Social Emotional Intelligence:
The Basis for a New Vision of Education in the United States

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Classes were in session and the halls almost empty. A teacher first noticed the little boy—small but chunky, maybe a second grader—then two other boys, a bit older, walking near him. One of the two called out: "Hey, Fatty! You stink up the soccer field! You suck at soccer!"

The object of the taunt took a deep breath and squared his shoulders, then turned to face his attackers. "You're right," he said. "I'm not good at soccer. And you are really good—one of the best in the school. But you know what? I'm really good at art. I can draw almost anything."

The air seemed to go out of the boy who had hurled the insult, and he said: "You're not so bad. Want me to show you some moves after school?" Then the pair walked off in another direction, the little guy still standing near the teacher.

"Gimme five!" she said to him, acknowledging how he had handled the situation. This teacher also found the second grader's teacher and let her know what he had done.

Today there are more and more examples in the U.S. of schools that are paying attention to children's social and emotional learning (SEL) as a basic part of their school's culture, structure, pedagogy, and curriculum frameworks. Imagine a school where:

- The uniqueness, diversity, and inherent value of every individual are honored, and education of the whole child is a basis for a lifelong process.
- Students recognize and manage their emotions, solve their own conflicts on the playground, and feel safe enough to discuss concerns with their teachers and classmates by taking an active role in school improvement and governance.
- The school staff pays more attention to equipping students with the skills they need to approach the "tests of life" rather than having their students' school experience be composed of "a life of tests."
- The school leadership shifts from a centralized concept of power to approaches that help individuals and groups in the school to self-organize and solve problems cooperatively.
- School spirit comes as much from collaboration, connection, and engaging classroom practices as it does from, for example, winning a football game.
- A coordinated, well-planned and evidence-based social and emotional learning program is seen as not an either/or choice in terms of a student's potential for academic success but rather as one enhancing the other.

> Growing evidence suggests that a key component in meeting educational goals for children, academic as well as social, is social and emotional learning.

The dream school described here is not out of our reach. This kind of school is becoming more and more the norm, not the exception, in American education. Thousands of schools in the U.S.—according to the latest data, 59% of schools in the U.S. have some form of social and emotional learning curricula at various stages of implementation[1]—are adopting research-based social and emotional learning programs in the context of safe and supportive school, family, and community learning environments in which children feel valued, respected, connected, and engaged in their learning. Why are more and more U.S. school systems embracing this expanded vision of education? What are the challenges we face and what do we need to do to move this vision of education forward?

This report outlines the journey that has taken place in the U.S. over the past few decades to implement high-quality social and emotional learning (SEL) programming as a regular part of kindergarten to grade 12 education. It describes the following:

- The challenges and barriers to learning for children growing up in the U.S. today, compared to those of the past, and why social and emotional learning is taking hold.
- The trends in American education that have shaped policy over the past decades and laid the groundwork for the social and emotional learning movement and the founding of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).
- What it looks like to further the vision of SEL when a school district and an individual school commit to this agenda. [Editor's note: The full report also contains a study of how Illinois is adopting SEL programming at the state level.]

I will take a closer look at the Anchorage School District in Alaska, which has been actualizing a vision of SEL as a basic part of the district's mission for close to two decades. I will also examine the implementation of SEL at PS 24, The Dual-Language School for International Studies in New York City. I will conclude with some thoughts about steps we still need to take in the U.S. to make SEL a household term and the accepted way we educate American children.

School systems throughout the United States are starting to realize that SEL more than pays for itself in benefits to individual children and to society.

Education in the United States

The U.S. system of education is complex, multidimensional, and among the largest systems of education in the world. Because the population of the U.S. is increasing, so is enrollment in all levels of education, both public and private. The country is divided into more than 15,000 independently operated public school districts headed by superintendents and more than 80,000 individual schools headed by principals.[2]

The governing structure of the U.S. educational system consists of each school district's having a local school board. Each of the 50 states has a chief state school officer, a governor, and a state legislature. There are six regional accrediting agencies and one U.S. Department of Education, which is in charge of national initiatives that include funding and other issues of legal compliance.[3] There are vast differences in race or ethnicity, wealth, religion, age, and population density among the various states. Although the Federal government contributes only 10% of each state's total education funding, it issues about 90% of the commands.[4]

Children attend compulsory education from 1st grade (about six years old) to 12th grade (about 17-18 years old).[5] There are 54,000 elementary schools, which usually cover grades from pre-kindergarten through grade 5, and 18,000 secondary schools, which are sometimes composed of middle schools (grades 6-8) and high schools (grades 9-12). There are variations in the way the 12 years of schooling are divided depending on the number of children in any given neighborhood. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten are not yet universal.

About 49 million students attend public schools and another 6.1 million attend private and independent schools, to which families need to pay tuition fees. Currently, about 1 million children are home-schooled.[6] The number of children ages 5-17 who speak a language other than English in the home more than doubled between 1979 and 2005, with 1 out of 5 school-age children speaking a language other than English at home today.[7] 38% of public school students are minority or children of color. Only 10% secondary school teachers, 14% elementary teachers, 16% principals and 4% superintendents, however, are minorities. The pedagogical staff is composed of 2.8 million public school teachers and about 70,000 principals who are the heads of the schools.[8]

In 1900 in the U.S., only about 7% of Americans had a high school diploma. About 75% lived on farms. Today, only 3% live on farms and about 75% have high school diplomas.[9] The average public school in 1900 enrolled 40 students, and the size of the average school district was 120 students. Today, an average elementary school enrolls more than 400 pupils, and a typical high school enrolls more than 2,000 pupils. In 1900, schools were more economically, racially, and ethnically homogeneous.[10]

