

# Personalized Social-Emotional Learning

by Dr. Tali Friedman and Hannah Weisberg-Gold

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## Preface

The cultural, social, and economic changes occurring in the world, especially in the world of work and employment, are making it vital to reorganize education systems and update the approaches to its role in preparing students to cope optimally with the challenges that this changing reality poses. These approaches are integrated with up-to-date knowledge from the learning sciences that call into question the traditional dichotomy between cognitive skills-knowledge and social-emotional skills. There is growing evidence that learning happens best in an empowering emotional environment and protected, secure social contexts.

Therefore, in many places around the globe, including the State of Israel, interest is growing in imparting and cultivating social-emotional skills along with academic knowledge. An extensive body of research indicates that these skills contribute to students' well-being, improved academic achievements, sense of satisfaction and belonging, and overall flourishing. Furthermore, many studies show that these skills can be promoted and cultivated through social-emotional learning (SEL). This approach has been gaining a great deal of momentum in recent years in the education systems of numerous states around the globe as well as in the Israeli education system. That said, many challenges remain on the path to complete, comprehensive, effective SEL implementation.

According to the latest broad definition that most of those active in this field accept, SEL relates to **the process through which students learn and apply an array of social, emotional, and behavioral skills as well as the character skills required to succeed in school, work, relationships, and civic life. These skills include self-awareness, emotion and behavior regulation, empathy, interpersonal and social abilities, and cognitive and mental flexibility, among other skills.**

In chapter 1 of this literature review, we briefly present the background and factors spurring the growing interest in SEL as well as findings from meta-analyses of social-emotional skills' contribution to academic and other achievements. This chapter also reviews the main processes underway in Israel and other countries to implement SEL.

Chapter 2 considers different theoretical approaches at the base of SEL along with related concepts and similar ideas. It then presents some of the leading SEL models in use around the world, with an emphasis on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model and Israel's vision for graduates of its education system.

Chapter 3 addresses SEL implementation. This chapter presents the latest research on factors critical to effective implementation of learning, as compared to factors that are liable to delay or impede learning. This chapter also expands on implementing SEL in **academic subject areas**. Chapter 4 presents examples of selected SEL programs in Israel and around the globe, providing a concrete illustration of SEL implementation in a school framework. This chapter also presents a number of digital SEL programs. Chapter 5 addresses the topic of evaluating and measuring SEL at different levels and the challenges this involves. It presents new innovations in measuring and evaluation tools that try to address with these challenges.

Chapter 6 focuses on personalized learning and the areas of overlap between it and SEL. To conclude, we briefly summarize the optimal impact that personalized SEL implementation in the various academic subjects could have on the student, the teacher, and the Israeli education system in general.

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## Chapter 1: SEL – Background and Current State

### What is SEL?

The extensive literature on SEL features a wide variety of concepts, emphases, and interpretations, which we will summarize in the pages that follow. According to the broad definition that the majority of those active in the field accept, **social-emotional learning is the process through which individuals acquire and effectively use the knowledge, abilities, stances, and skills required to cope with the challenges of daily life to develop into curious individuals with the ability to understand both their own feelings and those of others, to have positive interactions with others, to act from intrinsic motivation, to demonstrate cognitive flexibility and persistence, to regulate emotions and behaviors, and to make responsible decisions.** Later in this chapter, we relate to the varied theoretical background of SEL and the main models for its implementation.

### SEL – Why Now?

The SEL educational approach and the emphasis on the importance of social-emotional skills has been gaining momentum dramatically over the past few decades, and especially in the past few years, due to the combination of a number of factors, which are discussed below.

#### **Social-Cultural-Economic Changes**

##### *Increasing Heterogeneousness of Students:*

Recent years have been characterized by the growing number of students in each classroom, the placement of students with special needs in standard classes, and the absorption of students who immigrated to Israel from different cultural backgrounds. This heterogeneousness created a new challenge for the educational staff, which needed to cope with their students' different ways of behaving and communicating, along with their varied needs. This challenge is even more relevant when it comes to imparting social-emotional skills and creating a sense of belonging and a nurturing learning environment that enables

all students to express themselves, whatever their personal or cultural background may be.

### *Increasing Mental-Health-Emotional Issues:*

Data from many places around the world indicate a disturbing rise in reports of phenomena such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal tendencies among teens and even among children. Since the medical system is not succeeding to provide a suitable and timely solution to this, schools' educational staffs are playing an increasingly important role. They are helping students who are struggling emotionally or academically by imparting tools and skills to strengthen resilience and cultivate the ability to cope academically, emotionally, and socially. The coronavirus crisis and remote learning made the need for emotional support and developing psychological and emotional resilience even more important.

### *Changes in the Employment World:*

The need to cope with a rapidly changing reality, innovative technologies, globalization, and multiculturalism means that change is also needed in the way the education system prepares students to cope with tomorrow's challenges. The new world of employment will require not only technological and cognitive skills, but also social-emotional skills such as managing oneself efficiently and independently, cooperating with others, demonstrating creativity and cognitive flexibility, and adapting easily to changes ([National Research Council, 2012](#)). In addition, the globalization that characterizes the current world of employment requires multicultural communication skills and perception of different viewpoints ([Chernyshenko et al., 2018](#)).

Figure 1. Between the years 1982 and 2012, the jobs offers that demanded social skills rose by 12%, while the offers requiring only math skills (STEM) fell by 3%.

### *The Impact of the Coronavirus Crisis*

In the past year, all of the above were exacerbated dramatically. The coronavirus crisis has shaken the entire world, leaving a heavy stain upon education systems. Students and teachers alike were forced to learn how to cope with a global pandemic, anxiety, uncertainty, remote learning, and changes in daily routines.

The latest research has found that along with a fall in academic achievements, the coronavirus crisis has influenced students' (and teachers') social-emotional states. The social distancing and physical separation from school caused a rise in depression and anxiety, conflict between family members, and even suicidal tendencies. Thus, for example, a [Hebrew report from ELEM](#) (2020), an Israeli nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting youth in distress, indicates that requests for psychological assistance tripled. Another worrying aspect is the growing gaps between students resulting from, among other reasons, their resilience and cognitive flexibility or lack thereof ([Lee, 2020](#)). With regard to the above, see the [OECD publication \(2021\)](#) that emphasizes the need to prepare students for the new reality in which they must not merely function, but also regulate and manage themselves. For further expansion on aspects of SEL in remote learning, see the [survey by Kopelman-Rubin](#).

### **The Latest Knowledge on Learning Processes and Neuroscience**

Another source of the growing interest in SEL is the developing research on learning processes and neuroscience. This expansive body of literature indicates that learning is fundamentally **a social-emotional process**. Studies have shown that students attain higher academic achievements when they study in an environment that cultivates their social-emotional skills and is responsive to their needs ([Osher et al., 2020](#)). Research also found that the combination of many processes – neural, experiential, and interpersonal – contributes to realizing the unique developmental and performance potential of each and every student. According to these holistic approaches, personalized instruction, the context in which learning occurs, and the positive and supportive relationship between the teacher and the student have the utmost importance. [Neuroscience research](#) indicates that warm, consistent, empathetic interpersonal relationships influence vital processes and functions of the brain and realizing their potential and thus contribute to the overall development of each student ([Center on the Developing Child](#)). In this context, it is important to note the concept of the **growth mindset**, which researcher Carol S. Dweck coined to describe a mindset that assumes that all students can improve their abilities and achievements through effort and practice ([Dweck, 2008](#)). Thus a learning environment that encourages the students to believe in themselves and their abilities to succeed can indeed improve their motivation and academic achievements.

## Research Findings on SEL's Positive Impact

An important and central factor in the flourishing interest in SEL is the many empirical studies that indicate a positive connection between social-emotional skills and success, flourishing, and a sense of well-being among students and teachers in different aspects of life in the long term. **Furthermore, it has been found that it is possible to impart and cultivate these skills through explicit SEL programs.** We detail the main areas that SEL has been found to benefit below:

### *Improvement in Social-Emotional Skills*

The extensive evidence of this includes a noteworthy meta-analysis conducted for the EU on SEL programs in its member states. This survey found that the students who participated in these programs had an advantage over other students in a variety of relevant skills such as identifying feelings, setting goals, and managing goals. This also was true of their opinions of themselves, self-capacity, self-image, and more ([Cefai et al., 2018](#)).

### *Improvement in Academic Achievements*

One meta-analysis found that 83% of the SEL programs showed a clear improvement in students' academic achievements ([Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017](#)). Another meta-analysis that summarized the findings of numerous studies to examine the effectiveness of SEL intervention programs found that the academic achievements of the average student who participated in a SEL intervention program can be expected to rise by 11% ([Durlak et al., 2011](#)). A third meta-analysis indicated there is an improvement in academic functioning in general and in reading and math in particular ([Cefai et al., 2018](#)).

