



Statement on Social-emotional Learning: *What it is and why it's essential*

As schools prepare to get started in September, students and staff face many challenges, including divisive issues, stress, and other emotions. A number of schools plan on using social-emotional learning (SEL) to help them navigate these challenges and make the most of the opportunities the new year offers. During the coming year, our school districts will receive unprecedented resources and support for SEL. For some parents and educators, though, it's not clear exactly what SEL is. In some states, objections have been raised to using social-emotional learning in schools based on misinformation about the focus of SEL.

The Social-Emotional Alliance for New Jersey (www.SEL4NJ.org) is dedicated to ensuring everyone in NJ clearly understands the purpose and benefits of SEL. SEL is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. It also refers to the culture and climate of the school and the way schools promote students' positive character. Contemplating a school without SEL is like having air without oxygen—it's just not possible!

When students attend schools where SEL has a strong presence, they are more likely to enjoy school, less likely to act out, more likely to feel accepted and inclusive of their schoolmates, and more likely to do better academically. Not surprisingly, they have a better chance of completing higher education successfully and to have career advancement. It's not SEL that "does" this alone—it depends on whether the school has a positive, welcoming, accepting, respectful, fair, and supportive climate for all students, builds positive character, and that SEL skills are encouraged using best practices.

So, as we go back to school, all members of the community should hope that the school is well ventilated with fresh oxygen and SEL circulating all around. And that this does not just happen at the start of school but continues all year long. SEL works best when everyone, including school staff, parents and caregivers, and students alike, are involved in how SEL is designed, delivered, and integrated across all aspects of school life. For more information about SEL in New Jersey, check out www.SEL4NJ.org... and while you are at the website, join!