

A Case for  
**EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE**  
in Our Schools



**sixseconds**  
THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE NETWORK





*“Only **half or less** of US high school students are engaged in school... but effective mastery of **SEL** skills **results in improved outcomes** in well-being, health, self-efficacy and better school performance.”*





# What is social emotional learning and why does it matter?

Educators agree that it is the responsibility of schools to prepare students to become knowledgeable, responsible, caring adults.<sup>1</sup> Most educators enter the profession with a belief that education should develop the whole child, including their social and emotional development, but the direction of education in the past few decades has shifted into a focus on test scores and the development of technical skills to the exclusion of the whole person.<sup>2</sup>

We often get asked by educators and advocates for information that will bolster the case for emotional intelligence in education. They know in their gut this is important, but they want studies to back up their convictions. In this document, we explore the current research and thinking around the need for emotional intelligence and social emotional learning in schools and why it matters. We hope that educators, policymakers, and anyone wanting a more well-rounded education for our children will find this summary useful.

In the 21st century, schools are challenged to serve students who have varying abilities and motivation for learning, and who come from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Attention to the non-cognitive, emotional needs of students has greatly lagged

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<sup>1</sup> Elias et al., 1997

<sup>2</sup> Darling-Hammond, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011



A schoolwide  
**commitment to SEL**  
leads students to  
**re-engage**, to find a  
place in school where  
they can **feel safe** in  
their relationships,  
**ready to learn** and  
motivated to **succeed.**

behind in this era of standardized testing and accountability.<sup>4</sup> School engagement decreases from elementary to middle to high school, and only half or less of US high school students are engaged in school.<sup>5</sup> Engagement is essential for learning and school success.

Moreover, it has been estimated that 30% of high school students participate in high-risk behaviors that affect their school performance and likelihood of life success. Most middle and high school students report that their school did not help them develop social emotional skills like empathy, decision-making, or conflict resolution. A recent study of over 10,000 college students found that they are increasingly anxious and depressed<sup>6</sup>, and many engage in high-risk behaviors. In addition, a wide college graduation gap exists between affluent students and those of a lower socio-economic status.<sup>7</sup>

The need for all students to develop Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies for college and career readiness and for life success is garnering much needed attention among teachers, school counselors, and administrators. Researchers over the past two decades have successfully demonstrated that SEL skills can be explicitly taught, practiced, modeled, and integrated into student-centered learning, healthy classrooms and the entire school culture. Successful SEL implementation focuses on universal skills for all students and targeted interventions for students who are facing social, emotional, and/or behavioral challenges.<sup>8</sup>

SEL is a process for developing social and emotional skills – also called emotional intelligence, or EQ. EQ simply means, “being smarter with feelings,” and it includes specific, learnable, measurable skills. For the purpose of this monograph, SEL will be used interchangeably with EQ, so that we remain congruent with the prevailing usage in the educational field and also with our extended network of EQ assessors and practitioners around the globe.

Effective mastery of SEL skills results in improved outcomes in well-being, health, self-efficacy and better school performance. Furthermore, a surge in social neuroscience research has inspired educators to realize the impact of relationships on learning<sup>9</sup> and pay attention to the importance of a supportive school climate. As early as 1997, and again in 2013, SEL has been called the “missing piece” in education.<sup>10</sup>

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4 Darling-Hammond, 2015

5 Blad, 2014

6 Hoffman, 2015

7 Dynarski, 2015

8 Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015

9 Cozolino, 2014

10 Elias et al., 1997; Bridgeland, Bruce, and Hariharan, 2013



Over the past two decades, hundreds of researchers have studied the effects of social emotional learning programs and processes on youth, educators, schools and communities. They have discovered that SEL supports and, in fact, significantly increases students' academic development, promotes engagement and motivation, and strongly decreases problem behavior and attitudes.<sup>11</sup> As the authors of a major volume on social emotional learning stated, "the achievements of the field have exceeded the expectations of those who introduced and defined SEL 20 years ago."<sup>11</sup>

Our wish is that all schools embrace SEL so that it becomes available to students, teachers, administrators, and parents so that all members of our global learning community become kinder, more compassionate, more knowledgeable and more engaged citizens of the world.

Sincerely,

Anabel Jensen, Ph.D.  
Joshua Freedman  
Susan Stillman, Ed.D.

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11 Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015



**SEL** provides the skills for  
children and adults to **navigate**  
in a complex world



The essence of education is :

*The relationship between the teacher and the student, and the extent to which that relationship nurtures the longing of the child to matter in the world, and the longing of the teacher to nurture and fulfill that desire.*

Shriver and Buffett (2015)

# Introduction

*What are some key trends outlined in this Case?*

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The field of social emotional learning has matured to the point that best practices for implementation can be outlined with confidence.