### *Enhancing Students' Sense of Belonging and Well-being*

Taylor et al. conducted a meta-analysis of studies that examined the impact that SEL programs had on 97,406 students ranging in age from kindergarten to high school. Their findings indicate that SEL programs have a long-term impact on students' well-being, as well as other indicators that predict high well-being, such as high grades, pro-social behavior, optimistic outlook on life, lack of behavioral



problems, ability to cope with emotional difficulty, and refraining from drug use ([Taylor et al., 2017](#)).

### *Contributing to Reducing Gaps and Social Mobility*

Studies found that SEL programs help reduce social gaps between students from underprivileged populations and other populations, including when the programs are intended for the general student population. Research in this field found the beneficial impact was equal among students from varied ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes ([Ashdown & Bernard, 2012](#); [Taylor et al., 2017](#)). It seems that simply promoting SEL in the school framework contributes to the process of students' social mobility, even before these programs were adapted to suit specific populations. It can be conjectured that adapting the SEL programs to social and cultural minority groups would lead to even better results ([Hecht & Shin, 2015](#)).

Today the topic of reducing gaps has become even more important in the wake of the Coronavirus crisis, which contributed to increasing gaps between students from high and low socioeconomic status.

### *Economic Value*

Belfield et al. ([2015](#)) examined the financial returns of six SEL interventions in the US. They found that the economic benefits were greater than the costs in all of the interventions studied. On average, **for every dollar that was invested in a SEL program, the return was over \$11 for the US economy**. The economic value in this research related to the prevention of psychological syndromes and development of violent and dangerous behaviors among children, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, crime, school absenteeism, and more. All of these syndromes and behaviors cost the economy millions of dollars in the long term, which are invested in the effort to rehabilitate these children at later stages in their lives.

### *Contribution to Success in Work, Relationships, and Civil Life*

There are more than a few studies that show the positive impact of SEL programs is long lasting and contributes to better functioning in various aspects

of life. It has been found that the younger children are when the intervention program begins, the more durable its effects are ([Taylor et al., 2017](#)).

### *Contribution to Teachers' Well-being*

Research shows that teachers who undergo SEL training and are involved in inculcating SEL skills also improve their own SEL skills. It was found that in addition to contributing to their professional development, this also had a positive impact on their ability to regulate their emotions, reduced their sense of distress, and improved their interactions with students ([Collie et al., 2012](#); [Jennings et al., 2017](#)).

## **SEL around the Globe**

In light of the factors and developments mentioned above, more and more education systems and organizations around the world see the great importance of imparting and cultivating SEL in order to prepare students to cope with future challenges and the changing reality of the present. The international organizations acting to promote SEL include the [European Union \(EU\)](#), the [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development \(OECD\)](#), the World Bank, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (WHO). All of these organizations have recognized the importance of SEL and its contribution to various aspects of well-being and flourishing for both the individual and society as a whole. Leading academic institutions, such as [Harvard](#), [Stanford](#), and [Rutgers](#) universities, among others, are investing extensive resources to establish centers and labs to study the topic.

The organization that greatly influences advancing SEL in the US and many other places around the globe is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)). The systemic model which CASEL developed (which we elaborate on below) has been embedded in numerous ways in most US states as well as in various countries around the globe, including Israel. For example, the Canadian province of British Columbia is a world leader in systemic, comprehensive SEL implementation. Its local school system recognized SEL as a core subject and adapted its curriculum, schools' atmosphere, and teacher training and professional development programs accordingly. The province also,

as is discussed below, developed a measurement system that can be used for assessing and improving SEL.

## **SEL in Israel**

**In line with worldwide trends, many process are occurring in Israel to advance and implement SEL.**

The Coronavirus crisis caused interest in SEL to skyrocket in Israel. Activity in this field is expressed both at the systemic level of the Israeli Ministry of Education and in the activities of the local authorities, teacher training institutes, organizations, and nonprofits.

### **Israeli Ministry of Education**

For the past two years, the Israeli Ministry of Education has taken wide-ranging steps in the areas relevant to SEL. Among other activities, the ministry's management led a comprehensive project to prepare a [website for educators with K-12 curricula](#). As part of this systemic process, an online tool was built that brings together all of the curricula for all ages groups and sectors and also details (in addition to the learning materials) the skills suitable for each learning unit.

The ministry's planning and strategy department led a wide-ranging process to formulate a [graduate profile](#) and the skills the graduate would require for success in the future, putting special emphasis on social-emotional skills (we elaborate on this below).

[Life Skills](#), the flagship program of the ministry's Psychological and Counseling Services Division, which is presented below, also was recently updated and adapted to the principles of SEL.

The ministry's pedagogical secretariat is working, in cooperation with the Psychological and Counseling Services Division, to develop lesson plans that incorporate SEL skills into the academic subject areas studied.

In late 2020, the expert committee that the Yozma – Center for Knowledge and Research in Education formed, at the ministry's request, published a summary on cultivating social and emotional skills in the Israeli education system. The summary was instrumental in preparing this literature review.

### **Local Government**

In addition to the ministry's systemic programs, there also are activities that touch on SEL in localities that have adopted a SEL approach to implement in their schools. For example, the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa is promoting a municipal outlook that includes implementing SEL, including setting SEL developmental goals, suitable teaching methods, and training for educational staff. This process is still underway, but one can form an initial impression from the draft (work in progress) to define SEL goals for grades 7-9.

### **Teacher Training Colleges**

Many teacher training colleges incorporate courses on SEL and instilling social-emotional skills in future educators during their studies. Institutions that train principals, such as Avney Roshia, among others, also include SEL as an inseparable part of their training process.

## Chapter 2: Leading SEL Theoretical Frameworks and Models

The history of dealing with SEL began as long ago as the days of ancient Greece, where Plato proposed a holistic approach to education that combined studying arts, math, and science with character education and morality. His student Aristotle declared, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

Activities in this field have undergone many changes since the time of Plato and Aristotle. Contemporary activities are influenced by different conceptualizations, theoretical sources, emphases, and frameworks. The [Edutopia](#) website elaborates on the history of addressing this topic.

The term social-emotional learning (SEL) has a confusing resemblance to and overlaps with many other concepts, such as soft skills, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, non-cognitive skills, and character and personality education, among others. The many names also indicate the variety of approaches and theories at the base of SEL, which include positive psychology, emotional intelligence, motivation, moral education, and character shaping. It is beyond the scope of this literatures review to expand at length upon the different viewpoints as well as the different emphases and skills included under this heading<sup>1</sup>, but despite the concept’s ambiguousness, we can say that there is consensus regarding the essence of SEL: to develop and cultivate students’ abilities to understand and manage their feelings and interactions with others and to make responsible decisions.

### Similar Concepts

**Before presenting the SEL models, we will present three similar concepts from the world of education along with their context and interrelationship with SEL:**

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<sup>1</sup> . For an elaboration upon and mapping of the different conceptions of SEL, see [Sperling, D. \(2018\). \*Social-Emotional Learning: Conceptual Mapping, Theoretical and Empirical Base\* \(L. Yosefberg Ben-Yehoshua, Ed.\) \(Hebrew\) Mofet Institute Publications.](#) This survey was commissioned as background material for the expert committee’s work on cultivating SEL in Israel’s education system.



**21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills** refers to the skills that the Israeli Ministry of Education intends to impart to its graduates with the aspiration that this will enable them to **integrate into a world that is changing rapidly in the fields of information, technology, and communications**. This concept is at the base of the ministry's information and communications technology revolution. 21<sup>st</sup> century skills generally are divided into three categories: life skills; learning and innovation; and media, information skills, and technology. Some social-emotional skills (e.g. self-direction and social awareness) are included in the life skills that are imparted to students as part of the information and communications technology revolution and programs dependent upon it ([Eisenberg & Selivansky Eden, 2012](#)).

**Positive psychology and positive education in the education system** relate to improving one's relationship with oneself and one's surroundings. The emphasis in positive psychology is not actually on instilling skills, but on establishing **the conditions required for an individual's optimal development** (as compared to reasonable development). Positive psychology and education generally are divided into two categories: social and emotional skills; and conditions for optimal development. Certain social-emotional skills (e.g. empathy and managing emotions) are partially included in some of the skills imparted to students in this approach ([Seligman & Adler, 2019](#)).

**Character and civic education** is a field of education that emphasizes promoting values, positions, outlooks, and skills among students that will enable them to function in an **ethical, democratic, and efficient manner that has social value**. It is customary to divide these skills into three categories: social-emotional skills; knowledge; and cognitive skills. Some social-emotional skills (e.g. responsible decision-making based on moral considerations) are partially included in the social-emotional skills instilled in the student in character and civic education ([Berkowitz et al., 2012](#)).

## **SEL Theoretical Background**

As mentioned above, there are a wide variety of overlapping and sometimes conflicting definitions in the different models that define SEL. One reason for this ambiguity is that each model relies on a different theoretical background. It is beyond the scope of this literature review to detail each of these theories,

however, it seems that it can be stated that a broad approach to implementing SEL is based on a combination of principles from different theoretical approaches<sup>2</sup>. Thus, for example, **systemic** theories emphasize structural aspects of the framework and environment in which learning occurs, **social learning** theories focus on the interaction with significant figures in the learning process, **developmental** theories relate to tailoring learning to the student's age and developmental stage, and theories of **behavioral change** discuss the critical role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in creating change.

