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The application of social-emotional learning principles to a special education environment

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Abstract

Social-Emotional Learning plays a uniquely important role for students with special needs and the staff that serve them. This paper examines the strengths and challenges of students in two categories of special education: students classified as Emotionally Disturbed (ED), and students classified with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the social-emotional domain of functioning. In addition, the paper will present a model of incorporating Social-Emotional Standards and development through a school-wide approach in a large special education district in New York City and present policy implications for both general education and special education environments. The impact of this model on behavior, social-emotional skill development, and school practices is discussed.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, emotional disturbance, autistic spectrum disorder, special education, social skills

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Special education in the United States was granted statutory rights by Public Law 94-142 (Education of All Handicapped Children Act) (Abeson & Zettel, 1977), later codified as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 (US Department of Education, 2008). This act, which required public schools to provide a "free and appropriate education"to all children, ushered in a new era in public education in America. While the way schools go about meeting the requirements of this act is constantly evolving, one thing remains clear, challenges in the social-emotional domain of functioning is often a challenge for students receiving special education services. Therefore, explicitly attending to students' social-emotional development is an important foundation of any program educating students with disabilities.

Emotional disturbance and autism spectrum disorders

According to IDEIA (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), students can be classified with an Emotional Disturbance if they exhibit one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (http://idea.ed.gov, 2013)

A review of the definition for Emotional Disturbance points to difficulties that lie primarily in the student's social-emotional and behavioral domain of functioning. Across all age groups, students with ED make up 8.6% (6.2% elementary/middle school; 11.2% secondary school) of the special education population (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Within this context, research generally concludes that children classified as ED have the worst prognosis in terms of high school graduation, academic achievement, and future problems with anti-social behavior (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2008; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005).

The challenges of students with ED are influenced by a number of characteristics that have an effect on their educational success. Compared to all other students receiving public education, children with ED are more likely to be economically disadvantaged (33.2%), male (80%), and from single parent households (38%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Additionally, many students classified as ED have significant difficulties with language. A number of researchers have established the link between anti-social behavior and language-related variables. Language, behavior, and social skills overlap in early development, with each domain contributing to emergent competence in the others (Guralnick & Neville, 1997; Kaiser, Hancock, Cai, Foster, & Hester, 2000). Benner, Nelson, and Epstein (2002) identified two principal findings of relevance to this discussion. First, children with receptive (understanding language) problems are at a higher risk for anti-social behavior than children with speech disorders or speech-language disorders these students were rated the most aggressive by parents and teachers. Second, difficulty in initiating and maintaining interpersonal relationships has been suggested as a mediating variable in the association between language deficits and anti-social behavior, with

aggressive children using less verbal communication and more direct physical actions to solve interpersonal problems (Benner et al., 2002).

When applied to students classified with ED, the estimation of prevalence rates of language deficits range from 66% to 91%, in addition to an estimated 71% having difficulty in pragmatics (rules related to language use in a social setting such as speaker-listener relationship, turn-taking, eye contact etc.). Up to 90% of language deficits in students classified as ED are undiagnosed (Benner et al., 2002). Indeed, students with ED often come from a convergence of factors known to have a negative impact on social-emotional development. However, it is not just students with ED that demonstrate a concordance of social-emotional and language difficulties.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are a group of developmental disabilities that often are diagnosed during early childhood and can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges over a lifetime. Students with ASD share some similar symptoms, such as problems with social interaction, problems with communication, and highly focused interests or repetitive activities (Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 2012). While not considered one of the high incidence disorders (Specific Learning Disabilities, Speech/Language Impairments, Intellectual Disabilities, and Emotional Disturbance) that comprise more than 90% of all children in special education programs, the rapid increase of children diagnosed with ASD (78% increase from 2002-2008) warrants special attention to understand the strengths and challenges of working with this group of students from a social-emotional framework (Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 2012 ; U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

