



## Boosting Social and Emotional Development In and Out of School

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Social and emotional learning (SEL) has become more widely embraced as part of a well-rounded education over the past 20 years, leading to increased discussions among state lawmakers about whether and how to incorporate SEL into school and after-school curriculum.

In a recent [public poll](#), 82 percent of respondents said it is highly important for schools to help students develop interpersonal skills, such as being cooperative, respectful of others and persistent at solving problems. More than nine in 10 Americans [polled](#) also reported that they support public schools providing after-school programs, with 77 percent reporting that they strongly support them.

After-school programs, often based in schools or community organizations, offer a variety of academic and enrichment activities and have [been found](#) to be effective in supporting children and youth's social and emotional development. Since young people spend nearly 80 percent of their waking hours outside of school, after-school programs can be a way to complement the social and emotional learning taking place during regular school hours.

Social and emotional learning—sometimes [referred](#) to as non-cognitive skills, soft skills, character development or 21st-century skills—refers to a wide range of skills, attitudes and behaviors that can affect students' academic success, employability, self-esteem and relationships, as well as civic and community engagement. According to [researchers](#), SEL is important to student development and teaches children to manage their emotions, empathize, handle conflicts, persevere and engage in their schools and communities.

The [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) (CASEL), emphasizes five

“competency clusters” as the core of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills. Other organizations and partnerships define their own [social and emotional competencies](#), which can overlap or be entirely different from one another. This is further complicated by the fact that researchers are struggling with [how to best measure](#) social and emotional competencies.

With a litany of social emotional competencies from which to choose, teachers, schools and after-school programs often pick sets of competencies based on what aligns best with their programs and methods. In the classroom, SEL [may be taught](#) with specific curriculum, integrated into academic lessons, classroom norms and expectations, or included in teaching and discipline practices. In a [national survey of teachers](#), 95 percent said social and emotional skills are teachable, and 97 percent said SEL can benefit students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Since after-school programs have [long supported skills-building and positive development](#) in children and youth, they have been a natural partner to many schools in supporting young people's social and emotional development. After-school programs vary in how they incorporate SEL into programming. [Researchers](#) have found that children and youth who attend after-school programs that use evidence-based practices show increased positive social behaviors, fewer problem behaviors, less drug use, and improved test scores, grades and school attendance.

However, some lawmakers and others remain skeptical about the benefits of incorporating social emotional learning in the school setting. They contend that these skills should be taught by parents and families. Additionally, the numerous overlapping definitions and competing assessment tools pose a challenge to measuring and accurately evaluating SEL strategies.

### Did You Know?

- [Illinois' state ESSA plan](#) reflects the state's whole-child approach, adding references to the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students, along with high expectations for student achievement.
- [Massachusetts' state ESSA plan](#) lists supporting social-emotional learning, health and safety as among the state's core educational strategies.
- [South Carolina's ESSA plan](#) develops a framework identifying self-direction, perseverance, global perspective and interpersonal skills to be among the characteristics that every student should have when he or she graduates from high school.

