



HERE WE GO

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In diverse places and ways, learning leaders are building the capacity of educators to support students, showing how to weave together the academic, social, and emotional dimensions of learning.

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THE NEED FOR SEL IS GREATER THAN EVER

In 2018, my first editor's column in *The Learning Professional* made the case for integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into professional learning in more explicit and visible ways. Three years and multiple global crises later, the need is more urgent than ever, and the justification for ignoring it in professional learning nonexistent.

Even in the best of times, SEL affects learning. As David Adams explains in this issue (p. 22), high-quality teaching interactions rely on social and emotional skills like reading social cues, taking others' perspectives, and understanding how students respond to challenges.

Of course, these are not the best of times. Not only have many students lacked the connections that allow for such interactions with educators, but up to 40% of K-12 students and more than 60% of young children have experienced negative mental health, emotional, or social impacts during the pandemic (CRPE, 2021; Hanno et al., 2021).

As we start a new school year, students will not leave those struggles at the schoolhouse door. The closure of school buildings played a significant if unavoidable role in social and emotional turmoil (CRPE, 2021), but the reopening of schools can and must play a role in healing it.

Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, a report from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development (n.d.) challenged all educators to fulfill "an amazing calling: to foster in children the knowledge, skills, and character that enable children to make better lives in a better country."

This issue demonstrates how professional learning leaders are fulfilling that calling. In diverse places and ways, learning leaders are building the capacity of educators to support students, showing how to weave together the academic, social, and emotional dimensions of learning.

They are also demonstrating how we must do more to support educators' own SEL skills. As Barbara Patterson Oden says (p. 10), no prior professional learning prepared her to support colleagues and students as they experienced immense losses and stress over the past year.

We can change that, and this issue's authors show us how. School and community leaders are bridging divides to build consistent SEL approaches among all the adults who work with students (p. 30). Coaches in San Antonio are showing teachers why and how to integrate SEL into math class (p. 36). Educators are speaking truth about why and how SEL efforts should address race and racism (p. 12 and p. 40).

Although the pandemic makes this work urgent, SEL will always be necessary. There will always be new educators and students to support and both new and ongoing societal problems to address — racial injustice chief among them.

According to a CRPE review, only 31% of schools mentioned building social and emotional skills in reopening plans for fall 2020; only 7% mentioned tracking students' social and emotional outcomes (CRPE, 2021). Students need that to change now.

REFERENCES

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