

New Issue Brief from Robert Wood Johnson on Social and Emotional Learning

By Stephen Levay | Categories: Research, Data, and Impact

The research could not be clearer: elementary school programs that promote students' social and emotional development are vitally important. They substantially advance academic achievement and improve prosocial behavior while they reduce stress and behavioral problems. They give teachers tools to build classrooms that encourage students to build productive relationships with one another, and they boost students' ability to develop and maintain the social and emotional competencies that are so critical for success in college and their careers.

These are the central and urgent messages in a new issue brief from The Pennsylvania State University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The brief collects a broad array of findings from 20 years of research into programs that help schools develop social and emotional learning (SEL) in their schools.

Beyond the central point that academic success and behavior are improved by SEL programs, the report also emphasizes a few other imperative issues:

- SEL programs produce positive long-term student benefits and offer a strong financial return on investment.
- Research has shown that social and emotional learning programs are enhanced when schools partner with and involve families.
- Evidence-based programs are likely to be more effective when they are culturally and linguistically sensitive.
- High quality implementation is critical to program success.

These points confirm what we've observed in the implementation of our programs. We've long held as our fundamental belief that by developing children's social skills, we can transform classrooms, build community, and create the conditions for learning in which children can become thoughtful, principled citizens of the world. So it's no surprise that the brief highlights Caring School Community (CSC) as a program with multiple studies that demonstrate its effectiveness.

CSC helps students construct stable, supportive relationships with peers and adults, which create a sense of safety and belonging for students, allowing them to take the risks that true learning entails. Students learn to work with others through opportunities to collaborate; by doing so, they cultivate both concern for others and the motivation to work for the welfare of others. When students have a genuine say in the life of the classroom and school, students become committed to the decisions they help to make and feel responsible to the community they have helped to shape.

All of our programs adopt these beliefs and approaches and use them in day-to-day instruction. They give teachers support to implement a set of practices that help students take responsibility for their thinking and behavior while they work and learn.

It's a thrilling moment to be educators who have long championed the power of SEL. The brief notes that 11 states have articulated

explicit social and emotional goals for students at the elementary level, and a recent CASEL report offered evidence that there's "dramatically growing interest" across the country in developing implementation of SEL statewide approaches.

What have you seen in your schools and classrooms that reflects this trend?