

SEL Starts with Teachers: The Need for Additional High-Quality SEL Pre-Service and Inservice Teacher Training

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The Need for High-Quality Pre-Service and Inservice Teacher Training in Social and Emotional Learning

Successful implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs leads to positive student outcomes such as increased social and emotional skills, decreased problem behaviors, improved attitudes toward school, and increased academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Whereas a national survey shows that teachers believe SEL is effective and can be taught (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Harihan, 2013), many teachers also report limited training and confidence in their abilities to support SEL in their students, as well as a lack of school and district-level support (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Zinnser, Christensen, & Torres, 2016). One potential source of these insecurities is the fact that SEL training for teachers is often lacking in dosage, quality, and emphasis for pre-service and inservice teachers (Jennings & Frank, 2015; Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2015). We argue that providing high-quality SEL instruction to students is extremely difficult without first teaching the teachers how to provide this instruction effectively; therefore, work in the field should be geared toward increasing and improving SEL teacher training for pre-service and inservice teachers.

Teacher social and emotional competence is a key factor to address in both pre-service and inservice teacher education in order to prepare teachers to effectively provide SEL content to students. However, not a single state includes teacher education standards that address a comprehensive set of SEL competencies for teachers and only 33% of state standards address a comprehensive set of SEL competencies for students (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Development of teachers' own social and emotional skills is critical because these skills equip teachers to handle student behavioral needs, develop relationships with students, effectively manage classrooms, and model and demonstrate these skills; these skills are also associated with

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reduced teacher burnout and turnover (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). It would be beneficial for educators, current and aspiring, to regularly self-assess and develop their own social and emotional skills (Yoder, 2014). Additionally, assessments of teacher social and emotional competency could be incorporated in teacher training programs and professional development to help assess and monitor growth in these areas.

Educators also would benefit from greater knowledge about student social and emotional development, facilitating supportive classroom environments, and designing instruction that infuses SEL. Teacher knowledge of student social and emotional development is essential in forming positive classroom environments, developing positive student-teacher relationships, and fostering prosocial student development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Increased educator knowledge of child development has also been cited as a necessity in prioritizing SEL initiatives (NCSEAD, 2019).

As noted above, professional development (PD) opportunities tend to be inadequate in preparing teachers to incorporate SEL into their classrooms. SEL PD is often delivered as a “one-shot” workshop approach, which lacks continuous support for implementation (Jennings & Frank, 2015). Consistent support, goal setting, progress monitoring, and frequent collaborative sessions during which participants can actively practice approaches must be included in order for PD to successfully support implementation. Metro Nashville Public Schools serves as an example in prioritizing SEL improvement in that the district has designed and implemented comprehensive SEL evaluation rubrics for school-wide and classroom environment and also for instruction, including lesson plans, teacher feedback, and student reflection. (Metro Nashville Public Schools, 2017). These rubrics, or ones like them, could be used for informing PD targets and progress in these areas. PD opportunities can also be improved through solutions such as

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university-district partnerships, online training, development of internal capacity among senior teachers and counselors to provide peer coaching, and through the use of professional learning communities organized for SEL lesson study and data analysis. While obstacles including monetary and time constraints certainly exist, schools can leverage these practices to provide PD opportunities that are embedded within schools' larger operating systems, build teachers' own social and emotional skills, and transmit relevant developmental knowledge and strategies for implementation to teachers.

Incorporating SEL into pre-service teacher education programs, as well as ongoing reform and development of PD opportunities with inservice teachers, clearly communicates the value of SEL and reinforces the notion that SEL training is pivotal for all teachers, not simply an "add on". The time has come for educational leaders at every level to work toward high-quality training opportunities for teachers and to advocate for SEL pre-service and PD efforts to be treated with the same importance as mathematics or science training.

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