

# Momentum Explodes for K-12 Social Emotional Learning Standards in NYS Schools

by Anthony Pantaleno, Ph.D.

What better way to start the New Year than with a sharing of something so near and dear to my heart that it feels like a fourth daughter to me (and one that doesn't tax the limits of my VISA credit line). Since my last article in the SCPA Newsletter ("School Psychology's Next Generation: Hello EQ, Bye-Bye IQ"), developments and networking efforts in the field of social-emotional education have been booming exponentially. Witness the recent headline in the Sunday November 11, 2007 Long Island Newsday Money and Career section, "Play Well With Others? It's the Key Question for Many Employers." And so it goes. Oprah's "O" magazine has caught the SEL fever too. Its January, 2008 issue featured an eye-catching cover story on SEL: "Self-Esteem Repair Kit: The Radically New Way To Build Genuine Self-Confidence Fast!" While perhaps the literature in SEL is not so new for some, at least where the general public is concerned, the message is clearly getting out there. Schools need to tend to the development of social-emotional learning if they are to remain competitive in a global economy and stay connected with what young people perceive as "real" in order to survive and thrive in the diverse cultural and social world in which they are living. In the current marketplace of what educational research is telling us about the relationship between EQ and IQ, we are rapidly amassing a body of research evidence with each new study that the traits so long revered as part of the notion of what one needs to be smart – the "IQ" – cannot fully express themselves without acquiring a healthy dose and daily workout of one's EQ.

Anyone who thinks the SEL movement is just another passing educational fad simply needs to Google the George Lucas Educational Foundation at <http://www.edutopia.org/lucas-goleman-emotional-learning> to see how even the major film media

influences are taking note that they bear some responsibility in carrying the SEL torch to educators and students. In this web interview, "Educating Hearts and Minds: An Interview With George Lucas", Mr. Lucas and internationally renowned psychologist Daniel Goleman discuss the many ways in which social and emotional learning enhance the educational process. Click on the video link and watch the 13-minute video entitled, "Smart Hearts; Social and Emotional Intelligence Overview".

If you work with children and youth, you will immediately feel the emotional pull to learn more. Read some of the Priority Topics, Related Articles, or click on some of the other videos under the Related Media link. Do these pieces not speak directly to the heart of what originally drew each and every one of us into the field of education and into working with children in the first place? OK, the vacation time is great too!! But, at its core, we are all in this business to affect the hearts and minds of our students. When we retire, our personal legacy will not be remembered if for no other reason than the contributions we made to future generations of (hopefully) better human beings. As I often sit with my youngest daughter, Katie, a wide-eyed seventh grader who wonders on a daily basis about what she should "be" as a working adult, I somehow know that the endless lists of bacteria she has to memorize to be successful in the seventh grade science curriculum will not stick with her beyond the next test date, on which all of these facts need to be spewed back. Thousands of facts simply float in and out of her memory because they have no personal meaning – they are not a part of what stimulates her love of learning. Give her *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and she is fulfilled – stories of love, friendship, loyalty. Then we can get back to

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the drilling and memorizing that she will need to get a good SAT score. This has been the frenzy of our educational system, until now, when the promise of an education rich in social-emotional learning can bring our children down a better path.

For most school psychologists and other support staff traditionally concerned with social-emotional development, professional training programs have simply not kept up with current educational research findings. The traditional focus in most masters-level school psychology training programs, for example, continues to be on individual assessment of learning abilities and on the development of individual functional behavioral assessments and behavior improvement plans. At the same time, there is an explosion of research all around us, advising that the need for professional training needs to make a shift to more a more systemic, prevention-based approach. If we can address the barriers that underlie a large slice of the learning/behavior problem pie, we, in effect, may be able to actually prevent the development of many of these problems in the first place.

Educational professionals not versed in the language and concepts of SEL need not fear. There are a many worthwhile resources out there, but the mothership of them all remains the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). This group was founded in 1994 by researcher and author Daniel Goleman and educator-philanthropist Eileen Growald-Rockefeller. This not-for-profit organization based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, provides both national and international leadership and guidelines, tools, and abundant online informational resources at its web site [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org). The group's December, 2007 CASEL Update highlights the findings of a meta-analysis of 207 studies of SEL programs involving a broadly representative group of more than 28,000 students from urban, suburban, rural, elementary and secondary schools. A full report will be released in early 2008.

The core outcome of this major study indicated that across the studies involving academic outcomes, students scored 11 percentile points higher on standardized achievement tests, a significant improvement, relative to those peers not receiving these SEL programs. A second key finding was that classroom programs conducted by teachers were effective in each of the six outcome areas: Social and emotional skills; attitudes about themselves, others, and school; social and classroom behavior; conduct problems such as classroom misbehavior and aggression; emotional distress such as stress and depression; and achievement scores and school grades. Of even greater interest, it was only when school staff (not researchers) conducted the intervention did students' academic performance improve significantly. The third, and also critical finding (not at all surprising) was that programs which were carried through to completion without the zillion and one possible interfering variables taking hold (staffing changes, unexpected curricular infringements, etc.) had the strongest influence on strong outcomes. This begs for a committed SEL management team headed by a committed and dedicated principal.