## Main SEL Models

Literature reviews of this field present many dozens of theoretical frameworks and models that address SEL directly. Due to the conceptual ambiguity described above, the models emphasize different fields of skills and sub-skills and use different definitions to describe them. The [Explore SEL website](#), which was developed at Harvard University, offers an impressive visual presentation of the details of the different models. In addition, the attached [table](#) shows a chart prepared in Hebrew based on the [Taxonomy Project](#), a mapping initiative that also was developed by the Harvard team led by Prof. Stephanie Jones.

This literature review focuses on CASEL's comprehensive conceptual framework, which seems to have the greatest impact on education systems around the globe. Afterwards, we discuss two additional models in brief.

### The CASEL Model<sup>3</sup>

The CASEL model presents a systemic approach in which the most effective way to promote SEL is to integrate it into academic programs, in broad and varied contexts, in educational practices and teaching methods, and via ongoing cooperation with families and community organizations. These joint efforts intended to cultivate the voice and the involvement of the students and their being agents of change, to establish an optimal atmosphere in the classroom and school, to promote the adults' SEL skills, and to establish authentic

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<sup>2</sup> . To delve more deeply into these theoretical approaches to SEL, see [Brackett et al., 2015](#).

<sup>3</sup> . For further details on CASEL's model, see <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel>.

partnerships with families and communities.

### **The Competencies in the CASEL Model**

The skills focus on five broad, related areas of competencies. These five areas can be taught and named as detailed below for each of the different developmental stages from childhood through adulthood and for a variety of cultural contexts. The competencies and sub-competencies are:

**Self-awareness:** The ability to understand feelings, thoughts, and values and how they effect behavior

- Integrate personal and social identity
- Identify personal, cultural, and linguistic assets
- Identify one's own emotions
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity
- Link feelings, values, and thoughts
- Examine prejudices and biases
- Experience self-efficacy
- Demonstrate awareness of flourishing and development – growth mindset
- Develop interests and a sense of purpose

**Self-management:** The ability to successfully regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in various situations

- Cope with stress efficiently
- Control impulses
- Manage emotions
- Identify and use strategies to manage stress
- Exhibit self-discipline and self-motivation
- Set personal and collective goals
- Use planning and organizational skills
- Show the courage to take initiative
- Demonstrate personal and social agency

**Social awareness:** The ability to understand and identify with the perspective of



others, including people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts

- Adopt perspectives and recognize strengths of others
- Demonstrate empathy and compassion
- Show concern and care for others' feelings
- Understand the significance of gratitude and express it
- Identify diverse social norms
- Understand the influence of organizations and systems on behavior

**Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy, supportive relationships and to navigate effectively among people and groups

- Communicate effectively
- Develop positive relationships
- Demonstrate cultural sensitivity
- Practice teamwork and collaborative problem-solving and conflict-resolution
- Resist negative peer pressure
- Show leadership in groups
- Offer or seek assistance as needed
- Stand up for others' rights

**Responsible decision-making:** The ability to make caring, constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions in diverse situations

- Demonstrate curiosity and open-mindedness
- Identify solutions to personal and social problems
- Learn how to make a reasoned judgement after analyzing knowledge, information, data, and facts
- Anticipate and evaluate the consequences of actions
- Adopt critical thinking effectively both inside and outside of educational frameworks
- Understand the role of the individual in promoting personal, family, and community well-being

## **THE OECD Model**

The OECD selected the widely used Five Factor Model as its organizing model for SEL due to its strong research base ([Chernyshenko et al., 2018](#)). Also known as the Big Five model, it is widely accepted to characterize interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities and characteristics.

The main criticism regarding SEL is that this model doesn't sufficiently distinguish between personality characteristics (which are difficult to change) and skills, which can be imparted and cultivated. The chart<sup>4</sup> below shows the five broad personality dimensions that the OECD model relates to as well as the specific skills derived from them.

It should be noted that the OECD added the "compound skills" dimension, which came from a different conceptual framework, to the Big Five model.

Dimensions	Individual Skills or Facets
Conscientiousness	Motivated to achieve goals, responsible, self-controlled, and persistent
Emotional stability	Resilient in stressful situations, regulates emotions, and optimistic
Agreeableness	Empathetic, trusting, and cooperative
Extraversion	Sociability, assertiveness, and energetic
Openness to experience	Curiosity, tolerance, and creativity
Compound skills	Critical thinking, meta-cognition, and self-efficacy

### **The Jones & Bouffard Developmental-Contextual Model**

This model is built on developmental research and theories. It emphasizes the importance of the different contexts in which a child develops, such as age, developmental stage, socioeconomic status, culture, home climate, educational climate, and more. These contexts and the interaction between them impact the

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<sup>4</sup> . The chart is from the summary of the expert committee on cultivating SEL in Israel's education system.

child's emotional, social, and cognitive development ([Jones & Bouffard, 2012](#)). According to this model, the teacher plays a wide-ranging, vital role that involves not only teaching and interacting with a specific student, but also relating to the classroom and school contexts in all their aspects ([Sperling, 2018](#)).

This model represents almost the same skills as the CASEL model, but divides them into three different groups:

- *Cognitive regulation* – The student's ability to regulate his activities, inhibit inappropriate responses, plan his work, develop working memory and cognitive flexibility, and so on.
- *Emotional processes* – The individual's ability to be aware of his emotions, express his emotions via socially appropriate behaviors, express empathy and concern for the other, and comprehend sensitive situations from viewpoints that differ from his own.
- *Social and interpersonal skills* – The individual's ability to understand social cues, resolve interpersonal misunderstandings, disagreements, and conflicts, and behave in a prosocial manner.

### **The Israeli Ministry of Education's Graduate Profile**

The strategy and planning wing of Israel's Ministry of Education has been leading a broad, in-depth process in recent years to formulate a graduate profile and redefine its educational goals. This framework is based on principles from leading models around the world that have been tailored to the distinctive goals, needs, and challenges of the Israeli education system. The proposed graduate profile includes four groups of skills that must be imparted in a wide range of educational contexts and daily life:

- *Cognitive skills* – Language, math, and science literacy, critical thinking, creative thinking, and digital and information literacy.
- *Intrapersonal skills* – Self-awareness and self-direction (self-direction includes the ability to regulate oneself, self-motivation, and coping with



stressful situations).

- *Interpersonal skills* – Social awareness, social functioning, global literacy (which includes general knowledge and exposure to and familiarity with different cultures well enough to conduct a conversation and communicate with people).
- *Physical skills* – Body and health literacy.

## Chapter 3: How is SEL Implemented?

### Main Principles of Successful Implementation

The extensive research literature on successful SEL programs and effective implementation methods can contribute significantly to outlining the principles of successful implementation.

[Bracket et al. \(2019\)](#) propose examining the following questions before starting the process of selecting a SEL program:

- What are the goals for the program?
- Upon which population must influence be exerted to achieve these goals?
- What life circumstances characterize the program's target population?
- Who are the key figures who will make the decisions about program implementation?
- Who will actually implement the program in the field?
- What characteristics of the school and of the home climate are liable to promote or hinder the program's successful implementation?

**Numerous studies have examined the features of effective SEL programs. We present the main features that can contribute to the program's success (and what is important to be careful of):**

**1. SAFE** – This is an acronym for four vital components ([Durlak, 2016](#)):

- *Sequenced* – Learning is based on a step-by-step process.
- *Active* – The program incorporates active and experiential learning as well as practical exercises for students to perform of the skills being learned.

- *Focus* – The program dedicates specific, defined times to develop specific SEL skills.
- *Explicit* – The program clearly defines the SEL skills that it seeks to promote and sets clear goals for the learning process and the desired results.

**2. Curriculum** – It is important that teachers and the school staff, not outside professionals, implement SEL **within** a curriculum and embed it in an integral way into **academic subject areas** ([Taylor et al., 2017](#)). It is important to formulate a balanced curriculum that includes both intrapersonal skills (such as self-management and self-awareness) and interpersonal skills (such as social awareness). That is in addition to study skills that increase the student's motivation to participate actively in learning and contribute to better academic achievements. Seeing SEL as an inseparable part of the curriculum is especially important in light of the fact that teachers often tend to make concessions on SEL lessons in order to focus on improving achievements in areas like math or English ([Humphrey et al., 2015](#)).

**3. Supportive environment and climate** – This refers to the whole experience the student undergoes at school, with an emphasis on relationships, a positive climate that provides a sense of security, a sense of connection to the class and the school, cooperation, consistency in the messages the educational staff broadcasts, a sense of belonging in the class and the school, and more. A supportive environment and positive climate enable the student to practice social-emotional skills in her relationships with the people around her in class and in the entire school ([Durlak et al., 2011](#); [Jones & Bouffard, 2012](#)). To that end, it is very important to recruit all of the staff members surrounding the students (such as drivers, administrative staff, aides, and more) to these programs so that they can serve as a supportive community in implementing SEL ([Jones et al., 2017](#)).

