



Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

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Federal Legislation to Promote Social and Emotional Learning

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Social and Emotional Learning in the New Federal Education Law

CASEL has joined a growing number of educational organizations across the country in welcoming and applauding the new federal education legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which President Obama signed into law on December 10, 2015. Particularly important, according to CASEL, are new provisions in the law that support social and emotional learning.

Several elements of the new law support or have the potential to promote social and emotional learning. They include:

- **A broader definition of student success.** The new law allows more leeway to states and local school districts in defining and assessing student success. The law specifically refers to “nonacademic” factors as indicators of accountability. Student engagement, school climate, and safety, for example, could be among the indicators.
- **Language that encourages schools to “establish learning environments and enhance students’ effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success.”** This language appears in two places specifically: in Title II, referring to funds for professional development, and in the new program called Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants in Title IV. This grant program in particular will allow local education agencies the power of selecting and implementing activities for a variety of uses.
- **In Title IV, specific recommendations for “activities to support safe and healthy students.”** These include fostering “safe, healthy, supportive, and drug free environments that support student academic achievement,” helping to prevent bullying and harassment, improving “instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication,” providing “mentoring and school counseling to all students,” and “implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports.”

- **A broader approach to professional development and learning.** The new law says that professional development must be “sustained (not stand-alone, one-day, and short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom focused.”
- **The inclusion of “specialized instructional support personnel” in developing state and district school improvement plans,** identifying and supporting students most at risk of school failure, addressing school climate and school safety, and supporting the mental and behavioral health of students.
- **A boost in the School Improvement Program grants from 4% of the total Title I funds to up to 7%.** Although specific guidelines have not yet been developed, ESSA replaces the requirements of NCLB and allows more leeway to states and school districts in creating their school improvement plans, which can include social and emotional growth as part of a school’s improvement strategies.
- A new evidence-based research and innovation program similar to the Investing in Innovation program, which, under the previous version of the law, funded projects focused on social and emotional learning.

CASEL will continue to be involved in providing guidance, supports, and technical assistance to states and districts across the nation in order to assist with the law’s implementation. We will support and advocate for language in the guidelines that promotes the social and emotional competencies of students, with a strong emphasis on evidence-based practice in schools. The new law provides the opportunity for states and local districts to support nonacademic factors that impact a student’s overall academic success.

Other Federal Legislation in Support of SEL

Several other bills introduced in the current Congress support social and emotional learning.

H.R. 497. On January 22, 2015 Rep. Susan Davis (D-Calif.) introduced H.R. 497, the "Supporting Social and Emotional Learning Act." This legislation amends the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 to require:

- The National Center for Education Research to carry out research regarding the impact of social and emotional education;
- The Commissioner for Education Research to support research into social and emotional skills and habits; and
- Comprehensive centers to provide training, professional development, and technical assistance regarding the use of scientifically valid teaching methods and assessment tools in imparting social and emotional life learning.

The act amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require highly qualified teachers to have preparation in the understanding, use, and development of social and emotional learning programming. The act also requires Teacher Quality Partnership grants to be used

in preparing prospective and new teachers and principals to understand, use, and develop social and emotional learning programming. It requires centers of excellence to design

teacher training programs that promote the understanding, use, and development of social and emotional learning programming. And it requires Teach to Reach grants to be used to train general education teacher candidates to understand, use, and develop social and emotional learning programming.

[Download the text of H.R. 497.](#)

H.R. 850. On February 10, 2015, Rep. Tim Ryan introduced the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2015, H.R. 850. The bill defines social and emotional learning (SEL) and SEL programming, identifies core areas of social and emotional competency, and amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to allow funding for teacher and principal training and professional development to be used for SEL programming. In addition to Rep. Ryan, Reps. Susan Davis (D-Calif.), Dave Loebsack (D-Iowa), Matt Cartwright (D-Penn.), and John Yarmouth (D-Ken.) are co-sponsors of the bill.

[Download the text of H.R. 850 \(PDF\).](#)



“Social and emotional competencies aren’t ‘soft skills.’ They are the foundation for all the other skills. If we want a tolerant society, a compassionate society ... we need to teach the skills that create that society — the social and emotional.”

— U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan.

S. 897. This bill, titled the "Jesse Lewis Empowering Educators Act," was introduced in the senate on April 13, 2015 by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.). The bill would provide teachers tools and training to support students' social and emotional learning. It is named in honor of Jesse Lewis, who at six years old was tragically killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School. U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) is a co-sponsor, and Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty (D-Conn.) is a co-sponsor of the House bill.

Specifically, the bill would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act so that existing professional development funding could be used to train teachers in concepts related to social and emotional learning.

[Download the text of S. 897.](#)

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**CASEL: Collaborative for
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