Today's schools face unprecedented challenges to educate an increasingly multicultural and multilingual student body and to address the widening social and economic disparities in U.S. society. Of the more than 300 million people living in the U.S.,[11] more than 40 million move in a year, and of these, 7 million are school-age children. Further, we have no system to track a student who moves from one state to another.[12]

Kindergarten teachers say that about 20% of children entering kindergarten do not yet have the necessary social and emotional skills to be "ready" for kindergarten. Of very low income children, as many as 30% may not have the necessary skills.[13] About a third of today's students do not graduate from high school after four years. In 2003, 88% of Asians, 85% of whites, 80% of blacks, and 57% of Hispanics had a high school diploma. The U.S. now ranks 10th in the world in the percentage of youth who graduate from high school. We were first about 30 years ago.[14]

> When social and emotional skills are taught and mastered, they help children succeed not just in school, but also in all avenues of life.

After high school, of those graduates who do not directly enter the workforce, some students enter technical and vocational institutions. Others attend community college, which is usually for two years, or attend a four-year college or university. The average four-year college student—public or private—will graduate with a debt of $18,000, and this number is increasing.[15]

Challenges that Face American Youth and SEL as a Solution

Our experience of the world as children was vastly different from the world our children face. Today's world includes all kinds of stressors that didn't even exist when we were growing up. As an elementary teacher during the 1970s and later as an administrator in New York City schools, I started to notice that young people's social and emotional development seemed to be in a serious decline. I was seeing children coming to school more aggressive, more disobedient, more impulsive, sadder, and lonelier. Thomas Achenbach confirmed my observations; his groundbreaking studies of thousands of American children, first in the mid-1970s and then again in the late 1980s, proved this to be true. America's children—from the poorest to the most affluent—displayed a decline across the board in scores on more than forty measures designed to reflect a variety of emotional and social capacities.[16]

Children in America today face a host of unprecedented challenges to their safe and healthy development. National statistics hint at the scope of these challenges: 15% to 22% of the nation's youth experience social, emotional, and mental health problems requiring treatment; 25% to 30% of American children experience school adjustment problems; and 14% of students 12-18 years of age report having been bullied at school in the past 6 months.[17]

The 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)—the most current year available—revealed a large percentage of American high school students are involved with substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, violence, and mental health difficulties. For example, 16.9% of high school students had seriously considered attempting suicide; more than 40% used alcohol; close to 30% had ridden in a car with someone who had been drinking within 30 days of the survey; and almost 20% had carried a weapon some time during the past month.[18]

Threats to learning can be found on the home front as well. Young people today have virtually uncensored media access through the Internet, cable television, and music outlets; they are bombarded as never before by commercial messages that tout unceasing consumption and glamour as the routes to happiness. Young people today are far less likely than previous generations to have adults around them in their non-school hours, as mothers' labor-force participation has grown from 10% in the 1950s to more than 78% in 1999.[19] As of 2004, more than half of all children will grow up in a home without a biological father present.[20]

According to the 2006 Indicators of School Crime and Safety report from the National Center

for Education Statistics, 27% of schools report daily or weekly bullying incidents. In 2005, more than a quarter of students ages 12-18 reported being bullied within the past six months, with 58% of these students bullied once or twice during that period, 25% bullied once or twice a month, 11% bullied once or twice a week, and 8% of students bullied almost every day.[21]

In the past, the dominant paradigm in response to this decline in American children's social and emotional capacities focused on trying to identify the risk factors that caused this antisocial behavior. There were almost two decades of school-based "prevention wars," like the "war on drugs." In the last two decades we have witnessed a healthy paradigm shift. Researchers and practitioners are studying the concept of resilience—the innate ability we all have to self-correct and thrive in the face of life's challenges. Bonnie Bernard, a pioneer in the field of strength-based approaches, has helped us take a look at how young people's strengths and capabilities can be developed in order to protect them from the potential harm that these circumstances represent.[22]

Attending to social and emotional needs is critical. Students need to feel good about themselves to learn.

Despite, and perhaps because of, the challenges young people face, growing evidence suggests that a key component in meeting educational goals for children, academic as well as social, is social and emotional learning.[23] Robust research studies have shown that students in schools that use an evidence-based SEL curriculum significantly improve in their attitudes toward school, their behaviors, and their academic performance. Almost 30 studies have shown that SEL programs result in student improvements in achievement test scores—an average of 14% over students who do not learn SEL skills. Furthermore, the impact of SEL programs seem to be long-lasting.[24]

One major multi-year study found that by the time they were adults, students who received SEL in grades 1-6 (6 to 11 years of age) had an 11% higher grade point average, significantly greater levels of school commitment and attachment to school at age 18, and greater school success. Among students required to repeat a grade, the retention rate for students who received SEL was better at 14%, versus 23% for control students. Further, SEL students demonstrated a 30% lower incidence of school behavior problems at age 18, a 20% lower rate of violent delinquency at age 18, and a 40% lower rate of heavy alcohol use at age 18.[25]

Why Social and Emotional Learning Is Essential

A growing body of research suggests that helping children develop good social and emotional skills early in life makes a big difference in their long-term health and wellbeing. Studies have shown that children's social and emotional functioning and behavior begin to stabilize around the age of eight, and can predict the state of their behavior and mental health later in life.[26] In other words, if children learn to express emotions constructively and engage in caring and respectful relationships before and while they are in lower elementary grades, they are more likely to avoid depression, violence, and other serious mental health problems as they grow older. Conclusions like these may seem obvious but, in the face of nature-nurture debates, provide evidence for the importance of deliberate and focused education in these areas.

