



National Center for
Mental Health Promotion
and Youth Violence Prevention



Transcript

Social and Emotional Learning and Student Benefits: Research Implications for the SS/HS Core Elements

Wednesday, August 27th, 2008

2:00 – 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time

1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Central

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Mountain

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Pacific

Operator: Good afternoon. My name is (Thea) and I will be the conference operator today.

At this time, I would like to welcome everyone to the Social and Emotional Learning and Student Benefit conference call. All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. You will be able to ask questions throughout today's conference call by pressing star-1. If you would like to withdraw the question, press the pound sign.

Also, ladies and gentlemen, today's conference call is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the call over to (Jennifer) Kitson. Please go ahead, ma'am.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Thank you. Welcome to each of you joining this TeleRadio event today, Social and Emotional Learning and Student Benefits -- Research Implications for the (unintelligible) Healthy Students Core Elements brought to you by the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention.

The venue today offers an opportunity to become familiar with the latest research on positive results of social and emotional learning, which will be referred to as SEL, in schools and also the relevance to (unintelligible) healthy students work. We'll be talking about how this approach impacts on students, as well as strategies for implementing SEL.

SEL is not a program, but rather is an approach that can result in integration across the elements.

I am Jennifer Kitson. I'm a technical assistance specialist with the National Center and I will be moderating our interaction for the next hour. Also on the line is my colleague, (Kim Netter), in Newton, Massachusetts, who will be monitoring the incoming audience calls.

We're very pleased to welcome our two guest authorities, Dr. Roger Weissberg, a professor of psychology and education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the President of the Collaborative for Academic and Social/Emotional Learning, as well as Dr. Joseph Durlak, a professor of psychology at Loyola University Chicago.

These two esteemed professionals collaborated to conduct a large-scale review called a meta-analysis of more than 700 studies published through 2007, including (pool), family, and community interventions designed to

promote social and emotional skills in children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 18.

Over the next hour, we invite you to learn from these two professionals dedicated to completing research on social and emotional learning.

What we will do is offer opportunities for you at any time to press star-1 and we will be happy to take your calls.

So what is social and emotional learning and why is it of interest to (unintelligible) healthy students? Many of you are likely familiar with SEL in some way.

Perhaps you have participated in past webinars on SEL. You may have seen information on the National Center web site or the CASEL web site. You may have read the SEL research brief that was provided to you as you registered for this event. Or you also may be focusing on social and emotional learning as you implement programs.

The research clearly demonstrates the significant role of SEL in promoting healthy development and academic achievement of all students, something that is at the heart of our Safe School/Healthy Students Initiative.

It also shows that SEL reduces problem behaviors and emotions that interfere with learning and development. Programming significantly raises test scores and seems to lower things such as disruptive behavior and alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.

So SEL has been shown to be an effective approach for addressing many of the goals that Safe School/Healthy Students have and it crosses each of the

elements of safe learning environment, violence prevention, substance abuse prevention, behavior/social/emotional support, mental health services, and early childhood and SEL programs.

Social and emotional learning is the process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes, and skills to recognize and manage emotions, to develop caring and concern for others, to make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively.

There are five core areas that have been identified with social and emotional learning competency. And those five areas are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

And we know that SEL programming promotes the development and use of these competencies to assist and support students and hopefully result in safe and supported school, family, and community learning environments.

Basically what we want to do today is ask our guests to help us understand their findings regarding research and the relevance to our Safe School/Healthy Students Initiative, addressing the key elements.

As a reminder, this is a TeleRadio event as an interactive opportunity for you as the listener to ask questions and have a dialogue with our guests to learn more about how SEL works and how SEL can be integrated into the framework of Safe School/Healthy Students, as well as to consider implications of the research for your own initiatives.

Please press star-1 at any time with questions for our guests and you will be placed in a queue. While waiting, you will continue to be connected to our discussion.

So with that background, let's welcome our guests and begin the dialogue.

All right, to get us started in the discussion, we would like to welcome Dr. Joseph Durlak.

Joe Durlak's primary research interests are in prevention and promotion programs for children and adolescents. He is specifically interested in how positive youth development programs, which are usually referred to as social and emotional learning, can enhance young people's functioning and prevent later problems.

His interests focus on interventions that seek to foster different competencies in youth, either working directly with young people to foster skills, as well as to provide interventions that seek to change the environmental settings and achieve positive development and programs using both change strategies.

Now there's many well designed studies that have documented the positive effects of SEL programming on students of diverse backgrounds, from preschool through high school, in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Joe, would you please help us understand what a meta-analysis of the research provides and why it was it was completed?

Joseph Durlak: Okay, sure. I'd be glad to, (Jennifer). First of all, thanks for having me on this presentation. I appreciate it.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Thank you.

