Implementing Social-Emotional Learning in the Elementary Classroom

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Abstract

Social-emotional learning has the power to change how educators deliver instruction across the country. For this article, social-emotional learning research and journal articles were reviewed for the purposes of identifying common themes among existing research. Multiple perspectives were considered in the review of literature and the findings were used to identify potential issues and create overall recommendations. The first author provides an example of an implementation case at her elementary school. The recommendations from this case are provided for school leaders to consider when implementing social-emotional learning in their elementary school buildings. A step-by-step action plan is laid out for school leaders to use as a guide for this process, based on the first author's case, while taking possible issues into consideration.

Keywords Social-emotional · Instruction · Elementary

Introduction

Social-emotional learning has evolved within the field of education over the years and is recently gaining more attention as students adapt to a changing world and, thus, a new learning environment. This type of learning focuses on students developing life skills like empathy, emotional intelligence, and goal setting (CASEL, 2020). Supporters of social-emotional learning (SEL) argue that these skills are equally as important as academic content (Brennan, 2015; Durak et al., 2011; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Legislators support social-emotional learning as evidenced by the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This legislation allows schools to be evaluated on a non-academic outcome such as school climate and student engagement (National Conference of State Legislature, 2018). As the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the way teachers delivered instruction, a common sentiment among educators was to remind each other of the importance of "Maslow before Bloom" (Raschdorf et al., 2020). That is, students'

social-emotional needs should be met before expecting them to absorb and retain academic information. This belief has more early childhood educators calling for knowledge of social-emotional learning instruction and the best way of doing so. A large body of current research is allowing for education to head in this direction. The research provides support for the impact that SEL can have on schools across the country.

The purpose of this article is to examine potential practices for implementing social-emotional learning into the elementary classroom. Prior research will be reviewed for information surrounding the most effective way to implement SEL. After reviewing effective strategies, recommendations and their implications will be given to allow for a successful transition into the elementary setting. These recommendations are based on the implementation process at the first author's school. Potential roadblocks, like time management, financial considerations, and stakeholder buy-in, will be taken into account as a plan for implementation. A step-by-step plan will be outlined for assisting school leaders in the process of adding social-emotional learning to the classroom. A successful plan will convince all parties involved of the necessity of social-emotional learning, including administrators, parents, teachers, students, and community members.

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Current Approaches to SEL

Current literature offers insight into the impact of social-emotional learning on student academic performance. Research includes current social-emotional learning practices and how opposing views affect the implementation of SEL. This review will also discuss necessary components for successful implementation, such as the learning environment and SEL curriculum, based on prior research findings. The review will conclude with an overview of why further investigation is needed to determine the best plan for bringing SEL to the elementary classroom.

The Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning

The most popular argument for social-emotional learning is that SEL is as critical as academic instruction for students of all ages. When SEL is implemented correctly, there can be a dramatic increase in academic performance as a result. A meta-analysis of 213 studies found this to be true, concluding that social-emotional instruction has a significant impact on students' academic scores (Durlak et al., 2011). However, it is important to note that SEL does not replace core instruction. Instead, when taught as a supplemental curriculum, social-emotional learning benefits children from all backgrounds and helps to enhance their overall experience at school (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). When students' social-emotional needs are prioritized, they are more likely to respond to learning within the school environment. This is especially true for students who have experienced trauma, or adverse childhood experiences, who tend to struggle with the typical needs of the school day (Parker & Hodgson, 2020).

Furthermore, when implemented effectively, SEL connects very well with standards-based teaching and grading. A component of standards-based grading requires students to reflect on their learning and learn from their failures and mistakes. Standards-based grading also encourages students to be aware of their learning goals and work towards them at their own pace. These practices are remarkably like lessons taught as part of social-emotional learning, where students learn the importance of growth mindset and goal setting (Brennan, 2015). The connection between standards-based grading and social-emotional learning could result in increased academic performance for students at the elementary level (Brennan, 2015).

Opposing Views of Social-Emotional Learning

While research supports the impact of SEL on academic performance, there are arguments against the implementation of SEL in U.S. public schools. Those who oppose social-emotional learning argue that SEL is manipulative and works to mold student personalities into a uniform expectation, taking away student individuality (Zhao, 2020). Likewise, legislation involving funding social-emotional learning is consistently turned away by some legislators who argue that more time should be spent on academic instruction than on teaching soft skills (Stringer, 2019). Opponents also worry that social-emotional learning may influence students' future political views, rather than teaching them to develop their own opinions about political issues (Stringer, 2019).

