



# Improving student performance

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## ABSTRACT

“In too many classrooms and schools, children are missing a critical piece of their education. Year after year, and test after test, students and their teachers focus on the cognitive elements of education, while other life skills are often absent from the in-school experience. Reading and writing are intentionally taught, but not always resilience and responsibility. Arithmetic and higher math skills are embedded in school goals, but not necessarily persistence and grit. In some classrooms, an “either/or” dynamic has been established where core knowledge is taught, but not the skills to work cooperatively with others, resolve conflicts, and persevere. The research overwhelmingly shows the linkages among SEL, student outcomes, and school performance. [Many teachers now] understand that SEL promotes young people’s academic success, engagement, good behaviour, cooperation with others, problem-solving abilities, health, and wellbeing, while also preventing a variety of problems such as truancy, alcohol and drug use, bullying, and violence. In recent years, we have seen many promising signs of progress.” (Civic Enterprises, 2013)

One major challenge for educators is that not all students walk through the classroom door optimised and ready for learning in each subject. By investing time in SEL in schools, we are endowing students with the skills they need to thrive in each of their subjects. These skills are useful during their time at school, but students can also apply these skills to every area of their lives outside, and beyond, their time at school.

There is a growing body of evidence that proposes that SEL is a vital aspect of school improvement. One of the most thorough and illuminating meta-analyses of SEL was conducted for CASEL. The study included 213 different SEL programs involving 270,034 primary and high school students. The results were significant. Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviour. In addition, students who had participated in the SEL programs reflected an additional 11 percentile-point gain in achievement (Durlak, et al., 2011). Current research points to evidence that quality SEL drives learning improvement.



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Other support from the research includes a study of an SEL program entitled the Child Development Project. The study identified improvements in students' school-related attitudes and grade point averages, compared with the control groups that did not participate in the program (Battistich, Schaps & Wilson, 2004). This is supported further by a significant body of research that links a range of SEL programs to higher academic performance and other positive outcomes (Zins, et al., 2007; Elias, et al., 1997; Aronson, 2002). Current research suggests there is a strong correlation between SEL and performance. For best results, SEL will be taught through formal lessons and also embedded into the life of the school. Schools that invest quality time in SEL gain significant benefits.

Schools can no longer underestimate the value of SEL. The evidence that links SEL to improvements in behaviour, engagement, wellbeing, attitudes and academic achievement is substantial. "Schools will be most successful in their educational mission when they integrate efforts to promote children's academic, social and emotional learning" (Elias, et al., 1997). Some of the lighthouse schools in Australia have adopted this approach (such as Geelong Grammar, Brisbane Grammar and Wesley College) and are thriving as a result.

Whether we value academic achievement, workforce readiness, behaviour, engagement, positive attitudes, connectedness, school culture or persistence, the evidence points to the need for being intentional about SEL in our schools.



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