Joseph Durlak: So we were trying - what we were trying to do, this meta-analysis is essentially - think of it as a broad review of evaluations that have been conducted in the literature already.

So we were not doing an intervention ourselves. What we were looking at is what other people have found about the kinds of programs that they have conducted that specifically emphasize SEL principles, okay.

We tried to be very, very careful in finding these studies and getting a good representative sample so that the conclusions we reached, okay, we can reach with some confidence.

So we're trying to give a boost to the evidence basis behind SEL. And we thought that - hypothesized that these programs would be effective, but one of the things that we were looking at among other things were are there certain conditions in which they are more or less effective?

So what we tried to do was we tried to look at programs that were conducted in all types of schools for children from kindergarten to age 12 across the country, as well as some studies conducted outside of the United States.

Roger Weissberg: And Joe, it was through high school.

Joseph Durlak: Through high school.

Roger Weissberg: Grade 12, not age 12.

Joseph Durlak: Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry, grade - yeah, yeah, age 12 - grade 12, right, high school, that's right.

Thank you, (Rog).

Yeah, we even had international studies so that SEL has been taken and used in other countries outside of the United States.

We're looking at public schools. We're looking at private schools. We're looking at schools in different geographical locations, so we had schools that were in urban areas, we had schools that were in rural areas, we had schools that were in suburban areas.

We were also looking at the student body in these schools. So in our grand review, we have a lot of studies that focus on schools that primarily serve Caucasian students.

We - but we also have studies that serve primarily African American students. And we have a great many programs that we've looked at that serve a mixed student body, which is applicable to a lot of different situations.

So in general then, you know, we were trying to do as careful a review as we can, looking at all of these different kinds of issues to see whether or not we can specify how well SEL programming works, what kinds of outcomes it achieves, okay, and whether or not there are certain conditions or factors that will make a program more or less effective.

That's sort of the general overview.

We've also divided our review into different areas. We've done a review of universal or primary prevention programs taking place in the schools from kindergarten through 12th grade.

We've also looked at programs that try to reach out and help students who are starting to have some early difficulties in school. And we've done a separate review of those kinds of programs.

We've also done a review of after-school programs. And then finally we've also done a review of programs - universal programs for families, those that work with parents and/or all of the members of the family to see how well those kinds of programs work.

Most of our comments are - today are going to be reserved for the universal programs, but if there are questions about the findings for the other areas, we can go into that.

I think that's kind of the summary that I wanted to provide about what the project involves.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Very good. All right, thank you for providing that overview of what you did with the meta-analysis.

Now I think the next thing I'd like to do is introduce our next speaker, Roger Weissberg. And Roger, we're excited that he was able to join us. He is going to be able to talk to us about what was some of the findings in the meta-analysis that - looking at well planned and well implemented SEL programming can positively impact on the broad range of student social health, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

Roger Weissberg is the President of the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning and has been recognized for more than ten years as one of the county's leading advocates of social and emotional learning in childhood education, particularly his publications on SEL are widely known and the work that CASEL has done is very much of interest to the education community in social and emotional learning.

So, again, the work supports the five core competencies in social and emotional learning.

And with that, Joe has given us an overview of meta-analysis, so Roger, could you please help us to understand the outcomes that were identified with the SEL research that you did?

Roger Weissberg: Yes, I'll do my best. (Jennifer), it's nice to be on talking with you and many of the people who are working with the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative throughout the country.

What I'm going to try and do in 15 minutes or less is to offer a summary of 32 years of work I've been doing in the area of school-based prevention and youth promotion and especially highlighting findings from the meta-analysis that Joe and I and a cast of many supporters, graduate students and undergraduates at our institutions and CASEL staff have worked on for the past four years.

And while what we've done I think is a complex, ambitious undertaking, I think it's going to be possible to summarize some key points in a few minutes that will be useful to people who are out there doing the work in schools.

The first thing is some of this work began and was inspired actually after we wrote a book called - by Joe Zins and others called, "Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning -- What Does the Research Say?"

And in - when we did that book, people contributed and wrote chapters summarizing some of the best SEL programs and the impact that they had on social and emotional development and academic performance.

And we were impressed by this information provided by some of the top people in the field. And we thought that maybe it was time to look more broadly at the overall field of social and emotional learning.

When CASEL does - takes on something like this, we identify the top people in the country to collaborate with. And Joe has been doing meta-analyses for many years and has been a great collaborator.

What we did was we focused as Joe said on K-to-12 programs and looked at lots and lots and lots of studies, coding all of them very carefully to see the impact that the programs might have.