Conversely, advocates of social-emotional learning work to convince opposers by arguing that SEL is needed for students to become successful, functional adults in society. Because social-emotional learning develops students' ability to recognize their own emotions and empathize with others, advocates of SEL argue that students with these developed skills will be more successful later in life (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). In fact, some even attest that social-emotional learning is needed for complete human development, particularly in the early years (Ahmed et al., 2020). If students are not receiving a typical social-emotional environment at home, schools can replicate the teaching of these skills with an appropriate SEL curriculum. Students who have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences (ACES) in their home life can have an equal chance at proper social-emotional development when SEL instruction is delivered at school (Parker & Hodgson, 2020). Not only could SEL enhance students' overall health and development, social-emotional learning can also have a positive impact on school climate and atmosphere. SEL has been found to improve student engagement while at school and reduce high-risk behaviors (Meyers et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018).

Current Social-Emotional Learning Practices in the United States

While there remain arguments on either side of the spectrum, schools across the United States are implementing SEL to determine the impact it can have on students. In the United States, legislation provides funding for schools to research and implement SEL, like the School Climate Transformation Grant. School districts were able to first apply for this grant in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). From there, the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) offered more funding for schools wishing to add teacher leader positions in the field of SEL (CASEL, 2019). These changes allowed for schools in the United States to begin researching the impact SEL could have on their students and bring attention to meeting students' social-emotional needs.

Available Resources

Social-emotional learning gains much of its support and new resources from civic organizations in the United States. For example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a leader in helping schools to perfect their skills in SEL instruction. CASEL (2019) not only offers guides for implementation, but also reviews curricula to help school districts find a best fit. CASEL (2019) also provides extensive research touting the benefits of social-emotional learning. Similarly, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) conducted research to provide school districts with recommendations to begin SEL implementation. Their research concluded that social-emotional learning requires the following factors: policy alignment, continuous reflection, local ownership, trained leaders, and cross-sector coalitions (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). Finally, the National Education Association (NEA) supports teachers in their concern for student wellbeing (NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, n.d.). The NEA believes that social-emotional learning is an imperative component of a child's education.

The support from these types of organizations makes the creation of SEL resources and curricula possible. There continues to be more curricula on the market for administrators to purchase. Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) reviewed multiple SEL curricula, including Caring School Community, PATHS, Positive Action, Resolving Conflicts Creatively, Responsive Classroom, Second Step, Social Decision Making/Problem Solving Program, and Steps to Review. These curricula focused on the five social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2019). These curricula make it possible for the general education teacher to add SEL as a daily component in the classroom (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). Before deciding on which curriculum best fits a certain school, Ferreira et al. (2020) remind administrators of the importance of ensuring that the curriculum is developmentally appropriate for the intended age. Just as academics are scaffolded throughout the year, social-emotional skills should correspond to developmentally appropriate age ranges and expectations. In addition, while cost is an important factor to consider when deciding on a curriculum, administrators may recognize that the impact of social-emotional learning can create a financial return by improving student performance, school climate, and increasing standardized test scores (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). In this way, purchasing an SEL curriculum can be considered an important investment in a school's success.

Necessary Components for Implementation

Once schools receive the support and resources to begin the implementation of SEL, administrators need to research best practices for implementing social-emotional learning. These examples have revealed necessary components for SEL instruction to be the most successful. To begin, teachers should be aware of their comfort level with teaching social-emotional learning. To be able to teach social skills, educators need to be socially competent themselves (Collie et al., 2012). If educators are not aware of their own social-emotional competencies, then the art of instructing these skills can become too stressful. In this way, schools should set their priority on supporting adults first before expecting them to teach SEL (Darling-Hammond, 2018). Mentally healthy teachers will be more impactful with their instruction than those who have other stressors to worry about. With that in mind, it is helpful for schools to focus on simply initiating SEL and then be willing to reflect, learn from mistakes, and listen to teachers' thoughts and opinions about what was successful and what was challenging (Berman, 2018).

