback to ensure fidelity to the curriculum was being pursued. During the implementation of SSEL students were assessed twice in an academic year, once in the fall and once in the spring over the two-year study. They were given a multitude of tests over two days and 30-45 minute sessions. The list of assessments was the following: 1) Cognitive Ability: measure receptive verbal ability; 2) Executive Functioning Skills, a) Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders, perform actions contrary to what the examiner said; b) Backward Digit Span, repeat things backwards; 3) Social and Emotional Skills, a) Emotion Matching Scale, match emotion to a picture; b) Challenging Situations Task, respond how they would handle the given situation.

Upshur et al. (2017) share that between all 28 teachers, although there was some variation of implementation throughout the years, there was no statistically significant difference between overall fidelity rating and the correlation between the fidelity ratings and outcomes. Almost all the noteworthy items within the data were EF items that showed great favoring to the intervention classrooms. The EF skills included great growth in think time, attention and engagement, encouraging participation, specific reinforcements, and thinking ahead and thinking back (Upshur et al., 2017). In contrast, only one SE item was shown to significantly favor the intervention classrooms and that was the SE skill of calming down. There were no significant differences in understanding strong emotions, social problem solving, identifying feelings, perspective taking or friendship skills. This measure seems to show more differences in the intervention classrooms on

delivery of EF type activities than SE activities (Upshur et al., 2017). Controlling for baseline skills and cognitive ability, demographics, and accounting for nesting within classrooms, Upshur et al. (2017) found a significant impact for the intervention condition on end of preschool EF skills above and beyond baseline skills. “Since there is a great need for evidence-driven curricula that can promote both EF and SE, we believe that these preliminary findings show promise for this relatively new curriculum, especially with regard to the development of EF” (Upshur et al., 2017, p. 23).

**Academic impact.** Social-emotional and character development have been found to be viable steps in improving school culture and climate which helps narrow or close the achievement gap in high poverty schools. Research says they all go hand-in-hand, although many schools have yet to integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) and academic learning into their everyday curriculum. By teaching students social-emotional skills that promote prosocial and socially responsible behaviors, SEL, or character development curricula, have been proposed as one approach to decrease problem behaviors and increase prosocial behaviors so that the school climate is safe and supportive (Top, Liew, & Luo, 2016). Top et al. (2016) examined the effect of a school-based, character development program called Second Step. It examined the prosocial, problematic school behaviors, and school grades for 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students across four semesters.

Top et al. (2016) researched and studied the following: initial/baseline mean levels in schooling outcomes: problem behaviors, prosocial behaviors, and school grades; and the rate of change across 4 semesters in schooling outcomes. These questions were evaluated between treatment and control schools, accounting for student demographic

variables (i.e., gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status or SES). They also researched if the change in the growth rate in schooling outcomes can be explained by the schools' Second Step participation status.

Nineteen schools implemented the Second Step curriculum and 16 schools were the control schools that did not implement the curriculum but still participated in the four-semester long study. All schools were from a large open-enrollment charter school system in Texas. Five thousand one hundred and eighty nine students ranging from 5th to 8th grade participated in the study. Data was collected on students' problem and prosocial school behaviors and academic achievement. School behaviors were observed and recorded by teachers, while academic achievement was indexed by students' grade point averages (GPAs) as reported from official school records.

After the four consecutive semesters and data analysis, Top et al. (2016) found many things. Previous studies on the Second Step program generally focused on kindergarten and elementary school students, but fewer studies have focused on the social-emotional and character development needs of middle school students. This study addressed a gap in the literature by focusing on 5th to 8th graders. Researchers Top et al. (2016) found that there was no significant difference between the treatment and control schools in the initial/baseline grades and prosocial behaviors. But the treatment school's initial problem school behaviors were higher than the control schools. When looking at the growth rate of schools, the Second Step program improved students' grades and reduced problem behaviors in the schools that were implementing it than the control schools. But there was no significant difference in prosocial behavior.

“The growth rate of students’ problem school behaviors in treatment schools was lower than that of students in the control schools, after controlling for gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Although the literature shows that problem behaviors typically increase with age, the present findings on problem school behaviors suggest that the treatment, Second Step, counteracted that trend by helping reduce problem school behaviors in a longitudinal manner.” (Top et al., 2016, p. 36)

Top et al. (2016) state that it is interesting to note that the Second Step program explained a greater percentage in change for problem school behaviors relative to academic achievement (GPA). This change is to be expected because the fundamental goal of Second Step is to make a positive change in children’s behavior. They go on to say that given that social-emotional and academic competencies are very much intertwined and co-developing programs such as Second Step generally have indirect effects on academic achievement through improving school climate. Top et al. (2016) say that SEL and character development programs likely have dual benefits for students because of simultaneous benefits for students’ school behaviors and academic achievement. Based on the long-term positive impact that SEL has on students, implementing programs such as Second Step in schools appears to be a worthwhile investment to improve school culture and climate to support school engagement, learning, and achievement especially for high-need or high-poverty schools. (Top et al., 2016, p. 38)

### **Positive Action Program**

The Positive Action (PA) Program is grounded in a self-concept theory. People determine their self-concepts by what they do; that actions, more than just their thoughts and feelings, determine self-concept and that making positive and healthy behavior choices result in a feeling of self-worth. PA explicitly links thoughts, feelings and actions, so the development and integration of affective and cognitive brain functions are enhanced. PA is not only just an in the classroom program (Flay & Allred, 2003). The Positive Action Program trains all school staff, and parents to identify and reinforce positive feelings, thoughts and actions by students. They also involve the community in how to support the schools with this program. PA attempts the longevity of lowering behaviors and increasing academic achievement by a holistic approach to school reorganization, teacher-student relationships, parent involvement, instructional practices, and development of the self-concept of students, teachers, and parents (Flay & Allred, 2003).

