



e-quilibrium

- *“electronic briefs on behavior and health”*

Volume 5, Number 10
October 2009

SEL

One of the current initiatives in public education is to emphasize the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, often referred to with the acronym STEM. The intent is to graduate students with knowledge and skills that are in high demand. Locally, the Dayton Regional STEM School was recently started with significant support from Wright State University and will eventually serve students in grades 6-12.

There is a less well known initiative in public education that is also gaining momentum. This effort uses the acronym SEL, which stands for Social and Emotional Learning. SEL focuses on a very different aspect of student development than does STEM.

SEL is a broad-based approach that emphasizes proficiency in five core areas:

- Self-awareness (accurately assessing one's emotions)
- Self-management (regulating one's emotions/impulses and expressing them appropriately; managing stress)
- Social awareness (recognizing others' emotions and learning to empathize)
- Relationship skills (cooperation, managing conflict, resisting social pressure)
- Responsible decision-making (incorporating safety concerns, respect for others, and the consequences of various actions)

Certainly these are skills that parents should be teaching their children. However, hundreds of studies indicate that a number of benefits can be realized when these skills are also

taught in public schools. These outcomes include more positive attitudes toward education, decreased truancy, and fewer incidents of bullying and violence. Noteworthy in public education today, SEL curricula have also been associated with better academic performance, including higher standardized achievement test scores!

There is also reason to believe that SEL efforts, like STEM programs, will serve to prepare students for the 21st Century marketplace. There are research data indicating that emotional intelligence (sometimes referred to as EQ) is a better predictor of leadership success in the business world than is IQ.

Furthermore, health benefits have been associated with having students involved with SEL programs. These include:

- Decreased alcohol and illicit drug use among adolescents.
- Decreased teen pregnancy rates.
- Fewer mental health problems in youth.

To the extent that the social and emotional skills students learn as youth carry over into adulthood, one could hypothesize that there may be physical health benefits in other ways as well. This hypothesis is based on the research indicating that poor relationships harm health, that unremitting or ineffective management of stress impairs immune function, and that the presence of chronic negative emotions is associated with a myriad of health problems.

Given the challenges facing public education today, including funding, it is hard to predict the future of SEL programs. At present, however, there is a trend in that two states have legislation in place mandating SEL curricula in public schools, at least four other states have such legislation in process, and many other states have policies that address aspects of SEL skills. Based upon SEL research, this development appears to be good for student achievement and student health!

Note: For more information about SEL, go to www.casel.org.

Paul J. Hershberger, Ph.D.

... is a clinical health psychologist. He is Professor of Family Medicine and Director of Behavioral Science for the Family Medicine

Residency Program, Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine. His clinical practice includes psychotherapy, consultation, and coaching.

To subscribe or unsubscribe to this e-newsletter, send an e-mail message with your request to paul.hershberger@wright.edu

If you wish to read previous newsletters, you may find them at: www.med.wright.edu/fm/equilibrium/

To contact Dr. Hershberger:

e-mail: paul.hershberger@wright.edu

phone: (937) 278-6251, ext 2021