*This document includes data on:*

## **Recent trends in SEL science, practice, and policy.**

We cite the overwhelming evidence for the correlation between SEL and academic achievement and student success. We explore key implementation strategies and new directions in the field.

## **Emerging interest in school climate and the SEL development of both students and adults.**

Recent discoveries in neuroscience confirm what progressive educators have always known; that learning is social, and that the key to social emotional learning may well lie in the relationships established between student and teacher, and between students and their peers.

## **The Benefits of SEL**

SEL infusion will allow teachers to experience renewed energy and a sense of purpose, as they too re-discover the power of connecting to students and to each other in a learning community.

A commitment to the value of SEL in schools will allow students to re-engage, to find a place in school where they can feel safe in their relationships, ready to learn and challenged to succeed.

An SEL initiative will allow administrators to hone powerful leadership skills and use these skills to nurture all stakeholders to craft schools and communities that support the development of all as caring, compassionate, motivated and successful individuals, friends, family members, and engaged citizens of the world (Patti, Senge, Madrazo, & Stern, 2015).



## How is SEL evolving to integrate new directions and practices from research?

In building a case for EQ in schools, key topics include positive outcomes attributed to SEL, teachers as learners and models, SEL for creativity, innovation, and change-making in schools. There are new directions to examine in the SEL field such as mindfulness, growth mindset, and emerging neuroscience.

SEL assessments are now available for individuals, classrooms, and to measure school climate. There is an expansion of interest before and beyond K-12 grade levels into pre-school and higher education and the emergent focus on public policy.

## EQ and SEL

### What does it mean to be smart with feelings?

Emotions are valuable signals that help us survive and thrive. When we learn how to use them, emotions support us in making more effective decisions, connect with others, find and follow purpose — and lead a more whole-hearted life.

**Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the capacity to blend thinking and feeling to make optimal decisions — which is key to having a successful relationship with yourself and others.**

In 1997, Six Seconds developed an actionable model of EQ that is practiced by hundreds of thousands of individuals, schools, and businesses throughout the world. This model of EQ begins with three important pursuits: to become more aware (noticing what you feel and do), more intentional (doing what you mean), and more purposeful (doing it for a reason).



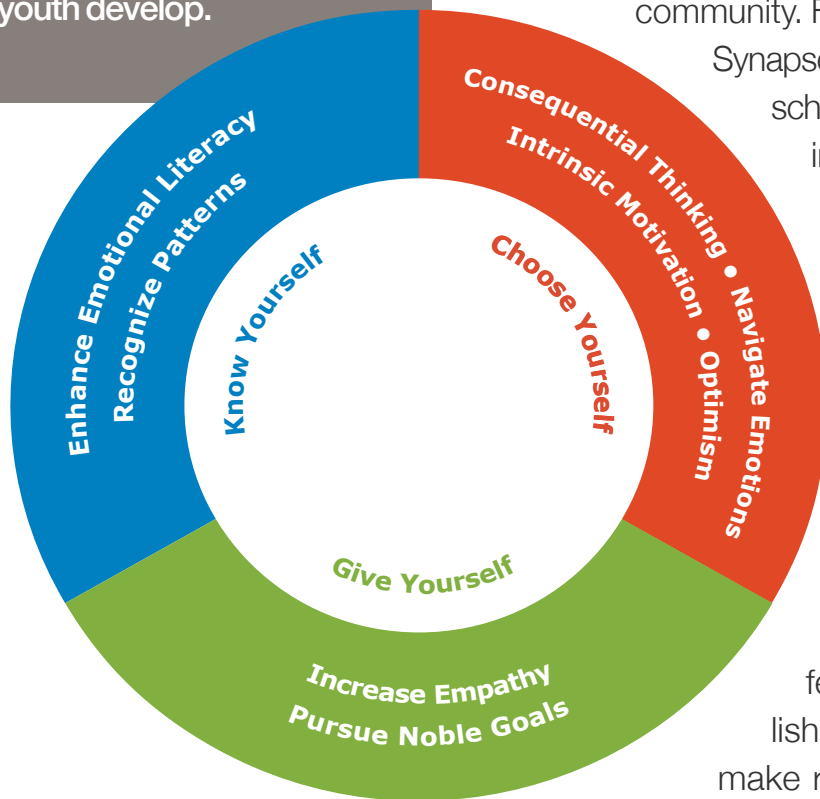
SEL encompasses skills and attitudes that help students to be successful in school and in life. It is also the process by which students and the adults who care for them (including teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators, parents) develop these same skills and the process. This allows educators to infuse social emotional learning into the fabric of the school community.