Flay and SREE (2014) state the Positive Action (PA) is a school-based program that includes school-wide climate change. PA has detailed curriculum with grade specific, scripted lessons, posters, puppets, music, games, and other hands-on materials that are integrated throughout the lessons. The program consists of six units that form the whole foundation of the program. Throughout approximately one hundred and forty lessons, students are presented the PA staple of Thoughts-Actions-Feelings about Self Circle, the nature and relevance of positive and negative actions/behaviors, and the positive actions for the physical, intellectual, social and emotional areas. Within this

program, schools are given school-wide climate development kits (elementary and secondary) and a Counselor's Kit.

### **Behavior Impact**

Recent research has increased the attention to positive facets of child and adolescent development, including positive youth development (PYD) and social-emotional and character development state the authors of “Can Universal SEL Programs Benefit Universally? Effects of the Positive Action Program on Multiple Trajectories of Social-Emotional and Misconduct Behaviors” (Duncan et al., 2016). Duncan et al. (2016) mention that there is a growing interest in understanding the development of youth from economically under-resourced communities. If a Social and Emotional Learning program wants to be successful, they need to be able to show development across a range of behaviors and in populations. The degree in which universal SEL programs impact different types of behaviors (e.g., aggression) across individuals in under-resourced communities who show different types of trajectories (e.g., more aggressive versus less aggressive) remains uncertain. Duncan et al. (2016) dove into a study on a multiyear evaluation of Positive Action (PA) and the impact PA may have on underlying trajectories of positive and problem behaviors.

The researchers predicted two things, first they predicted some youth to have relatively high levels of misconduct and low levels of social-emotional and character development (SECD) and second that the majority of youth would have relatively low levels of misconduct and higher levels of SECD. With their predictions, they asked the

questions: 1) What are the underlying latent trajectory classes of SECD from middle childhood to early adolescence and what effect does Positive Action have on them? 2) What are the underlying latent trajectory classes of misconduct from middle childhood to early adolescence and what effect does Positive Action have on them? (Duncan et al., 2016) They used data from the Chicago Trial of Positive Action program. This study followed children from 3rd through 8th grade with a total of one thousand one hundred and thirty youth in fourteen schools that either fell under the treatment (PA) schools or the control (business as usual) schools (Duncan et al., 2016). Students that participated in the study reported, using the same instruments to report, on their behavior at school and at home, as well as interactions with parents, teachers, and peers each wave of the study. Students were also rated in the Social-Emotional and Character Development scale. The 28-item Child Social-Emotional and Character Development scale was used to assess children's SECD behaviors. Items describe different SECD-related behaviors with students asked to rate their level of engagement in the behavior on a four-point scale.

After the data was collected, Duncan et al. (2016) concluded that the data was consistent with previous research. There was statistical evidence for multiple underlying trajectories on both positive and problem behaviors in this population. Duncan et al. (2016) state that their theoretical expectation was a larger class of youth with relatively higher levels of SECD and lower levels of misconduct and a smaller class with relatively lower levels of SECD and higher levels of misconduct. Their motive for identifying latent classes of trajectories was to understand how an SEL program affected the differing trajectories. The findings suggest that the Positive Action program similarly improved children's trajectories of SECD and misconduct regardless of class membership.

Evidence suggests that children from higher risk backgrounds can benefit from the holistic nature of the PA SEL program, which does not simply target or benefit the children in these contexts with the most behavioral problems or the lowest levels of social and emotional skills (Duncan et al., 2016).

Several social-emotional learning (SEL) or social-emotional and character development (SECD) programs have proven to show effectiveness in improving students academic achievements and behavior all while improving the child's SEL/SECD skills. Very few SEL or SECD programs have been able to reflect the effects for all three of these domains with students in schools of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, stated Flay and Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE), (2014). In this study, Flay and SREE (2014) report the effects of an SEL/SECD program across two very different groups of students and contexts.

Flay and SREE (2014) report the results from two cluster-randomized trials of the Positive Action (PA) program in elementary schools in two disparate locations. Program effects are presented on theoretically predicted outcomes of school quality and student character, negative behaviors, emotional/mental health, positive health behaviors, and school performance. Participants in this study are the following: 2002-2006 20 suburban and rural schools on three Hawaii islands and in 2004-2010 a second study took place in 14 high-poverty, inner-city Chicago schools. At the end of each school year, teachers and students responded to the questions about use of Social and Character Development (SACD) type strategies. Outcome data were primarily student self-reports of behavior and school-level archival data on disciplinary referrals/suspensions and achievement (standardized test scores) (Flay & SREE, 2014).



Flay and SREE (2014) reported the following results: 1) Program implementation was probably higher on average in Hawaii than in Chicago; 2) School quality: School-level mean scores on Hawaii student, parent and teacher reports of school quality improved significantly more in PA schools than control schools. In Chicago, students in PA schools reported stronger teacher and school attachment than students in C (control) schools, less victimization, more positive school orientation and school climate and better perceptions of the neighborhood; 3) Student character: Scores on the SECD scale items decreased as students got older in both Hawaii and Chicago, but the decline was less in the PA condition of both trials; 4) Negative behaviors: The negative behaviors reduced in PA schools compared with control schools in both trials; 5) Other social-emotional outcomes: improvement in affiliation with deviant peers or positive peers, aggressive problem solving, reductions in depression anxiety and improvements in life satisfaction; 6) Positive health-related behaviors; 7) School performance: From Hawaii, school-level standardized test scores were available for state-level (Hawaii Content and Performance Standards - HCPS) as well as nationally-standardized tests. Growth-curve models demonstrated significant effects for both reading and math (Flay & SREE, 2014).

Conclusions of this research study indicate that the Positive Actions program, in both trials, indicated the school quality and climate were greatly affected. Students from both Hawaii and Chicago reported a slower regression in their development of social-emotional and character development (SECD) skills. Students in the PA schools showed a significant reduction in negative behaviors compared to the control schools. There were very strong effects of the PA program on academic outcomes observed in the Hawaii

trial. Although the effect sizes were not as large in the Chicago trial (Flay & SREE, 2014, p. 4).

