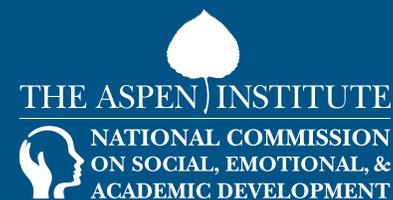


# The Evidence Base for How We Learn



## Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

Under the aegis of the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, leading scholars in neuroscience, education research, medicine, economics, and psychology have united to articulate a scientific consensus on the evidence base for how we learn. They've developed and endorsed the following set of consensus statements of evidence that affirm the interconnectedness of social, emotional, and cognitive development as central to the learning process.

### I. Social, Emotional, and Academic Development Matters

**Social, emotional, and cognitive competencies develop throughout our lives and are essential to success in our schools, workplaces, homes, and communities and allow individuals to contribute meaningfully to society.**

A strong body of evidence shows that high-quality preschool and school-based programming focused on social and emotional development make a positive difference for children's academic achievement and behavior.<sup>i,ii</sup> Children with stronger social and emotional competencies are also more likely to enter and graduate from college, succeed in their careers, have positive work and family relationships, better mental and physical health, reduced criminal behavior, and to become engaged citizens.<sup>iii</sup>

**Social, emotional, and cognitive capabilities are fundamentally intertwined—they are interdependent in their development, experience, and use.**

Studies confirm that academic skills in the first years of schooling are entwined with the ability to regulate emotions and behavior and to engage in positive social interactions with peers and adults, and that academic behaviors in the later years (e.g., attendance) are closely tied to students' social, emotional, and behavioral functioning.<sup>iv,v</sup> Furthermore, studies indicate that classroom instruction and academic activities that connect rigorous cognitive challenges with social interaction or that spark students' emotions result in deeper, longer-term learning.<sup>vi</sup>

**Engaging in effective social and emotional learning-informed programs and practices can improve teacher effectiveness and well-being.**

There is compelling evidence that a focus on social and emotional skills is central to effective classroom management, and there is growing evidence that interventions addressing teachers' social and emotional competencies lead to improvements in a variety of indicators of teacher well-being including reductions in stress and burnout.<sup>vii,viii</sup>

### II. Social and Emotional Skills Are Malleable

**Social, emotional, and cognitive competencies can be taught and developed throughout childhood, adolescence, and beyond.**

Social, emotional, and cognitive skills are not predetermined by one's genetic blueprint. Rather, our genes interact with experience so that these skills emerge, grow, and change over time, beginning in the earliest years and continuing throughout childhood and adolescence.<sup>ix</sup>

**Contexts and experiences can be shaped in ways that positively affect children's social and emotional learning and their academic and life outcomes, and there are programs and practices that have been proven to be effective at improving social and emotional development.**

Research has demonstrated that students who participated in evidence-based social and emotional learning programs showed significant improvements in social and emotional learning skills, behavior, attitudes, and academic performance, as well as reduced emotional distress and conduct problems.<sup>x</sup>

### III. Schools Play a Central Role in Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

**Schools can have a significant influence on social, emotional, and academic development. The wider community (families, community institutions, etc.) must be engaged to enhance the strength, depth, and pace of acquisition of these competencies.**

Early childhood educational settings and schools are a primary and critical context for intentionally and rigorously building and cultivating social, emotional, and academic skills. At the same time, including families and out-of-school-time organizations in efforts to ensure healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development allows for learning and reinforcement to continue across contexts.<sup>xi</sup>

**Social, emotional, and academic development is an essential part of pre-K-12 education that can transform schools into places that foster academic excellence, collaboration and communication, creativity and innovation, empathy and respect, civic engagement, and other skills and dispositions needed for success in the 21st Century.**

One of the most enduring and substantial effects of social and emotional learning is change in the culture and climate of classrooms, including organizational, instructional, and behavior management practices.<sup>xii</sup> Such interventions not only shape individual outcomes, but also broader, setting-level outcomes tied to a range of important school experiences.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Effective implementation is necessary to improve outcomes and for all children to benefit.**

Evidence indicates that high-quality implementation is positively associated with better student outcomes, and conditions for effective implementation are known. For example, social and emotional learning should be developmentally and culturally aligned to the needs of students and integrated across settings, including the school, home, and community.<sup>xv</sup>

**For social, emotional, and academic development to thrive in schools, teachers and administrators need training and**

**support to understand and model these skills, behaviors, knowledge, and beliefs.**

Students are more likely to benefit from social and emotional learning when staff receive training, and the program or strategy is implemented well and embedded in everyday teaching and learning.<sup>xvi</sup>

### IV. Focusing on Social and Emotional Development Is Worth It

**Supporting social, emotional, and academic development is a wise use of public resources, because there can be long-term social and economic benefits to society when schools implement and embed evidence-based programs that promote social and emotional as well as cognitive development.**

A benefit-cost analysis of prominent social and emotional interventions revealed a positive return on investment averaging a yield of \$11 in long-term benefits over a range of outcomes for every \$1 invested.<sup>xvii</sup> Evidence indicates that individuals with higher social and emotional competencies tend to have higher labor market earnings, and that these skills are likely to lead to gains in labor productivity and have important value from a public-health perspective.<sup>xviii xvix xx</sup>

**All students, regardless of their background, benefit from positive social and emotional development. At the same time, building, nurturing, and integrating social, emotional, and academic development in pre-K-12 can be a part of achieving a more equitable society.**

Interventions designed to build social and emotional skills have been shown to be effective for all children and youth, regardless of geographical setting (e.g., urban, suburban, rural) or socio-demographic background.<sup>xxi</sup> At the same time, it is important to recognize that this work is especially relevant for supporting low-income or at-risk students, providing them with a set of skills that can buffer exposure to adverse experiences or difficulty in school.<sup>xxii</sup>

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Citations are available online at <http://as.pn/evidencebasefootnotes>. The full list of endorsing scientists as well as a research brief outlining the comprehensive body of evidence that supports each statement is available at <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/evidence-base-learn/>.