



# ThinkUp!™

Supporting documentation  
for the development of  
**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel**



# Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel

Fostering knowledgeable, responsible, and caring students is a challenge facing all educators. In our schools all classrooms, whether face-to-face or virtual, are filled with students of different levels of accomplishment and need. This means that teachers are faced with increasing variability in students' abilities to control their own behavior and to appropriately interact and communicate with others. The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel will provide educators of all levels a tool to use in cultivating a responsible and caring culture. Teaching social and emotional skills can promote healthy student engagement and enhance academic performance. The lack of routine in learning during the spring of 2020 due to COVID-19 could trigger anxiety or school avoidance, as well as increase existing behavior issues. The SEL Educator Wheel will help provide supporting tips for rebuilding relationships and acknowledging emotions with students as schools reopen and continue to face challenging times.

Students need social and emotional skills to handle the challenges of learning and living in society. As Karen Niemi CEO of the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) stated, "...all learning is social and emotional from birth..." (Niemi, 2019, para 6). It is easily observed that SEL and academics are related, whether it is a toddler learning to operate a riding toy, a second grader learning to read, a fifth grader learning how to collaborate with peers to reach a resolution, or a middle schooler learning how to compose and communicate a poem to summarize a math solution. Researchers attest to how critical SEL is to the long-term success of students both in and out of school, and advocate for a focus on SEL throughout the K–12 years (Bridgeland et al., 2013; DePaoli et al., 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015). The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel can be used by educators to identify SEL

skills that can be integrated into the academic and social life of the school. Roger Weissberg and others (2015) identified five core social and emotional competencies. The SEL skills focus on these competencies: self- and social-awareness, self-management, relationship building, and decision-making are essential for the successful development of thinking, learning activities, and personal achievement.

The accountability of school districts is based on student performance. Districts and schools are expected to prepare their students to perform at exceptional levels in order to meet the federal and state requirements and to meet the expectations of parents and communities. The responsibility lies not only in educators but in parents too. Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) promotes the development of all aspects of children's learning, including social-emotional skills which are relevant for success in school and beyond (Dusenbury, Melnick & Taylor, 2018). There are numerous schools within and outside of the United States that have SEL programs (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). CASEL has several partnerships formed by the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI, 2011). For example, the Nashville district reported improved academics in reading and math scores during implementation of CDI and integrating SEL competencies. Other data can be found on the CASEL website where they note the research being reported as a result of the impact of CDI with schools when SEL is a purposeful factor in the education plan. Findings show academic achievement success is up and behavioral incidents are reduced—resulting in improved environments for learning and increased academic performance.

Funding at the local, state, and federal levels seems to be getting attention. While ESSA has no explicit



mention of SEL, the opportunities to support social and emotional learning are present, linking to ESSA evidence requirements along with funding paths (Grant et al., 2017). There is mention of a well-rounded education, enhanced peer interactions and relationship building skills which all are connected to SEL. The Social and Emotional Learning for Families Act (SELF Act), H.R.6120, was introduced in 2018 by Representative Tim Ryan from Ohio to increase parent capacity, with the help of educators, for teaching and demonstrating SEL skills to children. Higher education was also targeted for including SEL in teacher preparation programs. H.R. 6543 was proposed by Representative Robert C. Scott as the Aim Higher Act in 2018. In 2020 an appropriations bill was proposed which included funding at \$260 million for SEL.

To ensure students are prepared to excel at higher and deeper levels, teachers must be knowledgeable in preparing students to be successful in the classroom. Educators must be able to effectively integrate SEL into their daily instructional practices. Students learn social-emotional competencies in the classroom when teachers model appropriate behavior and provide them with opportunities to learn and apply such skills. Administrators are ultimately responsible for the performance of teachers and students so the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel can be a valued tool by every educator.

Educators who can benefit from this resource range from classroom teachers to those in special programs, principals, assistant administrators, counselors, other support staff and school leaders. This educator tool can also be used in new teacher training at the district level, with before school and after school program teachers, by Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) teams, and even assist students in teacher preparation college classes.

Utilization of this resource can contribute to any systematic process for promoting SEL as educators implement, extend, reinforce the ideas incorporated on the wheel. The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Educator Wheel supports teachers and other educators in successfully creating a culture conducive to learning, resulting in improved teacher and student performance and increased overall achievement. This SEL support tool can be used to address behavioral and learning needs and support health and emotional needs. The SEL wheel resource can serve as a catalyst for the integration of social, emotional, and academic development. With this, a high-quality learning environment can be cultivated where students are motivated to perform their best because the classroom community of learners is cooperative and welcoming. The school environment positively impacts students' ability and willingness to learn. When students develop the five competencies and apply them across the curricula and during social interactions in and out of school, they can increase their capacity to be successful in school, in work, and throughout their lives. In the *American Journal of Public Health*, a national study was published in 2015 that purports the effectiveness of students who received noncognitive skills or SEL skills in the early years of kindergarten and the impact on outcomes twenty years later as those same individuals reached adulthood (Jones et al., 2015). Planning interventions that enhance these social-emotional competencies at a young age appears to have positive effects in multiple areas (e.g., self-discipline, interpersonal skills).