We ended up - and it's a challenge to do this, but we summarized information, focusing on six domains. One was children's social and emotional skills, do these programs make them better at problem-solving, decision-making, goal-setting, emotion regulation, and the like.

We also looked at children's changes over time and children's attitudes, how they feel about themselves, about school, about their teachers, about engaging in positive behavior.

We also looked at behavioral outcomes in terms of kids' pro-social behavior and how they get along with their peers. We looked at impact on conduct and antisocial behavior. We looked at emotional distress. And then finally, we looked at the impact of this programming on academic performance as well.

It - much of what we did has relevance I think to what people do in Safe Schools/Healthy Students programming are interested in, ranging from promoting mental health to reducing problem behaviors, reducing violence, reducing substance use, and improving academic performance. We looked at all of those things.

The work, as you said, (Jennifer), is summarized in the document that we just wrote for the Center, research - "Social and Emotional Learning and Student Benefits, the Research Implications for Safe Schools/Healthy Students Core Elements."

To summarize, and I just want to give a few key findings that I think people will find most interesting. One thing is the strongest effect that we had and this was, of course, predicted is that social and emotional learning programs promote children's social and emotional skills, their competencies. They promote pro-social behaviors. That didn't surprise us at all because there's such a strong literature that indicates that.

On the other hand, when we looked at the impact of academic performance, moving into this meta-analysis, we didn't really know what to expect there in terms of effect on student performance with grades, but also standardized achievement test scores.

And we were surprised to see a strong impact, an 11 percentile improvement in academic achievement test performance, so - meaning that if somebody was

at the 50th percentile in our program groups and was - received SEL training, at the end of the programming, they would move from the 50th percentile in performance up to the 61st percentile. That was for us a surprising and a very important finding.

When it came to who implemented this work, we looked at classroom-based programs, as well as school-wide programs. One thing I want to emphasize because it is very important and I think relevant for the group and the audience is teachers who taught this program had powerful positive effects.

And one of the groups that we think is essential to promote positive behavior with children in an ongoing way, working with teachers to do this work is critically important. It's important to coordinate things with school-wide efforts, with student support staff and the like, and with community representatives.

Obviously all of this needs to be coordinated. But part of the glue of good programming to systematically teach kids social and emotional skills and have positive impact we found when it was done by classroom teachers, we - there were very positive results.

(Jennifer) Kitson: I - that's a very interesting finding I think and one that deserves maybe a little bit more discussion because I'm wondering about, you know, the programs where the teachers were a part of the program implementation and then the (unintelligible) success of that.

Did you look at what was done within those programs to get the acceptance in the schools for teachers to be the implementers? So - because in many of our Safe School sites as probably is true across many schools in the nation, there

is a great amount of investment in, you know, instructional time and making sure that kids are achieving academically.

And so sometimes it's difficult for people to feel like the time invested in developing social and emotional skills is going to be good for the teachers to do.

Roger Weissberg: Mm-hm.

I can say that from the meta-analysis standpoint, what we mainly looked at is the impact of teachers doing this work. And our important findings that - was that when teachers did it that the benefits were strongest for the kids.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Okay.

Roger Weissberg: Now in terms of work we've done with CASEL...

Roger Weissberg: ...more broadly and the work that many people in the field do, if teachers are going to do this work and do it well, it's necessary to get support at multiple levels for them to be able to do that.

Some is at the state level in terms of policies. Some people may know that in Illinois, for example, we've established social and emotional learning standards as part of the Illinois Student Learning Standards along with math and science and English language arts.

It's also important to have the district-level support working with superintendents and boards of education to prioritize these efforts.

And we find with CASEL that key work involves working with principals and leadership teams to develop systematic plans where, again, there is a priority on selecting and implementing evidence-based programs.

So the teachers can do this work and do it well, but it's got to be within a context that is supportive at multiple levels to make this a priority. I think the one thing where people are really taking note of this at this point is historically if I go back 25 years ago, I used to say it's good to teach these kids social competencies.

They'll be better behaved. They'll get along with their peers. They will become better, more socially responsible citizens. And it won't negatively impact or detract from their academic performance.

Now we're finding more that there's a twofer involved with this because it has those positive - a threefer. It has positive social benefits for the kids. It promotes their mental health.

And there's academic gains as well. So it may be more strategic at this point to really think in terms of if you want the kids to be functioning at their optimal level in terms of their social, emotional, and academic growth, making the investment so that teachers can do this work as part of a priority of their work becomes critical.

Joseph Durlak: Yeah, if I may interject, (Jennifer), just to add to what Roger is saying, I mean, I know you're talking about some of the hesitancies that exist in some districts or in some schools where there's a lot of pressure to increase students' academic performance.