School systems throughout the United States are starting to realize that SEL more than pays for itself in benefits to individual children and to society. Providing children with comprehensive social and emotional learning programs characterized by safe, caring, and well-managed learning environments and instruction in social and emotional skills addresses many of these learning barriers. School attachment—a sense of connectedness and belonging—is enhanced, risky behaviors reduced, and academic achievement positively influenced.

Many schools in the U.S. have begun to see the value in creating and supporting the school conditions and student capacities that SEL provides. Many educators today are working to change and manage school environments or climates—in classrooms, in hallways, on playing

fields, and in clubs. They are also working to develop students' skills and knowledge, skills and knowledge that maximize their potential for optimal performance, human connection, and effective relationships. These are skills like recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively. These skills, for example, allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices.

Students who are given clear behavioral standards and social skills, allowing them to feel safe, valued, confident, and challenged, will exhibit better school behavior and learn more. This statement is of monumental importance as we attempt to improve the outcomes of education in the U.S. In fact, SEL skills and the supportive environments in which they are taught seem to contribute to the resiliency of all children—those without identified risks and those at-risk of or already exhibiting emotional or behavioral problems and in need of additional support.

When children actively engage in meaningful, relevant learning experiences, …they learn concepts and skills in a deep and genuine way.

Daniel Goleman has contributed much to our thinking about the need to nurture the social and emotional lives of children. In his groundbreaking book *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman summarized research from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology that identify EQ—emotional intelligence—as being as important as IQ in terms of children's healthy development and future life success. He wrote:

> One of psychology's open secrets is the relative inability of grades, IQ, or SAT scores, despite their popular mystiques, to predict unerringly who will succeed in life. …There are widespread exceptions to the rule that IQ predicts success—many (or more) exceptions than cases that fit the rule. At best, IQ contributes about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 percent to other forces.[27]

Goleman's work has helped educators, including me, understand the importance of emotional intelligence as a basic requirement for the effective use of one's IQ—that is, one's cognitive skills and knowledge. He made the connection between our feelings and our thinking more explicit by pointing out how the brain's emotional and executive areas are interconnected physiologically, especially as these areas relate to teaching and learning. The prefrontal lobes of the brain, which are associated with emotional impulses, are also strongly associated with working memory and learning.

Educators and parents alike are now much more aware that when chronic anxiety, anger, or upset feelings intrude on children's thoughts, less capacity is available in working memory to process what they are trying to learn. This implies that, at least in part, academic success depends on a student's ability to maintain positive social interactions. Schools across the U.S. today are beginning to systematically help children strengthen their EQs by equipping them with concrete skills for identifying and managing their emotions, communicating effectively, and resolving conflicts nonviolently. These skills help children to make good decisions, to be more empathetic, and to be optimistic in the face of setbacks.

The hopeful news is that schools and parents, working together, can play pivotal roles in supporting children's healthy development in dealing with their emotions and their relationships. In the U.S., this is referred to as social and emotional learning because these are skills that can be learned and mastered, every bit as much as language or mathematics or reading can be. Furthermore, teaching academic skills and social and emotional skills is not an either/or proposition. There is a great deal of research evidence to indicate that students perform better when academics are combined with SEL.[28] When social and emotional skills are taught and mastered, they help children succeed, not just in school, but in all avenues of life.

The SEL movement in the U.S. is related to other national youth development and prevention

initiatives, such as character education and school-based health promotion programs. SEL is significantly different from these, however, because it systematically addresses the numerous social and emotional variables that place youth at risk for school failure, such as a lack of attachment to a significant adult or the inability to manage emotions.

Many of the early social and emotional learning efforts in schools were developed to combat risky behaviors such as teens' use of drugs and alcohol, dropping out of school, unwanted teen pregnancies, and other pitfalls of adolescence. These effects are related to children's social and emotional development by focusing on a single problem or issue such as preventing substance abuse. SEL, however, provides educators with a common language and framework to organize their activities. SEL is an inclusive approach that covers the entire spectrum of social and emotional competencies that help children to be resilient and successful learners. When the W. T. Grant Foundation commissioned a study of all such programs to see what actually made some of them work (while others did not), the teaching of social and emotional skills emerged among the crucial active ingredients.

> We owe it to our children to help them be fully prepared for the challenges and opportunities that they will face.

The Founding of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)[29] has been at the forefront of moving the agenda of social and emotional learning forward in the United States. Founded in the U.S., CASEL has been providing national and international leadership for educators, researchers, and policy makers to advance the science and practice of social and emotional learning since 1994. CASEL's organizational vision and mission guide all that it does:

VISION: We envision a world where families, schools, and communities work together to promote children's success in school and life and to support the healthy development of all children. In this vision, children and adults are engaged, life-long learners who are self-aware, caring and connected to others, and responsible in their decision-making. Children and adults achieve to their fullest potential and participate constructively in a democratic society.

MISSION: To establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education.

CASEL investigates the best ways to advance children's social and emotional learning and provides training to educational leaders and school staff in how to make SEL the foundation for academic success, disseminating research findings on the most effective practices and programs to educators, researchers, and policy makers. Working in collaboration with other organizations, CASEL promotes the principle that safe, supportive learning communities are an essential component of effective school reform.

CASEL was inspired by the vision of its cofounders, educator-philanthropist Eileen Rockefeller Growald and former New York Times science writer and author Daniel Goleman. In 1994, Growald, Goleman, and collaborators convened leading educators and researchers to discuss effective whole-school change practices that incorporate rigorous scientific research. Out of this meeting came both the term "social and emotional learning" and the organization—CASEL—to gather and disseminate reliable information about evidence-based SEL strategies and to translate scientific knowledge into high-quality educational approaches for all students.