There is no medical test for ASD. It is diagnosed based on structured observations by medical or psychological professionals. While children with ASD demonstrate a wide range of strengths and challenges (62% of children on the Autism Spectrum have typical IQ scores), there are some shared characteristics that characterize students with an ASD diagnosis. With regard to language, students with ASD often have challenges with receptive language (they struggle to comprehend spoken language, gesture, facial expression and other social nuances), expressive language (children with autism who can speak will often say things that have no meaning or that seem out of context in conversations with others or repeat words he or she has heard repeatedly), and language pragmatics (difficulty with language rules in the social context) (Wilkinson, 1998). In the interpersonal domain, students with ASD have difficulties with initiating interactions, maintain reciprocity, sharing enjoyment, taking another person's perspective and inferring the interests of others (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007). Considering that the large cognitive range of students on the Autistic Spectrum, it is deficits in social-emotional domains of functioning (impairments of social interaction, social language and communication, and social imagination) that characterize students with ASD (Mundy, 2007).

Interventions

Treatment approaches for students classified as ED and ASD often rely on direct instruction around the skills that impair their social and emotional functioning. Literature reviews and meta-analysis of the literature identified four major concerns with social skills interventions as applied to students classified as ED (Chen, 2006; Forness, Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, & Rutherford, 1999). First is a concern around maintenance and generalization students do not use the skills in different settings with different people

across time. Second are concerns around time, intensity, and opportunity to practice in natural settings the length and depth of packaged social skills programs is often lacking, considering the severity of the social problems of the students. Additionally, the skills are often not practiced in the settings in which they are expected to be put to use. There is also a concern with the failure to discriminate between social competence and social skills students who master skills but fail to employ them reflect a performance deficit, not a skill deficit. Last, is a concern around the process used to identify skills to remediate in practice, the targeting of social skills for instruction is often subjective, with little or cursory empirical justification of their need in identified students (Chen, 2006).

Although the etiology of the disorders are different and there is a wider range of developmental ability, students with ASD and students classified as ED must both be able to identify and adhere to a similar set of social-emotional expectations in order to be independent and contributing members of society. As such, social-emotional interventions for students with ASD share broadly common outcome goals and characteristics, as well as common critiques, as those for students classified as ED.

Interventions for students with ASD often include a mix of speech supports, focused on communication and language, and social skills supports. As noted above, there is a reciprocal relationship between these competencies. Indeed, the science of teaching social skills to students with ASD is robust and while there have been many achievements in teaching social skills to students on a one-to-one basis, a meta-analytic review of social skills training on a classroom level yielded a wide variety of results, ranging from ineffectual to highly effective (Bellini et al., 2007). Rao, Beidel, and Murray (2008) and Bellini et al. (2007) identified several weaknesses that mirror the instructional challenges for students classified as ED:

- A lack of a common definition of social skills makes it difficult to compare skills across studies.
- Low frequency and intensity of social skills training in the school setting lowered the effectiveness of the interventions.
- Failure to produce adequate maintenance and generalization effects occurred because training of ten takes place in decontextualized locations.
- Failure of many interventionists to match the social skills strategy to the type of skill deficit presented (performance versus acquisition).

A comparison of these two reviews reveals similar concerns around outcomes of social skills programs for students classified as ED and ASD. The next section of this paper will present a model developed in the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) designed to address these challenges for students receiving special education services in self-contained classrooms.

Social emotional learning for special education students

The NYCDOE is the branch of municipal government in New York City that manages the city's public school system. It is the largest school system in the United States, with over 1.1 million students taught in more than 1,700 separate schools. In the U.S., school districts often form cooperatives to educate students with the most severe disabilities in order to pool expertise and reduce costs. Within the

NYCDOE, District 75 is the administrative district that provides academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and other support services (Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, etc.) to its 56,000 students with a wide range of challenges, including students on the autism spectrum, students who have significant cognitive delays, students who are severely emotionally challenged, and students who are sensory impaired and/or multiply disabled, whose needs are not able to be met within a community school setting.The district operates 58 school organizations in 300+ sites throughout the city and serves the most challenging students within the NYCDOE.