After teachers are prepared for teaching SEL, school leaders then may consider focusing on perfecting the learning environment. School is naturally a social place for students, and it makes sense to instruct these skills in this setting (Dominguez & LaGue, 2013). Three themes emerged from the literature that were described as necessary components for SEL to be most successful. These all impacted the learning environment: positive teacher-student relationships, diversity and acceptance, and student voice (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, 2014; Farrel, 2019; Zalaznick, 2020). Students thrived in an environment where they felt supported and respected by their teachers and, therefore, were more open to SEL instruction (Elias, 2014). Likewise, SEL instruction that included conversations about diversity and acceptance created an ideal learning environment for all involved (Farrell, 2019). Students appreciated a classroom where they felt they had a voice in their learning and felt understood by their teachers (Zalaznick, 2020). When all factors were effectively put into place, students were more likely to improve in their academic performance.

After a proper learning environment is put into place, the instruction of SEL can begin. Prior research provides recommendations of important pieces to allow students to get the most out of the instruction. First, social-emotional learning was implemented throughout the day and taught regularly by classroom teachers (Bailey et al., 2019; Barnett, 2019). This took on multiple forms, including being integrated into another curriculum (e.g., literacy or math). On the other hand, some programs required separate times of the day devoted to SEL, such as morning and closing circle times (Berman, 2018; Stearns, 2016). These lessons focused

on the direct, explicit instruction of social-emotional skills. Oftentimes, these skills were practiced through peer collaboration in both general academic work and direct SEL work (Capp et al., 2018). However, when instruction was given, it was most helpful to be in the form of an easy-to-follow curriculum, with step-by-step instructions for the teacher to follow. Likewise, SEL was most impactful when families and the general community were involved in the students' learning (Greenberg et al., 2017; Haymovitz et al., 2018).

Roadblocks to Address

While an action plan is created, the following will be important roadblocks to consider: finding time for SEL instruction, locating money in the budget for resources and personnel, adequately preparing teachers for providing the instruction, gaining the support of stakeholders, and collecting data to reflect on its effectiveness. As the world changes, so do the students entering classrooms. Schools should recognize the need to educate the whole child, in lieu of focusing solely on academics (Durlak et al., 2011). The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires schools to be evaluated on conditions of learning, and social-emotional learning can positively affect school's climate to improve these scores (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020).

First, the main concern that teachers have about social-emotional learning is finding the time to fit SEL instruction into their daily schedule (Collie et al., 2012). There are many demands on elementary teachers; namely, expectations for students to perform well on standardized tests. A typical elementary schedule is already full of literacy and math lessons, and the notion of adding in another component may be overwhelming for elementary educators (Collie et al., 2012). With that in mind, it will be important for an SEL curriculum to be easy to implement and fit seamlessly into the normal elementary routine. SEL can also be embedded into academic curriculum, through partner work, minilessons during literacy, and as part of the Common Core State Standards speaking and listening standards.

Next, some schools may have difficulty acquiring money to support the implementation of SEL. Funds will be needed for multiple components, including curriculum, personnel, and professional development (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). School leaders should be aware of grant opportunities and government-controlled funds that would aid in the purchasing of these components. Professional development is necessary to ensure that teachers are properly prepared for providing instruction in social-emotional learning (Collie et al., 2012).

Finally, school leaders should recognize the importance of gaining support from important stakeholders including parents, the local community, and the students themselves. Those who oppose social-emotional learning believe that SEL takes precious time away from academics (Zhao, 2020). To combat those fears, school leaders need to create a plan for collecting data to prove the success of their chosen SEL program. Stakeholders will benefit from being kept informed on all levels, so that they know what to expect for outcomes from social-emotional learning.

