

## **Classrooms of Compassion: Heart-Centered and Skillful Response to Behavioral, Emotional, and Mental Health Problems**

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**Strand #1:** Social & Emotional Skills

**Strand #2:** Mental & Physical Health

Heart-centered, brain-based, and skillful strategies can support children with mental, developmental, and behavioral problems. Learn to broadcast a positive learning culture while addressing specific needs of children in distress. Educators, parents, paraprofessionals, administrators, and helping professionals can learn how and when to use focused skills like **MI, NLP, contracting, bibliotherapy, extra-academic programming, and metacognition** in an ethically oriented framework of sensitivity and multicultural respect.

Research supports the use of powerful instructional techniques that help students acquire critical skills for effective living. Explore strategies to diffuse a meltdown, interrupt a negative behavior loop, and support student learning. Recognize signs of distress, evaluate developmental challenges, and create layered lesson plans that address the complex social and emotional learning needs of children.

Discover how to promote the ability of children to self-calm, pay attention, handle feelings, get along with others, and contribute to a positive classroom culture. Those who serve children with developmental, emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges must employ research-based strategies to promote student success. Teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, helping

professionals, and parents can explore skillful strategies to boost capacities of students in crisis – while promoting an effective, safe, and respectful culture that supports all learners.

Children who are pushed too hard to perform academically – before being developmentally ready - may suffer serious harm that can lead to behavioral, developmental, and mental health problems. These children are at risk for developmental, behavioral, and mental health disorders that can result in dangerous behaviors like self-harm, harm to others, suicidality, and increased engagement in risky behaviors that can lead to injury, illness, and even death.

The most important tasks of childhood and adolescence are learning how to cooperate and negotiate with others, understand and handle feelings of self and others, have compassion for self and others, be in effective relationships, and use cognitive processes to navigate the complex demands of family, school, community, and beyond. The recent focus on standardized tests and a more rigorous academic curriculum have come at a cost. Exclusive focus on academic learning in children who lack the socioemotional fortitude to self-regulate in the classroom has led to school violence, increased mental health challenges, and a breakdown in the safety and morality of school culture.

Learn how to turn on a child's capacities for creativity, focus, comprehension, critical thinking, and emotional self-regulation. Enhance curriculum with extra-academic content that streamlines academic and socioemotional learning and self-regulation of students. Engage all children in a culture of respect and sensitivity that models effective citizenship and peaceful co-existence.

## **Evidence**

Emerging methods of scientific investigation include cutting edge models of neuroscience that overlap with research across the domains of psychology, childhood development, and education. *Classroom of Compassion: Heart-Centered & Skillful Response to Mental Health, Behavioral & Emotional Problems* represents a synthesis of the literature with a focus on unique opportunities to employ evidence-based strategies in a revised paradigm that now recognizes the importance of social and emotional learning of the child as a pathway to promote the learning and development of individual students while promoting a safe and effective school culture.

Following is a discuss of pertinent topics that include empirically supported strategies, concepts, and techniques to promote student health, learning, and development.

### **Narrative Discussion of Evidence-Based Support of Presentation**

Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are challenged with destabilization of the social fabric of communities that has led to school violence and domestic terrorism. Inclusion education presents new challenges as students who suffer from emotional, developmental, behavioral, and mental health challenges are being served in the mainstream setting. These phenomena are taking place against a backdrop of budgetary shortages, teacher layoffs, and increasingly complex demands on assessment and learning of students to achieve state and federal academic objectives. While these myriad challenges require complex and potent solutions, individual classrooms, schools, and systems are able to step forward in a positive direction with regard to promoting the social and emotional capacities of students. Social and Emotional Learning [SEL] programs are documented to increase broad capacities and outcomes of individual students as well as promote safe environments that support learning of all children.