During its first decade, CASEL defined the field of SEL in the text, *Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*, published in 1996 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). This document was sent as a member benefit to more than 100,000 educational leaders. CASEL established the research base for the field of SEL, publishing the essential characteristics and documented benefits of high-quality, evidence-based SEL programs for children. The U.S. Department of Education

funded CASEL to review and create an objective guide to SEL programs. The resulting document, *Safe and Sound*, sold out 15,000 copies and has been downloaded from CASEL's website more than 150,000 times.

CASEL research syntheses established the link between these programs and greater attachment to school, less risky behavior, and greater student assets, leading to better academic performance and success in school and life. The CASEL text summarizing much of this work is *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?* published in 2004 by Teachers College Press. Most recently, in partnership with urban, suburban, and rural schools in different parts of the country, CASEL has developed strategies for using SEL as an organizing framework for coordinating all of a school's academic, prevention, health promotion, and youth development activities. Knowledge and products developed from this work are combined with applications of the latest research in systems change, leadership development, and program implementation in the 400-page CASEL document, *Sustainable Schoolwide SEL: Implementation Guide and Toolkit*, which sold out its first printing of 2,000 copies and serves as the core element of CASEL's national training program.

CASEL also advises districts, states, and countries, providing technical assistance and training on policy approaches to support SEL and systems for expanding practice on a broad scale.

In the past two years CASEL has conducted 23 sold-out two-day school and district trainings with 300 school teams (representing several hundred thousand students) from across the U.S. as well as Australia, Spain, and Canada. In 2007, noting the research base for SEL and CASEL's role in the field, UNICEF contracted with CASEL to lead an evaluation of its Child Friendly Schools model, to assure better attention to student social and emotional development.

CASEL is having widespread influence on school practices, policies, and professional development throughout the world. Its website—www.casel.org—where papers and reports from CASEL's and others' projects are posted, attracts visitors from throughout the world. In addition, periodic reports are shared with the more than 10,000 subscribers to CASEL's electronic newsletter, *CASEL Connections*.

CASEL is unique in education today. It is an organization devoted to improving education by bridging theory, research, and practice—and to pursuing the goals of school improvement and student success through continuing dialogue and collaboration with educators.

Social and Emotional Learning in the Anchorage School District, Alaska[30]

Russian Jack Elementary School, Anchorage, Alaska, May 1993 (Linda Lantieri's journal entry):[31]

It is spring in Anchorage, Alaska. This is my first trip to Russian Jack Elementary School but my eighth trip to the Anchorage School District (ASD) since 1988, when I first started to assist this school district in paying attention to children's hearts as well as to their minds. Russian Jack has been part of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) for four years now. …Upon entering Russian Jack, I notice a sign on the entrance. It reads, "Our mission at Russian Jack, a school of cultural diversity, is to ensure that each student is actively involved in their learning, while developing a sense of self and becoming a productive citizen who will contribute to society in a meaningful way."

Already I have a sense of this school. I continue down the hallway, taking in my new surroundings. To the right there's a large glass display case. Inside are a myriad of art projects, bright colorful masks, and drums. A sign above reads, "These masks and drums are representative of the culture of the Inuit people of Alaska. They were made by our Young Ambassadors, students dedicated to promoting a deeper understanding of the rich cultural diversity of the children at the Russian Jack Elementary School."

Donna, the school's principal of six years, welcomes me. I had met Donna once before, at an RCCP advanced training for administrators a few years before. Donna offers to take time out of her busy schedule to take me around the school. She talks about her school and how they've implemented RCCP. Heading up the stairs toward the second floor, I see a huge banner with P-E-A-C-E in large, multicolored letters sewn over a pastel backdrop. It is magnificent. Young people must read this several times a day as they go back and forth to the library and their classrooms; adults read it too.

Teachers and children alike greet us as we visit classrooms and observe them at work. They are working in groups, talking and sharing ideas. Classroom walls display several indicators that Resolving Conflict Creatively Program is in place at this school. "Put-up" charts (giving examples of the opposite to "put downs") line walls. Words such as "I-Messages" and "Active Listening" are listed as tools to be used for communication in the classroom. There is calm in the air, not the frenzy one can sometimes feel in schools.

Recess begins. Donna is called to the office. I head out to the playground. It is a warm, clear day. The sun is up and shining almost all day at this time of the year. The children are playful and carefree. Mediators stand by in the lunchroom and outdoors. Several times a conflict begins to erupt, but mediators intervene immediately. I am told that the library mediation room is available in case it gets too cold to mediate outside.

Throughout the day, children and teachers share their experiences with me. They talk about Russian Jack proudly and openly. They talk about the benefits they see since RCCP has been at their school. They support their mediators, who they feel are helping to create a culture of nonviolence at this school. Young people talk highly about their teachers, principal, and mediation program. They feel safe at this school. "It's a good school," says Nikita. "Not like my other school where kids used to fight all the time."

These images from Anchorage offer hints of what can happen when the kind of educational vision we have been talking about is put into practice. Little did I know then what I know now—that the Anchorage School District (ASD) would lead the way for school districts across the U.S. to commit to implementing social and emotional learning standards and benchmarks. How did the ASD arrive at this place? What can we learn from them that can inform other school systems throughout the U.S. and the world to make SEL a core part of the mission and vision of an entire school district?