Six Seconds has a long history of developing SEL programs in collaboration with schools. Six Seconds teaches a process called *Self-Science*, developed to allow students to study themselves and develop their own skills of emotional intelligence. *Self-Science* was first published in 1978, and most recently by McCown, Jensen, Freedman, and Rideout (2010).



## The EQ Skills for SEL

This graphic represents the Six Seconds model of emotional intelligence, eight competencies that SEL helps both adults and youth develop.



Since the publication of the initial research on emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and its popularization by Goleman (1995; 2006), thousands of innovative schools and educational organizations have begun integrating SEL into their programs, their curricula and professional development, and into all aspects of their school community. For example, the Six Seconds Lab School, Synapse, serves 150 students in primary and middle school and integrates Self-Science and SEL fully into all aspects of the school. Self Science was highlighted in Goleman's 1995 book on EQ, which popularized the term for the general population.

Educators agree that SEL involves the processes through which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Elias et al., 1997; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). The development of SEL competencies enables youth (as well as educators and parents) to blend emotions and cognition to make optimal choices, improve relationships, and accomplish goals.

*SEL may be conceptualized as a series of three nested rings:*

1. individual, teachable EQ competencies for youth and adults in schools
2. classroom strategies for teachers and counselors to create safe, nurturing, inclusive, brain-based, and challenging classrooms
3. integration of SEL as part of the climate and culture of the school's community



Good science links **Social & Emotional Learning** to the following:

## Why SEL?

SEL skills are the foundation for high-performing students, classrooms, and schools (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). A meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programs, with over 270,000 students, revealed an 11% point gain in academic achievement in schools with well-implemented SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition, students who participated in high quality SEL programs were at significantly reduced risk for substance abuse, absenteeism, and other problem behaviors. Students were shown to exhibit more pro-social behavior and less emotional stress.

Decades of research have now shown that emotional intelligence and SEL are strongly linked to academic retention, avoidance of risk behaviors, and enhancement of health, happiness, and life success (Elias et al., 1997). Evidence exists that SEL can accelerate student learning by increasing students' intrinsic motivation to achieve, their ability to be attentive and engaged in their work, their satisfaction with learning, their sense of belonging, and their desire to work cooperatively with other students (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013).

### STUDENT GAINS

- ☑ Social-emotional skills
- ☑ Improved attitudes about self, others & school
- ☑ Positive classroom behavior
- ☑ 11 percentile-point gain on standardized achievement tests

**Benefits of Social Emotional Learning**  
(Durlak et al., 2011)

- ☒ Conduct problems
- ☒ Aggressive behavior
- ☒ Emotional distress

### Reduced Risks For Failure





*Successful students develop outcomes associated  
with SEL competencies, such as:*

**resilience**  
*tenacity*

**PERSEVERANCE**  
positive academic  
mindsets

# Students

Successful students develop outcomes associated with SEL competencies, such as resilience, tenacity, perseverance, and positive academic mindsets. Researchers at Six Seconds have shown that students who develop their SEL competencies will have higher scores for good health, relationship quality, personal achievement, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Jensen, Fieldeldey-van Dijk, Freedman, 2012).

Students with SEL skills also exhibit broader social emotional competencies such as interacting with diverse individuals and groups in socially skilled and respectful ways. They also contribute responsibly to their family, school, and community. While the emphasis historically has been on student achievement, experts in SEL are emphasizing the school as learning organization (Senge et al., 2000), and the importance of all stakeholders becoming socially and emotionally adept. As Brackett (2015) has said, “everyone with a face” needs to be invested in an SEL school.