Traditional concepts of nature versus nurture have been replaced by modern science. The new science explains an interdependence among the myriad environmental and genetic factors of the individual in a way that opens the door for unlimited potential for each human (Perlmutter, 2013). Even genetic coding is now understood to be a statement of probability, not of determinism, that is richly impacted by quality of life, environment, and relationships of the individual (Perlmutter, 2013). As such, schools are implicit in either promoting a healthy epigenetic evolution of the individual student toward desired outcomes such as eudemonic well-being, self-determination, effective life skills, academic competence, and functional socioemotional intelligence, or promoting a negative situation in which students experience a frustration in sense of well-being, illness, mental health, emotional and behavioral problems, academic failure, interruption of socioemotional development, and lack of capacity for self-determination and independent living. Recent research has promoted the foundations of epigenetics as instrumental in potentially promoting brain health (Perlmutter, 2013). At the heart of this concept is the awareness that children must be protected, nurtured, and taught the social and emotional skills and capacities that will result in successful academic and developmental

outcomes. Research highlights how repeated exposure to trauma and abuse in and out of school settings increases likelihood of some students becoming repeated violent juvenile offenders (Fox, Perez, Cass, Baglivio, & Epps, 2015).

Combining the practical mandate to protect students, staff, faculty, and family members from school violence perpetrated by students with the new knowledge of epigenetics, schools must clearly articulate a culture of social and emotional learning (SEL) competency and broad multi-cultural competence, sensitivity, and responsiveness in order to promote favorable learning, developmental, and safety outcomes. A competent social and emotional learning culture is no longer optional for school systems that wish to promote the safety, health, and well-being of students in conjunction with academic instruction.

While the exigent circumstances surrounding the need for an SEL Curriculum and resultant shift in school culture are clear, the economics require investigation. Recent research and projections for cost benefit analysis of SEL training and implementation point to numerous economic benefits (Belfield et al., 2015). Significant cost benefits stem from improved functioning of the individual across various settings, reducing economic demands on the community from educational, medical, rehabilitation, judicial, correctional, and mental health expenses (Belfield et al., 2015). Cost benefit analysis of potential savings for schools that implement SEL protocols include financial and humanistic benefits (Belfield et al., 2015). Some of the monetizable benefits of SEL implementation include the following categories: Mental Health, Personal Behavior (Belfield et al., 2015, p. 57), Substance Use, Delinquency, Health, and Social and Emotional Skills (Belfield et al., 2015, p. 59).

Students who develop better emotional self-regulation tend to exhibit improved behavior, which reduces financial expenditures for special education, disciplinary, and rehabilitation related services while also improving the emotional state and overall mood of teachers who have fewer violent and recalcitrant students in their classrooms. While the benefit of improved teacher experiences in the classroom did not directly translate into economic gain in the Belfield et al. (2015) report, the benefits are linked to greater teacher effectiveness and productivity and may potentially reduce the time teachers take off from school due to conditions aggravated by stress. Research supports the benefits of an SEL-type program for improving academic, behavioral, and

other outcomes of students in urban communities (Bavarian et al., 2013; CASEL, 2013). One study specifically demonstrated the impact of a school wide program to improve incidence of delinquency and school violence (Botvin, Griffin, & Nichols, 2006). A direct relationship between length of intervention and improvement of student outcomes was documented, signaling the need for follow-through and fidelity to school-wide and district-wide SEL program implementation (Botvin et al., 2006).

Implementation of an initiative during early childhood may hold the greatest promise for student outcomes and has been linked to significant social and economic benefits to society (Cohen, Piquero, & Jennings, 2010). Broad gains from SEL programs have been documented across various cultural, economic, and geographic settings. One study clearly documented gains in student autonomy, prosocial behavior, cooperation of females in groups or dyads, and overall egalitarian thinking (Frey, Nolen, Van Schoiack Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005). A heart-centered and skilled approach to SEL incorporates innovative strategies that leverage unique learning, developmental, and motivational factors of stakeholders to maximize student gains.

Predictors of violence of youth include factors that are directly implicated in SEL programming. Furthermore, “Multicomponent interventions targeting identification of shared predictors and constellations of risk factors may be more effective in preventing violence than those that target single risk factors” (Hawkins et al., 2000, pp. 7-8). Broad SEL measures promise to mitigate factors that are linked to youth violence such as: Aggressiveness, concentration problems, hyperactivity, academic failure, involvement in additional forms of antisocial behaviors, and low bonding in school (Hawkins et al., 2000, p. 2). The aforementioned body of research indicates the ability for broad SEL programming to improve such student-related factors, and may reasonably mediate improvements in outcomes for student violence.