**Academic impact.** Some have always debated that a broad range of young children's behaviors are related and have common causes and that effective positive youth development needs to cover a layer of aspects such as principles of effective character development, health promotion, disease prevention, and academics. This would be great to be able to cover all aspects of development but school districts cannot afford multiple programs that address each of these needs (Flay & Allred, 2003) What schools need is a comprehensive approach that includes self-concept development, schoolwide environmental change, and parental and community involvement and maybe all of that together would have a successful outcome. Flay and Allred (2003) study and report on the long-term effectiveness of one program that provides schools with the means to achieve student character development, behavior, school involvement, and learning in a comprehensive and integrated way.

One large school district that already had data on student performance and disciplinary referrals took part in this study. There were three types of schools within this school district and are labeled as the following. Schools that have implemented only PA will be stated as PA-only. Schools that did not implement PA will be stated as non-PA and lastly schools that have been implementing PA and another special education program will be called PA+other. Schools also differed on levels of socioeconomic status (Flay & Allred, 2003).

Flay and Allred (2003) retrieved some staggering results in their study. Schools that were implementing PA show better testing scores (40% better) than schools who

were not implementing PA. The program proves to have a higher effect on the schools who are in most need with the higher free/reduced lunch. By using archival school-level data, the researches have a) replicated results of an earlier matched-control study on the effects of the Positive Actions program on elementary school achievement; b) found that adoptions of other programs in additions to PA led to no significant improvements; c) found that the effects endured through middle school and high school for a broad array of indicators of both achievement and behavior; d) found a clear dose-response relationships for most outcomes, such that school with more PA graduates reported better student behavior; e) found that behavioral effects were as large or larger in higher risk as lower risk schools. All of these results provide strong support for a) the strength of the PA program increasing academics and b) the idea that a comprehensive program can have broad and long lasting effects (Flay & Allred, 2003).

### **Other Valuable Studies**

Throughout my research on the top SEL programs, the following articles fall under a category together. They are all evidence-based research on other SEL programs that CASEL suggested within their extensive research.

### **Impacts of Other SEL Programs**

Something that is very critical to a child's well being is their ability to develop positive peer relationships. When a child is socially rejected by their peers it causes a substantial risk for later troubles in academic performance, school dropout, criminal activity, and psychiatric problems state McKown, Gumbiner, Russo, and Lipton (2009) A child's behavior powerfully influences their social acceptance by their peers. The more a child engages in socially competent behavior (being cooperative, assertive, having

socially appropriate behavior, and actively participating in group activities) the more likely their peers accept them. As children grow and develop their engagement in social competent behaviors, some aspects of their cognitive, behavioral, and emotional processes must operate cohesively. When we look at these aspects of the process, children need the SEL skill. The Social-emotional learning (SEL) skill (will be referred to as SEL skill) includes the ability to encode, interpret, and reason about social and emotional information says the authors of “Social-Emotional Learning Skill, Self-Regulation, and Social Competence in Typically Developing and Clinic-Referred Children”. Researchers McKown et al. (2009) examine the relationship between children's SEL skill, their ability to regulate their own behavior, and the competence of their social interactions within a two-part study. Within their research, they propose that SEL has three skill domains. 1) nonverbal accuracy, label emotions from nonverbal cues 2) social meaning, ability to interpret others intentions; and 3) social problem solving, identify and solve complex social problems. They hypothesized that each of the three domains play an important role in developing SEL skill and that self-regulation and SEL skill are associated with parent-and teacher- reported social competence and peer relationships (McKown et al., 2009).

As stated early, McKown et al. (2009) conducted a two-part study. Over the course of three years, the first study was in two elementary schools where one hundred fifty eight children between preschool and grade eight participated in a series of tests. Children were interviewed individually over the course of 2-3 sessions at their school by one of the ten trained research assistants. The children were tested in the following areas:

- 1) Nonverbal Accuracy: facial affect recognition, prosody recognition, posture

recognition, gait recognition, 2) Social Meaning: strange stories, empathy, pragmatic language; 3) Social Problem-Solving Ability: social problem solving, self-regulation, and social competence (McKown et al., 2009). The researchers found that study one suggests that a) SEL measures reflect the three domains; b) which reflect overall SEL skill; c) the better that the child performs on their tests, teacher and parents reported more social competence and showed association with self-regulation; d) SEL skill and self-regulation independently predict social competence (McKown et al., 2009).

The second study McKown et al. (2009) performed had a purpose of replicating the models from study one using different measurements and with a clinically referred sample. One hundred twenty six children who ranged from the age of 5-17 were evaluated to address parental concern about their academic, social, behavioral, or emotional functioning. The children within the sample had a variety of diagnoses such as: ADHD, ASDs, learning disorders, and mood/anxiety disorders. (McKown et al., 2009). This group of children underwent a series of tests similar to study one. After analyzing the data, the findings from study two exemplify the same findings as in study one.

McKown et al. (2009) discuss the two studies both provide strong evidence that the three domains of SEL skill and self-regulation are predictors of competent social behavior. Both studies share common propositions about how SEL works: a) how social-emotional information is encoded, b) how the information is interpreted, c) how higher-order reasoning is enlisted to work through social problems that arise. The findings report that a child's ability to regulate their behavior is an important determinant of social results.

Teaching children to actively participate in learning, get along with others, and care about themselves prove to be the most significant outcomes a child's schooling career. However, students in some schools are having a difficult time achieving these outcomes and a lot of the time educators have not been given the adequate preparation to create the instructional environments that accelerate these outcomes. As a result, these schools have become a negative place. Children do not have supported, comfortable, and ultimately they are not interested in learning. Because these circumstances, learning is negatively affected even for some of the most able students. DiPerna, Lei, Bellinger, Cheng, and Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE) (2014) say that the development of socially competent students is a top concern for parents, teachers, and students as well as other educational stakeholders.

