SEL and College & Career Readiness

A Pathway to a Lifetime of Success

JOBS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Our information- and technology-driven world is changing at such a rapid pace that many of the jobs today's students will get after graduation don't even exist yet! This means that now, more than ever, we must ensure students are prepared to enter post-secondary and work environments with skills that will enable them to adapt and succeed in a rapidly changing environment. But how does one go about teaching skills needed for a job that may not yet exist? Clearly, traditional methods of teaching are no longer enough. Students need skills beyond academic and technical knowledge — they need strong social and emotional skills to help them think critically, solve problems creatively, and learn and apply information in ways that are highly adaptable.

Finding Qualified Job Applicants

There is a growing labor shortage in this country. With rising unemployment and underemployment rates, this may seem hard to believe. Yet a recent report by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) shows **31 percent of employers worldwide struggle to find qualified employees** (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010). A main complaint of employers is that applicants lack the required skills needed to perform the jobs they have available.

In fact, a recent survey shows that the number one skill employers look for in new employees is creative problem-solving (Committee for Children, & the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2016). Many hiring managers feel that while technical job knowledge is desired, it's not as important as "soft skills" such as problem-solving, critical thinking and teamwork.

Another survey published by Forbes Magazine (2014) examined the top 10 skills employers want in graduates with supporting data collected by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) These skills are listed below, ranked in order of highest priority.

The top four skills are directly related to social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies.

1. Ability to work in a team structure (relationship skills)
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems (decision-making skills)
3. Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization (social awareness)
4. Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work (goal-directed behavior)
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell and influence others

The results of these surveys speak volumes about what employers need from their employees. In environments where technology and communication systems allow vast amounts of information to be available with the click of a mouse, we need to focus on how students learn so we can ensure they are able to apply and adapt knowledge in fluid ways. In short, modern students need strong critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills, and they need to be able to quickly adapt and apply these competencies to real-life situations.

What Does it Mean to Be College and Career Ready?

So what exactly does it mean to be college- and career-ready in today's world? Traditional definitions have typically centered on academic and technical knowledge. But in addition to those requirements, students also need to:

- acquire and effectively apply knowledge
- understand and manage emotions
- set and achieve positive goals
- feel and show empathy for others
- establish and maintain positive relationships and
- make responsible decisions (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

This process is known as SEL and it teaches students non-academic competencies that will help them achieve academically and also become healthy, well-rounded and productive members of society. As defined by CASEL, the SEL framework "enhances students' capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges" (Core SEL Competencies, 2017). SEL fosters aptitude in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive domains.

The Link Between SEL and College & Career Readiness

Many studies show that **students who possess strong social and emotional skills are more likely to graduate and achieve success in college and/or their careers**. For example, research indicates that social and emotional competencies can help students become better communicators, cooperative members of a team, effective leaders and self-advocators, resilient individuals, and caring, concerned members of their communities (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004, Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). These skills also contribute to increased productivity, higher wages, and reduced risky behaviors (Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006).

On the other side of the coin, several studies have examined the reasons why students drop out of college. Results reveal that **students are more likely to drop out when they lack strong social and emotional competencies**, rather than for academic reasons, such as incomprehension of the material (Fink & Geller, 2013; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Zins et al., 2004).
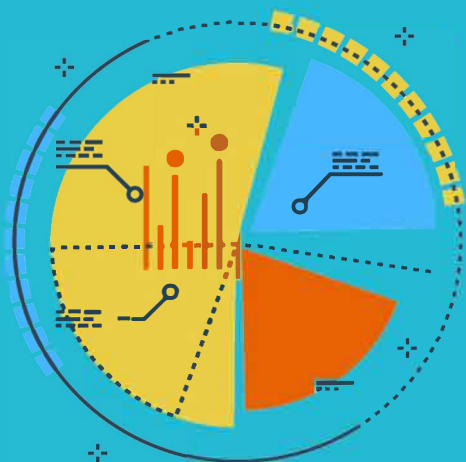
Rooted in Research

"...across all of the interventions analyzed, benefits outweighed the costs of the programs by a ratio of 11:1."

Research also shows that SEL is very cost effective and has lasting benefits to society. For instance, Columbia University's Center for Cost-Benefit Analysis conducted a research study to examine whether SEL programming in schools results in a positive return on investment. Researchers performed a cost-benefit analysis on six prominent SEL programs, chosen both because of their wide use in schools and to ensure a diversity of student populations, goals, and outcome measures. Outcomes included higher lifetime earnings, improved health (mental and physical), and reduced juvenile crime. The study found that across all of the interventions analyzed, benefits outweighed the costs of the programs by a ratio of 11:1. This means that for every $1 spent on effective SEL programming, the return on investment is $11 in long-term benefits to students, schools and communities (Belfield, et al., 2015).

Fewer and fewer young adults are entering the workforce equipped with what many employers feel should be innate social and emotional skills. But the good news is that schools can help students develop these critical social and emotional skills in the classroom. One example of a highly effective, researched-based SEL program is Aperture Education's DESSA Comprehensive SEL System. Aperture Education's tools enable schools to begin developing social and emotional skills in students as early as kindergarten and include:

- research-based assessments (which are based on CASEL's critical SEL constructs)
- data-interpretation strategies
- implementation ideas, and
- SEL lesson plans

Aperture Ed's system helps students develop the critical SEL competencies needed to achieve success in school as well as post-secondary environments and the workplace. The Evo SEL system enables schools to gain insight into students' social and emotional needs. Robust data reports help educators provide targeted SEL curricula based on the assessment findings. From lessons on cultivating critical problem-solving skills to activities for strengthening decision-making, the Evo SEL strategies span different instructional settings and grade levels. Social and emotional interventions can also be administered universally, in small groups, individually, or at home.

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