

Using Social and Emotional Learning to Improve Employability

Social and emotional learning (SEL) represents the core competencies students require to thrive across various aspects of life, including employment. Extensive research has consistently demonstrated SEL's positive effects on students' academic performance, personal growth, social relationships, family dynamics, and career prospects. Given these benefits, it is important for educators to understand the impact of SEL on employability and incorporate SEL in their daily instruction (Paolini, 2020). Furthermore, legislation such as the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act of 2003, requires educators in the state of Illinois to implement SEL standards.

What is Social Emotional Learning?

SEL encompasses the cognitive and behavioral processes through which individuals, including children and adults, regulate and manage their emotions, establish goals, demonstrate empathy, cultivate positive relationships, and make sound decisions (CASEL, 2019). There are five core competencies that are crucial to SEL and necessary to achieve successful employment (See Table 1).

What the Research Says

Research on interventions to improve self-determination and job performance for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in postsecondary and employment settings demonstrates significant overlap with SEL competencies. While self-determination is not explicitly included in standard SEL definitions, it closely aligns with core SEL skills such as self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Recent studies highlight this connection and its importance for individuals with IDD.

Randall et al. (2023) examined a self-monitoring intervention within the ChoiceMaker Curriculum for postsecondary students with IDD, finding

moderate gains in participants' knowledge of choice-making steps, with most requiring explicit instruction alongside the curriculum and a self-monitoring checklist to achieve mastery. This approach fosters self-awareness and self-management. Similarly, Nittrouer et al. (2016) investigated a collaborative approach using person-centered teams and functional assessments to design individualized goals and self-management interventions for young adult employees with disabilities. Their findings indicate improvements in on-task behavior and job completion in community-based employment settings, emphasizing responsible decision-making and self-management.

Table 1
SEL Core Competencies

Competencies
<p>Self-Awareness Evaluating oneself, one's actions, and one's influence on other people.</p>
<p>Self-Management The ability to manage stress, restrain desires, and regulate emotions in order to postpone gratification.</p>
<p>Social Awareness Having the capacity to understand a wide range of thoughts and to have empathy for people who could hold opposing or similar opinions.</p>
<p>Relationship Skills Establishing connections, forging cooperative relationships, resolving disputes, listening intently, engaging in negotiation, solving problems, speaking out, and asking for assistance when necessary.</p>
<p>Responsible Decision Making Making morally sound decisions based on respect for others, ethics, and the results of one's activities.</p>

Note: Developed from Paolini (2020).

Both studies underscore the importance of combining multiple strategies to effectively support individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education and employment contexts. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive, individualized approaches to foster self-determination and workplace success for young adults with disabilities, while simultaneously developing crucial SEL competencies. By focusing on self-determination skills, these interventions inherently support the development of core SEL competencies, demonstrating the interconnected nature of these skill sets in promoting success for individuals with IDD in employment settings.

Guidelines for Practice

Research suggests that SEL for students with disabilities should incorporate explicit instruction, self-monitoring strategies, and collaborative goal-setting processes. By integrating these elements, SEL interventions can help students with disabilities develop crucial skills for workplace success. The need for comprehensive, individualized approaches highlighted in both studies aligns with best practices in SEL, which emphasize tailoring instruction to meet diverse student needs. Moreover, the positive outcomes in job performance and self-determination skills indicate that SEL interventions incorporating these strategies could have far-reaching benefits for students with disabilities, extending beyond the classroom into employment settings. This research underscores the importance of embedding SEL principles and practices into special education curricula and transition planning to better prepare students with disabilities for future employment.

Additional Resources

Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/SEL-Standards.pdf>

This document was developed by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to guide educators on what skills to teach and when.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Framework

<https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>

This link provides information about the CASEL framework that ISBE has adopted for teaching SEL.

References

- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (n.d.). *Fundamentals of SEL* Retrieved from <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>
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