While the majority of SEL-oriented areas of focus are clearly defined by the literature, some confusion still exists in the area of moral and ethical development of children. Exclusion of moral and ethical development constitutes a significant lacuna within the scope of educational practice, and may constitute a form of *social injustice* as children may be unable to fully engage in the democracy without a foundational understanding of related morals and ethics (Cohen, 2006). Practically, many school rules and boundaries directly stem from the body of law, further

supporting the notion that children require instruction in matters related to lawfulness and related values. Logistically, moral and ethical considerations may be reasonably approximated by a discussion of *core values*. CASEL (2013) listed the ability to identify *values* as one critical capacity of children that must be promoted by an SEL program. Values remain an undetermined factor as a result of attempts to separate church and state; yet, certain basic core values can be lawfully extrapolated by consideration of basic laws and humanitarian mandates as set forth by the Geneva Convention, and the United Nations. A strictly legalistic and humanistic interpretation of *core values* may serve to approximate the moral and ethical curriculum that has been separated from the educational system. As such, *core values* are a critical component of the *Social Justice Domain* within a responsive SEL strategy.

### **School System Level**

Social and emotional capacities of children are transmitted and reinforced through complex social interactions. Students who navigate the academic and sociocultural school environment typically possess specific social and emotional knowledge, skills, and awareness that facilitate academic success. Arslan (2014) demonstrated that self-regulation was a predictor of student capacity for metacognition. Those children who struggle with academic learning, social interaction, and self-regulation tend to lack a set of knowledge, skills, and awareness that would otherwise promote success. An effective SEL curriculum addresses those specific capacities that are likely to promote the learning, growth, and development of students at the individual, class, grade, and school levels.

The school system is the environmental repository of the culture, wisdom, and insight that represents the complex network of skill, awareness, and ability to which students must become acculturated. The social and emotional capacities that each child brings represent a hodgepodge that is not necessarily focused on achieving academic and developmental success. The school system must broadcast a system of social and emotional awareness that does translate into academic and developmental success for the individual student and the school body.

Meanwhile, Thomas (2014) explored the abysmal circumstances facing young African American students from disadvantaged communities. The United States has the largest incarcerated

population in the world, with a preponderance of those imprisoned being African American males (Thomas, 2014). All efforts to create a consistent school- and district-wide SEL Culture must address the role that the educational system plays in contributing to the number of African American males who are currently incarcerated (Thomas, 2014). Dialogue must extend toward teachers, students, families, and other community stakeholders. The mechanisms that place a disproportional number of African American men in prisons must be identified and amended to create a more egalitarian educational environment. One culturally responsive SEL approach involves the exploration of hip-hop music to investigate the embedded social influences of the art form (Irby, Hall, & Hill, 2013).

The most prominent and foundational theorists who have elucidated Social and Emotional Learning [SEL] processes of children include Albert Bandura, John Bowlby, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Noam Chomsky, Erik Erikson, Howard Gardner, Arnold P. Goldstein, Lawrence Kohlberg, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky (Braaten, 2003; TAFE-NSW, 2010). Broad development of children is supported by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center initiatives (Rentner & Price, 2014). The spirit of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center is inherent in this SEL program, which offers extended before- and after-school programming to advance social and emotional learning outcomes of students in alignment with foundational developmental childhood theory (Rentner & Price, 2014). School systems must maintain pro-family attitude and promote collaboration among families, educators, and other professionals.

Meanwhile, children are sensitive to subtle rifts in the SEL school culture. The attitudes of teachers and other stakeholders play a critical role in the social and emotional learning of students. Social and political schisms can lead to a lack of organizational coherence, which can transmit to individual children and student bodies. School system leadership can embrace the existence of disagreement and conflict while still upholding an effective learning environment; a competent SEL culture can exist in the presence of discord. Tolerance painted with sociocultural respect and responsiveness are key components that facilitate a wholesome SEL culture even in the presence of social disagreement and conflict. Implementing an SEL curriculum must be instigated at the top and infused into all layers and strands of the educational system, both vertically and horizontally. Administrators are encouraged to work through a formal process of

identifying and clarifying SEL goals and objectives, and furthermore integrate these into the existing statements of mission, value, and purpose.

### **SEL at the School Level (Including School-Level Administration, Staff, Faculty)**

The process by which children acquire Social and Emotional Learning [SEL] capacities is mediated by complex social processes. The quality of SEL culture in a school mediates the extent to which school-wide and classroom-wide social and emotional capacities are transmitted successfully to students. The spirit of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center is inherent in this SEL program, which offers extended before- and after-school programming to advance social and emotional learning outcomes of students (Rentner & Price, 2014). The schools maintain a pro-family attitude and promote the collaboration among families, educators, and other professionals to promote SEL growth and development of students.