Social-emotional learning seems to be the latest trend in education, but it does not come without controversy. Many states are beginning to see the benefits of providing SEL instruction and will likely begin to require this type of instruction in schools. However, the problem remains in creating steps to follow for a smooth implementation, while addressing issues like time, money and resources, and stakeholder buy-in. These issues need to be considered for an SEL implementation plan to succeed.
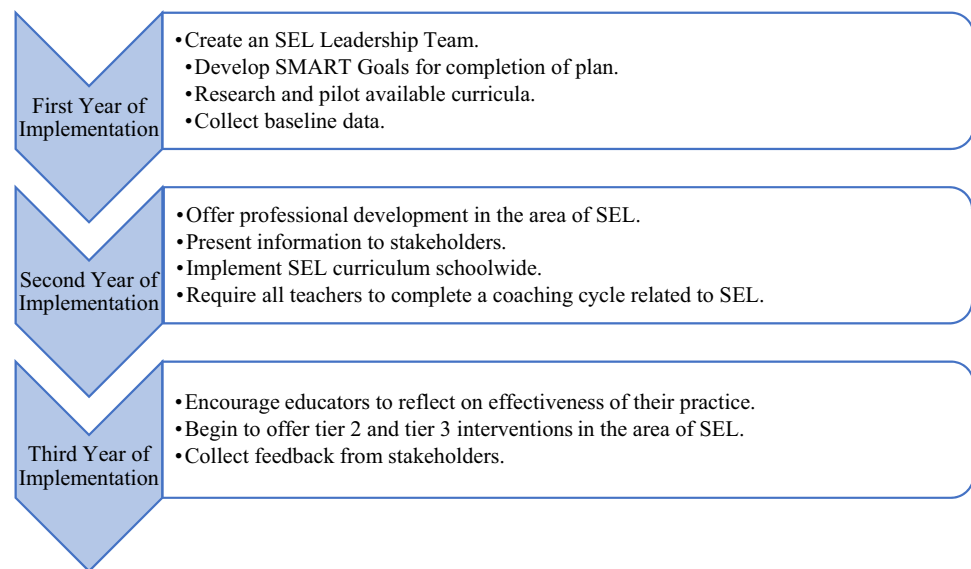
Recommendations and an Example Case

Clearly, the process of implementing social-emotional learning into the elementary classroom does not come without its challenges. However, the recommendations from the current research offer valuable insight into the best approach for beginning the process. School leaders may consider simply choosing a starting point and working from there to get off and running (Berman, 2018). Before jumping into the implementation, it will be important to consider the previously mentioned sub issues that are likely to affect the success of a plan. From there, a step-by-step plan, based in the literature's findings and the first author's experiences, can smoothly guide the development of social-emotional learning throughout an elementary school's classroom.

Action Plan

With the existing research and the first author's actions at her school in mind, the following action plan is presented. This action plan includes multiple elements to ensure that the implementation of social-emotional learning goes as smoothly as possible. These components include creating a social-emotional learning leadership team, offering multiple opportunities for staff to receive professional development on the topic of SEL, creating a plan that includes frequent communication with all stakeholders, developing consistency among elementary classrooms within the school building, and offering tier two and tier three interventions for students needing targeted instruction in social-emotional skills. The first author implemented a similar action plan in her school and examples from this school are given for each step. Refer to Fig. 1 to see an example of an implementation timeline.

Fig. 1 A Timeline for Implementing Social-Emotional Learning.

First Year of Implementation
- Create an SEL Leadership Team.
  - Develop SMART Goals for completion of plan.
  - Research and pilot available curricula.
- Collect baseline data.

Second Year of Implementation
- Offer professional development in the area of SEL.
- Present information to stakeholders.
- Implement SEL curriculum schoolwide.
- Require all teachers to complete a coaching cycle related to SEL.

Third Year of Implementation
- Encourage educators to reflect on effectiveness of their practice.
- Begin to offer tier 2 and tier 3 interventions in the area of SEL.
- Collect feedback from stakeholders.

Note. This example shows a potential timeline for implementing the steps laid out in the action plan.

Social-Emotional Learning Leadership Team

The first step towards success when implementing social-emotional learning should include the creation of an SEL leadership team. This team should include a wide variety of staff members to include diverse perspectives. Some positions to consider are the instructional coach(es), the curriculum coordinator, a teacher new to the district, a teacher new to the profession, at least two veteran teachers, and the school guidance counselor. Monthly meetings of the SEL team are suggested to plan and fulfill actions towards adding social-emotional instruction to the elementary building. At the author's school, these members were selected by the elementary principal to identify the weaknesses in the area of social-emotional instruction and then work towards a solution. Creating a shared vision is one of the first actions that the team will want to complete. This vision will include where they see SEL fitting into the school and the changes it will bring to the overall school environment. The shared vision should include a mission statement. An example of a mission statement is: "Under the implementation of a new social-emotional curriculum, our elementary school will offer an environment where the maximum amount of learning can take place, where students can feel safe, where teachers are appreciated, and all feel welcome." The mission statement will be used, along with the shared vision, to introduce SEL to the elementary staff. The vision statement encompasses the beliefs of how the leadership team expects both students and educators to act underneath their new SEL plan. The following questions may be beneficial in generating discussion to create a shared vision:

- What does an ideal school environment look like?