The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) is a comprehensive program that integrates multiple levels of assessment and intervention to improve children's social skills and engagement in classroom learning. The Classwide Intervention Program (SSIS-CIP) is the universal component of the SSIS, and it has been developed to help students learn the ten social skills that teachers have identified as most critical to classroom success.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of the SSIS-CIP using a Multi-Site Cluster Randomized Trial (CRT). Specifically, DiPerna et al. (2014) hypothesized that children in classrooms implementing SSIS-CIP would demonstrate improved social skills and show increased academic engagement compared to children in non-implementing (business-as-usual) classrooms. In the study, two Pennsylvania school districts participated. Within six schools, twenty classrooms were randomly selected to be

the intervention group. The ten skills were listening to others, following directions, following classroom rules, ignoring peer distractions, asking for help, taking turns in conversations, cooperating with others, controlling anger during conflicts, acting responsibly, and showing kindness to others. Data for the intervention group and control group was collected in a series of measurements: 1) Social Skills Intervention System Rating Scales – Teacher Form (SSIS-RST); 2) Academic Competence Evaluation Scales (ACES) measures academic skills and academic enablers; 3) Cooperative Learning Observation Code for Kids (CLOCK); 4) Classroom Assessment Scoring System: Kindergarten – Third Grade (CLASS).

After the study was conducted, DiPerna et al. (2014) analyzed the data and found that there was a statistically significant interaction between SSIS-CIP and class-level pretest on teacher ratings of all social skills and academic engagement/motivation measures except assertion and self-control. Classes that had a lower average score on the pre-test showed a grave difference in the results. This went for both of the SSIS-CIP classrooms and the control classrooms. SSIS-CIP showed now significant improvement for classes that had high average pre-test scores when holding other variables constant. Additionally, there was a statistically significant interaction between SSIS-CIP and student-level pretest on teacher ratings of academic motivation. (DiPerna et al., 2014)

“Based on the results of this study, the SSIS-CIP yields small- medium positive effects (increases) in prosocial behavior (overall, communication, cooperation, responsibility, empathy, social engagement, social skills intervention composite). In addition, SSIS-CIP positively impacted academic engagement and motivation, suggesting there may be academic benefits from its implementation. Across all of

these variables, the effects of SSIS-CIP appear to be more specific to those children with more severe deficits in these areas prior to SSIS-CIP implementation.” (DiPerna et al., 2014, p. 4)

Teachers recognize the SEL importance and are being pressured to pay it adequate attention because of the weight to prepare children for high-stakes assessments state the authors of Brief Report: Integrating Social-Emotional Learning with Literacy Instruction--An Intervention for Children at Risk for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (Daunic, Corbett, Smith, Barnes, Santiago-Poventud, Chalfant, Pitts, D & Gleaton, 2013). Within the primary grade a large amount of instructional time is spent in literacy/language arts. The phonemic and phonological awareness are already a high priority for primary teachers, they additionally are responsible for students' oral language. This is foundational for conversations, learning new vocabulary, and developing the reading comprehension skills all while having to help develop a child as a whole with social emotional skills. Daunic et al. (2013) developed and piloted Social-Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF), an SEL curriculum that is embedded in literacy instruction for children at risk for emotional and behavioral problems in the primary grade. SELF is constructed of the 5 social-emotional learning competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making and each competency has its own unit (Daunic et al. 2013). Each unit is always introduced with an authentic children's storybook that needs to follow the specific criteria that Daunic et al. (2013) specified. (Developmental appropriateness, cultural and ethnic diversity, clear story structure with social emotional topics to which students could relate, and illustrate that support social emotional vocabulary and help students narrate the story)



During lessons one and two the selected storybook is read, discussed, and taught more in depth concepts. The third lesson requires students to engage in activities like role-play and scenarios that require social decision-making. Daunic et al. (2013) state that the carefully coordinated combination of theoretically based instruction strategies used in SEL enable the teachers to emphasize critical SEL concepts and vocabulary. It helps students generalize learned skills to novel situations within and outside of the outcomes in small group settings.

Daunic et al. (2013) state that teachers found that the SEL program was engaging and feasible to incorporate during kindergarten literacy instruction. By providing strong interventions to students, the students strengthen their social-emotional competence and further behave academic learning and which contributes to future school success. SEL and its pedagogical structure provides a way for teachers combine instruction of SEL and literacy instruction by using the resources available in most elementary schools. “Our pilot study findings provide a preliminary indication that integrating SEL and literacy can lead to improvements in self-regulation that should enhance positive social and academic development” (Daunic et al. 2013, p. 49).

Identifying colors, numbers, letters, reciting the days of the week, and many other academic skills are what most teachers would qualify as a positive school readiness indicator. Some would say that those academic indicators have shifted to skills that are social in nature. Saad (2018) says that the early childhood life skills training called “Preschool Life Skills” (PLS) are defined as the desirable responses to commonly occurring and evocative classroom situations. Within this study, Saad (2018) researched for a difference in post-test score means from the control and experimental groups and

examine the effectiveness of PLS and if the effects of the program are evident a month later with disruptive behavior of preschool students.

Sixty-one children that attend two different preschools were the sample of the study at hand. The PLS program was implemented using the response-to-intervention (RTI) model. Universal interventions (Tier 1) are implemented with all children to help. In Tier 1, behavioral expectations and social skills were taught. Tier 2 focuses on individuals who are not responsive to universal interventions and require more targeted interventions that are delivered in a small-group setting. Tier 3 focuses on children who do not respond adequately to Tier 1 or Tier 2 interventions and require individualized instruction (Saad, 2018). Before PLS started, teachers were to use the “Teachers rating of Child’s disruptive behavior scale” that Saad (2018) created in order to have balanced data for this study. The rating consists of 20 items and utilizes a 4-point scale response options. This assessment is used as a pre, a post, and a follow-up test.

In the comparison between experiment and control group, the data was in favor of the experimental group. When looking at the data analysis of the pre-and post-tests, the post-tests came out in favor of growth but overall when analyzing the post and the follow up tests, there were no statistically differences between the two tests. PLS in a modified small group was effective in teaching and maintaining social skills, and to prevent problem behavior in the classroom with a result of 74% reduction in problem behavior (Saad, 2018).