**4. Adapting to context and needs** – Effective programs are adapted to the students' surroundings, social, cultural, and economic context, and life circumstances. This refers to both adapting the skills taught and the ways they are taught ([Jones et al., 2017](#)). In the Israeli context, it is important to pay



attention to the many groups that compose Israeli society – Arabs and Jews, secular and religious, and more – and to adjust the program to their characteristics and needs. This also is true at the school level: an effective program is one that suits the culture, values, and vision of the entire educational framework and all the resources at its disposal. Without such adaptations, the programs are liable to fail and waste extensive resources ([Jones et al., 2017](#); [Ran, 2018](#)).

**5. Educational staff’s involvement and cultivating its abilities and well-being –**

SEL programs were found to be more effective when they succeed to promote the teachers’ social-emotional skills. The better the teachers’ skills are and the more their sense of well-being increases, the more they are capable of helping their students acquire these skills. Therefore, it is important to invest in training the educational staff in the process of implementing SEL programs and in cultivating their own well-being. In addition, it is very important to involve the educational staff in the programs’ development stages and adapting the content and teaching methods. This cooperation will help create a sense of ownership among the teachers, increase their range of activity, and reduce objections ([Jones et al., 2017](#)).

**6. Appropriate to the developmental stage –** Developmental research shows that

certain skills serve as foundation stones for the development of more complex competencies and skills that develop later. Thus, for example, the ability to identify one’s own feelings is a vital prerequisite to the ability to effectively regulate one’s feelings. In addition, knowledge is starting to accumulate that indicates that the level of importance and relative centrality of such SEL skills and others changes to suit the tasks and demands of each developmental stage. In that case, it is important that the program relate to developmental suitability regarding two central aspects: 1. selecting and focusing on SEL skills and competencies that are critical to that developmental stage; and 2. adapting teaching methods and implementation to the characteristics of that developmental stage. For an elaboration on the developmental aspects of SEL, see [Kopelman-Rubin \(2019\)](#). In general, it is worthwhile to start implementing SEL interventions as early as possible. Research indicates that implementing programs in early stages of students’ lives is more effective than doing so at later stages ([Jones & Kahan, 2017](#)).

**7. The student's voice** – Students should be full partners not only in the SEL process, but also in planning such a program, making decisions regarding the program, and more. This way, the students will not feel that the SEL intervention programs are imposed on them by adults and will instead be full partners with personal, intrinsic motivation for the program to succeed ([Downes & Cefai, 2016](#)).

**8. Parental involvement and education** – It is vital to strive for the parents to be full partners in SEL programs and even receive knowledge and explanations about these programs ([Garbacz et al., 2015](#)). Research of SEL programs shows that students whose parents were less involved in implementing the program at school achieved less positive results both academically and according to emotional and behavioral indicators, regardless of students' socioeconomic status or ethnicity ([McCormick et al., 2016](#)).

**9. Personalized interventions** – As noted above, studies have found SEL programs are effective for children from all backgrounds. That said, research indicates that it is important to ascertain that the programs for specific populations, for example, at-risk children (children who come from an underprivileged background and are at-risk of developing mental illness or negative behaviors), be more focused and relate more to the specific needs of these groups ([Downes & Cefai, 2016](#)).

## **Implementing SEL in Academic Subject Areas**

Despite the research findings on SEL's contribution to students' academic achievements, teachers remain committed, first and foremost, to students' success in the main school subject areas in which they are graded: English, math, sciences, etc. As a result, they feel compelled to dedicate time to teaching these subjects, at the expense of lessons to promote SEL ([Humphrey et al., 2015](#)).

Moreover, not every school has SEL programs and those schools that do have programs do not always train their staff to teach the SEL lessons, but instead rely on outsourcing. Thus SEL programs are taught separately from the main subject areas and not in an ongoing way by the educational staff.



Incorporating SEL into the academic subject areas will make it more relevant to students and enable them to experience and practice it regularly and thus contribute to closer relations between the teacher and student. Furthermore, emphasizing social-emotional aspects can also contribute to understanding and internalizing the material taught in all subjects. As proof, there are studies that show a connection between developed SEL competencies and the ability to succeed in STEM subjects (for more details, see [Eduporium](#)). Furthermore, there are studies that show that SEL competencies such as motivation, positive attitude, and social interaction with others contribute to learning a second language, particularly when it comes to learning English (for more information, see [Melani et al., 2020](#)). Another study found that integrating SEL into science studies contributed to better understanding of sciences and developing the ability for collaborative discourse ([Rimm-Kaufman & Merritt, 2019](#)).

A number of aspects of SEL are relevant to implementation in specific school subject areas:

- **Collaborative-social learning** – In this type of learning, students do not only learn alongside one another, but also engage in a shared task, reflect together, and conduct a respectful dialogue in order to achieve a shared goal. In recent years, there is growing evidence from research of higher academic achievements in science and math classes in which students participate in scientific inquiry and argumentation that includes hearing ideas, relating to the ideas of peers respectfully, and building and checking shared arguments. The research shows that teamwork based on norms such as relating respectfully to the other, the subject area, and logical thinking is vital to learning and contributes to it ([Schwarz et al., 2015](#)).
- **Self-efficacy** – The student’s belief in his ability to learn, to succeed, and to continue developing is an important emotional characteristic of academic success ([Pajares & Schunk, 2001](#)). This approach connects to the concept of the growth mindset, that was described in chapter 2. The sense of self-efficacy in turn depends on a number of social-emotional skills, such as: the ability to evaluate past performances objectively; how one relates to success and failure; and the ability to accept criticism in a



practical manner. Students' sense of self-efficacy can be harmed when students connect a psychological-emotional state such as anxiety, stress, or infirmity to their abilities. In light of all this, it is important that teachers adjust their feedback to suit students' true performance and help them develop their sense of self-efficacy.

- **Motivation** – The motivation to learn science is vital to learning, depends on the existence of social-emotional skills, and is influenced by these skills (for example, see [Kaplan & Maehr, 2007](#)). A central factor that effects motivation is whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic. Teachers can support the intentions to develop skills in the sciences in many ways: first of all, to explain the importance of learning itself; to emphasize in-depth understanding and not simply earning grades; with regard to teaching methods, it is important to challenge the students with assignments that require thinking and reasoning; to dedicate time to questions and to students' areas of interest; and to grant students autonomy in selecting the directions of their studies. In this context, it also is very important to promote a growth mindset among the students along with the belief that they are capable of continuing to improve, grow, and develop in math and science (and any other subject).
- **Emotionally supportive surroundings** and learning through interaction with others have been found to be factors that contribute to reducing anxiety and to improved performance in learning English as a second language ([Melani et al., 2020](#)).

As mentioned above, among the wealth of SEL programs, there are few that directly address promoting SEL in specific school subject areas. Of those that do, it is worth citing the [Students Take Action Together \(STAT\) program](#), which was developed by the Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab at Rutgers University in the US. The staff, led by Maurice Elias, developed a systemic approach to embed SEL in the regular teaching process for all specific school subject areas. The program endows teachers with teaching methods to promote skills and behaviors such as empathy, communications, problem solving, and civic engagement. The program emphasizes methods such as establishing norms for communication and group discussion as well as the development of



problem-solving processes based on defining the problem, identifying possible solutions, determining an action plan, and noticing indicators that the problem has been solved successfully.

CASEL offers a variety of [ways to integrate SEL into academic instruction](#), including [guidelines and concrete examples for teachers of different subjects](#). [Aperture Education](#) (see chapter 4 for more information) offers teachers [tips](#) to integrate SEL into lessons in English language arts, science, math, and social studies.

Similar recommendations also can be found in the [portfolio of curricula for educators](#) that the Israeli Ministry of Education developed. The skills relevant to each subject area are listed along with recommendations for methods that are suitable for promoting these skills during the different lessons. For example, in seventh-grade English class, the students discuss texts that address the [qualities of a good friend](#) or [feeling confident in school](#).

## Chapter 4: SEL Programs in Israel and Abroad

Programs designed specifically to teach SEL clearly are the main tool for imparting and cultivating social-emotional skills in students. In most cases, these programs are based on a theory of change that defines the skills on which a program focuses, the goals for improvement, the ways to achieve this, and the actions required to evaluate effectiveness. As mentioned above, there are many thousands of programs, with different emphases and ways of conveying SEL. We selected examples of programs from Israel and around the world, mainly those whose effectiveness is supported by research.

### Key to Features:

Program integrated into academic subject areas

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

Program implemented by external staff

School-level program – The learning is expressed in setting norms, forming customs, and structures related to the school climate and its support services for students. In addition, the program promotes the school staff's social-emotional skills and insists on involving students' families.

Class-level program – The learning includes various opportunities for SEL within the school's regular curriculum. Thus, these opportunities also occur in regular lessons.