Anchorage's SEL journey began in December 1987, when Tom Roderick, Executive Director of a nongovernmental organization—Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility—was asked to write an article on the topic of children and violence for the contemporary issues section of *Educational Leadership*, a well-known and respected educational journal in the U.S. Tom wrote a wonderful article tracing the history of conflict resolution in schools and highlighting our work in New York City with the researched based SEL program he and I co-founded—the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). He titled his article "Johnny Can Learn to Negotiate." Since *Educational Leadership* is a journal to which almost every principal in America subscribes, we became national news and began to receive many inquiries. One of them was from the Anchorage School District in Alaska, saying that they were ready to sponsor a course in "peace education" in three weeks. My first thought was, "Are you kidding? How could something that was developed in urban New York City be of any use to a school system in Anchorage, Alaska? I also had a sense, however, that what we were doing in NYC was going to catch on around the country and that we needed to humbly share what we had been learning. By the end of the day I called them back to say yes.

Flying into Anchorage airport, the earth blanketed in white, the imposing mountains at a distance, I wondered whether this was a crazy idea—a big mistake—or whether our grassroots origins in New York City, teaching young people how to manage their emotions and resolve conflict nonviolently, had a certain universality regardless of the distance and differences that separated these two places.

In retrospect I understand how important it was to go to a place like Anchorage. Had I not expanded to the Anchorage School District next with our SEL program, I suspect it would have taken me a long time to realize that this kind of work could take hold in any school environment that was concerned about these issues. Today, the ASD is the nation's 88th largest school district, with about 50,000 students—nearly 40% of Alaska's school children. Over 30% of ASD students live in poverty. Increasingly diverse, ASD now has a 50% minority population; 84 languages are spoken in its schools. The ASD has the largest population of Alaska natives in the state. While the district is proud of its ethnic diversity, it is also experiencing the pains of large achievement gap among constituencies and a huge dropout rate.

In the summer of 2007 I made my 28th trip to the ASD. It has been a joy to work with such an

amazing group of people, people who are changing the vision of education for the whole country. Here is their story.

The Anchorage School District's SEL Journey of Success

In an era in which the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has forced schools to concentrate on increasing students' test scores rather than engaging them in a world in which they will succeed, the Anchorage School District was able to place social and emotional learning at the center of its mission. How did the district get its families, community, and school board not to dismiss this kind of curriculum as "soft and touchy-feely" and help them recognize that social and emotional learning can be part of a rigorous and achievement-oriented education? We have much to learn from their example.

In August 2006, the Anchorage School Board became the first school district in the U.S. to unanimously approve the implementation of SEL standards and benchmarks for incorporation into the district's academic program. How was this diverse urban school district, with a teaching staff of 3,500, able to make this significant commitment to such a holistic vision of education for the 50,000 students it serves? The story involves the courageous leadership of dynamic superintendent Carol Comeau, forward-minded thinking on the part of the wider leadership of the district, and a long term democratic decision-making process committed to building staff and community understanding and support for these efforts.

For two decades the ASD has had an expansive view of what skills a graduate needs to be ready for the 21st century. During 1988-1998, it became committed to implementing a few different research-based SEL programs, including RCCP, in many of its schools, well before most school systems were even thinking in terms of prevention. During this same period, the district was also introduced to the work of the Search Institute in Minnesota, which had identified forty "developmental assets" that young people need to be successful. The more of these assets young people had in their life, the Search Institute research found, the more likely they were to grow up healthy, productive, and caring.

School board members and superintendents statewide started to be trained in the Developmental Assets Framework. Michael Kerosky, Supervisor of Anchorage's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program remembered how important this was: "It was a radical shift for us. Instead of focusing on stopping negative risk behavior, we were focusing on building young people's strengths. Exposure to this training also convinced [those at] the top that this kind of approach made sense. We also each knew intuitively from working with young people that this approach would work."

The ASD engaged teachers, staff, principals, and the wider community in many meetings to begin to identify which of the external developmental assets the family, school, and community were already providing their young people and which of the internal assets they were strengthening through implementing researched-based SEL programs. The Developmental Assets Framework became common language at the ASD. Every new teacher was exposed to this training, as were bus drivers, security guards, and school secretaries. The entire community was involved in reflecting on the social, emotional, and ethical state of the children they served. As Michael Kerosky said,

> Adopting SEL benchmarks was based on the resiliency work that had been done before. That created the fertile ground for this work not to be seen as 'social engineering,' as it had been looked upon by many a decade earlier.

In 2004 Anchorage passed another important milestone on its SEL journey. Superintendent Carol Comeau, in an effort to consistently infuse the Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework district-wide, convened a team of people to design an action plan. The team conceived of the Social and Emotional Learning Six Year Plan. The plan had as its main premise the goal of having SEL as an integral part of the curriculum frameworks of the entire district. To ensure that this plan would move forward, the school district committed itself to creating a new position, the Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum Coordinator. Victoria Blakeney, a veteran high school teacher who had been actively incorporating SEL in her high school English curriculum, was selected for the position. In 2007, in a show of support, the school board voted to absorb the

SEL Curriculum Coordinator's salary, previously grant-funded, into the general fund.

Under Vickie's direction, a district-wide steering committee was created to help drive the SEL initiative. The academic curriculum frameworks of the ASD was and still is primarily standards-based, which means that for each subject that is taught, there are specific grade level appropriate competencies in which students are expected to become proficient. These are known as "benchmarks"—competencies that are easily measurable and observable. The first task of the SEL Steering Committee, therefore, was to write SEL standards and benchmarks to bring before the school board. The purpose of this strategy was to ensure that the teaching of social and emotional learning skills would be considered as important as any of the other curriculum areas students in the Anchorage School District were expected to learn.