Social-emotional supports in District 75 are organized around a three-tiered model of intervention. At the primary support level is an effective behavioral system and school-wide SEL programming. Given the relationship between language and social-emotional functioning, many schools in District 75 with a predominance of students classified as ED use the RULER Approach as the foundation for their students' social-emotional development. The RULER Approach has a strong emphasis on the development of students' language and communication skills around the recognition and labeling of emotions (Rivers & Brackett, 2011). Additional SEL skills, such as relationships, perspective-taking, and decision-making skills, are integrated into the school environment and supported through other programs and approaches (see Figure 2.)

At the secondary support level, students may be placed in small group settings around a specific behavioral or social-emotional challenge that is targeted through assessment. At the tertiary support level, one-to-one counseling supports and behavioral assessments for students are used to develop skills and performance around a specific area of need. A deeper understanding of this model will be gained by reviewing some of the concerns identified in the literature and how District 75 works to address these challenges in practice.

Lack of common definition

Although discussions around the verbiage used to describe constructs such as social-emotional learning can sometimes seem frivolous, the language used to frame a student's social and emotional functioning has real implications with regards to creating a shared understanding and framework around a student's growth. In practice settings, language can create bridges and collaboration or encourage isolation and fragmentation. Students in special education often receive an array of supports from speech, to counseling, to academics, with each focusing on their individual contributions to the student's development. Each field uses specialized vocabulary that often obscures the overlap in outcomes each respective service is trying to achieve. Using a broad common framework to understand students' social-emotional development increases the likelihood of a targeted and coordinated approach subsequently.

In order to achieve this goal in District 75, participating schools have adopted SEL Standards that were modified from the Anchorage, Alaska Standards in order to organize the language and programming around the social-emotional development of our students. The Anchorage Alaska Standards are based on the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2005) framework that form the basis of the state standards adopted by the state of Illinois. The Anchorage Standards were chosen for implementation in District 75 because the organization of standards around "self", "social""awareness"and "management"with accompanying sub-standards provided the most parsimonious framework from which to communicate student social emotional development to staff. In addition, the Anchorage Standards were adapted by Intermediate District 287, a consortium of 12 school

districts based in Minnesota, USA, to reach back to the sensory-motor stage of development in order to maintain a common framework for social-emotional development at a range of developmental levels. In practice, schools using an SEL approach to student development are able to use the SEL Standards to articulate the developmentally appropriate desired social-emotional outcomes for students across a range of disabilities, programs, and support services using a common language that focuses on student results. Nesting SEL skills in a broader social-emotional framework provides a context for these skills in the larger world and clarifies their relationship to each other.

For example, many programs identify active listening (a communication technique that requires the listener to feed back what it is heard to the speaker) as a skill that students should develop. Schools using an SEL approach to student development however would identify that developing active listening skills is an important aspect of how students understand others (Social Awareness) and more specifically, is an important aspect of building relationships and understanding the roles and perspectives of others. Teachers, counselors, and service providers (speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc.) would all be familiar with the language and able to identify any potential overlaps in their work with the student around active listening. Through this process, a shared understanding of the student's social-emotional functioning is developed and opportunities for collaboration and cooperation are increased. This collaboration is important when considering the challenges around maintenance and generalization of skills.

Maintenance and generalization

Bellini et al. (2007) highlight the fact that the delivery of social-emotional programming in pull-out sessions and other de-contextualized venues hampers the ability for the skills to be maintained or generalized. In District 75, the model developed to address this concern focuses on conceptual consistency and integration of skills across the school environment. When educators have a clear understanding of the outcomes they are influencing, instruction becomes more focused. Curriculum-based social-emotional instruction is provided in the classroom by the classroom teacher or with the classroom teacher present. This means that the student is taught the skills in the setting and with the people with whom the student spends the majority of the day. Instruction is often integrated into English Language Arts (ELA), and, in most cases, the language and artifacts around social-emotional learning are shared throughout the school and infused in the school culture. Additionally, all school staff and administration are trained on the standards as well as the curricula designed to meet them, and a school team meets on a consistent basis to review the implementation and fidelity of programming. When students and staff share a language and common understanding around social-emotional development, students are exposed to a consistent message around social-emotional skills that supports the generalization of skills across contexts. It is also important to recognize that explicit social-emotional instruction through a curriculum is not the only opportunity for students to learn and practice social- emotional skill sets.