Student-level program – The learning occurs via personal instruction and assignments, participation in lessons specifically on SEL, and group assignments in the afternoon with students' families and parents.

### Examples of Programs in Israel

#### The Israeli Ministry of Education's Psychological and Counseling Services Division's [Life Skills](#) Program

Student-level program

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Life Skills is the Israeli Ministry of Education's flagship program and is designed as a required course in the curriculum. The program works on developing students' social-emotional competencies and reinforcing their abilities and capabilities to cope with different situations in life, from routine daily life to emergencies, in the present and the future.

It is a developmental program with age-appropriate components. It has five areas of focus that are referred to with a Hebrew acronym that can be translated as, "The strengths I contain." The focus areas are:

Me and my identity (reinforcing independent identity)

Emotion regulation

Self-management

Between me and them (interpersonal skills)

There's a way out (coping with stressful situations, dangers, and crisis)

**Rationale:** The program is based on the assumption that optimal development occurs not only via preventing psychological syndromes and risky behavior among students, but also and mainly by focusing on, realizing, and expanding the latent personal resources of each student.

**Ages:** The program is intended for students in grades 1-12.

**Details:**

- The program is based on allocating one hour of mandatory studies per week during homeroom for the homeroom teacher or the school counselor to deliver a lesson on life skills.
- Life skills lessons are based on lesson plans that are prepared in advance and designed to encourage candid, open discussion between the teacher and students on topics relevant to the students' age and developmental stage. For example, in seventh grade, when students are in the stage of self-definition, the program includes activities to find their distinctive and different features through personal reflection followed by a discussion with a partner (for more information, see the [activities for seventh grade](#)). The lesson plan also includes experiential learning methods, such as

working in pairs, independent work, group activities, and more.

- The homeroom teachers receive training and guidance from the school counselor. The training in this program is distinguished by the fact that it is experiential, enabling the teachers to try out the experiences in the program themselves. Thus, during the training, the teachers participate in an open discussion led by the school counselor. When necessary, the teachers also can turn to the school psychologist, who is a partner in planning and implementing the program in the school.
- The lesson plans are structured, but the program in general is flexible and can be tailored to meet the needs of the hour, local needs, or specific events in the life of the class or school.

**Research:** Studies to examine the program's efficacy were not found.

### **Resilience Education**

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

School-level program

Class-level program

Student-level program

Resilience Education is a psychoeducational program that includes a wide range of age-appropriate interventions to develop and reinforce personal resilience and ability to cope with stressful situations. It is one of the programs offered by the Cohen Harris Resilience Center, which was founded by the Children at Risk association.

**Rationale:** The program is based on the approach of developing resilience to stress, in other words, the assumption that practicing coping with "small" crises develops methods for coping with "big" crises. It is offered as a preventative program and in times of crisis, a team of experts convenes to develop new tools for students that are appropriate to that specific crisis.

**Ages:** Preschool-high school

**Details:**

- The program aims to create a positive atmosphere in the school and classroom in which the student can develop important skills and that empowers the role of the teacher in this system. On the theoretical level, the program is based on the latest research-based cognitive behavioral psychology tools.
- The program extends over three years: one year to instill knowledge, one year for assimilation, and one year for expansion. After three years, the “language of resilience” has become the main language of the educational institution. The program is assimilated via the “fan” method: introducing the program to principals; training led by experts for school counselors and psychologists at the school (one-time, 20-hour training course plus ongoing guidance every two weeks); the counselors and psychologists teach the teachers (one-time, 4-hour basic training plus a weekly individual guidance session); and the teachers then teach the students.
- The program itself consists of 45-minute lessons that are delivered once a week and are considered part of the Life Skills program (see above). The lessons are structured and include discussions with the students regarding their experiences with issues related to development, sexuality, identity, taking risks, and more.
- In recent years, the program has been providing pinpointed enrichment sessions which expand the use of resilience tools beyond the weekly allocation of lessons. They include “drops of resilience” (short 10-20-minute modules to refresh resilience tools the students have learned – from the second year of the program, 50 such modules are offered); “resilience tutors” (students in higher grades use detailed lesson plans to teach younger students resilience tools); or “chain of resilience” (students teach residents of old-age homes resilience tools).

**Research:** A study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child*

*and Adolescent Psychiatry* (the world's leading journal in this field) found that students from Ashkelon who participated in the program prior to Operation Cast Lead (the Israeli military operation in 2008-2009 in response to Hamas rocket and mortar fire on Ashkelon, among other areas), showed 50% less symptoms of post-trauma than children in the city who had not participated in the program ([Wolmer et al., 2011](#)). The evaluation of the Israel National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (RAMA) also found that the counselors and homeroom teachers in the different schools felt that the program significantly benefitted the students ([RAMA, 2013](#)).

### **I Can Succeed (ICS) Program**

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

Class-level program

Student-level program

The I Can Succeed (ICS) program was developed by the SEL.IL Center at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya (now Reichman University), the Israeli Ministry of Education, the Israeli National Insurance Institute, and Schneider Children's Medical Center of Israel. It is a systemic program that aims to promote students' social, interpersonal, emotional, and academic functioning by imparting and cultivating executive functioning, emotional, and social skills. The program is implemented by the educational staff, which undergoes a special training course designed to endow it with knowledge and practical tools that are tailored to the students' ages. In the wake of the Coronavirus crisis and remote learning, the program was adapted to a digital format so that it also can be used for remote learning.

**Rationale:** The ICS program is based on three bodies of theoretical knowledge and research: attachment theory, with a special emphasis on the literature that addresses the connection between attachment and learning; the contribution of executive functions to the development of optimal academic-social-emotional functioning; and literature about variables that influence the efficacy and effective implementation of school-wide programs to promote SEL.



**Ages:** Kindergarten to ninth grade

**Details:**

- The main content of the program are adapted to each grade level and available in both Hebrew and Arabic. They include the following topics: understanding the connection between academic functioning and social-emotional functioning; self-awareness; emotion and behavior regulation; effective interpersonal communication; planning and organizing; and decision-making.
- In accordance with the principle of SAFE programs that CASEL recommends for effective SEL programs, the program is built on layer upon layer (Sequenced), includes active learning (Active), focuses on specific skills (Focused), and is based on explicit instruction and practice (Explicit).
- The lesson plans are based on detailed protocols, but the program enables flexibility and adapting the contents to the needs, culture, and conduct of each school.
- The skills taught are tailored to the developmental stage and to subjects relevant to all age groups. Thus for example, in seventh grade, the lesson plans that address self-awareness include, among other topics, the student's ability to identify strengths and weaknesses; how to overcome failure and fears; how to adjust to changes and new situations; and more. The lessons on interpersonal communication for this grade address, among other topics, conduct on social media, perspective taking, and cooperation with others.
- The lesson plans employ a range of teaching methods – videos, games, quizzes, stories, groups discussions, and more.
- Homeroom teachers lead the sessions after completing a training program that takes about one year during which they are introduced to the program's rationale, the latest knowledge, and unique tools the program

provides.

**Research:** A number of studies have been conducted that found the program effective. One study that was published recently examined 419 students in grades 5-6 at seven schools over two years. 283 of the students participated in ICS and 136 students were in the control group. The research included repeated measures and examined a number of factors via self-report questionnaires and collecting information on academic achievements. It was found that only among students who participated in the program was there a discernible rise in assertiveness and initiative alongside a discernible decline in signs of depression and anxiety as well as physical and verbal bullying. Academically, students who participated in the program demonstrated a discernible improvement in achievements in Hebrew and English studies. Teachers' reports indicated their very high satisfaction with both the training and the program and that they succeed to embed the program into studies ([Kopelman-Rubin et al., 2020](#)).

### **The Maytiv Program**

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas  
Program implemented by the school's educational staff

School-level program

Class-level program

Student-level program

The Maytiv program for schools is operated by the Maytiv Center for the Research and Application of Positive Psychology at IDC Herzliya (now Reichman University). The program aims to promote happiness, success, and morality, but contains many elements from the field of SEL such as emotion regulating, positive relationships, improving climate, and more.

**Rationale:** The program is based on the fundamentals of positive psychology and also includes emphases on social-emotional skills. Unlike other SEL programs, this program also emphasizes aspects such as gratitude, compassion, hope, and mindfulness.

**Ages:** Kindergarten-middle school

## Details:

- As a preparatory step before implementing the program in a school, educators participate in a distinctive training program led by Maytiv facilitators. The training is progressive and includes two sessions at which positive psychology is presented by a clinical psychologist followed by 15 preparatory sessions, one for each of the lessons that will be taught to the students. Each session lasts about 90-120 minutes, part of which is dedicated to the subject of the lesson and part to methods to teach the material. In addition, there are feedback processes and sharing between peers after conveying the material to the students.
- The program is based on 15 positive psychology sessions. The sessions are led by the homeroom teachers who were trained for this. The sessions last about two hours and take place every other week.
- At each session, skills and behaviors relevant to the topic are presented, including discussing stories and opportunities for students to practice and strengthen the skills they learned.