At this stage of its planning, the ASD Steering Committee reached out to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). At that point CASEL was experienced and committed to advancing the science and expanding the practice of SEL in schools, school districts, and state policy. The benchmarks and standards Anchorage created were inspired by CASEL's work in the state of Illinois. The ASD Steering Committee also spent two years looking at what other districts were doing and engaged each other in reflective conversations about what they really wanted for their students in the social and emotional learning domain. They got input from staff and community and finally drafted their own version of the benchmarks and standards. The Steering Committee creatively devised an approach to organize and communicate what they were trying to do by using the four components of SEL as outlined by CASEL, which are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and social management. Vickie describes the process:

> I remember a great moment in our group when one of the steering committee members realized that the four quadrants that make up the goals for SEL could correspond with certain headings:
> Self-Awareness = "I am…"
> Self-Management = "I can…"
> Social Awareness = "I care…"
> Social Management = "I will…"
> This resounded with all of us and, from then on, the task seemed easier. We could use as our mnemonic the phrase, "I am, I can, I care, I will."

Once the committee drafted the standards, they aligned them with their corresponding Developmental Asset, to honor the framework that had already been established in the district. From there began a year's worth of listening sessions—editing, informing, and trying to make the standards accessible to all of their stakeholders. On August 14, 2006, after an hour-long question and answer session, and with much excitement, the Anchorage School Board adopted the implementation of the SEL standards.

During the following year, Vickie continued to work to align the standards with many of the other existing programs and curricula so that teachers could see which of the standards were being taught and which needed more focus. For example, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) was implemented in quite a few elementary schools, so Vickie brought together a team of RCCP teachers and they evaluated the RCCP curriculum through the lens of which SEL standards were being directly taught and in which lessons they were being taught. A similar alignment was done for the district-adopted health curriculum, the middle school Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders (AVB) Program, and 12 other programs or curricula currently implemented in the district, including the elementary reading curriculum.

The long-term goal for the school district is to figure out how many of the SEL standards teachers have the potential of teaching by using their existing curricula and which ones they need to find more ways to support. More and more of the schools in Anchorage are self-selecting to add a research-based SEL program to their school day.

The next task ASD is working on is figuring out how they will assess whether or not students have mastered SEL skills. The ASD sees their work as "putting the assets into action." The adoption of these standards, however, does also seem to be empowering the various individual schools to address SEL more intentionally and programmatically. In order to support the deepening of the work around SEL standards, the school district decided to select two elementary, two middle, and two high

schools to be SEL pilot schools. These pilot schools are helping the SEL Coordinator to determine what resources or support schools need, and then Vickie works to provide that for the pilot schools as well as all of the other schools in the district.

It also became apparent to the school district that they weren't really going to help students thrive in their SEL skills if they didn't focus on providing them with a culturally responsive environment in which to learn, given how culturally diverse their student body was. Therefore Vickie worked with the district's Culturally Responsive Education Action Committee, spearheading the design of a Culturally Responsive Teaching Continuum. This continuum provides teachers with a look at their practices, showing them how culturally responsive they currently are, and how they can move further through the continuum. Both tools—the continuum and the SEL standards—are used at various professional development offerings at conferences and trainings around the district.

At least one team from every school in the district has now been trained in the use of both. Vickie is also an active member of various initiatives in the wider Anchorage community. For example, she serves on committees around Anchorage aimed at closing the achievement gap and ending racism as it exists in their community. ASD is currently working on developing a district-wide plan to roll out diversity training to all of its school personnel. The district has found that SEL and cultural responsiveness work can be a perfect match in both building a strong sense of self-awareness and a willingness to deal with a formerly taboo subject—racism.

Finally, ASD is also developing a Standards Based Report Card for social and emotional learning. The current report card has a place to score things like citizenship and responsibility. The scoring is arbitrary, however, and nearly meaningless to teachers and parents. A new report card is being designed, therefore, with rubrics that will rate the 15 SEL standards individually, giving teachers clear indicators by grade level (K-6) to help them to determine whether or not the student is learning and applying a standard.

Anchorage's success has reached beyond Alaska. Superintendent Carol Comeau is recognized as a national leader in SEL reform and serves on CASEL's Advisory Board. ASD's Assistant Superintendent, Rhonda Gardner, volunteered on the original SEL steering committee, serving a pivotal role in writing the ASD SEL Standards and Benchmarks. Because of the level of their investment, the ASD has drawn national attention to the field of SEL. In 2007, the George Lucas Education Foundation filmed an onsite documentary of ASD's SEL initiative for the online magazine *Edutopia*. Superintendent Comeau presented their work on SEL at the Council of Great City Schools and the CASEL Forum in 2007. Many nationally known SEL leaders and practitioners support and collaborate with the ASD on the work they are doing. This national support has helped to ensure that their implementation of SEL is excellent.

Social and Emotional Learning at PS 24, the Dual-Language School for International Studies in New York City

Public School 24, also called the Dual-Language School for International Studies (Spanish and English), is a school in which academic instruction, social and emotional learning, and mental health services are fully integrated for the benefit of students, families, and teachers.[32] This elementary school for children 4 to 12 years of age is located in the heart of a largely Latino working-class neighborhood called Sunset Park in Brooklyn. Nearly half of the school's 839 students are learning English as a second language. Most emigrated from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and other countries in Spanish-speaking Central and South America. Some children are Chinese. About 90% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, which is a clear indicator that they are from low-income families. New York City has more than a million public school students and 1,400 public schools. The student population of the entire school system is diverse: 32.5% Black, 39% Latino or Hispanic, 14% Asian, and 14.5% White.

Inside the school building, signs of a child-centered approach to teaching and learning are evident. PS 24's walls are covered with children's colorful artwork. Teachers aren't screaming in hallways or classrooms; the lunchroom is noisy, but the children are engaged and mannerly. "Visitors to our school often comment about the warmth and respect students and adults show for each other here," says Principal Christina Fuentes.