SMART Goal Example

SMART Goal Example
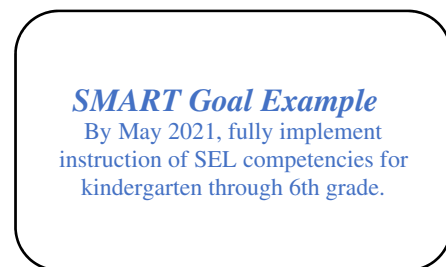By May 2021, fully implement instruction of SEL competencies for kindergarten through 6th grade.

Fig. 2 SMART goal example

- How do ideal students solve problems with one another?
- How should teachers be supported in their profession?
- How does social-emotional learning relate to our school mission statement?
- How could social-emotional learning transform our school?

After developing a shared vision, the SEL leadership team will need to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) goals for how to meet their vision. These goals should be broken up by priority, and the SEL team should make both short-term and long-term goals. These goals could include the development of schoolwide norms, or expectations, for students to follow no matter where they are in the school building. This consistency will be helpful in enhancing the school's learning environment (Durlak et al., 2011). Also, the SEL team will want to develop a plan that ensures teacher morale stays positive (Darling-Hammond, 2018). For example, SEL leaders may

work on celebrating staff accomplishments on a regular basis or rewarding teachers with small sentiments. Both factors will be very impactful in improving the climate of the school and the learning environment for students (Fig. 2).

When making the SMART goals, the SEL team should have a plan for collecting data to show their growth towards goals. One possible assessment tool is the social, academic, emotional, behavioral risk screener (SAEBRS) assessment offered by Fastbridge. This assessment screens students from kindergarten through 12th grade and quickly identifies students who may need a targeted intervention related to social-emotional skills (Illuminate Education, 2021). The data from this assessment could be one of the main determinations in SEL goal achievement.

In addition to collecting student data from an assessment like SAEBRS, the SEL leadership team will also want to have additional data collection tools. First, the leadership team will want to collect data from teachers, including their thoughts on the school climate and levels of job satisfaction (Darling-Hammond, 2018). A survey, anonymous suggestions, or a similar idea could be created. Teachers should feel supported in their own job before they can competently teach social-emotional lessons (Collie et al., 2012). This survey could identify potential issues before they hinder the SEL team's efforts. Similarly, students could complete a school climate survey. For example, the Iowa Department of Education in the United States requires all public schools to conduct a Conditions of Learning Survey, collecting data on students' feelings about their school (Des Moines Public Schools, 2021). All these pieces of data will be crucial in determining a starting point for the SEL team, and later in determining the success of the team's efforts.

Next, the SEL team will want to choose the tools for SEL instruction. There are many available curricula in the social-emotional domain, so the pros and cons of all curricula will need to be weighed. Factors to consider when choosing a curriculum should include ease of use, cost, resources included, and research-based materials (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). An appropriate curriculum will meet most of the school's needs. It may be beneficial for the leadership team to choose one or two teachers to pilot a program and share their thoughts on the program before purchasing it for the entire elementary. The first author was chosen to pilot the Caring School Community curriculum from the Center for the Collaborative Classroom at her school. This program was used with her 27 fourth-grade students. Data was collected to determine its effectiveness, and the author presented her findings to her colleagues at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year. In addition, the author trained her colleagues to use the curriculum in their own classrooms. It is helpful to have a curriculum chosen and sample materials made available

as the shared vision is presented to all elementary staff members.

Professional Development

After choosing a curriculum, the next step in SEL implementation is preparing the educators for delivering social-emotional instruction. The SEL leadership team should organize professional development opportunities for elementary staff. The professional development opportunities should occur more often during the first year to best support educators in the transition to social-emotional learning. These first sessions should include opportunities for teachers to develop their own social-emotional competencies (Darling-Hammond, 2018). Administrators will want to emphasize the importance of teachers taking time for self-care or activities where they take the time to refresh and elevate their mental health (Collie et al., 2012). These types of activities include fitness, mindfulness practices, free-reading, or any other activities that teachers enjoy doing in their free time. In addition, teachers should be able to recognize and manage their own emotions to assist students in doing the same (Darling-Hammond, 2018). For example, at the author's school, the administration brought in area education agency members to train staff on social-emotional learning practices. This included the viewing and discussion of the documentary *Paper Tigers* (Redford & Pritzker, 2015).