**Research:** The program was the subject of several studies. One study compared 531 students in grades 7-9 who participated in the program to 501 students at a demographically similar control school that did not participate in the program. It found that the students who participated in the Maytiv program demonstrated a significant reduction in anxiety and depression as well as increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism ([Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014](#)). In another study, researchers observed 2,517 students from 70 classes at six schools for two years. The classes were randomly divided into classes that participated in the intervention and control groups. The analysis indicated that the intervention had a positive effect on a number of indicators such as positive emotions, good peer relationships, school engagement, and grades in different subject areas. In comparison, this effect was not found in the control groups, which even showed some negative changes ([Shoshani et al., 2016](#)).

## [Ve'ahavta Program](#)

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

Class-level program

Student-level program

The Ve'ahavta program was established by the Ve'ahavta NPO. The program's goal is to enhance students' empathy and develop their interpersonal skills.

Today the program is offered in cooperation with the Israeli Ministry of Education and various municipalities, such as Tel Aviv, Holon, and Or Yehuda.

**Rationale:** The program is based on neuroscience research and tries to change the neural pathways of empathy in the brain via experiential tools.

**Ages:** first and second grade

**Details:**

- The program is based on experiential techniques, supported by neuroscience research. These techniques are implemented on both the students and teachers. These techniques have been dubbed “a workout for the empathy muscle.”
- The exercises include weekly sessions in the classroom using triggers, such as stories, video clips, games, and more, and deliberate questions that together facilitate practicing the process of empathy. One of these distinctive activities is a series of sessions where the students meet a mother and baby. The students get a firsthand view of the interaction that develops between the mother and the baby and also observe the baby's development.
- The homeroom teachers receive ongoing guidance at weekly sessions with personal instructors.
- In addition, there are joint counseling and learning sessions for the school staff, who receive access to a daily exercise program and workshops.

## **Research:**

Research conducted at the Levinsky College of Education examined the implementation of the program among 1,500 children. Using quantitative and qualitative tools, the research found significant differences between children who participated in the program and those who did not. They included a higher level of empathy among the students who participated and a reduction in violence in classrooms. Likewise, the homeroom teachers reported that the program helped them better understand their relationships with their students and improve the classroom climate ([Sagee et al., 2015](#)).

## **Sagol School Program**

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas  
Program implemented by the school's educational staff

Class-level program

Student-level program

The program was developed by the Sagol Center for Brain and Mind at IDC Herzliya (now Reichman University). The program is based on research in neuroscience, psychology, and education. The program's goal is to promote and cultivate mindfulness among students and teachers. Mindfulness is a state of consciousness in which attention is intentionally and nonjudgmentally turned inward to focus on the individual's physical and mental experience at that moment. It has been found to be connected to indicators of well-being, happiness, and health. The program operates with the support of leading philanthropic foundations in Israel.

**Rationale:** The program is based on the whole school approach. This approach sees the school as a space for SEL to develop and flourish by bringing together all the aspects related to the student's life and engaging the school staff and students' parents. The program includes material on mindfulness along with SEL skills, but recently has been emphasizing additional aspects in the spirit of the Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning model, such as practicing attentiveness, compassion, and systemic thinking.

**Ages:** Elementary through high school. The program also is suitable for special education and alternative schools.

**Details:**

- The program is based on building an ecological system to facilitate long-term systemic change through the engagement and commitment of all the stakeholders in the school and community.
- The full process includes three years of certification, during which the school establishment gradually implements the program. It begins with a basic introduction to the language of mindfulness and neuroscience research for the entire educational staff followed by advanced training for the leading staff and establishing Sagol labs in the school to build a school culture based on mindfulness, which will continue on in the school after the three-year program ends.
- The training for teachers is based on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) exercises, which included guided breathing exercises, paying attention to the body, contemplating feelings, paying attention to the present moment, and more. The teachers who are trained then implement these practices in their daily work with the students through breathing exercises, contemplation, and so on during lessons in the classroom and outside it.

**Research:** As mentioned above, the program is based on neuroscience research conducted in Israel and around the globe. That said, as this literature review is being written, studies that methodically examined the implementation of the Sagol School program were not found ([Albalada et al, 2019](#)).

## **Examples of Programs Abroad**

Below we present examples of a number of the outstanding programs that are being widely used today and research has found to be effective.



## **Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)**

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

School-level program

Class-level program

Student-level program

PATHS is one of the oldest and most-researched programs to promote SEL. It was developed by Greenberg and Kusché ([2006](#)) at the University of Washington in the US.

**Rationale:** The program's psychological framework is called ABCD (affective-behavioral-cognitive-dynamic). The program revolves around the approach of promoting social-emotional skills via emotions, behaviors, and cognitive understanding.

**Ages:** Kindergarten and elementary school

### **Details:**

- The school allocates time in its weekly schedule for the program's lessons.
- Educators are trained by the program's staff before the program is implemented in the school. Throughout the process of implementing the program, the educational staff can receive assistance online, feedback, and personalized coaching as needed.
- The program includes age-appropriate units that aim to teach the students to identify and tag signs of emotions, to distinguish between feelings and behaviors, to create connections, to be polite, to take turns, and to learn to resolve disputes and conflicts in a friendly manner.
- The program's main component is 20-30-minute lessons, which are delivered in class four times a week. The lessons include frontal

instruction, behavioral modeling, discussions, stories, videos, and additional learning aides.

- The program emphasizes the way teacher expand upon the content learned and use teachable moments in different contexts throughout the school day.
- The program is mainly funded by the school and costs between \$350 for materials to \$59,000 for comprehensive training for a school ([Ran, 2018](#)).

**Research:** A number of studies of the program found a positive connection between participating in the program and better interpersonal skills alongside a reduction in aggression and disciplinary problems ([CPPRG, 2011](#)). An improvement also was found in cognitive skills such as concentration and linguistic fluency ([Greenberg & Kusché, 2006](#)).

### **Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating (RULER)**

Program integrated into academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

School-level program

Class-level program

Student-level program

The Center for Emotional Intelligence at Yale University developed the RULER program to promote research-based SEL in schools.

**Rationale:** The program's guiding principle is the RULER model. According to this model, it is important to develop five key skills among the students in order to promote SEL ([Nathanson et al., 2016](#)).

### **According to this approach, every student should capable of:**

1. Recognizing one's own emotions and those of others
2. Understanding these emotions, their causes, and their consequences
3. Labeling these emotions and use a diverse vocabulary to describe emotions
4. Expressing emotions in a constructive way across different contexts



## 5. Regulating the strength of emotions in accordance with expectations

**Ages:** preschool-high school

**Details:**

- **In the first year**, the school staff (principal, teachers, counselors, and psychologists) participate in a two-day training session at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. During the process of embedding the program in the school, the school staff can receive ongoing support such as guidance and access to materials online (courses, sample lesson plans, and more).
- After the school staff is trained, the program and its rationale is presented to the students' parents. The parents also are offered leadership seminars, the opportunity to consult with the school's professional staff, and online access to activities especially for families.
- Throughout this year, four research-based anchor tools are introduced to embed SEL in school life. These tools will be used throughout the program:

1. *Charter*: A shared charter helps the school fashion a positive, supportive learning environment for students, with the assumption that an optimal environment increases the well-being of both the students and the staff. The school's staff and students formulate the charter together, defining norms and rules for behavior at their school, which they refer to as a community. In this way they define how they want to feel at school (labeling), what behaviors they think would promote that (understanding), and how they can cope when difficulties arise in promoting these behaviors (regulating). The charter is drafted once, but checkins take place regularly to verify it is actually being implemented.

2. *Mood Meter*: This tool helps the students and teachers be aware of changes in their feelings and how this changes influences their behavior during the school day. The tool is built with the assumption that identifying feelings and understanding actions are important tools in SEL. This tool includes a grid that is

divided into four quadrants: the X-axis measures pleasant to unpleasant while the Y-axis rates the emotion's intensity from low to high.

3. *Meta-Moment*: This tool helps students and teachers cope with emotions in order to make decisions effectively. The tool relies on a step-by-step process and is used in relaxation exercises, visualization, and guided visualization. It facilitates analysis of “how my best version of myself would behave in a similar situation” as well as access to a variety of effective strategies.

4. *Blueprint*: This tool enables students and teachers to manage conflict by relating to issues from the other's perspective, developing empathy, and cooperating to reach a positive solution. The tool's goal is to promote a pleasant, safe environment in which the students and teachers can learn together.

- The Feeling Words Curriculum is only implemented in **the second year**. In this curriculum, the teachers work with the students on expressing and managing a variety of feelings throughout the school day and during lessons in different subject areas. The goal is that the student will be able to exercise emotional intelligence throughout the different learning contexts in the school day.

**Research:** Different studies indicate that the intervention program has a positive impact on the school climate, which is expressed in the teachers' satisfaction and high commitment to work ([Castillo-Gualda et al., 2017](#)), in the students' academic achievements, fewer behavioral problems among students, reduced signs of distress and depression among students, and better quality relationships between students and teachers ([Ran et al., 2018](#)).