Evidence based strategies for promoting SEL capacities of students are firmly rooted across the domains of psychology and education. SEL programming must coincide with foundational developmental knowledge. The Sociocultural Learning Theory of Lev Vygotsky and the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura elucidate how schools can leverage the rich benefits of socially-mediated learning and development (TAFE-NSW, 2010). The SEL curriculum must concomitantly express foundational wisdom about how children develop cognitively and morally. Jean Piaget's cognitive and moral development models and Lawrence Kohlberg's moral developmental model articulate the process and general timing of development of critical capacities that relate to SEL curriculum (TAFE-NSW, 2010). An effective SEL curriculum must simultaneously coincide with educational environmental systems theories, such as the Ecological Systems Theory of Uri Bronfenbrenner (TAFE-NSW, 2010). A compilation of these and other theories and foundational knowledge must support a definitive SEL curriculum that also incorporates Arnold Goldstein's insights into how children learn social and emotional concepts (Braaten, 2003). A rational SEL curriculum is firmly rooted in the theories and foundations of knowledge represented by these developmental pioneers whose work continues to inform the educational and psychological communities.



Further enhancement of a SEL-oriented approach involves an emergent focus within the programming format. From a practical perspective, an Emergent Curriculum component of the SEL programming will seek out and develop relationships with stakeholders who are able to promote the SEL outcomes of students and schools. At all levels, those individuals who demonstrate outstanding insight, initiative, and capacity to promote SEL programming leading to SEL growth and development of students will be invited to participate in an SEL Task Force to represent an ongoing collaborative consultation among all the levels of stakeholders including students and families. Members of school leadership and boards at the school level will be included on SEL Task Force rosters as appropriate.

### **SEL at the Classroom Level (Including Teachers and Students)**

Teachers shoulder the direct primary responsibility for promoting the learning, growth, and development of students. The educational curriculum has focused almost exclusively on academics. Minor exclusions include attempts to promote character education as well as IDEA mandates to address social and emotional learning of students being served under an IEP. These and other complex factors have contributed to the breakdown of cohesion, respect, and safety within schools and classrooms. Students necessarily face myriad dangers ranging from drug use and bullying to violence and prejudice throughout the school year. Children maintaining constant vigilance on their safety are not fully committed to the learning process. Meanwhile, the anxiety and stress of unsafe and unfriendly school systems interfere with children's natural developmental processes.

Beyond this foundational recognition of the challenges facing children lies a second and equally important fact. SEL capacities allow children to develop a wide spectrum of self-regulatory and interpersonal skill and awareness that improves academic learning and socio-emotional development of students. Research of the CASEL (2015) model firmly demonstrates how implementation of a cogent SEL curriculum is likely to improve student performance and classroom outcomes, generating a positive impact on finances.

Teachers are invited to explore active implementation of a functional SEL curriculum in order to maximize learning outcomes and behavior of students. The changes in children who receive

effective SEL instruction include improved emotional self-regulation, compliance, academic performance, and broad socialization. As teachers observe these benefits of SEL implementation, they are better able to achieve academic objectives within the classroom.

The spirit of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center is inherent in a functional SEL program, which must offer extended before- and after-school programming to advance social and emotional learning outcomes of students (Rentner & Price, 2014). Teachers maintain a pro-family attitude and promote the collaboration with families and other professionals to promote SEL growth and development of students. Community collaborations among teachers, students, and parents (as cited in Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Keith, 1999) must offer to achieve mutually desirable goals that are otherwise unachievable in the absence of the collaborative initiative (Hands, 2014). To this end, teachers must establish and maintain effective bi-directional communication with parents, utilizing translators to ease communication with parents who possess a diversity of linguistic or communication style. Consistent, high quality, supportive emails, newsletters, phone calls, handwritten notes, parent-teacher conferences, and parent workshops will educate parents on ways to collaboratively promote the learning and development of students (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011). Teachers are able to provide scaffolding and meaningful feedback to those parents who actively strive to participate and make a difference in the classroom or the community (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011).