From there, teachers can begin to practice empathy by learning about trauma-informed instruction and adverse childhood experiences (ACES). An understanding of these topics is crucial in being able to deliver social-emotional lessons and create a classroom environment where all students feel safe and comfortable (Parker & Hodgson, 2020). The author's colleagues participated in a book study of *Help for Billy* by Heather Forbes. When students experience trauma in their young lives, the development of their brains is affected (Forbes, 2012). Because of this, their ability to maintain relationships in the same way as traditional students is diminished. Behavior typically becomes a problem with these types of children, and it is helpful for educators to be professionally trained in a trauma-informed approach in order to best meet their needs. Social-emotional learning can reduce high-risk behaviors when implemented correctly (Parker & Hodgson, 2020). Consequently, professional development should offer the opportunity for educators to learn and understand the neuroscience behind trauma and ACES.

Once educators have the foundational knowledge necessary for teaching social-emotional learning, they can begin instruction. However, the learning does not stop there, and school leaders should consider utilizing their instructional coaches to continue to improve educator's SEL practice. Like other coaching sessions focused on academics, an

instructional coach can complete a coaching cycle with his or her co-workers, analyzing social-emotional lessons. To make the most out of the first year of schoolwide SEL implementation, administrators should consider requiring all teachers to complete a coaching cycle in social-emotional learning. This coaching cycle will involve the instructional coach reviewing a lesson with the teacher beforehand, observing the lesson, and reflecting with the teacher afterwards. The coaching cycle will give teachers a chance to ensure they are delivering instruction in the best way possible for students to gain as many social-emotional skills as possible. Likewise, the instructional coach can learn from his or her colleagues to build a "toolbox" of knowledge for all elementary staff to share as they plan their SEL instruction.

Communication with Stakeholders

Creating a vision of SEL and preparing educators for instruction will serve as the building blocks for success of implementation. From there, administrators and school leaders will want to consider the involvement of educational stakeholders. This will include parents, students, all school workers, school board representatives, and community members. Community members may include local business owners, student relatives, and all those who have a stake in the funding for the school. For SEL to be most effective, communication with stakeholders should happen regularly and consistently (Raschdorf et al., 2020). The SEL leadership team will want to share their SEL vision with all stakeholders and present it in a way that shows them the benefits of such instruction. At the author's school, parents were given an overview of the new social-emotional curriculum at Back-to-School night and were also able to ask any questions or raise any concerns during this time. After the
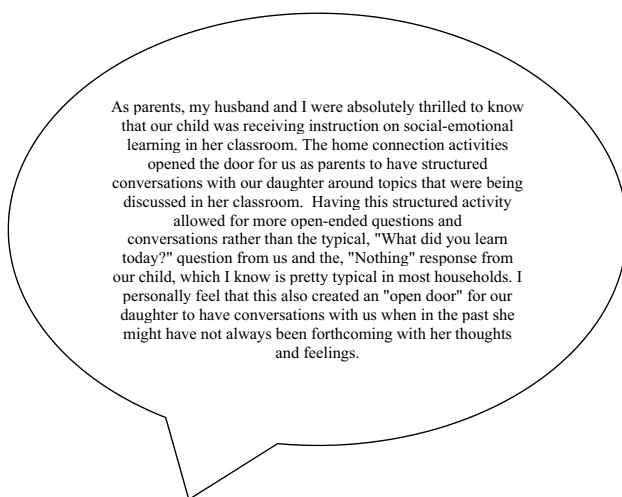
Example Learning Target

Example Learning Target
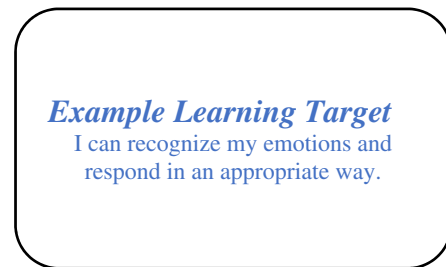I can recognize my emotions and respond in an appropriate way.