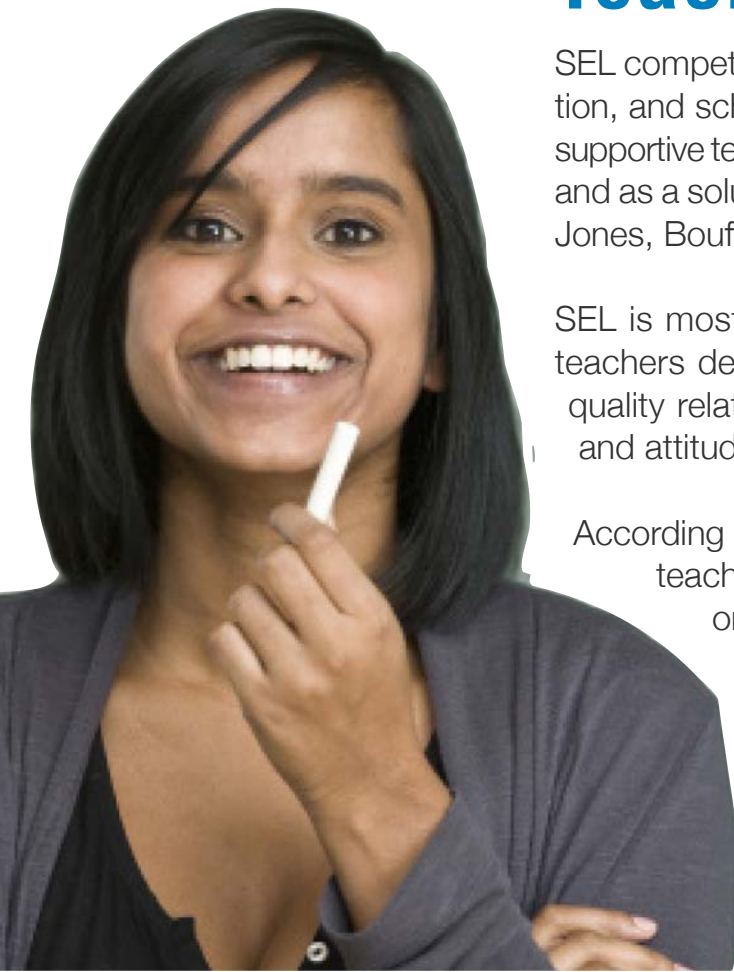


# Teachers

SEL competencies are important for student achievement, motivation, and school engagement. They are also critical ingredients for supportive teacher-student relationships; for classroom management; and as a solution to teacher burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013).

SEL is most effective when it begins “from the inside out,” with teachers deepening their own competencies, forming deep and quality relationships with students and modeling SEL behaviors and attitudes for their youth.

According to Shriver and Buffett (2015) the relationship between teacher and student is strengthened when teachers focus on their own SEL skills. The Missing Piece Report warns that to the extent that we ignore SEL, we are disengaging both teachers and students from learning and from contributing to a thriving learning community (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013).







## Parents

SEL is a comprehensive approach as it involves all the stakeholders of a school organization, including teachers, administrators, counselors, and students. Moreover, it must include parents. Putting the parents front and center is one key component of SEL best practices. When parents can use and teach a common language based on emotions, SEL is modeled and reinforced at home. With EQ skills, parents can build thriving relationships with their children (Freedman, 2016).

*When applied, these EQ competencies can contribute significantly to their children's happiness, purpose and success in life. EQ skills will help the whole family to:*

- **Understand core values and develop noble goals**
- **Increase awareness of emotion**
- **Navigate chaos and complexity**

*When parents are included in a school's SEL initiative and supported with basic knowledge about neuroscience and the child's evolving brain, positive results emerge:*

- **Parental and child optimism increases**
- **The children's potential and talents are enhanced**
- **Children learn skills to be responsible and thrive**
- **A growth mindset is encouraged**
- **Family resilience is developed**

(Seligman, 2007; Siegel & Bryson, 2012)



## School Administrators

While evidence has long existed that successful leadership in the global business community is linked to emotional intelligence competencies (Goleman, 1995; Freedman, 2010, 2012) this correlation has not always been evident to educational leaders. As an understanding of the components of school climate grows, leaders in the educational field are realizing that school reform and change requires educational leaders who develop their own social emotional competencies, which, in turn, enables them to transform others (Patti, Senge, Madrazo, & Stern, 2015).

School administrators are beginning to appreciate the value of SEL in creating classroom and school climates that are socially and emotionally safe and academically challenging. The

development of social emotional as well as cognitive skills has been called “the missing link” in school leaders’ preparation (Patti, Senge, Madrazo, & Stern, 2015). With this preparation, school administrators can be most effective as transformative leaders.

Educators are recognizing the importance of SEL school-wide initiatives directly instituted and supported by administrators. Administrators are adopting best practices that include school SEL leadership teams, SEL professional development and support for all staff, a focus on and measurement of classroom and school climate, EQ assessments for youth and adults, and integration of SEL into whole-school community, including parents.



Woodd and Killeen (2013), trained in the Six Seconds emotional intelligence model, shared their goals as school administrators:

Clearly, we need to create a culture wherein **making mistakes & taking risks** associated with learning becomes the **desirable norm**.

This **paradigm shift** has been met with enthusiasm on behalf of our teachers...

The dialogue and **tools for this transformation** are found in the literature, but are **made usable and practical** through the **Six Seconds group**...

As is the case with any discipline, **sharing a common vocabulary** to process emotions and contemplate better choices is **essential**.