Well, I mean, again, what Roger has just said is so important that what we are finding is that these SEL programs can lead to academic gains. So it's not so - we need to get this message out so that schools understand this so they don't think of SEL as something quite apart from the students' natural curriculum.

I mean, we see it as an important part of a child's educational curriculum because as Roger says, it can have a positive impact on so many different areas. So it doesn't - not take away from academic performance. It can improve it. And that's really important for people to understand.

Roger Weissberg: I think another part of this is if this work is planned, ongoing, and systematic and becomes a formal part of a curriculum in a school system that's not going to be changing constantly, that is something where teachers can make an investment in doing this work and recognize that there's a longer-term district commitment to it.

I think historically -- and this will be one of the challenges for people in the audience -- sometimes if somebody says well, I want to develop a safe school environment and I want to prevent violence, I want to prevent drug use, I want to promote good mental health and behavior for students, sometimes they think of those as a bunch of different programs.

And I think the SEL approach that we've emphasized enables people to think more about coordination of efforts and recognizing that some of the same basic programs can fulfill multiple needs.

So there may be one kind of curricular initiative that can promote the positive and good mental health and social development in kids, but also lead to reductions in violence and drug use.

I think people run into difficulty sometime is if they pick a new, separate, un-integrated program to address one categorical negative outcome after another. We're trying to think about ways to promote positive growth and development from the start in a planned way.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Yeah.

And I think that the point that you're making is one that's very near and dear to most Safe Schools/Healthy Students projects because as you know they have a number of elements that are addressed, many of which they may have some kind of programs that could be relevant to social and emotional learning.

So it becomes often a challenge as to how to best select out and implement and then evaluate the outcomes of those programs when you have a number of them coordinating at the same time.

Sometimes they aren't as coordinated either and they may be sort of done in isolation of one another and may not really coordinate all the social and emotional learning outcomes that could be addressed otherwise.

So I'm wondering, I want to remind our - or our listeners to call in and just press star-1 on your keypad and you'll be in a queue for a question.

As - but I want to ask you, Joe, as you reflect on the outcomes that have been found...

Joseph Durlak: Mm-hm.

(Jennifer) Kitson: ...in your meta-analysis, well, Roger mentioned some of the findings in terms of the academic achievement increase that was surprising, and there may be other surprises that you would like to talk about.

But how would those kind of findings be important at when Safe Schools/Healthy Students grantees are looking to target their evaluation of SEL outcomes?

Joseph Durlak: Well, you know, just picking up on what Roger said, you know, there's - the current situation is that often things are done in a very piecemeal kind of fashion. And I think that good SEL programming can address a lot of the needs of the student body, as well as the pressures that a lot of school districts face.

Now it's not a panacea. We don't want to oversell this and say, you know, every program's going to work and all of the kids are going to change dramatically. But, again, our review suggests that there's good empirical support for these kinds of interventions.

And so people should be thinking about how one or more - or one of these programs can be integrated very carefully into an ongoing curriculum.

I think you mentioned, you know, some of the reluctance that school staff might have or districts might have in terms of selecting programs. And there is a lot of work about how you can work with schools, okay, to guide them in this sort of process. They need to be aware of the findings, which is what we're trying to promote right now.

They need to have a good understanding of what the program is. They need to have a good understanding of what's expected of them, okay, and feeling that

they're going to have a good support in doing it. They need to know what to expect and be realistic about it. And then they need some input in terms of being able to modify it for their own setting.

And the other research, not that we've done, but other people has suggested that that last part is also important that you don't want to just push something down people's throats, but give them a genuine input into what's going to happen so that they can figure out what's best in their own setting, because there's a lot of different ways that SEL can be used in a school.

I hope that sort of addresses your question.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Yes, yes, it does, absolutely, thank you.

Joseph Durlak: Mm-hm.

Roger Weissberg: One of the things that I wanted to emphasize, this is for people who have a chance to read the brief that has been developed, on Page 6 of the brief, we talk about Safe School/Healthy Student core elements and then identify sample SEL evidence-based programs and talk about some of the outcomes from these programs.

And that - the one thing I wanted to have people understand is when we list something like the Caring School Community, Responsive Classroom, Lions-Quest, PATHS, Social Decision-Making, Problem-Solving -- those are good, base programs that can be conducted in the classroom and have components that involve reaching out to the entire school, to parents, to the community.

And it would be an error if people looked at this and said okay, I'm going to pick Caring School Community for safe schools and violence prevention and Lions-Quest for drug prevention and PATHS for - you know, we don't want people selecting a different program for each one of these elements.

Many of the programs that are beneficial have broad positive effects and can serve as a base for work to be done.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Okay.

Roger Weissberg: So while we're emphasizing the evidence-based work, we're not saying introduce hundreds of different programs. We're trying to encourage people to be thoughtful.