## Digital SEL Solutions

The programs that we present below are based on digital technology and offer digital solutions to impart SEL.

### Ripple Effects

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff  
School-level program

This is a prize-winning educational initiative to promote success and flourishing among children and youth. The organization provides accessible, personalized, research-based digital solutions to impart and cultivate SEL skills among students from preschool through high school as well as among educators. The organization's management and executive committee include renowned researchers such as Maurice Elias, one of the leading figures in the world of SEL. It is a systemic program that incorporates four areas:

- Information collection
- Evaluation
- Intervention
- Professional counseling services

In developing intervention programs, the organization relies not only on established research-based knowledge but also on youth and children who shared their personal stories, insight, problems, and so on with the developers. Their technology is based on, among others, natural selection patterns in order to personalize the experience to provide each student with the SEL skills, behavioral interventions, and practices for social-emotional empowerment that are relevant to him. Each topic has a variety of measurement tools, teaching methods, and ways of participating, which makes personalization possible. The program that was developed for teachers includes practices intended to promote SEL in **subject areas** as well.

[The program for teens](#) offers 428 different applications (apps) to build core SEL skills, address behavioral problems, and even to identify the sources of such problems. The tools can be accessed via a variety of platforms – personal computers, iPads, and smart phones. A relatively new development is the [Pocket Coach](#), a mobile phone app that can be used anywhere and anytime.

Research on the program found improvements in behavior and academic achievements as well as in prosocial behavior. Details of the studies, methodologies, and findings are [summarized on the program's website](#).

### **Panorama Education**

Program integrated into academic subject areas

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

Program implemented by external staff

School-level program

This American company offers advanced assessment tools, which are used to refer users to a broad reservoir of interventions to strengthen SEL skills among students in preschool through high school as well as teachers and other adults. The company's tools were ranked the top SEL measurement tools in a 2021 report from Tyton Partners supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and CASEL. Assessment is done at the level of the students and educational staff, starting from a specific class up to the district level. After the needs are mapped in the assessment stage, a customized program is offered from the company's [Playbook](#), which contains hundreds of programs from leading SEL providers.

The customization includes setting personal goals, class goals, and even district goals. In order to verify that the material is appropriate, data is collected on the students, teachers, and community leaders after the intervention. The data collected is used to customize materials to users frequently and precisely in response to their needs, identify successes, and set updated goals.

The company offers a number of channels for activity to students, teachers, principals, etc. The goal is to engrain the SEL language at the most comprehensive level in the district. The company currently is active in 17,000 schools in 150 school districts in the US, reaching more than 10 million students.

### **Aperture Education**

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas

Program implemented by the school's educational staff

School-level program

This company offers a system of advanced solutions to assess needs, customize a strategy, and develop SEL programs based on the CASEL conceptual model (see chapter 2 for details). The company's program is designed for schools, intervention program operators, and local education systems. The program offers a suite of advanced assessment and measurement tools, known as the [DESSA](#), to collect data before launching the program, during the program, and after it (see chapter 5 for details). This includes analyzing the data and reports at different levels, such as the student, class, or school. A customized strategy is formulated, based on the data and insight from it, to reinforce SEL skills among the students and educational staff. The method makes it possible to monitor progress at the student level and evaluate the student's social-emotional state. The educational staff can then use that information to tailor a strategy specifically for each student or a small group of students.

The student plays an important role in this process. The student uses a digital tool for self-reporting and then receives the results and feedback immediately, along with action strategies for improvement that are personalized to that student. The student also can use the system to select personal goals and evaluate progress towards them. All of these activities are done in a user-friendly manner on a mobile phone.

The company also offers a program for educational staff called [Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training \(EdSERT\)](#). This professional development program cultivates SEL knowledge and skills and improves the teachers' well-being. This framework provides the staff with access to extensive materials about SEL.

### **Evolution Labs**

Program taught in dedicated lessons separate from the academic subject areas  
Program implemented by the school's educational staff  
Class-level program

This company developed a digital SEL program called [Suite 360](#). The program is designed to impart and cultivate social-emotional skills among students and



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offers a companion program for teachers and parents. The program is based on research and includes a wealth of visual materials to illustrate practices to impart SEL skills based on the CASEL model. The materials can be customized to each school's goals. According to the developers, the program suits the habits and preferences of generation Z in that it presents attractive visual materials and advanced technologies (a dedicated website and mobile phone app).

Schools that purchase the program receive access to a vast library of lesson plans on SEL skills, which are tailored to the characteristics and needs of each age group. In addition, the educational staff receives access to sophisticated tools to monitor and evaluate that enable them to monitor the progress at the level of the school, class, or student. The program's youtube channel features a [short video](#) about the program.

## Chapter 5: Measuring and Assessing SEL

Assessing and measuring SEL skills in the education system can serve a variety of aims and purposes. Therefore, a variety of assessment and measurement methods and tools have been developed. The table below presents the four main domains on which assessment and measuring processes in this field focus: individual diagnosis; program evaluation; school evaluation; and evaluation of wide-ranging systemic processes.

<b><i>Focus of the Measurement</i></b>	<b><i>Why measure?</i></b>	<b><i>Who is measuring?</i></b>	<b><i>How is the measuring done?</i></b>
<b><i>Individual diagnosis at the student level</i></b>	Identify difficulties in the social-emotional field. Identify factors that impact learning such as personal tendencies, patterns of processing social information, ways of regulating emotions, and more	In a clinical setting: educational psychologists and counselors ----- In an educational setting: homeroom teachers and teachers	A variety of professional, validated diagnostic tools <hr/> Questionnaires, observations
<b><i>Evaluation of specific programs</i></b>	Examine the processes and results of the program. Was there a change in the SEL aspects on which the program focused? To what extent was the program embedded? Information will be used in decisions to select a suitable program.	Internal or external evaluation team that oversees the program	RCT research, before and after studies, cost-benefit analysis, and more
<b><i>Internal school evaluation</i></b>	To evaluate the intervention's impact at the class or school level and improve teaching and learning processes	The school's educational staff	Customized, specific questionnaires for teachers and students; performance tasks for the students; teachers' direct evaluation of the students; monitoring and analysis of internal data



<b>Wide-ranging systemic evaluation</b>		(grades, attendance, discipline problems, etc.)
	Wide-ranging evaluation of SEL for control and monitoring, setting policy and making decisions, as part of a suite of indicators for external evaluation of schools	Government research authorities; external professional bodies

There are many challenges in assessing and measuring SEL programs. In most cases, there is not consensus regarding the criteria that is suitable for evaluating a program's quality, selecting measures of success or of the process, and how to perform cost-benefit analysis so it serves as a basis for making decisions. In many programs, the researchers develop distinctive tools that focus on that program. All this results in significant differences between evaluation processes, harms their psychometric quality (regarding validity and reliability), and actually limits the ability to compare different programs. In recent years, there have been attempts to develop online repositories of reliable, valid tools in different fields of SEL. Such repositories can help evaluators select tools and tailor them to the distinctive needs of evaluation research, as well as maintain suitable psychometric criteria. In Israel, SEL assessment still is a challenge and most of the programs being implemented have not been properly assessed for efficacy. For a comprehensive survey of this, see [chapter 10 of the Yozma expert committee summary](#).

### **Measurement and Assessment Tools: Challenges and Innovations**

**Questionnaires:** The use of questionnaires is widespread at all levels of measurement. They can be student self-reports, teacher self-reports, or the teacher's report on the student. Though using questionnaires is relatively inexpensive, their credibility and validity are low in most cases because of



distortions stemming from misunderstanding the question, wanting to give the “correct” answer, and other subjective-perspective influences, among other reasons ([Karabenick et al., 2007](#)).

In recent years, as mentioned above, efforts are being made to develop questionnaires that will overcome these difficulties. [SSIS SEL](#) is one example of an advanced system of questionnaires. It is a research-based system designed to measure SEL according to the CASEL model among students between the ages of three and eighteen years. The system enables the school to collect data from the students, their families, and the educational staff regarding a variety of components of social-emotional skills such as responsibility, cooperation, empathy, self-control, and more. The questionnaires make it possible to monitor a specific student, class, or the entire school. A similar tool based on the CASEL framework is the DESSA of [Aperture Education](#) (see chapter 4), which offers a computerized platform to evaluate SEL strengths as a base to formulate growth strategies for students and evaluate their impact. These two tools provide detailed information on different skills at the individual and group level for different age levels while relating to comparative standards and norms. In this context, it also is worth mentioning again that [Panorama](#) (see chapter 4) offers a range of advanced assessment tools to evaluate SEL skills among students from kindergarten through high school. Panorama’s tool provides access to a library of programs and activities tailored to different needs that the evaluation identifies.

In the Israeli education system, there is not a measurement tool today that directly evaluates social-emotional skills among students. Surveys to evaluate school climate and the Education Growth and Effectiveness Measures in School exams are given regularly, but as mentioned above, they do not measure SEL directly.