PS 24 has been implementing research-based social and emotional learning programs since the school opened its doors in 1997. Explains Fuentes:

> Attending to social and emotional needs is critical. Students need to feel good about themselves to learn. If we want them to be risk-takers intellectually, we need to help them feel safe in school and at home. The more we address emotional needs, the fewer discipline problems we'll have. This is not only right to do morally; it's a strategy to get kids to achieve academically.

PS 24 has partnered with a nongovernmental organization, Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, to carefully implement its SEL curriculum. Morningside Center was founded in 1982 by educators concerned about the dangers of nuclear war. Its mission is to help students and teachers learn creative, nonviolent ways of dealing with conflict and cultural differences.

Virtually all of the teachers have received professional development in SEL through the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), one of the longest running research-based K-8 SEL programs in the U.S. Some of the teachers have also been trained in a newer SEL program called the 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) Program, which integrates conflict resolution into reading, writing, and speaking skills for grades K-5. Each unit of the 4Rs curricula begins with a teacher reading a book aloud to the students. Students practice SEL skills in the context of understanding the story and its context in their lives. Currently this program is undergoing an extensive three-year scientific evaluation, and initial results are promising. Through both of these efforts, the teachers at PS 24 are able to provide regular instruction for their students in SEL skills (for example: active listening, dealing with feelings, assertiveness, negotiation, mediation, dealing well with diversity, and making a difference).

In addition, the school has approximately 40 trained peer mediators (4th and 5th graders) to help their classmates talk out problems and arrive at solutions. Mediators receive a three-day training and learn a specific 17-step mediation process. Once trained, they work in teams of two, usually during lunch or recess. They wear peer mediator T-shirts when they are "on duty." The mediators always have an adult coach, usually a parent, who has also been trained in the process. The coach is nearby in case a problem should arise.

Some of the mediators also become "Peace Helpers" who go into kindergarten through third grade classrooms to set up "peace corners" to help younger students address problems that arise by resolving conflict nonviolently. A peace corner is a place where a student can go for a few minutes if he or she is upset or having a conflict with someone. Peace helpers are available on request to sit with the upset students to help them feel better or work things out. At PS 24, every kindergarten through grade three classroom now has a peace corner and peace helpers. The school also operates an after-school program, PAZ ("Peace from A to Z") every school day of the year for some 360 students.

In the spring of 2007, some upper grade students got specialized training to become part of a "diversity panel" that shared their cultural stories and experiences with various classrooms in the school as part of the school's first ever "Diversity Week." Teachers were asked to discuss diversity in their classrooms every day during that week and the student diversity panel helped by making classroom presentations.

When Heather shared her story in one classroom, she explained to her fellow students:

> It was hard for me in my old school. People made fun of me because I have only one hand. So I started playing sports—basketball, football. And when I got better at it, they started to leave me alone.

Jason described his experience as an African American with the following remarks:

> I was in the park one day with my mom and her boyfriend. And I was bored, because only younger kids were there. And then three white kids came into the park that were my age. I asked if I could play with them. And they said, "No, we won't play with you." And I asked them why. And they said, "Because you're black." I went away and I thought about it. And I thought that they were wrong, that it shouldn't make any difference what color my skin was. So I went back over to them and told them that.

Many other aspects of PS 24's curriculum promote SEL. For example, the school's dual language program helps the many new immigrants make an easier adjustment to their new country. Students read books of their own choosing, write from their life experiences, and practice their communication skills in group discussions which foster SEL skills as well.

Of course, there are some children at PS 24 who need extra help in SEL (as there are children who need extra help in reading or math). For 2nd and 3rd graders who continually get into trouble during lunch and recess, a staff developer from Morningside Center and the school's guidance counselor provide "lunch clubs," in which three or four of these challenging younger students are paired with older peer mediators to form a group that meets once a week for six weeks or more to check in with each other and get extra practice in SEL skills. For example, in these sessions they might role-play how to be strong without being mean in specific situations. The lunch clubs have resulted in significant improvements in the behavior of many participating students. To address the needs of youngsters and their families who need even more support, the school has a relationship with Lutheran Medical Center—a local mental health agency that provides trained therapists and counselors to work with families.

A few years ago, PS 24 chose to become an "empowerment school." Empowerment schools, in the structure and governance of the New York City Department of Education (NYC-DOE), get more autonomy in exchange for greater accountability. The DOE piloted a fairer and more nuanced accountability system in empowerment schools in 2007. In this process, called "value added," cohorts of students are tracked and their progress measured from year to year, schools are compared with other schools that have similar student populations, and schools receive a letter grade (A through F).

In the 2006-2007 school year, evidence came flooding in that PS 24's teaching efforts were having a major impact, not only on the school climate, but also on students' academic performance. The NYC-DOE rated PS 24 "exemplary" in closing the achievement gap. Latino students in the lowest third in English Language Arts rose to higher levels, and all English language learners rose to higher levels in mathematics. The school received a B+, one of the highest grades among schools rated. The school also received outstanding scores on the NYC-DOE's Learning Environment Survey. PS 24's survey responses were above average in every category (academic expectations, communication, engagement, safety, and respect).

In its most recent Quality Review Report, the NYC-DOE gave PS 24 its highest rating, calling it a "well-developed school" in all five areas evaluated. The report noted that:

> The school has developed excellent partnerships with organizations dedicated to conflict resolution and peace mediation. Students as young as kindergarten age are trained as peacemakers and mediators. There have been no suspensions this current school year and only one last year …Children are happy, feel safe, and take an active role in their daily learning. Students who were questioned felt respected by all teachers and were able to name not one but several individual staff members whom they trusted.