In District 75, participating schools complete a logic model to make connections across programs and approaches to students' social-emotional development. The document uses the adopted SEL standards to articulate a specific theory of action around a program or approach and a student's outcome in the social-emotional domain. The logic model contains four columns and is program centric. The first column is a description of the program (what is the program). The second column asks for intended outcomes of the program in the social-emotional domain, as referenced by the SEL Standards (what are

the outcomes). The third column is the theory of action. This column makes the explicit connection between program activities and program outcomes (how does the program or approach achieve these outcomes). To attain this, schools identify if the program or approach is teaching an SEL skill or reinforcing it, and then reference specific program activities that align to the SEL standards that demonstrate how the skill is being taught or reinforced. For example, schools clubs [program] reinforce [teach, vs. reinforce] a student's sense of personal responsibility [SEL standard] by providing opportunities to demonstrate how taking personal responsibility can lead to success [theory of action.]. The last column asked the school to identify what data are being collected that reflects the intended program outcomes (how do we know). The data collected should align to the program outcomes articulated in the second column. See Figure 1 for an example.

Program/ Approach	Target Population	Social Emotional Learning Standards	Connection	Data Points
Debate Team	Standardized	Self Awareness - 1B. Students demonstrate an awareness of their personal traits.	Debate Team teaches students awareness of their strengths and weaknesses by giving opportunity to reflect upon the personal qualities they possess that make the msuccessful members of the debate team. It teaches students to describe and prioritixe personal skills and interests they want to develop.	Student survey to capture perceptions of school community
		Self Management - 2A. Students demonstrate ablility to manage their needs and emotions.	Debate Team teaches students to manage their emotions by giving students opportunities to set goals analyze outcomes, and learn from experiences.	
		Self Management - 2D. Students demonstrate increasing levels of independence and the ablility to set and achieve goals.	Debate Team teaches students to set and achieve goals by giving students opportunities to set goals, analyze outcomes, and learn from expiences.	
		Self Management 4A. Students use positive communication and social skills to interact effectivly with others.	Debate Team teaches students communication and social skills by giving students opportunities to demonstrate cooperative behaviors in a group goals and attentive listening skills.	

Figure 1. Sample Social Emotional Learning Log Model

This approach allows the school to rationalize their programming designed to promote students' SEL skills and to identify social-emotional skills that may be secondary to the program or approach (i.e., a physical education program's primary purpose may be exercise, but the weekly setting and monitoring of goals speak to children's self-management skills). Schools also complete a Program Matrix which flows from the logic model. Instead of listing the programs and connecting the SEL standards, the matrix looks at the SEL standards and arranges programming around them. This provides the school with an understanding of what program and approaches teach various social emotional competencies. See Figure 2 for an example. As a framework, the program matrix clarifies for schools the skills the students are exposed to over a wide range of programming, which in turn means the educators can create more meaningful opportunities and supports for the those skills across the school environment. The language of the SEL standards indicates to schools that the ideal end state of student functioning is one where students have internalized the skills and dispositions that reflect effective functioning in society, as articulated through the SEL standards, and can calibrate their behavior from this internalized understanding.

Performance vs. knowledge of skills

Both Chen (2006) and Bellini et al. (2007) identified the lack of distinction between challenges around the performance of a skill vs. knowledge of a skill as an area of concern. In addition to the Program Matrix, which as discussed above, explicitly asks schools to identify if the program or approach is teaching or reinforcing skills, participating District 75 schools combine behavioral approaches with instruction in the social-emotional domain to ensure that the learning environment actively reinforces intended student behavior while supporting the student to internalize these behaviors over time. Most schools use the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) approach to achieve this balance.