Fig. 4 Example learning target

implementation of SEL program, parents continued to give feedback. One of the thoughts from a parent at the author's school is shared in Fig. 3.

In fact, when parents are involved in social-emotional instruction, the impact on student performance is that much greater (Haymovitz et al., 2018). In addition to including parents and school workers, SEL leaders will want to coordinate community partnerships (Greenberg et al., 2017). These partnerships can give students the opportunity to give back in their community, learn as an apprentice, or other various learning experiences.

After providing an overview to school stakeholders of SEL instruction, it will be helpful for the leadership team to gather data from them to gauge their feelings about the implementation process. This information will help SEL leaders pinpoint any specific areas of concern that could be addressed when communicating with stakeholders. Similarly, the SEL leadership team will want to share success stories as they begin lessons and collecting data from students. This could happen in multiple formats, including website updates or informational fliers sent to the school's community partners. These celebrations will help the stakeholders to see the importance of teaching social-emotional skills to students in their community (Fig. 4).

Social-Emotional Learning in the Classroom

The most critical part of SEL instruction will occur in the elementary classroom. There are numerous factors that should be considered to make the lessons the most effective. These elements include focusing on positive student–teacher relationships, developing consistency among all elementary classrooms, and ensuring classrooms are culturally responsive. All teachers should include SEL in their classrooms somehow, and this SEL instruction should occur daily (Bailey et al., 2019). From there, teachers will want to work on fostering positive relationships with their students. Research supports the importance of students feeling respected and cared for by their teachers (Raschdorf et al., 2020; Yang

As parents, my husband and I were absolutely thrilled to know that our child was receiving instruction on social-emotional learning in her classroom. The home connection activities opened the door for us as parents to have structured conversations with our daughter around topics that were being discussed in her classroom. Having this structured activity allowed for more open-ended questions and conversations rather than the typical, "What did you learn today?" question from us and the, "Nothing" response from our child, which I know is pretty typical in most households. I personally feel that this also created an "open door" for our daughter to have conversations with us when in the past she might have not always been forthcoming with her thoughts and feelings.

Fig. 3 A Parent's perspective on SEL curriculum at RRMR elementary

et al., 2018). When these relationships are in place, student behavior will improve, and students will be more likely to respond to SEL instruction. An easy way to begin to develop these relationships is to follow the "two-minute-a-day" strategy (McKibben, 2014). This strategy focuses on giving students targeted, positive attention every day. This focused attention allows for the student to see their teacher as an ally, rather than an enemy. This strategy can be particularly meaningful for students who typically have behavioral issues (McKibben, 2014). These relationships are the foundation for creating an ideal learning environment.

Next, once SEL instruction begins, it will be essential for there to be consistency among all elementary classrooms (Durlak et al., 2011). There should be schoolwide discipline policies and expectations in place that are followed by all staff members. Administrators may consider doing classroom walk-throughs to check for this consistency on a regular basis. The SEL leadership team may focus on using positive language in these expectations (Whisman & Hammer, 2014). For example, instead of writing "Don't run in the hallways," the language could be changed to "Walk in the hallways." This language can also be used in the classrooms. Teachers should consider rewarding students for positive behaviors, rather than scolding those acting out. These factors will also contribute to an ideal learning environment.

As SEL is added to the elementary classroom, there are multiple components that will be helpful in ensuring that instruction is the most impactful. First, educators will want to create explicit learning targets, like academic learning goals. These learning targets can relate back to the five SEL competencies by CASEL (2020) or the SEL competencies required by the state's department of education. In this way, SEL instruction can relate back to the process of standards-based instruction and grading, where students take ownership of their learning, using the learning targets as their guide. These learning goals can also be used to assist students in the process of self-assessment. Just like with their academics, students will want to recognize their growth in social-emotional skills, and self-assessment is a meaningful way to do so.

In addition, social-emotional learning can be integrated into other subject areas to add components of it throughout the school day. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is by including peer collaboration into all subjects. When students work together on a variety of tasks, there are many social-emotional skills coming into play (McKown et al., 2016). Students are required to use their communication skills, teamwork, and conversational skills to work best with their partner. Students should not be simply assigned to a partner project for the sake of practice. Instead, students should be provided with direct, explicit instruction in how partners should work together for that task. Afterwards, reflecting on the successes and challenges of their partner

work will help students to identify their strengths in social-emotional skills (McKown et al., 2016).