At the local level, this writer, along with NYASP President John Kelly in Commack and Joan Fretz in Huntington (co-founder, Long Island Social Emotional Learning Forum (LISELF)) has teamed with other SEL pioneers from across the country to form the Metropolitan Area SEL Network. This group includes prominent researchers/authors Linda Lantieri and Janet Patti, Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor, Maurice Elias and other members of the CASEL group in Chicago, as well as the author of the Anchorage, Alaska SEL curriculum Victoria Blakeney, and a consulting group of SEL-friendly local school administrators from NYC and Long Island Schools. Our most cherished participant is a member of the NYSED, Mr. Mark Barth, whose charge is to work with the NYS Office

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of Mental Health in the formulation of a groundbreaking proposal to the state Board of Regents: the framework which will set the stage for the development of K-12 SEL curricular standards. This group met in November, 2007 at Hunter College and began the dialogue of merging the pedagogical and research content of SEL with the political process of moving such a huge undertaking through the channels in Albany to create a final draft of SEL guidelines that will not intimidate or frighten those school administrators who will ultimately be responsible for SEL implementation in some form. Let us recall that this effort was energized in New York by Governor Pataki's signing of the Children's Mental Health Act of 2006. One of the initiatives set forth in the CMHA was for the preschool through college development of voluntary guidelines that incorporate social and emotional learning into elementary and secondary school programs.

What will all of this mean for practicing school psychologists? I see a number of things in our collective futures, if our value as significant contributors to our school-based teams is to continue in the future as it has in the past:

1. Surely, we will all need to do some reading and professional development education on the history, content, and delivery of SEL programs. These trainings have begun to appear over the last couple of years through LISELF and will continue to make their appearance known at local, state, and national conferences over the coming year;
2. As school practitioners, we will need to continue to develop our collaborative working relationships with classroom teachers. For SEL to take root, we will need to draw on the expertise of the classroom teacher as a manager and primary SEL leader, and teachers will continue to trust and seek our expertise regarding issues of mental health, overcoming SEL program glitches, etc. It is strongly recommended that in or out-of-school SEL trainings be

attended by classroom teachers, psychologists, administrators, and other support staff and experienced together as a team;

3. Our notion of helping individual children with learning and/or behavior problems shall continue as the need for our services in this area will continue to grow. However, our role as systems-consultant will need to grow at an even more significant rate. As the RTI model has shown us, with respect to learning problems and models of intervention, we can now apply this same tool to the prevention and intervention efforts under the rubric of SEL. All children will receive some SEL training, select groups will get more, and individual treatment-resistant children will get the most.
4. In an effort to expand our own knowledge base outside of our usual training resources, it is suggested that readers visit web sites such as The Search Institute ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)) for a list of 40 Developmental Assets, organized by age groups (Early Childhood ages 3-5, Middle Childhood grades 4-6, and Adolescents ages 12-18). These "assets" are concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising successful young people. One may also review the SEL standards already in place in the state of Illinois ([www.isbe.state.il.us](http://www.isbe.state.il.us)) just to see how a systems-wide model of mental health may be conceptualized in a manner that has not been a part of our traditional training. At this web site, simply enter "social emotional learning" in the home page search box and witness what New York and all the other states in the nation may aspire to duplicate. School psychology program directors are strongly encouraged to bring SEL coursework into the curriculum, much in the same way that teacher training programs will need to do in order to be SEL-ready when the need presents itself.

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If you find yourself asking the questions that we all tend to struggle with when we resist change –

*How will I find the time?*

*What if my principal/PPS Director/Superintendent/BOE does not want to do this?*

*Who is paying for this when our BOE cuts PPS programs and services every day?*

Take heart and begin your self-education process. These questions have been asked and responded to by authors much more experienced than I. Let us realize that the SEL movement is here to stay. The time for resistance has already passed. Now the time has come to embrace what will hit the school systems with an impact not seen since the passage of P.L. 9-142 when I was a young graduate student back in 1975. For those of you too young to remember, P.L. 94-142, the

Education for All Children with Handicapping Conditions Act, was the predecessor of IDEA. This single piece of legislation shaped my entire professional career for the past thirty years in the same way that social-emotional education will shape the careers of my junior colleagues for their professional lifespans.

Fasten your keyboards, cordless mouses, and click away. The people and positive experiences you are certain to connect with will rejuvenate your reason for waking up and going to work each day. And if we as the adults in the system can be re-energized through SEL, how miraculous would it be to create that type of enthusiasm, connectedness, and feelings of wanting to go to school in all of New York's children?

Welcome to the adventure and the hope that is Social Emotional Learning!!!