And this gets back to Joe to review some of these programs and then base - make a selection about a beneficial program that fits a school context and that a school's going to be able to make a longer-term commitment to so that it can be implemented well and then adapted over time to meet the needs of the students and the community.

(Jennifer) Kitson: That's very helpful. And as in - coming up right now, we would like to pause for some opportunities for callers.

But before we do, I just want to follow up with that, Roger. That was Roger speaking, correct?

Roger Weissberg: Yes. Mm-hm.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Yes, okay.

Roger, as you're talking about, you know, looking at the kinds of programs that might reflect on or would approach outcomes in several of the areas that Safe Schools address, what resources might be available for people to look at the kinds of programs and what might they want to think about when they're looking at a program that could, you know, result in safe and drug-free schools, violence prevention, as well as substance abuse prevention? (Where)...

Roger Weissberg: Well, of course, our top choice would be to have people go to promoteprevent.org because there's so many helpful things on the web page there. CASEL also has information on our web page at casel.org. And we've done a review called, "Safe and Sound," which is an educational leader's guide to selecting evidence-based SEL programs.

Then there are some of the important reviews that have been done sometimes by the federal government by SAMHSA are the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention or reviews done at the state level to identify a lot of the evidence-based work out there.

The thing that I would say that distinguishes what we - we've done with CASEL is we're not just, again, interested in seeing the negative outcomes prevented.

A strong part of the emphasis within SEL is to promote social and emotional competencies with students so that they know themselves and manage their feelings and behaviors well so that they are more socially aware and can get along with others and make responsible decisions.

So if you think about wanting to graduate students who are prepared to deal with life and the workplace, college, the community, a lot of the things that we do is emphasize kids' social and emotional competencies.

So in our reviews, we've looked at how well programs are designed to improve the social and emotional competencies as well as prevent the problem behaviors.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Okay, very good.

All right, I believe, Operator, I would like to invite a caller onto the phone to ask the tough questions.

(Jennifer) Kitson: ...I believe that you each have some important ideas and - to share with us in terms of what you found with implementation. I know that you found universal school-based social and emotional learning programs resulted in three major areas of outcomes -- feelings and attitudes, indicators of behavior adjustments, and then school achievement. And those outcomes obviously are of interest to safe school communities.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Please tell us your key learnings that you would regard as most critical to implementation of SEL in obtaining those positive outcomes.

Joseph Durlak: Okay, should I start, Roger?

Roger Weissberg: Yes. And then I'll follow up.

Joseph Durlak: Okay, yeah, very, good, yeah.

I mean, I guess our message is that anything that's worth doing is worth doing well. And that's what implementation is all about. Once you've selected a program, once you've committed yourself to it, are you able to do it in the way you want to do it?

And there's been a - and we found that one of the things that influences the outcomes of these SEL interventions is whether or not there are serious implementations that schools encounter when they try to mount these interventions.

Now the problems can come from all kinds of areas. It can come from insufficient leadership where the school staff doesn't feel that leadership within the school or within the district is supportive enough.

It could come from inadequate or insufficient training where schools may take on a project, teachers might become motivated, but they don't get sufficient kind of training and practice to do the kinds of things they need to do.

An important element of training and implementation is ongoing technical assistance because schools can usually count on some problems along the way. So it's very helpful to have trainers or consultants available that will be able to provide technical and personal support to schools when they do this.

That's why the finding that the school staff can do these kinds of programs if they do it well is so very important. You know, some of these programs are done by researchers. They bring a great deal of resources and staff in. And they probably are able to implement it much more carefully because they're, you know, they're focused totally on that. They don't have to teach a whole classroom of kids all day.

So those kinds of things are very important. And, again, I - you know, I - earlier I mentioned buy-in where the schools that implement this, you know, have to make a free, voluntary decision to do this.

There have been instances in which administrators of one form or another have said we're going to be doing this because I want this. And those kinds of programs aren't implemented very well or they're not continued when that pressure lets off.

Of course, the very best programs are those that will continue after the initial evaluation has said that it is effective.

(Jennifer) Kitson: And when you were looking at the implementation, did you find out any tips that are useful for gaining the teachers' interest in these kind of programs?

Joseph Durlak: A lot of - probably the thing that works best is really personal contact, okay. It's very hard for people to just read information and gather a full and true sense of what the intervention is all about.

So most people talk about the value of personal contact where yes, there's didactic information, but you really have a chance, just like this event, for people to listen and to ask questions and to have some sort of input. And I think this person-to-person exchange is really, really important.

Because there are also people that say, you know, sometimes schools are not ready to do this. Sometimes schools aren't ready for an intervention, okay. But if you take it on when you're not ready, it's not likely to work as well, you know.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Okay.

