Q&A: Practical Advice from the Field

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A November 5, 2018 CASEL webinar, "Innovations in SEL Action Research and Practice: Considerations of Diversity, Ecological Models, and Educators' SEL Competence," featured three of the nation's leading researchers offering advice to practitioners about key challenges. The researchers were recently named 2018 winners of CASEL's Joseph E. Zins Award, which honors action research in social and emotional learning (SEL).

The complete webinar recording and slide deck can be found **here**.
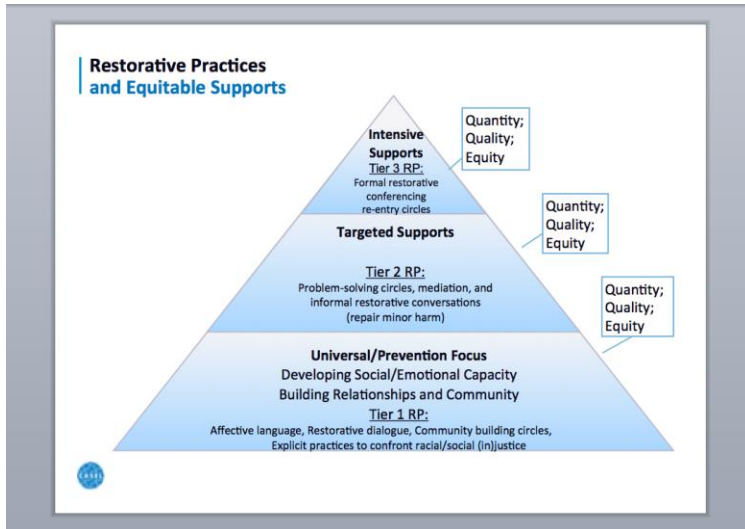
Anne Gregory
Associate Professor, School Psychology Department, Rutgers University Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology

Risks
Schools are undertaking SEL-oriented school discipline reform. If we don't consider issues of equity while implementing reforms, we may inadvertently serve more advantaged students while perpetuating inequality. Interventions could create another form of student tracking, sorting, and stigmatizing, using another set of deficit-oriented labels.

Recommendations
When schools implement SEL initiatives, they can use a framework of equitable supports to ensure fair access, bias awareness, and culturally conscious practice. For example, using a multi-tiered system of supports, educators should ensure that Tier 1 interventions include affective language, restorative dialogue, community-building circles, and explicit practices to confront racial/social justice issues.

Restorative Practices and Equitable Supports

Recognize a range of competencies, such as the ability of students of color to "code-switch" from home to school. And recognize that self-management might look different for a white, middle-class student than for a lower-income student of color. Understand that disparities are not confined to race, but also play out across gender, class, and gender, among other identities.

To help ensure they are implementing with fidelity, schools should survey students to measure four key aspects of their well-being. Look for and address disparities in the data.

- **Safety** (Am I physically and emotionally safe? Does my school use circle formats and circle agreements?)
- **Belonging** (Do adults and peers treat me with respect? Are they responsive? Is the instruction relevant?)
- **Student voice** (Do I have a say? Am I encouraged to take risks and solve problems?)
- **Learning** (Am I learning social and emotional skills?)

In Tier 2, restorative practices should include problem-solving circles, mediation, and informal restorative conversations. Survey questions could include:

- "When someone misbehaves, my teachers ask students questions about their side of the story."
- "When someone misbehaves, my teachers have that person talk to who they hurt and asks them to make things right."
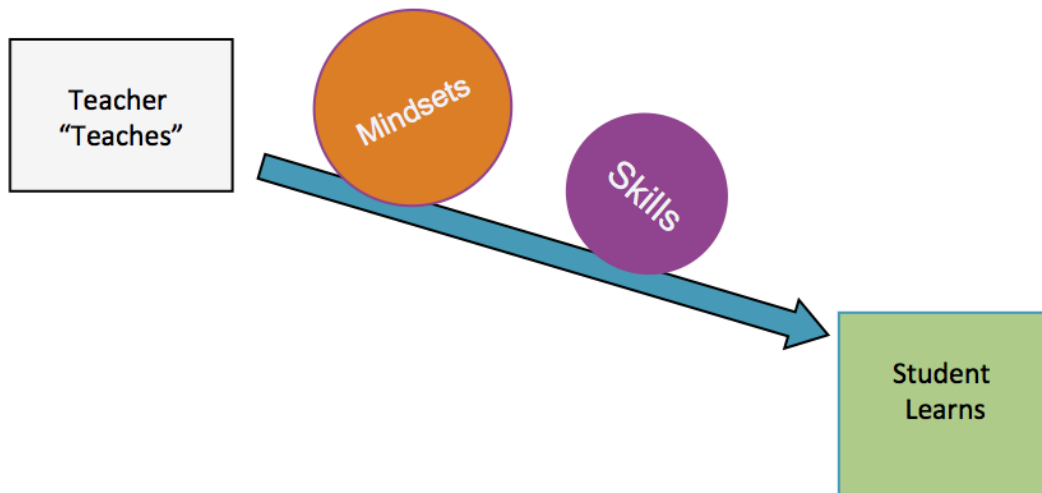
Tier 3 interventions should include formal restorative conferencing and re-entry circles.