PBIS is an operational framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based academic and behavioral practices for improving important academic and behavior outcomes for all students. It is characterized by an emphasis on data collection, positive reinforcement techniques to shape behavior, a tiered support model with increasing supports towards the top, and the communication of clear expectations for behavior (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). PBIS works to support positive social behavior by developing practices on a school and classroom level that serve to create a structure that clarifies behavioral expectations and reinforces them in a consistent and positive way. At the broadest level, PBIS is concerned with the interaction between the student and the environment and places an emphasis on creating environments that reinforce positive behavior. At the most intensive level, a Functional Behavioral Analyses (FBA) is completed. Data taken on the context around students' focal behaviors lends insight into the interactions between the student and the environment that may influence a child's performance of learned skills.

Social Emotional Learning Standard	Programs(s)/Frameworks
Self-Awareness (I am): Reconizing who I am, what I need and how I feel relative to the world around me	
1A. Students demonstrate awareness of their needs and emotions	- RULER Approach - Counseling - Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) - Resolution Room
Self-Management (I can): Manage my behavior in pro-social ways	
2A. Students demonstrate ability to manage their needs and emotions	- PBIS Behavior Matrix (RPS) Point Sheet School Store Clubs - RULER Approach - Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) - Resolution Room - Counseling - Drama Workshop - Debate Team
Social Management (I will) : Interact with others in meaningful and productive ways	
3A. Students demonstrate awareness of their people's roles, their emotions and perspectives	- RULER Approach - Clubs - PBIS - Assemblies - Drama Workshop - Culinary Workshop - Student Council
Self-Awareness (I care): Demonstrate an awerness of the role and value of others in the greater community	
4A. Students use positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others	- PBIS Behavior Matrix Clubs Assemblies - RULER Approach - Mighty Milers - Culinary Workshop - Debate Team - Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI)

Figure 2. Abridged Sample Program Matrix.

Targeting social-emotional skills to develop

Chen (2006) reflects that the connection between behavior and the underlying skills sets, such as social-emotional competencies, that serve as the foundation for such behavior is often poorly understood in practice settings. As such, the identification of social-emotional skills for student development on an individual level often lacks a clear theory of action. For any type of effective instruction to take place, teachers and students must understand what is to be taught, the relevance of the instruction to prior knowledge and the gap between the current and the intended functioning. In District 75, this is addressed through the use of assessments and instructional plans around social-emotional functioning that combine classroom instruction with small group or one to one instruction through counseling supports.

For students classified as ED, District 75 is piloting the use of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) a 72-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that assesses the social-emotional competencies that serve as protective factors for children in kindergarten through the eighth grade (Naglieri, Goldstein, & Lebuffe, 2010). The assessment relies on CASEL's framework for the organization of its scales, which connects the assessment to the standards and instruction. Since the DESSA is strength based, it allows educators to identify what the student should be doing and to create instructional plans to close the gap between the student's current and intended level of functioning.

Teachers complete the DESSA three times a year: November, January, and late May. After the teachers complete the DESSA, the counselors and teachers meet to discuss the results. Counselors then review the outcomes with students to help improve self-awareness and as an opportunity to self assess. Next, teachers and counselors use a backward design instructional approach, in which instruction is planned after assessment determines the desired outcomes, and plan their counseling sessions to remediate any skill gaps that a student may have that is making it difficult for them to meet the behavioral indicators articulated in the DESSA around effective functioning. In the classroom, in addition to using the RULER Approach as their curriculum, teachers create opportunities for the student to practice the skills they are developing and build structures that help to support skill acquisition. For example, a counselor may be teaching about personal responsibility in her sessions, and in the classroom the teacher may create classroom jobs and ensure the student is praised for independent completion of such jobs. The students' progress is monitored in the classroom domain through discussions between the counselors and the teachers and formally re-assessed at the end of a three-month intervention period. After this re-assessment, counselors and teachers review the data to determine whether or not the student has made enough growth on the area of concern to move to another need or to continue working on the area of concern identified in the initial evaluation. For students with ASD, a similar model is used with variations in assessments (Student Annual Needs Determination Inventory, Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills , Brigance Inventory of Early Development) and instructional foci based on the child's developmental level of functioning along with visual supports as necessary.