Roger Weissberg: I'll chime in with a couple of things that are variations of what Joe has said.

In some of the studies, one of the things that was emphasized is what a key role the principal plays. And in a very simple way -- being publicly supportive, being a cheerleader for the program, being somebody who's willing to walk into classes and encourage teachers to implement these programs.

We found that in some of those studies, the principal behavior not only supported better implementation of the program, but better outcomes in the kids where the programs were implemented.

So I - always we emphasize an important role that a principal can play, both as a program advocate and as an instructional leader.

Professional development is also very important. And some of that will involve onsite coaching when possible. The - it is one thing to come to a daylong or a two-day training where people get exposed to how to implement programs, but unless there is some follow-up support onsite, I think the training that is received is not as helpful because the teachers I think need some support and help in figuring out how to adapt the programming to the needs of their kids.

(Jennifer) Kitson: I'm going to interrupt you because we have some callers on the line.

Roger Weissberg: Okay.

(Jennifer) Kitson: And they may have some specific questions that are relevant to what you're discussing now.

So Operator, could you first put the caller from Albany on the phone for us?

Operator: Okay.

Mark Barth, your line is open.

Mark Barth: Hi. Thank you. Hi everybody. I'm Mark Barth from both the New York State Education Department where I work on guidelines for social and emotional development and I also sit on the Board of Education in Albany of public schools and they are a recent recipient of a Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant.

So in both my paid and unpaid work, I am preoccupied with schools that work against the odds and also (now designated) in unflattering ways. And what I wanted to ask my question about was the figure on Page 7 of the article we received. It is the pyramid or the triangle that shows the mental health treatment support model.

And, well, my question is this -- the - we've worked in the state education department with a group called Turnaround for Children. And Greg Greicius is someone who spoke and Pamela Cantor have spoken to the regents.

And one of the things that they've observed in the schools they work in is that the pyramid wouldn't have those kinds of breakdowns, that, in fact, they would have more kids in the high risk and the at-risk categories in the schools where they work. And, in fact, in those schools, the instructional mission is

challenged by kids who come in with, you know, with their behavior problems.

And so the question I wanted to pose to the group is given the - if you look at poverty say as perhaps an indicator as - of environmental stress, is there - would you approach those schools in a different way?

Would you - I don't know whether your research has been able to probe this or if perhaps, you know, from personal examples with the technical assistance say that CASEL has provided? Do you have strategies? Are they different strategies? Are there different emphasis in programs that would work in schools like those?

Joseph Durlak: That's a great question, Mark.

Before we answer it - before you answer this, Roger, let's refer all of the listeners to the pyramid that Mark is talking about. There's the pyramid on the document that was distributed on Page 7.

If you don't have it in front of you, essentially it says - it proposes a model where you do something for all of the kids in the school, universal intervention, all of the kids get the intervention.

And then as the pyramid goes up and narrows, you're focused on a more selective group of kids, kids who might beginning to show some kids of problems, okay, as compared to like all students in the school.

And then at the top of the pyramid, the smallest little part of that, is more intensive intervention for kids who are really at-risk and are having all kinds of problems.

So Mark's question is well, does that sort of model, would that sort of model hold for most schools, all schools, or do you have to do something different.

So now the stage is set for you to answer the question, Roger.

Roger Weissberg: Thank you for setting the stage and, Mark, for a great question.

Joseph Durlak: (Yeah).

Roger Weissberg: And there are a couple of things I'd like to say briefly about it.

The first thing is I'm glad that you called attention to the percentages, which really should not be fixed in anybody's mind. The - one of the things that is pointed out by this is the need to do a needs assessment and to get clear estimates of how many and if you wanted to call them at - high risk, at-risk, and all students, you know, who would fit into those groups.

So I can tell you, we've done some work in the Chicago Public Schools where we've had teachers identify children who were at risk and there have been some projects we've worked in where 50% to 75% of the students were in that middle block that says 5% to 10%.

So one of the things, which is a starting point, and I know this is part of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students work that is done and it's also work that we do when we collaborate with schools is to get good estimates about how many kids experience what kinds of problems.

I think a second thing that is very important, which is part of the needs assessment, is to look at - and resource assessment is to look carefully at what's being done well already in the school.

You don't want to come in and have a clean sweep with this work. There is some work that needs to be done with kids who have severe problems, some early intervention work and some universal work.

It - if I were to change this table (to that) Joe has talked about, I wouldn't call it necessarily universal prevention. I might call it universal promotion in terms of what are the competencies that you want to enhance for all kids.