When children actively engage in meaningful, relevant learning experiences, as they do at PS 24, they learn concepts and skills in a deep and genuine way. As David Elkind wrote, "Once growth by integration has been accomplished, it is difficult—if not impossible—to break it down."[33] Creating an effective school-based SEL program that teaches young people how to intervene mindfully and respectfully in conflict situations and to make ethical choices in their own personal and social behavior requires the kind of instruction that goes beyond just telling students what they ought to know and how they ought to behave. It requires a pedagogy of active learning that enables students to recognize and practice the skills and ideas they have learned in the classroom in real life.

The story that began this article is one powerful example of this kind of learning in action. The boys in that story had SEL instruction for at least a couple of years. The boy who was insulted practiced some important and standard techniques for managing his emotions and handling the conflict. First, he paused and took a slow, deep breath. This is a technique taught to children to help them control their emotions when they realize they are

about to be "high-jacked" by strong feelings. Then he gave a "put-up" (the opposite of a put-down) to his attacker and himself, reminding them both of something positive about each, thus leveling and elevating the encounter. The put-ups also cued the children to the SEL teachings they were familiar with as well, further invoking past learning about handling conflict. As a result, what might have been the start of days, months, or even years of conflict between the younger boy and two older oppressors was quickly diffused and turned into a positive encounter.

Generalizing, we note that effective SEL programming, such as that at PS 24, includes:

- Instruction in and opportunities to practice and apply an integrated set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills.
- Learning environments characterized by trust and respectful relationships.
- Implementation that is coordinated and reinforces classroom, school-wide, out-of-school, and at-home learning activities.
- Systematic and sequential programming from preschool through every grade level.
- Developmentally and culturally appropriate behavioral supports.
- On-going monitoring and evaluation of implementation for continuous improvement.

Currently, PS 24 is one of thousands of schools in the U.S. proving that a school does not have to choose between promoting academic achievement and fostering good citizenship in the context of a caring learning community. A new vision of education that values young people's hearts and spirits as well as their minds is beginning to take hold. Adults and children at PS 24 are partners in creating a positive school environment. The children are developing their leadership skills, and have skills in social and emotional learning that they will use for the rest of their lives—at home, at school, on the street, at work, and as citizens.

As we prepare our children to meet the challenges of living and working in the 21st century, all children deserve the kind of education practiced and modeled at PS 24. Our future depends on it.

Conclusion

The United States has been the first home of the social and emotional learning movement in education in the world. At least some component of this approach is used in more than half of the thousands of schools in the U.S. Over the last decade, this humanizing wave in American education has inspired many other parts of the world to follow. As this report outlines, many other countries are using SEL curricula. Today SEL is incorporated in some form in schools under diverse titles such as "emotional literacy," "social and emotional education," "life skills," "citizenship education," and "character education."

In Singapore, the Ministry of Education launched a nationwide SEL program in 2006 and UNESCO formulated ten basic SEL principles[34] in a statement issued in 2002 to ministries in 140 countries.[35] The ten basic principles are summarized here:

1. Learning requires caring.
2. Teach everyday life-skills.
3. Link social-emotional instruction to other school services.
4. Use goal-setting to focus instruction.
5. Use varied instructional procedures.
6. Promote community service to build empathy.
7. Involve parents.
8. Build social-emotional skills gradually and systematically.
9. Prepare and support staff well.
10. Evaluate what you do.

The SEL movement is one of the most promising trends in education that we have witnessed in a long time. It seems to be the "missing piece" in bolstering academic success and preparing young people for the challenges they face in the 21st century. The challenges the movement faces now are to tackle the barriers that may obstruct more widespread adoption.

What will it take for social and emotional learning to be fully incorporated into the American education system as a norm, not an exception? First, we need to get the word out. Educational leaders in our country are still largely uninformed about the research findings concerning the value of social and emotional learning and how best to integrate and

sustain it as a central component of their curriculum, policies, and practice. Although scientific evidence and know-how is available, this information is not effectively utilized in most American schools. A strategic communications plan is needed at every level of American society to inform school administrators, teachers, parents, and the public about the positive short- and long-term impacts of SEL. CASEL needs to take a lead in publishing and broadly disseminating reports summarizing SEL programming impacts and to continue to update its "consumer's guide" of evidenced-based SEL programming.

Second, in order to broadly adopt an SEL vision of education, there needs to be a model established to train large numbers of people to train others in these approaches. Again CASEL's role here is essential in making SEL more widespread in the U.S. It would be helpful, for example, for CASEL to experimentally evaluate their resource *Sustainable Schoolwide SEL: Implementation Guide and Tool Kit* and continue to provide technical assistance to other states toward SEL implementation. Currently, school personnel struggle with choosing, implementing, and sustaining effective SEL programs.

Third, there is insufficient research and knowledge on how best to assess SEL outcomes. CASEL needs to play a role in further refining and field-testing rubrics for guiding and measuring SEL practices and program implementation. SEL report cards for parent-teacher- student conferences need to be designed and evaluated.

Finally, in order for SEL implementation to be widespread, the actions of educators alone are not sufficient. Policy work is required to guide states and countries to systematically and broadly implement and sustain evidence-based SEL programming.

The U.S. faces many challenges in educating its children, but we are also in a time of great hope and possibility. The SEL framework—if broadly adopted—would do much to improve the educational system in the U.S. We owe it to our children to help them be fully prepared for the challenges and opportunities that they will face. I end with the words of Pablo Casals:

> Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that never was before and will never be again. And what do we teach our children in school? We teach them that two and two makes four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique… And when you grow up can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must cherish one another. You must work—we all must work—to make this world worthy of its children.

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