Impact

The introduction of an SEL framework to schools in District 75 has had a significant impact on student outcomes. In a Manhattan high school that serves many students with ASD, 76% of students met

their teacher-generated social-emotional goals written into the IEP in 2011-2012. In 2012-2013, the school introduced indicators from the SEL Standards, incorporated SEL Standards into the curriculum map and asked teachers to reference SEL in their lesson plans (addressing lack of common definition, targeting of social skills to develop, and the low frequency and intensity of social skills training). Currently, 98% percent of students are on track to meet the social-emotional goals written into the IEP.

In a Bronx, New York City high school that serves students with intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, and students with autism, the introduction of a SEL framework school-wide was related to important effects on student outcomes. In counseling, counselors used the SEL Standards to identify gaps in student functioning in the social emotional domain and create plans in collaboration with the classroom teacher to improve their skills (targeting social skills to develop). One counselor asked teachers and school deans to rate three of his students in counseling on indicators from the SEL Standards around students' ability to understand other people's emotions and perspectives. One student made great gains through the focused work, originally being rated an average of 1.3 on a one (Never) to four (Frequently) scale on the question, "Over the last month, how often have you seen your student demonstrate an understanding of how their behavior effects the emotions of others?", scoring an average of 3.4 after six months of focused intervention. At the school-wide level, the introduction of an SEL framework was concurrent to a decrease in behavioral incidents in the school. There were 324 behavioral infractions recorded in 2010-2011, 297 behavioral infractions recorded in 2011-2012 and after a full year of focus on school-wide SEL, 81 behavioral infractions recorded in 2012 -2013 (maintenance and generalization).

In another Bronx middle school that serves students with ED, when asked whether the DESSA helped to make teachers more aware of their students' social-emotional needs, teachers (n = 6) averaged a 3.71 response on a one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree scale). A Manhattan middle school serving students with ED introduced SEL lessons in classroom aligned to school wide needs reported from the DESSA and recorded small gains in teachers' perceptions of students social emotional functioning in a pre and post- test (M = 40.69, SD = 7.69) vs. (M = 41.61, SD = 9.02) as per the DESSA's composite SEL score in a four month intervention period (targeting social skills to develop). Anecdotally, feedback from schools in the Bronx and Queens, New York (another borough of New York City) reported that the use of the DESSA and the corresponding model was a "great dialogue tool between students, counselor, and parents"and that it served as "important link between the classroom and counseling"(maintenance and generalization). Lastly, using a logic model, one Manhattan school serving students with ED determined that a video game club that was designed to cooperation skills was rated by the students as an area where social-emotional skills were "rarely" or "never" practiced, prompting the team to review the theory of action and how it was translated into practices during the club (maintenance and generalization).

While these findings are far from conclusive, they represent the feasible efforts schools can undertake and use for program and policy development. The accumulated experience to date in District 75 has some important policy implications for those concerned with extending the paradigm of character education and social-emotional learning to students with special education needs.

Policy implications

Although District 75 reflects a special education context with regard to the social-emotional development of students, it operates within the larger NYCDOE. Consequently, a large percentage of students currently in District 75 started either within a general education class or within an integrated classroom in a community school. As such, the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports offered in general education schools in New York City, and in many urban environments generally, have a considerable impact on the student's baseline level of functioning when placed in a more restrictive special-education only setting. Indeed, many of the challenges faced by students classified as ED in District 75 fall along the same spectrum of challenges as those faced by students in general education settings, only manifested with greater frequency, intensity or duration. Since the majority of students in special education have spent time in general education environments, policy recommendations must also span both contexts to be meaningful.

