

WORKFORCE LEADERSHIP BY ADDING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS TO EDUCATION

Opening Statement

It is generally accepted that academic performance translates into employability, and economic benefits. Employers need workers who have emotional and social skills in addition to technical skills. Many qualified candidates are unable to find employment because of the lack of these social skills¹. To address the labour shortage, we need to ensure that students are set up for success in the employment market by including social and emotional learning in the school curriculum.

Background

In British Columbia, all children ages six to 16 must attend schooling or can study at home. Schools in the province consist of elementary (also known as primary) and secondary (also known as high school) education. Grades range from kindergarten to Grade 12. Elementary school operates from kindergarten to Grade 8 and secondary schools from Grades 9 to 12.

Based on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)², which tests 15-year-olds worldwide in reading, science and math, BC performed better than the Canadian average in all three subjects in 2015. BC had the highest score among the provinces in reading and the second-highest in science and math.

Some colleges and universities devote time and resources to developing students' social and emotional skills, such as emotional intelligence (EI). The goals of such programs are partly for personal development but partly to increase academic performance. A 2020 study of emotional intelligence predicting academic performance found that when emotional intelligence was included in a curriculum, students were able to perform better academically.³ This is not a new concept, however, as many researchers have touted social and emotional learning as necessary for enhancing a student's ability and capacity to achieve.⁴ This enhancement leads to a more educated workforce, and creates the leaders of tomorrow, who will tackle issues that are inconceivable today.

A recent OECD study found that students' social and emotional skills still predict how they perform in school. When comparing students with similar socio-economic backgrounds, it was the social and emotional skills (SES) such as intellectual curiosity that differentiated post-secondary education expectations.

In an age where technical knowledge and employability skills are required for all jobs, we cannot ignore the benefits that EI or SES can provide. These skills not only translate to better outcomes in academia, but also benefit social relationships, and enhance an individual's employability. Additionally, SES are tied to creativity, which is a skill that is in demand in the current labour market.

¹ <https://www.nber.org/digest/nov15/growing-importance-social-skills-labor-market>

² <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

³ MacCann, C., Jiang, Y., Brown, L. E. R., Double, K. S., Bucich, M., & Minbashian, A. (2020). Emotional intelligence predicts academic performance: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(2), 150–186. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000219>

⁴ Ragozzino, K., Resnik, H., Utne-O'Brien, M., & Weissberg, R. P. (2003). Promoting Academic Achievement through Social and Emotional Learning. *Educational Horizons*, 81(4), 169–171. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42925455>

We need to accelerate the education of these skills. This is through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). It can be defined as “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.”ⁱ

A World Economic Forum report found that in educational policy development, SEL is not being prioritized sufficiently for a variety of reasons, ranging from limited awareness of SEL and its benefits to low levels of funding and resources for SEL.ⁱⁱ When people who work in multicultural environments possess these skills, collaboration can be achieved easily, which ends up being highly profitable; and when they lack these skills, collaboration can be disastrous with serious and negative bottom-line implications.

International Examples⁵

United Kingdom The interest in SEL has been growing very quickly in the UK, in both England and Wales and in Scotland (which have separate educational systems). Work to promote social and emotional skills in schools can now be found in some form in most areas across the UK, supported by considerable interest and involvement by voluntary agencies and universities.

Australia The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing supports several national initiatives that are focussed on social and emotional learning and wellbeing. MindMatters is a resource package and professional development program for secondary schools. Throughout Australia, over 80% of schools with secondary enrolments have sent staff to the free MindMatters training.

British Columbia Context

BC has developed a Social Responsibility framework. Social Responsibility is the term used to describe social and emotional learning. Social responsibility includes:

- Contributing to the classroom and school community
- Solving problems in peaceful ways
- Valuing diversity and defending human rights
- Exercising democratic rights and responsibilities

A Ministry of Education document outlines age-specific K-10 social responsibility performance standards.⁶

The program is voluntary, and a unified format for reporting on students’ social responsibility development has yet to be developed.

For students to achieve success in school, career, and life, they must be taught social and emotional skills—just as they learn reading, math, and science—through instruction and practice. School-based SEL curricula provide a key to workforce development by explicitly teaching the social and emotional skills employers are seeking and the economy needs.

⁵ <http://www.ncflb.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/SEL-worldwide.pdf>

⁶ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/teach/resources-for-teachers/curriculum/bc-performance-standards>

Teaching degrees include emotional and social skills learning as part of their degrees so they can teach children these skills. As SEL evolves, so too must the education teachers require. Individual school boards could also upgrade teacher training to encompass these skills.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government:

Orient the education curriculum for K-12 students to focus more on social and emotional skills using universal, school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs to better meet the needs of the business community.

Submitted by the Surrey Board of Trade

ⁱ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (n.d.). What is SEL? Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>

ⁱⁱ . Shirley, A. (2016, May 18). Five charts that explain the future of education. Retrieved from the World Economic Forum website: [https:// www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/5-charts-that-explain-the-future-of-education/](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/5-charts-that-explain-the-future-of-education/)