A critical component of social-emotional learning is to include parents in the practice of social skills (Haymovitz et al., 2018). This component should be executed by all classroom teachers teaching social skills. Teachers will need to communicate with parents the learning goals of SEL, so that the skills can be reinforced at home when applicable. For example, when teaching students about the importance of agreeing and disagreeing respectfully, prompts can be sent home to use in the home setting as well. At the author's school, students are given a home connection activity to complete every week with an adult at home. This activity relates to the current SEL learning target. When SEL skills are put into practice both at school and at home, students will be more positively impacted (Haymovitz et al., 2018).

Likewise, teachers will want to respond to students' home environments by ensuring that classrooms are culturally responsive. Social-emotional learning offers an ideal opportunity for teachers to address diversity across the globe and appreciate cultural differences. Similarly, educators should be aware of cultural differences when celebrating holidays at school. Teachers should also ensure that students are exposed to diverse literature, where all students can "see" themselves in the books that they read. Literature gives students the chance to put themselves into others' shoes, and, therefore, practice the skill of empathy while also practicing literacy skills. When all these components are put together in the classroom, social-emotional learning will be most effective.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports for SEL

Once students are given direct instruction in social-emotional skills, they should be provided with interventions when needed (Barnett, 2019; Green et al., 2019; Greenberg et al, 2017). These interventions should be provided on both a tier two and tier three level to meet all students where they are at with their social-emotional development. To put these interventions into place, all elementary students should be assessed with a universal screening assessment to identify students in need. This assessment will aid in identifying the specific areas of need for students to grow. Tier two instruction can occur in a small-group setting, where students work on social-emotional skills together. Likewise, tier three instruction will occur individually, where students can focus on their own growth where needed. This instruction could take on the form of a regular one-on-one conference with the student to help them with whatever skills they may need. The conferences will give students the opportunity to share any social woes they may have and work on problem-solving strategies for alleviating them. The universal screener can be given three times a year, and the data from this screener can

serve as a reflection tool. Teachers will be able to identify growth among their students in social-emotional skills, and the school will be able to determine the success of its social-emotional skills as a whole.

School leaders who wish to implement social-emotional learning will benefit from these recommendations. It will be important for leaders to keep the concerns in mind, like issues with time and money, when beginning the step-by-step plan. However, by using findings from current research, these recommendations are practical and possible for beginning the process SEL implementation.

SEL implementation is not an easy path to take. There are likely going to be issues that arise during the process, including pushback from stakeholders, scheduling conflicts, and budget shortfalls. However, if those are directly addressed in a step-by-step action plan, the process may go much smoother. When school leaders begin to implement social-emotional learning, they will want to begin with creating an SEL leadership team. This team will be in charge of creating a shared school vision, training staff members, and guiding their co-workers through the implementation process. While there are many roadblocks to consider in this action plan, the benefits of following through with it are sure to outweigh any negatives. If SEL is implemented correctly, students and teachers are more likely to experience a high quality, less stressful learning environment. Communication between the school and its stakeholders may increase, developing important relationships. All educators involved in the implementation process will be given the opportunity to grow in their instructional practice, as they dive into professional development on social-emotional learning and trauma-informed teaching. Administrators will become more aware of the importance of teacher mental health and self-care, and students will feel the results in the classroom academically. As social-emotional learning grows in popularity, the research supports these notions. School leaders should seriously consider evaluating their current practice and determining a place for social-emotional learning in their buildings. The effects of doing so may be felt for many years, as students learn to become well-rounded, emotionally intelligent adults. An administrator at the school of the first author noted these effects: *As a building administrator I have noticed a decrease in small behavior issues that come through my office simply because of the common language and the fact that students are able to resolve conflicts on their own. Teaching those strategies and skills over the course of a school year with daily lessons has been so valuable for everyone.*

SEL can prepare students for living in a diverse world, by teaching them to interact with all types of humanity. Teacher burnout and anxiety can decrease when approached as part of the process, and stakeholders in the community will get the chance to be involved in student development.

Additionally, students across the world can benefit from direct instruction in managing emotions and working with others. The history of humanity teaches us the importance of knowing these skills, and the future of the world depends on the next generation. By empowering this generation with necessary social-emotional skills, children can confidently face their futures. For these reasons, SEL belongs as a promising future in the field of education.

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