Camille Farrington
Managing Director and Senior Research Associate, University of Chicago Consortium on School Research

Risks
The primary teaching paradigm (the teacher pours content, mindsets, and skills into students, then tests them and measures growth over time) is at odds with the science of learning and development.
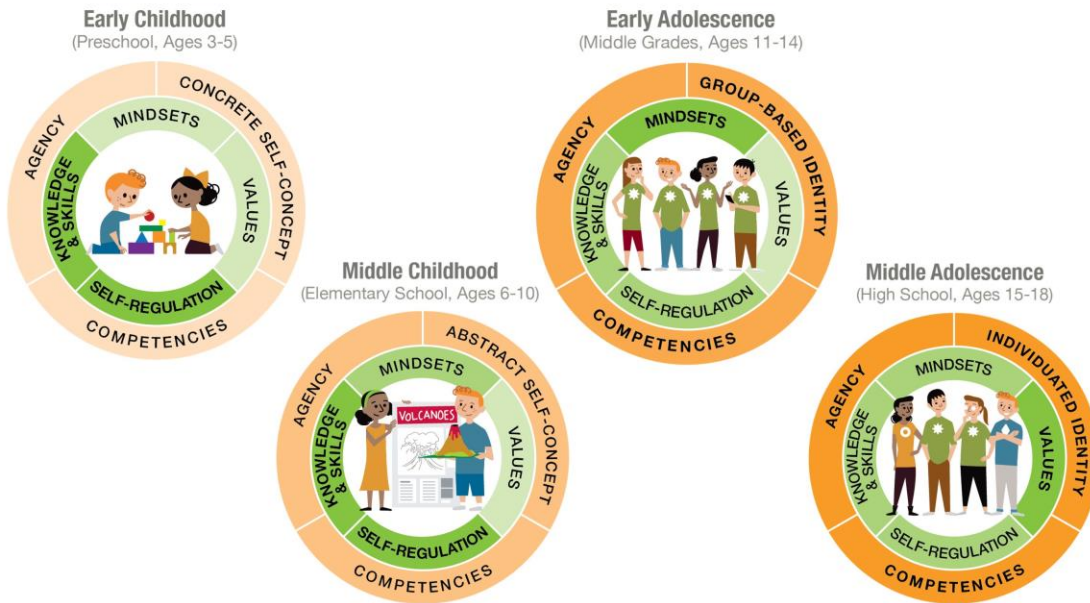

The reality is that classroom conditions predict mindsets, learning strategies, perseverance, and behaviors, which in turn predict students' academic performance, even when comparing the same student across two classrooms.

Recommendations
Classrooms, schools, and school districts/networks must strive to be equitable developmental spaces for the young people and adults who inhabit them.

Because mindsets are key, measure them. Use surveys to ask questions such as: "I belong in this community," "My achievement increases with effort," "I can succeed at this," and "This work has value for me."

Understand how students' agency, identity, and competencies (academic and social and emotional) vary across developmental phases.

Early Childhood (Preschool, Ages 3-5)

Middle Childhood (Elementary School, Ages 6-10)

Early Adolescence (Middle Grades, Ages 11-14)

Middle Adolescence (High School, Ages 15-18)

Instead of just "pouring knowledge into students' heads," give them multiple opportunities to act and reflect on what they are learning.

Measuring students' perceptions of learning settings, their opportunities for developmental experiences, and the quality of their connections to adults will yield more actionable data than trying to measure the development of students' social-emotional skills.

David Osher
Vice President and Institute Fellow, American Institutes for Research

Risks
SEL can support robust equity, including the ability to participate successfully in deeper learning, collaborate with others, and address challenges facing individuals and the world.

Privilege is too rarely addressed. In AIR's recent study of 135 frameworks, only two (those addressing people of color and people with disabilities) even mentioned privilege.

Recommendations
Provide learning opportunities that allow for personalization, encourage deeper learning, critical thinking, and creativity. Give students chances to form their own identities, take perspectives, make meaning from their learning, and problem-solve together.

Help them develop the self- and social-awareness and relationship skills that support caring, humility, agency, and code switching, and that address the impacts of institutionalized prejudice and privilege.

To help students develop social-emotional competence, schools must create the conditions for learning, engagement, well-being, and performance. Students need to be **safe** (physically and emotionally) and respected. They need to have **connections and support** that are culturally responsive. They need to be **challenged**.

RESOURCES

[University of Chicago Consortium](#)

A series of tools that support proper use of SEL assessments, *[Ready to Assess](#)*

A coaching tool that helps administrators and coaches support implementation of SEL practices, *[SEL Coaching Toolkit](#)*

A brief on policy levers to support SEL implementation, *[When Districts Support and Integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)](#)*

10 things educators can do to support the integration of SEL and healthy learning environments, *[Creating Healthy Schools: Ten Key Ideas for the SEL and School Climate Community](#)*

A series of tools that support embedding SEL in afterschool practices, *[The In-School and Afterschool Social and Emotional Learning Connection: A Planning Tool](#)* and *[Social and Emotional Learning Practices: A Self-Reflection Tool for Afterschool Staff](#)*

A short video that explains the connection between SEL and college and career readiness, *[Social and Emotional Learning Explained: How SEL Helps Students in College, Career and Life](#)*

[Resources from the November 5, 2018 Innovations in SEL Action Research and Practice Webinar](#). This document includes links to several articles co-authored by Joseph E. Zins.

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