And I think that one of the challenges in all of this work is to think about the coordination of what's done in terms of promotion of competencies for all kids, what's done with early intervention and what's done intensively, I think that there's a greater power for the intervention when you're coordinating across these sectors rather than having three different, unrelated service delivery models.

I think that some of the things that - work that needs to be done, too, is dealing with hot spots and also the kids who may be most disruptive, very often attention is drawn to those students, sometimes at the expense of thinking of more of a promotion in - of effort for all kids. So a balancing of the portfolio I think is going to be necessary, too, in the work to be done.

(Jennifer) Kitson: And may I ask a brief follow-up question...

Joseph Durlak: Sure, sure.

(Jennifer) Kitson: We have another caller waiting, so I don't want to take too much time with this, but I think this is an area that's I think most Safe Schools/Healthy Students projects deal with in terms of developing universal, selected, and indicated levels of intervention.

And I think one of the things that I guess I wanted to ask is in your meta-analysis, did you find anything that would indicate that if you have universal interventions for all students that those students who also have a need for the (tap)-level intervention have more success when they have that universal level as well.

Joseph Durlak: Yeah, let me answer that in two different ways.

We do have schools in our sample, for example, that are in low income areas. There are a lot of urban schools in our sample. And when we looked at the results for those schools, they were just as effective as for schools serving, you know, a student body from a higher socioeconomic class or a different geographical location.

So the SEL programs that we were looking at did work in all different types of schools. That's very important.

There is some accumulating data, okay. We have some - just a little bit in our review, but other people have also looked at this. And that is that not only can a great number of students benefit from a universal sort of SEL intervention or universal preventive intervention, but in a lot of programs, those kids who have some problems that were there when the intervention began might get more out of the intervention. All will show some benefit, but kids at some higher risk could profit even more. So that's very encouraging.

Now does it attend to all of the more serious kind of problems? I don't think we have a good answer to that. I don't know if anyone has a good answer to that. So a lot depends on the type of problem you're talking about and how chronic it is.

Roger Weissberg: Now one of the things with the trailblazing group here because Safe Schools/Healthy Students, there's nobody who is in a better position to do this, to think about the coordination and the integration across these levels, because we were struck in our looking at 700 studies at how few actually really systematically link what's going on with the universal programming...

Joseph Durlak: Mm-hm.

Roger Weissberg: ...to early intervention and working with high risk kids. There are a few groups that do that and that may get back to some of Mark Barth's questions. And Fast Track is an example where there is where there is - they really work with both all kids universally and also the toughest 10% with peer group interventions and family interventions.

But that was the exception rather than the norm in a lot of work that's being done and would be a big challenge I think for the people in the audience.

(Jennifer) Kitson: Okay, thank you.

I'm going to now ask the Operator to connect our next caller, please. I believe it's Connie Funk.

Operator: Okay.

Connie Funk, your line is open.

Connie Funk: My line is open, but it's not my question. We have about 18 participants here. I'm going to give you our new (stat) coordinator, (Dan Berlson).

(Dan Berlson): The problems that you address are problems that have gone on for an extended period of time. I'm older than most everybody in this room and have, you know, studied these, worked with them for many years.

With SEL, do you look at a percentage or a percentage of improvement when you implement SEL? And I have a question about SEL strikes me as a really solid program at - but I've run across other solid programs that have seemed to fade. And is this due to the fact there's not enough training, people become disenchanted?

And so is it your thought that there's going to be a certain percentage of improvement in certain areas?

(Jennifer) Kitson: (Dan), is your question around what is the most effective way to evaluate the outcomes?

(Dan Berlson): Not only evaluate, but also...

(Dan Berlson): ...present to the classroom teachers that I think that - I don't know why - you know, some programs that are effective just seem to fade. So is it a matter of training and keeping the training going in a consistent fashion? What's their thought about that?

Roger Weissberg: Joe, if you answered part one, I'll try and answer part one?

Joseph Durlak: What's part one? Which one is part one?

Roger Weissberg: Well, presentation of the data and whether (unintelligible)...

Joseph Durlak: Oh, I see, okay, yeah.

Roger Weissberg: I could do that, too, but I...

((Crosstalk))

Joseph Durlak: Yeah, I mean, when - most of the evaluations we found did not break the data down that way, (Dan), in terms of how many students that were receiving SEL programming benefited. I mean, we can translate some of our data in terms of, you know, a percentile gain for the average student in the intervention group.

Like Roger talked about, the average student in the intervention group will gain 11 percentile points in test scores compared to a student who doesn't go through an SEL intervention.

But at this point, we can't tell which student is going to gain and we can't tell which students will gain more than others except for that - those couple of studies that we're talking about previously.