Social-emotional development for young children is vital for school and life success but are teachers capable of creating and implementing their own social-emotional activities that fit the standards of SEL? Antoinette White and Sue Walker (2018)

implemented a study that examines the effectiveness of teachers that are given a few research-based resources in order to guide their instruction for social emotional teaching. These teachers were not given lesson plans or specific activities. White and Walker (2018) asked the question if teachers were able to create and implement teacher created activities through the resource package that they were given and the success of those teacher developed activities. Two teachers and their teacher assistance from a daycare center that offers kindergarten programming participated in this study. Teachers that received the resources show a significant effect on children's social-emotional development and that the resources contributed to teacher planning, documentation, and assessment of teaching SEL to their students (White & Walker, 2018).

**Worldwide social and emotional learning.** Ashdown and Bernard (2011) wanted to investigate the social-emotional program called *You Can Do it! Early Childhood Education Program* and the effect that it has on the social-emotional development, well-being, and the academic performance in the young children of Melbourne, Australia. A total of four classrooms (two-grade 1 and two-preparatory classes) were a part of this study and only one of each grade level was chosen to prepare, model, and teach *You Can Do it!* (YCDI) curriculum while being compared to the two control classes who were not teaching that curriculum. After a ten-week period, Ashdown and Bernard (2011) concluded that the vibrant program of YCDI that includes laid out lessons, songs, puppets, and colorful posters, had a significant positive impact on the social-emotional well-being and competence of young students. They found a vast reduction in problem behaviors for the grade 1 YCDI students but the YCDI prep class stayed consistent. After evaluation of academic performance in student reading levels, the

study showed that YCDI program played a significant role in helping the lower achieving readers grow their reading level. The YCDI teachers reported that the students were considerably more able to manage their emotions, get along with others, and engage in their academic learning. In the end of the study, Ashdown and Bernard (2011) concluded that the *You Can Do it! Early Childhood Education Program* classrooms showed significant gains in their teacher-rated levels of social and emotional competence and social skills then the students who did not receive the program and was an effective way of improving social and emotional competence of young children.

Teachers across the world are pressured with a greater responsibility for children's social emotional literacy, which previously had been a function of the family states Baia Martinsone (2016). Children often come to school with insufficient skill in behavioral and emission regulation, social awareness and communication. In order to guide students in the right direction of learning all of these important social emotional skills, teachers in Latvia are in need of a curriculum that is culturally contextualized specially for them. Martinsone (2016) focused on the implementation process of a culturally appropriate and sustainability of a social emotional learning program that was originally developed just for the Latvia community. Sociali Emocionalla Audzināsana (SEA) has been developed based on evidence based research programs and is tailored specifically for all thirty-nine schools and grade levels.

The SEA program will cover four core competencies of social and emotional intelligence: emotional self-regulation, positive social interactions, setting realistic and positive goals, and problem solving. The Latvia schools started with a base assessment. This base assessment showed that 25 of the 39 schools revealed insufficient social and

emotional competences as one of the risk factors. Teachers were given their resources that go with the SEA program (handbook with detailed and structured lessons, work materials, CD's) The teachers were trained on how to engaged students in discussions, group work, role-play, behavior modeling, research, projects, actions and the prosocial activity project (all depending on grade level)

The point of this study was to see the sustainability of the specifically developed program so the full evaluation portion of this study is still ongoing. The researchers reported that in the initial results revealed the programs “short-term” success and impact that SEA shows a statistically significant difference in teacher ratings between the SEA schools and the control schools. Teachers consider relationship quality, cooperation between teachers and pupils, and understanding of positive behavior habits is a result of implementing SEA (Martinsone, 2016).

Children undergo significant social-emotional learning problems such as child abuse, aggression, anti-social and maladaptive behavior and all of these situations are rapidly increasing worldwide. These off-school experiences have been proved that social-emotional learning affects students' self-recognition and self-acceptance, improving skills such as communication and empathy, prevents use of drugs, violence and bullying and provides life-long learning. Therefore, teachers play an important role in helping children develop and grow in their self-awareness, social consciousness, decision-making skills, ability to establish relationships and self-management capacities. Research states that teachers help their students learn more than just academics. A social-emotional learning program is meant to help a teacher develop classroom management skills, stronger teacher-student relationships, and to help students develop their anger

management skills, problem solving, and social skills (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017).

Teachers that take the time to develop their own social and emotional competencies are able to encourage students to collaborate, solve their own problems, and establish positive communication within their classroom. However, teachers don't always just develop these skills on their own. They need to be coached in SEL and the programs in order to be able to use the materials effectively to develop their students' social-emotional skills (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017). When schools effectively implement social-emotional programs, their whole school climate can change. Students can build caring relationships among one another, they can improve their academic achievement, have kinder classroom environments, and decrease their negative behavior. But research shows that teachers' knowledge of social-emotional learning is limited and that this leads to lack of social-emotional care for students.

Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017) focused on understanding primary teachers' views of social-emotional learning and social-emotional learning programs through their own statements. The research aims to understand how primary teachers describe SEL, their role in SEL, and how research can help teachers increase their SEL awareness and knowledge.

This study evaluates a variety of fourteen teachers who all work in different districts ranging from within the city centers and those who work in villages on the outskirts of cities. The teachers that were involved in this study ranged from two years of experience to thirty-six years of experience and with different educational backgrounds (2 years of training or 4 years of institutional education). When this study took place, all

fourteen teachers were interviewed with open ended questions by the researchers in the 2014-2015 academic school year (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017).

Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017) found that when the teachers were asked for a detailed explanation about the concept of social-emotional learning, they could not give a detailed explanation. Although the vast majority of the teacher's state that they do not know about social-emotional learning, they tried to explain students' social-emotional development through using words like communication, anger control, respect, awareness, empathy, self-expression, happiness and success to describe SEL. The teachers' explanations show that the concepts they use to express their students' social-emotional development are similar to the definitions of Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) by using the five dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, establishing healthy relationships and responsible decision-making. Many teachers emphasized the importance of being aware of the individual's own feelings and thoughts, empathy, establishing a healthy and positive relationship, decision-making and self-management in social-emotional learning (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017).

Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017) indicated that the teachers who do know of the concept do not have adequate information about it. They also emphasize that the teachers who stated they do not know anything about SEL, use activities and strategies to resolve problems within their classroom, which in turn is developing students' social-emotional skills without labeling it. Another finding through this study is that the social environment in which students live is important in students' social-emotional development. It influences the social and cultural structure of the family. According to

the teachers who participated in the research, students who live in the city centers have stronger social-emotional skills than the students who live in towns and villages. The study's findings indicated that students who live in the urban areas have higher social-emotional skills than the students who live in rural villages. Since asking and educating these teachers more about SEL, they all stated they are willing to improve their social-emotional practices (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017).

### **Social and Emotional Learning Implications**

“In our work with states developing learning standards to articulate what students should know and be able to do in terms of their social and emotional development, we have found that state teams often struggle with an immediate question from their stakeholders and constituents: How can teachers effectively promote or teach social and emotional competence to achieve these standards? Put another way: What do teachers and other adults actually need to do in the classroom and school to help students achieve the goals laid out in social and emotional learning (SEL) standards?” said Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Collaborative for Academic, S and E. L. (CASEL) (2015). Dusenbury et al. (2015) examine the previous CASEL's program reviews to help teachers identify and describe the most effective strategies to use when promoting student SEL. In all of CASEL's program reviews from preschool through high school, and across all the many programs we have reviewed, it is observed that evidence-based SEL programs use one or more of the following four approaches to promoting social and emotional competence across the five core competency clusters (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making).



First, lessons that can be taught on their own that provide the step-by-step instruction in order to teach the five core competencies of social and emotional learning. They need to be age-appropriate and dive into topics that discuss responsible decision-making, labeling feelings, managing anxiety or stress, resolving conflict, developing empathy/compassion, goal setting, communicating effectively, and being assertive. Lesson should rely heavily on the effective learning techniques. The techniques can include role playing, discussions, or small-group work and they must be appropriate for the cognitive level that is being taught. Throughout the lesson there must be highlighted opportunities for students to be able to practice the skill that was learned. Not just in a role play but throughout the day. By having these opportunities to learn and grasp the learned skill, students feel a strong relationship with their teacher and feel loved and welcomed within their classroom (Dusenbury et al., 2015). The authors of the article also indicate that an elementary level SEL lesson should have a lesson on how to label feelings using words like “enjoyable,” “happy,” “mad,” or “annoyed.” Students that are being taught through an SEL lesson should be learning methods for managing stress or anxiety by doing yoga, deep breathing, reading a story, or taking time to reflect on the situation and explore the different perspectives and feelings of others. Students should also participate in activities that encourage working together as a class to achieve a community improvement goal. While students should be taught on how to work together, they also need to be taught how to solve their own person problems. Across all developmental levels, the “free-standing lesson” approach also promotes SEL throughout the whole school and beyond. It fosters a positive school climate by providing teachers and staff with common language, goals, and strategies for SEL. Strategies that students

learn as part of SEL are most effective when everyone in the building is familiar with them, so that they can support their use throughout the day and in real-life situations that occur outside lesson times and in settings other than the classroom (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

Second, the SEL program or lessons should have general teaching strategies that would evoke classroom and schoolwide conditions to help support the growth in social and emotional development of all students. Although SEL teaching practices are similar across the different developmental levels, the specific interactions and techniques teachers are encouraged to use vary according to the students' developmental stages. Having developmentally appropriate interactions and techniques provides positive and predictable classroom environments and the positive teacher-student relationships (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

Third, the ability to integrate the learned SEL skill within other academic curriculum during instruction or practices.

Fourth, schools cannot successfully implement an SEL program without the proper guidance for administration and teachers. This guidance should help the stakeholders know how to facilitate the SEL program school wide by reorganizing the structures, operations, and academic, social, and emotional learning goals. Evidence-based SEL programs that take this approach should provide school leaders with a multitude of resources and guidance on the following processes: a) How to form an SEL leadership team; b) How to create a schoolwide vision for SEL, including, for example, schoolwide goals and objectives, mission statements, and strategic plans; c) How to conduct a needs assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement that are

important to SEL implementation; d) How to develop learning standards and policies that will support students' social and emotional development; e) How to select evidence-based programs to support SEL; f) How to integrate SEL programming into all aspects of the school's functioning; g) How to plan for professional learning for all staff; h) How to use data to inform decisions that involve students' academic, social, and emotional learning; i) How to monitor progress toward SEL goals (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

“The identification of these four approaches and the types of strategies that support each one should help school leaders and teachers develop a comprehensive plan to foster social and emotional learning at the same time it creates positive classroom conditions and school climates. Several states and school districts are laying the foundation for these strategies in their learning standards.” (Dusenbury, et al., 2015, p. 5).

Educators find themselves being held accountable for raising academic performances through standardized tests but also find themselves under an immense amount of pressure. Teachers need their students to do well on the standardized tests because of external requirements but a huge factor in them doing well is said to be the social and emotional well-being of the students. But teachers are being criticized because the teaching of an SEL program comes at the expense of the academics. Clarke and Barry (2018) state that in such a climate, it becomes important for the social and emotional curricula to be taught in order to demonstrate the impact it has on their academic performance.

Social and emotional learning is defined as the process through which we recognize and manage emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals,

behave ethically and responsibly and avoid negative behaviors. Clarke and Barry (2018) include in their article that SEL involves the integrations of two interrelated components: skill development and supportive environments. Skill development needs to happen in order to help students feel motivated to succeed, to believe in their success, to communicate well with their teachers, to set academic goals, to organize themselves to achieve these goals, to overcome obstacles. Students need a supportive environment in order to feel cared for, respected, and able to have a model and opportunities for them to apply the above skills. Communication styles, high performance expectations, classroom structures and rules, school organizational climate, commitment to the academic success of all students, and openness to parental and community involvement are all necessary for the successful creation of a supportive learning environment (Clarke & Barry, 2018) The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) illustrates the connection between social and emotional learning and improved academic performance. Based on a review of the evidence, CASEL affirms that SEL interventions and skill development should be taught within a supportive learning environment and should also contribute to the enhancement of such a climate. This in turn leads to positive child development and greater attachment and engagement in school. The final outcome is improved academic performance and school success (Clarke & Barry, 2018).