Recommendation #1: Social-emotional functioning of all students should be measured and reported by schools.

For social-emotional learning to become an integral part of the educational landscape, valid, reliable, and actionable measures of social-emotional functioning for students must be incorporated and reported out to relevant stakeholders in the school community. This is likely to be equally important outside of the U.S. if SEL and related areas of functioning are to be viewed as essential aspects of education. In general education, highly effective systems in for screening and responding to social-emotional challenges could reduce the escalation of those identified challenges in many students so that referrals to a more restrictive environment like District 75 are less likely to be necessary. In addition, unlike behavioral data that often focuses on behavioral infractions, measurement of student social-emotional functioning allows students to identify strengths in their profile, as well as areas of need. Finally, the ongoing measurement of social-emotional functioning creates opportunities for schools to effectively and efficiently monitor interventions being tried to see if they are indeed working or need modification.

Recommendation #2: Students at risk for social-emotional difficulties should be measured on their language fundamentals (Receptive language, expressive language, pragmatics, etc.).

As discussed above, language skills, social skills, and behavior are intimately related, especially in early childhood. However, the language deficits of students with challenging behavior are often overshadowed by the behavior itself (Guralnick & Neville, 1997; Kaiser, Hancock, Cai, Foster, & Hester, 2000). Language and communication deficiencies can impair social-emotional skill performance, and mislead educators into thinking that SEL skills have not been adequately learned. Students with behavioral challenges should have their language skills assessed concomitantly with assessments of social-emotional functioning.

Recommendation #3: All schools should develop or adopt social-emotional learning standards and complete a logic model (Program matrix) to articulate how programming creates desired outcomes.

The Common Core Curriculum Standards are nation-wide standards recently adopted throughout most of the United States to ensure that school districts' curricula create "college and career ready"students. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) While these standards have many strengths, in the introduction of these standards, their limitations are discussed:

While the ELA and content area literacy components described herein are critical to college and career readiness, they do not define the whole of such readiness. Students require a wide ranging, rigorous academic preparation and, particularly in the early grades, attention to such matters as social, emotional, (emphasis added) and physical development and approaches to learning (NGACBP & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 6)

Although there are opportunities for social-emotional development in the Common Core Standards (e.g., an emphasis on cooperative learning), the lack of articulated nation-wide standards for social-emotional learning means that social-emotional development is often considered ancillary to the intellectual development of their students. Notwithstanding the long-standing evidence showing how social-emotional skills supports academic achievement (Coie & Krehbiel, 1984; Elias, Gara, Schuyler, Branden-Muller, & Sayette, 1991), or that when asked what skills young people need to succeed at work, businesses across the United States have long identified personal qualities such as individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity among the three foundational skills of workplace competence (United States Dept. of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992), the mission of public schools is not only to prepare children for college and work, but to foster the skills and behaviors citizens need to govern themselves and contribute to the public good. Adopting SEL standards brings this goal into sharp focus. It provides the language for schools to incorporate the planning of such skills into their academic programming and recognize the multiplicity of their mission as public institutions. This is particularly important for at risk students, who tend to have a high degree of mobility from school to school.

However, standards are only as useful as their translation into instruction and supports in schools. Utilizing a program matrix to achieve social-emotional goals that align with SEL standards (or even the social-emotional goals within a particular school) increases the likelihood schools can apply a SEL framework to programs and activities inside and outside of the classroom that will prepare them to be productive members of society.

Policy summary

Social-emotional development is an important component of special education programs and the general education schools that feed them. Policy decisions should reflect an understanding of the extent to which deficiencies in the social-emotional domain are common to many students receiving special

education services, especially those with ASD and ED classifications. This suggests the need for explicit instruction and supports regarding these skills before students reach a special education program; and the importance of this only accelerates after they are placed. Additionally, the needs of special education students require added intensity, coordination, and consistency in social-emotional skills development efforts. Measurement, tied to standards and related to program goals, intervention procedures, and supports also must be essential to any discussion around policy and social-emotional learning.

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