So that's, you know, so part of the reason, getting to, you know, to sort of preface what Roger's going to say, part of the reason I think that some people might give up is they might have unrealistic expectations of how much change is going to occur or they might be thinking that it's really going to be a panacea for certain kinds of problems. And, boy, we, you know, since you've

been around a long time, (Dan), you know we don't have the answer. We don't have the panacea.

So I think realistic expectations is very important and that initial commitment to the program and working to improve the program, because there's always ways you can improve things.

And then, of course, also the circumstances in which some of these programs were chosen in the first place, because there wasn't a sufficient buy-in, then, you know, enthusiasm's going to fade over time.

(Dan Berlson): Yeah. Now...

(Jennifer) Kitson: Well, thank you very much.

I know this is a question that is very involved and could go for quite some time in talking about it. I know that Roger and Joe have already, you know, mentioned some of the things that are helpful in terms of ongoing training and practice and coaching and having TA support and such.

I'm - because we have some other callers on the line...

Man: Sure, okay.

(Jennifer) Kitson: ...I'm going to ask that we get to some other callers and either at the end of this call, perhaps Joe and Roger would be willing to take other calls or emails. We can talk about that as we end the call today.

But I do want to offer an opportunity for those that are waiting to take the next call. So Operator, could you connect us in to Jim Vetter from Newton, please.

Operator: Yes ma'am.

Jim Vetter, your line is open.

Jim Vetter: Thank you. Hi.

I just wanted to ask that you both have mentioned at several points about looking for a particular program or a set of programs that is going to be not only evidence-based, but also a good fit for the particular school or community.

And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what kind of processes you've seen have been really effective at finding a program that's really a good match, and then you talked about adapting it.

Man: Well, I think a few things can be very helpful. One is to look at a recommended set of programs. And if you can actually get a presentation on the programs and look at the curriculum materials and have a group within the school be involved with that review and selection process, that's enormously helpful.

I think sometimes doing a site visit to another school, which might be implementing the program or - because overall, when it comes to what evidence-based means, it means a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

On one level, I think a scientific use of evidence-based often is concerned about has there been experimental research to demonstrate that a program produces positive behavioral gains for students.

On the other hand, there's another equally important part of evidence for people who are selecting and implementing programs, which is - hasn't been implemented.

In schools similar to mine and do people feel good about what's happened and how it's happened and then can I see it to get a feel. That's a different kind of evidence that comes from educators who are in the trenches.

So I think both kinds of evidence are important and can be helpful in people making a selection about programming. Other people also try out a couple of different things in a year.

Very often the planning process to select and implement the programs, time spent upfront trying some things out and getting local interest and support and an infrastructure to feel excited about and be able to support implementation of programming I think can also be helpful.

((Crosstalk))

Man: ...yeah, if I just may add one thing, I think also that the self-evaluation is very helpful for the (match), Jim. Doing a needs assessment of exactly what the needs are in a particular school because sometimes, you know, some more vocal people will express their opinions and then people get on the bandwagon.

But it might not really address all of the things that might be attended to. And so once you can get some good information about your local school, that can be very informative. Then you can set some priorities.

Man: Also a history -- and Maurice Elias has done great work in this -- about what's happened historically in the school, what kinds of initiatives have been introduced, why did they work or not work, and providing a chance really to reflect on what has been because part of - if you decide to introduce new programs, part of that includes I think getting - removing other programs that may be in place that people are dissatisfied with.

(Jennifer) Kitson: So I'm going to wrap this up now. Thank you all for your time and for the questions that've come in. I know there's some other questions we didn't get to today, but we are almost out of time.

I just want to thank our speakers today, but I want to sort of end with saying that it sounds like implementing SEL and getting good outcomes is a complex process that involves lots of things from identifying the needs and doing a review of what's in place, sort of an assessment of resources, and selecting out the programs that best fit, looking at the comprehensiveness of it and making sure you evaluate it carefully. There's lots of resources available and this great meta-analysis that could be very helpful to us.

So hopefully you will all take a look at the brief that you received or is up on our web site.

First, I want to thank all of you again for participating and offer a special thanks to Roger Weissberg and Joe Durlak for taking the time and sharing their research and relevant insight from their work to integrate social and emotional learning with Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative.

Please note that we will have an archived audio recording of today's event, as well as the brief that you received, SEL and Student Benefits, Research

Implications of the Safe School/Healthy Students Core Elements available digitally at the National Center web site, www.promoteprevent.org.

You may also refer to the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning web site at www.casel.org or locate - or where you can locate numerous resources and implementation tools and research and you consider social and emotional learning.

Each of you that registered will be receiving an evaluation via email. We appreciate your feedback. And please also consider contacting your technical assistance specialist for further follow-up to support your efforts.

Thank you and have a good day.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for participating in today's conference call. You may now disconnect.

END