Research has connected SEL skills with academic achievement and better preparation for work and life. Students need to be able to apply knowledge and skills to understand and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Students who practice, acquire, and apply SEL skills can engage in learning and work collaboratively and successfully with peers. It takes commitment, time, practice, and support. Hartup (1992) and Ladd (2000) concluded that youth who have not acquired social-emotional competence have a greater probability of experiencing less academic success and continued at-risk status throughout adolescence and adulthood years. Mahoney and other colleagues (2018) investigated four meta-analyses on student outcomes regarding school



based SEL programs. The evidence indicates that SEL programs do show significant benefits for those students who participate. In other words, there is a strong support that SEL programs can produce positive outcomes not only for the time in school but carry over in later life.

In an earlier meta-analysis of 213 rigorous studies of SEL in K–12 schools (across urban, rural, and suburban settings), (Durlak et al., 2011) indicated that students receiving quality SEL instruction demonstrated the following positive meta-analysis findings:

- Improved academic performance – Achievement scores were an average of 11 percentile points greater than those students who did not participate in SEL instruction.
- Better attitudes and behaviors – Improvements were indicated in increased motivation for learning, deeper commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and improved behavior in classrooms.
- Reduced negative behaviors – Disruptive behaviors in the classrooms seem to be fewer in number, including noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals.
- Less emotional distress – Reduced reporting of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal.

In addition, the meta-analysis indicated that school-based programs conducted by school staff (e.g., teachers) rather than those by outside providers are most effective. This shows that SEL practices can be integrated into routine teaching practices. Concluding data appears to show SEL is productive in improving the social and emotional skills of students, with connections made to positive behavioral and academic outcomes.

In 2017, Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg assessed the longitudinal effects of the eight original SEL programs that measured academics. Results indicated that students involved in SEL programs had academic performance an average of 13 percentile points

higher than their peers who had not experienced SEL programs. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017) along with Jones and Kahn (2017) agreed that SEL programs will be most effective when the implementation is “planned, systemic, and ongoing from preschool through high school.” School administrators have requested that the connection between SEL and academic performance be further studied for the purpose of gathering additional data. Mahoney and colleagues (2018) state that the four meta-analyses revealed “... significant, positive connections between participation in universal, school-based SEL programs and student academic performance over the short and longer term” (p. 22).

The overall purpose of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel is to assist educators in the integration of SEL into regular instructional practices and supports. Mentoring Minds offers several ways for using the Educator Wheel to render valuable SEL support to schools.

- Educators who seek a simplistic way to introduce SEL to their staff will find direction.
- Educators exploring resources that complement an existing approach or program will find numerous ideas.
- Educators who have programs in place can use the wheel to find ways to strengthen their program.
- New and experienced teachers can reflect upon and deepen their understanding about the five core competencies of SEL: self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision making.
- Conversations can be jumpstarted with wheel content to build capacity and support for SEL integration throughout the school.
- A common SEL language can be acquired and used to improve the integration of SEL across the grades and promote a shared SEL vision.
- The wheel might be used to enhance or continuously improve existing SEL practices.



Produced in a wheel format with easy access to content for educators of any grade, the layout of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel contains two sides with one face and six windows on each side. The face of Side 1 introduces SEL with definition, core competencies, purpose of SEL, and research-based outcomes. The five windows on Side 1 list the five competencies as identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and highlight associated skills: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills, and Responsible decision-making. Window 6 on Side 1 features Classroom Culture and descriptors of what SEL classrooms entail. Side 2 is more about informing educators how SEL can be incorporated into the classroom and with parents and families. The face of Side 2 showcases Activities that Enhance a Strong SEL Program, Teacher Role, and Strategies for Regulating Emotions. Five windows on Side 2 feature strategies, techniques or activities associated with each of the five SEL competencies that can be implemented, extended, and reinforced with students. Window 6 on Side 2 highlights Parent SEL ideas for Parent and Family Engagement.

Mentoring Minds' Curriculum Development Team for Educator Resources investigated the literature and research that substantiated SEL being of value across the curriculum. Jacobson (2020) stated that a survey administered by nonprofit Learning Heroes revealed

that respondents indicated a degree of worry as a result of Spring 2020 school closures due to COVID. In the survey findings, fifty-nine percent of the more than 3,600 parents and guardians surveyed noted the loss of social interactions from school and with their peers as a concern. A smaller percentage of 54% cited academic loss as a worrisome factor. After reviewing the survey results and SEL outcomes shared by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and others purporting the importance of infusing SEL into daily instruction and encounters, the need was determined for a resource to help acknowledge emotions and develop coping behaviors as well as teach students how to cultivate and sustain relationships and make responsible decisions. After receipt of permission to use the five core competencies of Social and Emotional Learning as identified by CASEL, this resource was created to maximize the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Hoping to increase students' capacity to learn and ignite a commitment to learn while increasing student engagement and improving the knowledge of both educators and students, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Educator Wheel was created. Our goal at Mentoring Minds is to equip educators with a tool to advance social and emotional learning and help students thrive in academic and social environments throughout their daily lives in schools, in homes, and in their communities. It is our intent that students will continue to advance their SEL skills for the remainder of their lives.



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