Clarke and Barry (2018) refer to the rigorous assessment done by Payton and colleagues in 2008 on the impact of SEL programs on children. Three hundred and seventeen studies and 324,303 students later, their results show very impressive improvements on children that were in the intervention groups compared to the control groups. The following were the improvements: 1) enhanced social and emotional skills;

2) improved attitudes towards self, school and others; 3) enhanced positive social behavior; 4) reduced conduct problems – misbehavior and aggression; 5) reduced emotional distress – stress and depression; 6) improved academic performance – test scores and school grades. The results from that study indicate that in addition to improving students’ social and emotional skills, these SEL programs also significantly improved children’s academic performance. SEL programming yielded an average gain on achievement test scores. “Although some educators argue against implementing this type of holistic programming because it takes valuable time away from core academic material, our findings suggest that SEL programming not only does not detract from academic performance but actually increases students’ performance on standardized tests and grades” (Clarke & Barry, 2018, p. 3). Payton gave that statement about the significant findings in the study

The results from the comprehensive review of three hundred and seventeen studies, Clarke and Barry (2018) confidently state that SEL programs not only improve social and emotional outcomes but also improve skills, which are vital for children’s academic performance. This is particularly noteworthy in this era of accountability and teachers’ concerns about raising academic standards. Learning social and emotional skills is similar to learning other academic skills in that the effects of initial learning are enhanced over time to address the increasingly complex situations children face regarding academic achievement, social relationships, citizenship and health. (Clarke & Barry, 2018).

## CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

### Summary of Literature

Social and emotional learning involves the processes of developing social and emotional competencies in children. SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful; social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker; and many different risky behaviors states Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional, Learning (CASEL, 2012). As SEL developed, CASEL (2012) identified five competencies that are effective when teaching children an SEL curriculum: 1) Self-awareness, 2) Self-management, 3) Social awareness, 4) Relationship skills, 5) Responsible decision making skills. Greenberg et al. (2003), Martinsone (2016), and Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017) agree that in order for a teacher to have the best outcome from an SEL program, the classroom must have effective classroom instruction; student engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom; and broad student, parent, and community involvement in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Ideally, planned, ongoing, systematic, and coordinated SEL instruction should begin in preschool and continue through high school.

The three highly research based SEL programs that were addressed throughout this thesis are 4R's (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution), Second Step, and Positive Action. All three of these programs show high levels of success in SEL but all bring an array of information with the program and research.

The first program that is stated in this thesis is the 4R's (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) program. 4R's aims to impact the social-learning and literacy

development in elementary aged students (Berg et al., 2010). The 4R's program has proven through research to 1) lower hostile attributional bias, a slowed rate of growth in social aggressiveness; 2) aggressive behavior was slowing and show increases in social competence (Jones et al., 2010; Portnow et al., 2015). Throughout teaching and fully embracing all the components to the 4R's program teachers reported a higher level of support in academics and classroom management (Browns et al., 2010)

The second program that is provided through all evidence based research is Second Step. The Second Step curriculum is considered an SEL and character development curriculum utilized to enhance children's social and emotional competence as well as prevent aggression and violence. Second Step is a comprehensive, classroom-based curriculum aimed at inculcating skills in the areas of empathy, perspective taking, problem solving, self-control or self-regulation, and anger management or emotion regulation for preschool through 8th grade (Top et al., 2016) Top et al. (2016) also expresses that Second step, an SEL and character development program, is likely have dual benefits for students because of simultaneous benefits for students' school behaviors and academic achievement. Based on the long-term positive impact that SEL has on students, implementing programs such as Second Step in schools appears to be a worthwhile investment to improve school culture and climate to support school engagement, learning, and achievement especially for high-need or high-poverty schools. Students that are taught the Second Step program often show high levels in social-emotional competences and a reduction in problematic behaviors (Low et al., 2019; Hart et al., 2009; Frey & Sylvester, 1997). Second Step has shown through the heavy amount of research that it improves academics and reduces problematic behaviors. Upshur et al.

(2017) dives deeper and states that social and emotional and executive functioning skills as complementary components of behavioral regulation.

The third highly sought SEL program stated within the thesis is called Positive Action (PA). PA explicitly links thoughts, feelings and actions, so the development and integration of affective and cognitive brain functions are enhanced. This is why PA attempts the longevity of lowering behaviors and increasing academic achievement by a holistic approach to school reorganization, teacher-student relationships, parent involvement, instructional practices, and development of the self-concept of students, teachers, and parents (Flay & Allred, 2003). Through the six units in PA, students show an increase social-emotional and character development and significantly lower levels in negative behavior (Flay & SREE, 2014; Duncan et al., 2016).

Throughout reviewing different programs and the research done with programs, within the thesis I state a few programs that prove to have high levels of improvements in SEL but lack the extensive amount of research like the three key programs above. The research that was done on these programs is highly applicable to the SEL argument and supports my question.

McKown et al. (2009) explain their two studies on how SEL works. They state that in order for a child to be able to have positive social outcomes, they need to be able to encode and interpret ones and others emotions/feelings as well as reason on social and emotional information that is provided to them. When a child is learning about social and emotional skills, they need to be presented with an effective program. DiPerna et al. (2014) studied the Social Skills Improvement System along with a Classwide



Intervention and it proved to increase student's prosocial behavior, which backs up McKown et al. (2009).

Daunic et al. (2013) agreed with CASEL (2012) and the five competencies of SEL. They developed and implemented a program called Social-Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF). By taking CASEL's guide of the competencies and developing a program to help teachers support their students emotionally, cognitively and academically, shows great success in behavior regulation and strengthening emotions. Saad (2018) adapts some of the competencies as well when implementing they study on Preschool Life Skills program and finds that when social skills are taught in a small group setting, there is a reduction in 74% of classroom behaviors. White and Walker (2018) evaluate teachers that are given a resource package teaching them about SEL and the competencies but not given a whole program. The teachers that were given the resources for SEL were able to develop and effectively teach SEL lessons and concepts to students. This study proves that SEL is easily adapted within classrooms but this study doesn't prove the longevity of the competencies.