One example of effective use of questionnaires in a systemic measurement system can be found in the Canadian province of British Columbia, a world leader in SEL implementation. The education system there developed a tool to measure the status and well-being of children in the context of their home, school, and neighborhood with regard to five domains: social-emotional development; connectedness to peers and adults; school experiences; physical health and well-being; and after-school activities.

The process of embedding measurement tools and collecting data involved cooperation between educators, community leaders, and mayors. The findings are analyzed for the school and the local community. The information that is collected is used to write comprehensive reports and as a base for making decisions at the local and regional level ([Thomson et al., 2018](#)). More information about this can be found on the website of the [University of British Columbia](#), which is a partner in developing this measurement system.

**Performance tasks:** This tool is designed to bypass the distortions in self-report questionnaires by directly measuring students' social-emotional abilities based on their performance of an activity and measurements of the results. Performance tasks can measure a range of skills, such as emotion regulation, problem solving, social understanding, and more. That said, there is difficulty with validation and reliability of measures with performance tasks as well, mainly because they measure the students' skills only in a specific situation and not on a regular and ongoing basis ([Bierman et al., 2008](#)).

The extensive resources required to develop, deliver, collect, gather, and analyze data from performance tasks greatly limit their use. That said, in recent years, there has been much progress in developing computerized performance tasks, for example:

[\*SELweb\*](#): Computerized performance tasks presented as a game measure social-emotional skills among children in kindergarten through third grade. The tasks are based on research and enable monitoring a specific student, the class as a group, or even the entire school. The tasks measure social-emotional abilities in general as well as four sub-areas of these abilities: (1) identifying feelings, (2) self-control, (3) ability to adopt the other's perspective, and (4) solving social problems.

[\*Zoo U\*](#): Computerized performance tasks presented as a game measure social-emotional skills among children in second through fifth grade. The tasks are based on research and have norms that can be compared. The tasks make it possible to monitor a specific student, a class as a group, or even an entire school. The tasks measure social-emotional abilities in general as well as six



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sub-areas of these abilities: (1) communication, (2) cooperation, (3) emotion regulation, (4) empathy, (5) impulse control, and (6) social initiation.

## Chapter 6: SEL and Personalized Learning

There are many intersections between SEL and personalized learning. Both approaches are based on the profound understanding of the need to transform the current educational approach to suit the changing reality of the present and the demands and challenges students will face in the future.

Before discussing the intersections between the two approaches, we will briefly present the main principles of the approach to personalization in education. To delve deeper into this topic, see [Personalization in Education](#). This Hebrew-language survey was written as part of the [P.I.E Challenge](#) (2017) and is the source for the explanations in the introduction that follows. The personalization solutions that were developed for and competed in the P.I.E Challenge are used today in thousands of schools in Israel and around the world.

Personalized learning is an educational approach according to which teaching methods should be tailored to each student according to that student's needs – learning pace, interests, strengths, etc. According to this approach, the teacher and the student take joint ownership of the learning process. Every student has a personal learning path that was customized especially for him that can challenge him, promote his strengths, and enable him to fully develop his latent potential and reach the highest level of expertise in the disciplines studied and in the personal goals set for him. The student thus accumulates skills that are important to the modern world such learning how to learn, coping with obstacles, and taking responsibility. Personalization has already led to groundbreaking revolutions in parallel areas such as marketing, medicine, and high-tech, which have succeeded to tailor a “personal track” to each client. Research conducted around the world shows that personalized education led to significant improvements in the quality of learning for all students involved, especially the lowest-performing populations ([Pane et al., 2015](#)).

The main concepts at the base of the personalized learning approach correspond to a large extent with the principles of SEL. By nature, personalized learning transfers extensive responsibility to the student and thus cultivates many SEL skills in the student such as self-awareness, intrinsic motivation, self-management, cognitive flexibility, and more.

## The Seven Main Principles of Personalization

**Diagnose, evaluate, and measure:** There is continuous evaluation of the student's state, both academically and emotionally, to seek the best way for the student to learn, while taking into account the student's strengths, interests, weaknesses, etc.

**Tailoring a personal learning path for each student:** With the help of the solution and based on the ongoing diagnosis and measurements, the teacher can tailor a learning path for each and every student and adjust the path as the student progresses.

**Teacher and student feedback:** Immediate and frequent feedback for the teacher and the student to help them understand the student's progress relative to the personal learning path that was designed for him. In this way, the learning path can be readjusted for the student as the student progresses.

**Ownership of learning is transferred to the student:** Learning is driven by the student, who receives ownership of his education, fostering the student's sense of engagement and personal interest in learning as well as ongoing personal reflection.

**The teacher is significant in learning and the teacher's role changes:** The teacher receives more data about the student and thus becomes a professional and emotional advisor.

**Flexibility and change:** Since the student changes and develops throughout the process, the learning path will be flexible and changing, adapting repeatedly to the student as the student progresses.

**Scaleability:** The ability to replicate and expand the solution on a large scale for use in many classrooms, while using resources and staff sustainably.

More and more education systems are realizing that SEL and personalization contribute to each other's efficacy. As the [Department of Personalized Learning](#)

in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) put it: “social emotional learning ensures that schools create and foster safe learning environments that maximize student engagement and achievement. Within personalized learning, SEL practices and skills are an essential element towards building and achieving holistic learner success.”

The chart below presents a number of the main interfaces between SEL and personalization and emphasizes both the SEL skills that are **vital** to personalized learning and the SEL skills that **benefit** from personalized learning:

**Personalized instruction** – Instruction is customized to the student’s personal goals and specific needs. Instruction focuses on the student means that the students function in their personal field of development which promotes their **self-awareness**. Division into groups based on levels or interests requires the students to cooperate with their peers and thus they build **interpersonal-skills**.

**Flexibility in content and teaching methods** – Enable customized track, pace, and performance tasks. Flexible content and teaching methods guarantee that the materials and learning environment will meet the students’ **social and cultural needs** and facilitate opportunities to develop **social awareness**.

**Decisions based on data collected** – Frequent actions to collect data help make effective pedagogic decisions. Being based on data strengthens the information culture among students and enables them to use their personal data to determine their next learning steps. Thus this promotes their **ability to make responsible decisions**.

**Ownership and reflection of the student** – Ongoing reflection contributes to the student’s ownership of learning. The student’s reflection contributes to **self-awareness**, including identifying strengths and growth areas. A sense of ownership guarantees that the students will practice **self-regulation**. They take responsible for learning by **setting personal and academic goals and striving to achieve them**.

The combination of these two approaches – SEL and personalization – can fulfill the needs of education systems seeking to prepare students to cope with the

challenges of the future. Many states in the US already are implementing this combination of the two approaches. Examples of schools that are doing so can be found on the [KnowledgeWorks](#) website.

### **Summary: What Will Come of This?**

This review has found there is great potential to dramatically transform the learning experience for both the teacher and the student by raising awareness and increasing access to effective, personalized SEL solutions and integrating them into subject area studies. Developing social-emotional skills is key to enhancing the student's well-being and happiness. It also contributes greatly to academic achievements in important subject areas in the education system like science and English. These SEL solutions will enable teachers to instruct their students to develop and practice their SEL skills routinely in a way that suits each student, taking into account his weaknesses and strengths, without depending on external resources and sources.

### **The Student**

Learning SEL in the subject areas taught in class is going to completely change the picture for the student. This, in combination with a personalized SEL program, will cause the student to be active, self-aware, aware of the surroundings, and responsible for his education. The research indicates an improvement in academic achievements, behavior, well-being, and happiness. This is conducive to a future with a successful career and relationships as well as personal prosperity.

### **The Teacher**

Implementing personalized SEL will enable the teacher to prepare the student for a changing reality, to serve as an advisor to the student, to imbue the student with critical learning skills, and to renew curiosity, self-confidence, and professional interest. Establishing personalized learning will enable the teacher to adapt the learning path to each and every student, as well as invest resources in developing personal connections and providing ongoing support. Beyond the improvement in the student's learning and executive function abilities, it has been

found that SEL contributes to closer and more positive teacher-student relationships, a sense of well-being and satisfaction, and to a decline in professional burnout.

Embedding personalized SEL in subject areas will enable the teacher to cultivate these skills as part of the learning routine. Not only will imparting these skills not compete with delivering the material, but it will multiply the power that will help each student learn the subject in a connected, optimal, and relevant way.

### **The Education System**

Implementing personalized SEL will improve students' achievements and thus increase the number of students who earn a high-school matriculation certificate. Fostering a pleasanter atmosphere at school will increase the sense of belonging and thus reduce dropping out, both openly and invisibly, from school. The rise in teachers' satisfaction with their roles could lead to a change in how the role of teaching is seen in Israel. Incorporating SEL into subject areas like sciences and English is expected to contribute to better achievements in both the short and long term, lead to reduced gaps between groups, and promote prosperity for society as a whole.



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