

Improving Social Emotional Skills in Childhood Enhances Long-Term Well-Being and Economic Outcomes



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This issue brief, created by The Pennsylvania State University with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is one of a series of briefs that addresses the need for research, practice and policy on social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL is defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Learn more at www.rwjf.org/socialemotionalllearning.



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SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILLS are vital for human development

They include interpersonal skills like communicating with others, building relationships and working well together. They include intrapersonal skills such as self-control, self-awareness, self-motivation, responsibility and creativity.

LEARNED EARLY, SE skills can help children overcome challenges and avoid unhealthy behavior improving a variety of outcomes into adulthood.

A recent study on multiple SE skill building programs found over an \$11 return on investment for each dollar invested. Starting earlier with SE development and making SE programs more available in more high-risk communities could result in an even higher return on investment.

POLICY MAKERS are considering whether strategic investments in SE skills could translate into economic benefits or savings for individuals and society.

ESTABLISHING SE SKILLS EARLY can help children build productive relationships and manage and solve problems in or out of school.

IN PRESCHOOL AND EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS, children with strong SE skills can more effectively manage their emotions, interact socially, build peer relationships and maintain productive academic behaviors that promotes repeated success in school.

- **LONG TERM** – increase likelihood of graduating from high school and college. Comprehensive review of educational studies found that SE skills were key to school success and that relying on cognitive ability alone would ignore a key part of the learning process.

POOR SE SKILLS can lead to the need for costly resources related to teacher time spent managing behavior problems, special education referral, grade repetition and even healthcare costs related to behavior problems or emotional concerns.

STRONG SE SKILLS means a student is more likely to graduate from college and get a well-paying job.

- As SE skills increase employability, fewer unemployed adults reduces the burden from public assistance programs.

EARLY PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN was linked to significantly lower likelihood for arrests, substance use and reliance on public assistance.

SEL SKILLS BENEFIT ADULTS: better physical and mental health; more employment opportunities; less likely to engage in substance abuse; fewer relationship problems

SEL SKILLS BENEFIT SOCIETY: lower crime, fewer public assistance services needed, less risky behavior and addiction; higher employment resulting in higher tax revenue

Investments in SE skills are less likely in low resource settings that are limited to prioritizing physical health and academic improvement needs first. Implementing effective SEL programs in more high-risk communities could have the greatest economic payoff by addressing problems before they become entrenched and lead to greater costs down the road.