SEL is a big part in education even outside of the United States. Ashdown and Bernard (2011) found that the You Can Do It! program in Melbourne, Australia was just as effective as some of the other SEL programs that were implemented in the U.S.. Mainly YCDI program showed the greatest gains for the lower achieving readers in their ability to read. Student were able to use their social skills they were taught to get along with others, manage emotions, and engage in learning better. Another overseas study showed that the Sociali Emocionalla Audzināsana (SEA) program provides students with social and emotional competencies very close to the CASEL guide competencies.

Students improved interactions with teacher and peers, maintained motivation, set goals, solved problems, learned more effectively, and participated more all along. (Martinson, 2016)

When we look at all of this research we often ask ourselves, what can we do with this information and how do we start teaching SEL? Dusenbury et al. (2015) provides a list of the most effective strategies teachers/schools can do when trying to teach CASEL (2012) five competencies. 1) Free-standing lessons that provide explicit, step-by-step instructions to teach students social and emotional competencies across the five core competency clusters on age-appropriate topics such as labeling feelings, coping with anxiety or stress, setting and achieving goals, developing empathy and compassion, communicating effectively, resolving conflict, being assertive, and making responsible decisions; 2) General teaching practices that create classroom and schoolwide conditions that facilitate and support social and emotional development in students; 3) Integration of skill instruction and practices that support SEL within the context of an academic curriculum; 4) Guidance to administrators and school leaders on how to facilitate SEL as a schoolwide initiative by restructuring the school's organizational structures, operations, and academic, social, and emotional learning goals (Dusenbury et al., 2015). The identification of these four approaches and the types of strategies that support each one should help school leaders and teachers develop a comprehensive plan to foster social and emotional learning at the same time it creates positive classroom conditions and school climates states Dusenbury et al. (2015).

Social and emotional learning is defined as the process through which we recognize and manage emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals,

behave ethically and responsibly and avoid negative behaviors (Clarke & Barry, 2018). Clarke and Barry (2018) state that SEL programs not only improve social and emotional outcomes but also improve skills, which are vital for children's academic performance. This is particularly noteworthy in this era of accountability and teachers' concerns about raising academic standards. Learning social and emotional skills is similar to learning other academic skills in that the effects of initial learning are enhanced over time to address the increasingly complex situations children face regarding academic achievement, social relationships, citizenship and health.

### **Limitations of the Research**

This literature review focused on the evidence based research and literature grounded in elementary school education that had a connection to social and emotional learning. The research was selected from 1990-2019 through searches of Educational Journals, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest Education database and EBSCO MegaFILE.

During my research, I decided to intentionally include literature and studies that have been done internationally. Education looks different from country to country but I wanted the holistic approach to my research. Social and emotional learning and education around the world is evolving and it is worth understand how it is being approached through those various studies and for that reason, my thesis included these international studies.

My thesis mainly focus' on preschool and elementary aged children and the importance of social and emotional learning. I chose to primarily focus on preschool and elementary aged students because of the research found in the importance of teaching

children social and emotional skills at such a young age. Early childhood and primary education plays a very important role in my thesis because it is where the foundation of education and social skills are highly needed in order to set a child up for future school and life success.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Throughout the research I gathered, social and emotional learning plays a huge role in improving and reducing student behaviors. The research I read often stated that behaviors are heavily linked to a child's academic performance but there are limited evidence-based studies on the academic portion on SEL.

Based on the research I gathered, teaching academics and academic achievement is often looked at as more important than teaching an SEL program. Throughout the studies in my thesis it is often stated that if classrooms implement an SEL program, teachers are able to better instruct their student in the core curriculums because they are not having to deal with such high volumes of negative behaviors. Social and emotional learning is in such high demand for children, for that reason teachers to need to know that the small portion of time it takes to teach one of the SEL programs stated in this thesis, truly doesn't take away from core curriculum. In the long run, taking that small amount of time, negative behaviors will improve but their academics will improve as well. I believe that if researchers took more time to link SEL programs to highly level of academic achievement, teachers and school districts would be more willing to adapt and implement an SEL program.

### **Implications for Professional Application**

Throughout the research and literature in this thesis, we are reminded that the core curriculum is not the only important role that educators have. Educators have been torn in two directions, academic achievement and social emotional skills. Which is why we are reminded how important taking the time to teach an SEL program is.

As educators, we find it hard to balance all of the curricula thrown our way but through the research in this thesis, we are reminded of the importance of teaching the five SEL competencies to children in order to have success within the classroom. My thesis shows that students that are taught an SEL program, will gain prosocial behaviors and they will reduce the problematic behavior that occurs within a school day.

We need to use the information within this thesis to find ways to better our schools and help our students be set up for success. I think as a primary educator, I need to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Am I laying a strong foundation for every student that walks through my door? A strong foundation is needed not only in language arts or math but in a child's ability to have self-awareness, be able to self-manage, have social awareness, build and maintain strong relationships, and make responsible decisions. If this foundation is over looked, the child may lack development in social skills and struggle with character development.

Teachers have a duty of leading, teaching, and most importantly developing students in a way that is primarily focused on individual needs. Through this thesis, teachers can feel supported and motivated in such way that helps drive them and their colleagues in providing the best education for their students because it included solid SEL components.

## **Conclusion**

Social and emotional learning is an ever growing need in our schools. Research states that students are in more need of guidance in social skills than ever before. Providing students with an SEL program that helps them develop prosocial skills and the five competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making will not only help improve the negative behavior but will also improve the classroom atmosphere, teacher and peer relationships, and academics. Having an SEL program in early childhood and elementary aged classrooms will lay the important foundations for all students to feel success throughout their academic career.

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