### **SEL at the Family Level (Including Parents and Family Members of Students)**

Children acquire their first introduction to social and emotional competencies in the home; awareness is expanded as children explore beyond the home setting to include public and professional settings as well as school environments. As such, families are critical stakeholders in the Social and Emotional Learning of students. Family members [parents] are encouraged to take an active role in co-creating a SEL Culture that spans the home-school-community environment, potentially promoting the quality of the child's global environment as reflected by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (TASE-NSW, 2010).

Parents can be valuable collaborators in helping mold the capacities and competencies of their own children through family-school collaborative initiatives. The school can scaffold the

capacities of parents to promote their children's SEL growth and development through an interactive curriculum that mirrors the targeted SEL culture. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center concept sets forth a model that creates a vital center for support in the school that stretches beyond the span of the typical school day (James-Burdumy, Dynarski, Moore, Deke, & Mansfield, 2005). Parents receive training and ongoing support to understand school policies, testing and assessment protocols, disciplinary and special education procedures, and best ways to participate in the classroom or in the community to promote desirable student outcomes (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011).

Parents are sources of extracurricular insight, support, and resources that can facilitate student SEL growth and development. The lines of communication between teachers and parents must remain open and bi-directional (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011). Translators must be utilized as necessary to promote parental involvement and effective parent-school communication. To further parental involvement as stakeholders in their children's education and development, parents are invited to participate in an Emergent Curriculum component of the program in order to increase their sense of connection to the program as well as expand the relevance and impact on the school, student body, classrooms, and individual students. Parents are likely to be more willing to engage in collaborative community initiatives with schools (as cited in Hargreaves & Fullen 1998; Keith, 1999) if the intended outcomes of such collaborations reflect a shared agenda that is otherwise unachievable in the absence of the initiative (Hands, 2014)..

### Unique Aspects of SEL Alignment

A competent SEL approach can transmit concepts and capacities to students to promote resilience, flexibility, and capacity to thrive in the school setting. Eudaimonic well-being is a complex concept that represents the experience of living a good and meaningful life from a subjective and personal perspective (Kiaei & Reio, 2014). While students may not be prepared to fully embrace the notion of eudaimonic well-being, they are able to grasp components of the concept that are within developmental reach. To this end, students may be introduced to eudaimonic well-being through a curriculum of metacognition and self-actualization (Kiaei & Reio, 2014). Students who explore eudaimonic well-being in increasing intensity may be more likely to progress toward self-actualization later in life.

Resilience is another aspect of the intrapersonal dimension of the child that exhibits bidirectional correlation with mental health, and is thus a critical factor of students (Khanlou & Wray, 2014). Resilience of child and family is also implicated in improved learning and developmental outcomes for individuals from extreme poverty and other disadvantaged populations. Additionally, resilience of students is loosely connected to social development (Khanlou & Wray, 2014), further emphasizing the importance of promoting resilience of students. The CASEL (2015) requirements for SEL programs to promote capacities for impulse control, stress management, and ability to persevere to overcome obstacles are all promoted by resilience of learners. Supporting students to correctly identify their orientation within society with respect to gender, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, culture, ethnicity, racialized status, legal status, ability vs. disability status, linguistic capabilities, etc. promotes the capacity for resilience across many groups (Khanlou & Wray, 2014). This process of self-identification according to various classes or groups synergistically promotes student capacities toward self-regulation (Khanlou & Wray, 2014). According to Panter-Brick and Leckman (2013) resilience “is the process of harnessing biological, psychosocial, structural and cultural resources to sustain well-being” (p. 335) and may lead to positive changes in neurocognition and epigenetic shifts of learners. Self-compassion is a quality that has been positively correlated with increased resilience (Neff, 2011). Resilience along with self-determination, resourcefulness, and motivation contribute to the development of student capacities for academic and personal goal setting, planning, implementing and evaluating processes.

Play has long been a fundamental component of education, especially in early learning settings. Teachers are encouraged to engage in and model play within the classroom as well as encourage play at home in order to promote academic learning in addition to social and emotional development of students (Cohen, 2002). Investigation of the role of playfulness in adults revealed a correlation with extroversion and improved emotional stability, demonstrating that the benefits of play continue throughout and beyond childhood (Proyer & Jehle, 2013). Play is a developmental goal while it also supports attainment of other goals such as linguistic, social, and motor development (Lifter, Foster-Sanda, Arzamarski, Briesch, & McClure, 2011).

