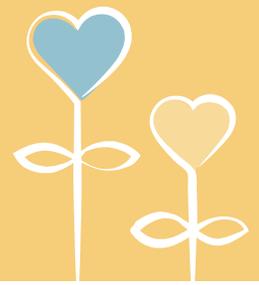# INTEGRATING A FOCUS ON
EQUITY INTO SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Educators are embracing **social and emotional learning** (SEL) as a way to support the whole child and equip students for success. Rigorous research shows that **SEL can lead to improved academic achievement, employment, health, and well-being.** For schools, such benefits can help reduce opportunity gaps and create more supportive learning environments.[1,2]

How students express and develop social and emotional skills is shaped by their life experiences and backgrounds, including gender, race, culture, and class. For this reason, differences and inequities, such as disabilities, poverty, and discrimination, can pose barriers to children's social and emotional development.[2,3]
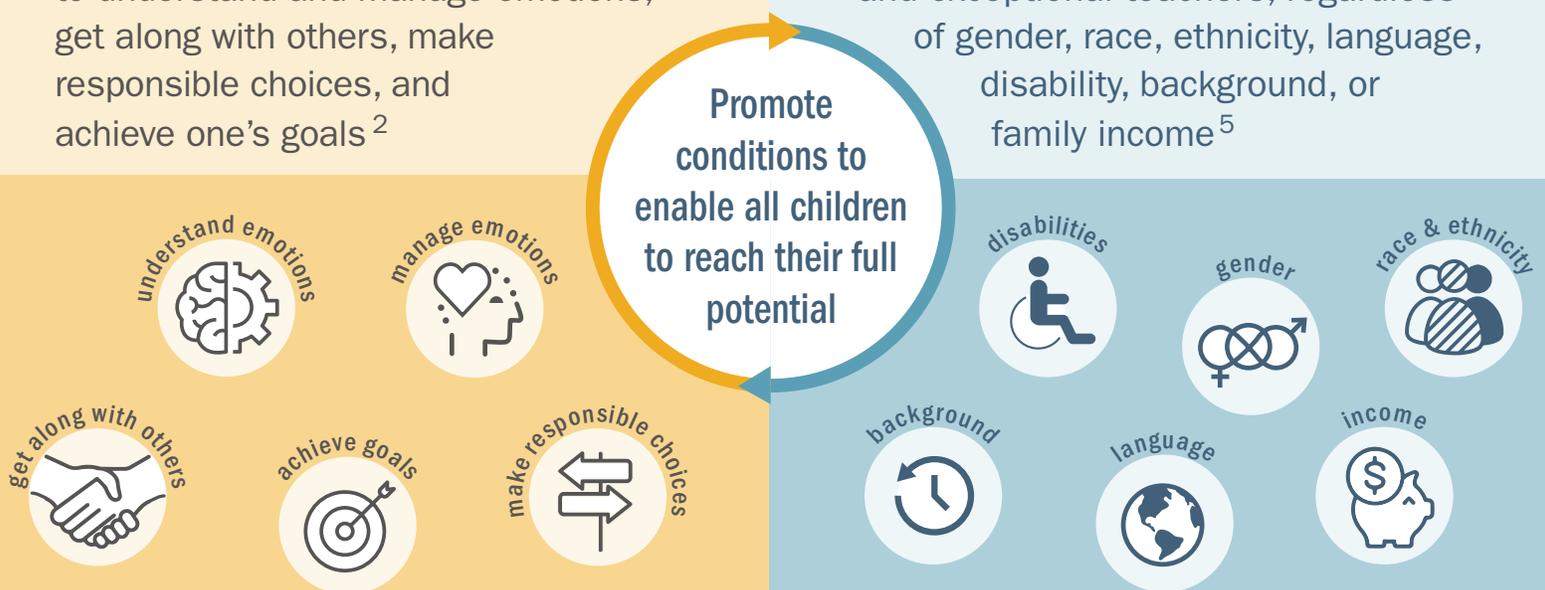
By **grounding SEL in a focus on equity,** educators can further promote the conditions that enable all children to build on their unique assets and abilities and reach their full potential.[4]

SEL

Development of the knowledge, behaviors, and perspectives needed to understand and manage emotions, get along with others, make responsible choices, and achieve one's goals [2]

EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Equitable access to a high-quality education, including rigorous coursework and exceptional teachers, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, language, disability, background, or family income [5]

Promote conditions to enable all children to reach their full potential

understand emotions
manage emotions
get along with others
achieve goals
make responsible choices

disabilities
gender
race & ethnicity
background
language
income

REL MIDWEST

Strategies to ground SEL programming in equity

Create safe and inclusive schools. Providing a positive, safe environment where all students feel welcomed, valued, supported, and celebrated can foster a sense of belonging, build trust and caring relationships, and promote a readiness to learn.[1,3]

Embrace students' assets and abilities. An emphasis on student deficits and inequities can promote negative self-perceptions among marginalized groups. Shifting the focus to building on students' strengths and reducing opportunity gaps can bolster students' belief in their abilities.[3]

Develop cultural competency. Implicit biases and prejudices can lead to low expectations for and disengagement among marginalized groups. Examining biases, building respect for other views and cultures, and increasing teacher diversity can boost empathy and student engagement.[1,4,6]

Engage families and the community. Training staff in research-based methods for engaging marginalized families and respecting their culture, concerns, and hopes for their children can help educators build trust with the community and gain support for SEL initiatives.[1]

Provide trauma-informed care. A tendency to focus SEL on building skills can miss underlying causes of behavior, such as poverty, neglect, and abuse. Complementing SEL with trauma-informed care can reduce triggers, promote healing, and foster a sense of security for students.[1,4]

Rethink discipline. Suspensions and expulsions can have long-term negative effects and are often imposed disproportionately on Black and male students. Focusing discipline on managing behavior and taking responsibility for one's actions can promote safer and more equitable schools.[1,4,7]

Build educators' social and emotional skills. Stress, burnout, and turnover can affect educators' ability to model SEL and support students in crisis. Developing staff's social and emotional skills can strengthen their well-being and ability to manage stress and support all students.[1,4]

Invest in staff training. Providing training and coaching on SEL and equity can help staff integrate and tailor SEL, recognize and address inequities, and provide culturally responsive instruction.[1]

Explore the resources below to learn more about the research base supporting SEL and promoting strategies for promoting more equitable SEL.

1   The Aspen Education & Society Program. (2018). *Pursuing social and emotional development through a racial equity lens: A call to action.* Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED585618

2   Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, *82*(1), 405–432. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ927868

3   Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2018, February 5). *Leveraging SEL to promote equity: What educators need to know and do* [Webinar]. Chicago, IL: Author. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2bB-08hikM

4   Simmons, D. N., Brackett, M. A., & Adler, N. (2018). *Applying an equity lens to social, emotional, and academic development* (Issue Brief). University Park, PA: Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University. https://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2018/rwjf446338

5   The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). *Leading for equity: Opportunities for state education chiefs.* Washington, DC: Authors. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED577044

6   Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M. D., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N. W. (2017). *The long-run impacts of same-race teachers* (IZA Discussion Paper No. 10630). Bonn, Germany: Institute of Labor Economics. https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/10630/the-long-run-impacts-of-same-race-teachers

7   Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *The Future of Children, 27*(1), 117–136. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144814

To explore more research on SEL and equity, see the companion Ask A REL response on our website: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/askarel/2018/social-emotional-learning-equity.aspx

REL MIDWEST