When adults and students communicate with **understanding** and give voice to their feelings in calm and meaningful ways, **a culture of acceptance, trust & belonging** is the result.





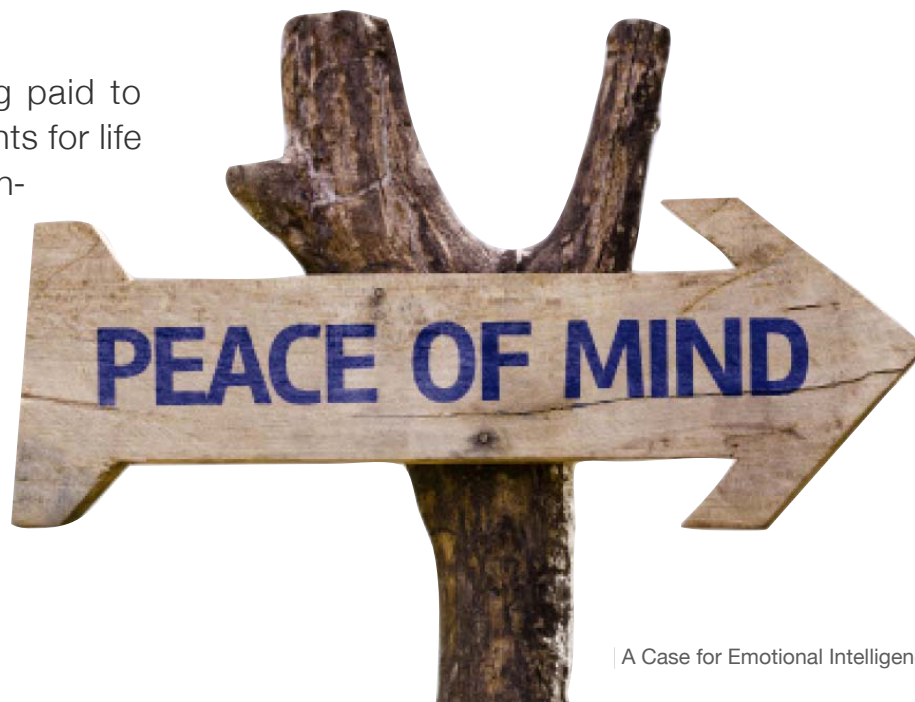
## A Learning Continuum

Greenberg et al. (2003) showed that a well-designed and implemented SEL program could positively influence youth development in health, social-emotional skills and academics. More recently a host of studies have continued to demonstrate the impact of SEL for youth problem prevention and positive health, social, and academic outcomes. Researchers and educators have demonstrated the value of SEL across the spectrum of learning contexts, from Pre-K to post-secondary, from brick and mortar to online learning, from stand-alone curriculum to after school programs, and school-family-community partnerships.

Attention is now increasingly being paid to how SEL can help to prepare students for life beyond high school and offer SEL pathways for college and career readiness. Researchers continue to find that “when schools promote academic, social and emotional learning, students will develop the attitudes and skills needed for successful engagement

in K-12 schools, in post-secondary education, and in the world of work and for constructive and engaged citizenship” (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013).

In a recent survey of 605 teachers, researchers found that more than 75% felt that a “greater focus on social and emotional learning would be a ‘major benefit’ to students because of its positive impact on workforce readiness, school attendance and graduation, life success, college preparation and academic success” (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013).





A close-up photograph of a person's eye, looking slightly to the right. The eye is green and has long, dark eyelashes. The background is a warm, orange-brown color.

**“Go for a slow and mindful walk.**

**Show them every little thing that catches your eye.**

**Notice every little thing that catches theirs.**

**Don't look for lessons or seek to teach great things.**

**Just notice. The lesson will teach itself.”**

Martin (1999)

# **Designing a New Vision for Education**

In the 1990s, the science of emotional intelligence was established. In the 2000s, the case was built. Now in the third decade, it's time to focus on application. At Six Seconds, we believe the essential ingredient is for educators to develop their own EQ. Then, we hope every school will apply SEL in an integrated, seamless and unique way that honors the school community and its diversity.

To get the benefits of SEL: build engagement with all stakeholders; develop a school wide learning community practicing emotional intelligence; measure results to guide intervention; sustain the SEL initiative; ensure that individual students, the teachers, the entire school staff, and the community obtain lasting benefit from its value.

This is an exciting time for social emotional learning.

**Join us in this powerful Vision for Education!**

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WE ARE WORKING  
TOWARD **ONE BILLION PEOPLE**  
PRACTICING EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE

[www.6seconds.org](http://www.6seconds.org)