### **Social Justice with SEL**

Citizenship is a foundational capacity that allows students to lawfully thrive in accordance with prevailing social and institutional rules. Children cannot be reasonably expected to intuit laws and regulations through the course of a typical childhood. Cohen (2006) suggested that the lack of a firm grasp of what constitutes lawful conduct may interfere with a student's ability to function within the democracy. Promoting a culture of lawfulness is one SEL intervention that is documented to promote student lawful behavior (Morin, 2000). Meanwhile, core values that articulate the social beliefs of the democracy through interpretation of legal code may be critical to the academic, social, and emotional learning of children (Cohen, 2006). Morin (2000) discussed instruction about lawful behavior within the context of crime and corruption as a remedy to negative influences of drug dealers and other criminals in a community. Teachers require substantive training to prepare to lead a classroom that successfully transmits a culture of lawfulness (Morin, 2000).

The concept of lawful and humanitarian orientation is represented by the microcosm of the school or classroom. Students are able to explore self-governance, foundations for lawmaking, and implications for rights of individuals. Student government is an extracurricular activity that can promote student awareness of matters of fairness, humanitarianism, equality, and legality. Humanitarian values are duly expressed within the context of mandates of the United Nations as well as the Geneva Convention. Together with a basic interpretation of values as expressed in the Constitution of the United States, these provide further support for a core value system that will help students explore personal convictions while navigating lawful conduct. SEL programming has been documented to promote egalitarian thinking of students (Frey et al., 2005). Extensions of basic values of humanitarianism and egalitarianism may promote student concepts of peace, philanthropy, and philosophy.

A SEL-oriented curriculum can also promote student learning within interpersonal dimensions, which explore practical matters related to young children. SEL programming for Preschool through Kindergarten must include direct instruction, modeling, and support to promote capacities for sharing and taking turns. These simple learning objectives will open the door for a more potent curriculum for grades 2 and above. Students must further develop emotional literacy through interpersonal channels, which will support them in expressing their emotions in a socially appropriate fashion across a broad range of settings and situations.

Authenticity is a reconciliation between feeling and intent that reflects a sincere perspective that is the result of personal reflection and growth (Salmela, 2005). The capacity for authenticity may open the door for students to better recognize and understand their own emotions and reactions, without which students would be unable to achieve this CASEL (2013) mandate to be capable of recognizing and being able to discuss emotions of the self and of others. The ability to accurately identify emotions of self and others requires an emotional intelligence of students that is critical to establishing and maintaining supportive relationships with others and may reflexively promote metacognitive awareness (Arslan, 2014). Meanwhile, leaders who demonstrate authenticity and emotional leadership are rated higher in idealized leadership capacities (Ilies, Curseu, Dimotakis, & Spitzmuller, 2013). This makes authenticity a valuable capacity of administrators and school leaders who wish to exert a positive influence on the development of faculty and staff. Authenticity may be even more important for teachers as they attempt to exert similar positive influence on students and family for the purpose of promoting learning and development outcomes of students.

Other capacities surrounding interpersonal development include compassion and empathy which are closely related to tolerance. Communication skills are crucial to interactions among humans, and can be enhanced through exploration of collaboration, team building, and development of social connections. Further enhancement of communication skills may include training in active listening and reflective responding with development and refinement of capacities for conflict resolution. Students can be further encouraged to develop social, collaborative, and interactive capacities through student-community initiatives that promote SEL gains (Hands, 2014).

### **Unique Strategies of a SEL-Aligned Approach**

Teachers are already stretched to the breaking point with challenging student-teacher ratios and a lack of support that was historically available from paraprofessional and other ancillary staff. At the same time, additional requirements for EIP, RTI, IEP, and Common Core objectives further complicate a teacher's job. Mandatory standardized testing requirements are concomitantly expanding to take up more instructional time from teachers. As a result, an effective SEL model must be streamlined with the existing curriculum in order to maximize academic gains.

A final foundational component of evidence-based SEL programming to promote a positive school culture involves the use of “motivational interviewing”, and other enhanced communication and motivational strategies, with students and parents. Teachers who are trained and competent in this communication- and motivation-enhancing set of tools are able to successfully move through barriers to learning and development that are connected to student resistance, lack of cooperation, failure to engage in the curriculum, and lack of direction or motivation (Shelton, 2010). As educators are able to successfully engage students through Motivational Interviewing and other enhanced communication and motivation strategies, less time will be wasted on student behavior problems and distractions of students who fail to comply with classroom rules and directions.

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