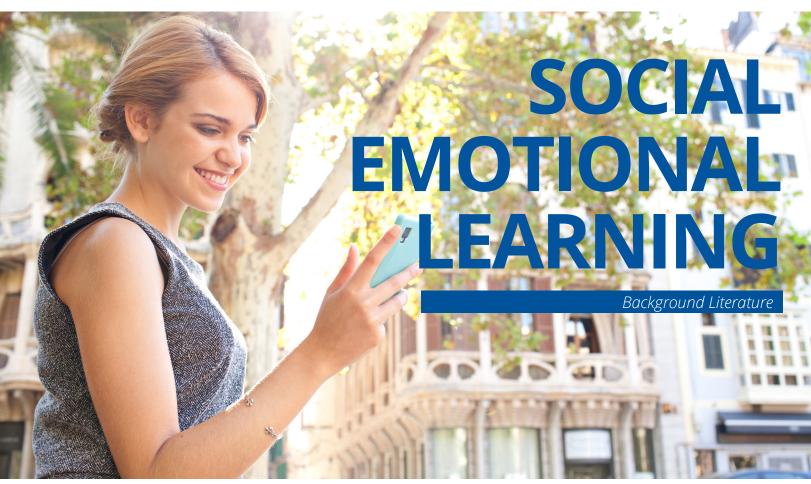# SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Background Literature

Executive Summary

Social emotional learning and intelligence are concepts that describe one's ability to communicate and interpret emotional information and behaviors. Students with under-developed social emotional skills are shown to be at significantly greater risk of behavioral disruption and poor academic performance, ultimately leading to decreased likelihood of high school completion.

Existing literature attributes inadequate development of these skills and behaviors in large part to declining student engagement and increased levels of disaffection in response to the depersonalization of their learning environments. Studies examining differing levels of social emotional proficiency among students found those with greater social emotional intelligence to be more motivated, academically successful, confident, and less emotionally distressed.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) reaffirms the importance of these findings in their designation of Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (2014). A majority of these are the same behaviors examined in SEL literature.

This paper identifies how resources within the Kuder Career Planning System® (KCPS) provide alignment and opportunity with respect to these skills and behaviors, and reviews findings highlighting the benefits that are realized in the form of critical measures of student success.

Social emotional intelligence encompasses a variety of capabilities and skills examined across academic fields. Salovey and Mayer describe emotional intelligence as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (1990). Social emotional learning is characterized as "the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills necessary to comprehend, manage, and articulate social and emotional information that is associated with social behaviors such as maintaining positive relationships, recognizing emotions, and making responsible decisions" (Davis, Solberg, Baca, & Gore, 2014; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Elias et al., 1997; Nowicki & Mitchell, 1998).

Problems associated with insufficient social emotional learning among disadvantaged students are evident in declining levels of engagement at the early-secondary level. Davis et. al write, "In response to an increasingly depersonalized learning environment, many youths disengage from middle and high school, evidenced by lower academic achievement, higher absenteeism, and increased behavior disruptions, all of which too often culminate in leaving school" (Davis et. al, 2014; Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox 2010; Eccles et al., 1993; Rumberger, 1995).

Effectively reducing these instances is, in part, a function of optimizing youth development through the personalization of social emotional learning opportunities to accommodate the changing needs of youth (Davis et. al, 2014; Battistich, 2010; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Eccles & Roeser, 2010; Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001).

To examine this directly, Davis et al. observed the variation of 5 social emotional learning subscales among a sample of nearly 5,000 secondary students Measures serving as independent variables included academic self-efficacy, academic motivation, social connections, importance of school, and psychological and emotional distress.

The dependent variables used consisted of three distinct indicators all measuring a different form of academic success.

The first was a standard measure of cumulative grade point average (GPA). Second was a composite index quantifying standardized levels of "high school performance" as a function of grades, attendance, and disciplinary/behavioral reports. Finally, an indicator measuring "progress towards graduation" was calculated as a ratio of a student's earned credits to attempted credits.

The researchers found overwhelmingly that students demonstrating the highest level of academic success displayed significantly higher levels of social emotional learning across all measures. Specifically, with respect to predicting GPA, indicators related to students' emotional stress level and their perceived level of importance they assign to furthering education accounted for a fourth of all variance. In terms of credit completion, students displaying high levels of classroom confidence, motivation to attend school, and lower levels of academic stress were far less likely to be at risk of dropping out (Davis et. al, 2014).

Additional research surrounding SEL and student achievement suggests that this relationship is evident even before students reach their high school years. Participation in social-emotional and character development (SECD) programs has shown to reduce rates of absenteeism and improve math and reading performance among socioeconomically disadvantaged, specifically among those transitioning from 7th to 8th (Bavarian et. al, 2013).

Social Emotional Learning and Academic and Career Planning

These findings and previous literature examining similar factors have consistently demonstrated the importance of fortifying social emotional intelligence among students to ensure academic success. Among the most effective in predicting success are those SEL measures related to motivation (specifically to remain in an academic setting), academic stress, identifying the importance of academic opportunities, and student confidence in the classroom.

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In addition to fostering this type of personal-social development, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) identifies academic and career development as a central focus of school counselors' work with students (ASCA, 2012; Trusty, 2002; Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005). ASCA also identifies mindsets and behaviors that incorporate the importance of social and emotional intelligence with respect to academic success of high school students. Among those are confidence in ability, self-motivation and direction, and creating positive relationships with peers and adults. In examining the effects of academic and career guidance interventions, the previously specified SEL measures, mindsets and behaviors are categorically identified as areas of improvement among students accessing the Kuder Career Planning System (KCPS).

Perceived Importance of Postsecondary Opportunities

In surveying nearly 400 high school students utilizing Kuder Navigator®, the component of the KCPS designed for those in grades 6-12, users reported the system as being highly helpful in several areas intuitively related to perceived importance of educational opportunities. Among those listed were the ability to choose a postsecondary program, set educational goals, and seeing the connections between schoolwork and careers/occupations (Trusty, 2013).

Motivation

In the same study, students overwhelmingly reported Navigator as being conducive to their motivation in academic settings.

They rated the system as highly helpful in generating motivation to stay in school, being successful in school, focusing on academic obligations, and improving class attendance (Trusty, 2013).

Confidence & Relationships

In a study surveying 40 students of a socioeconomically disadvantaged background, those utilizing the KCPS and participating in a Kuder-led career coaching program uniformly expressed improved levels of confidence in interacting with peers, communicating, and balancing school, work, and family responsibilities. Furthermore, a vast majority of students reported improved confidence in their ability to plan and with respect to their futures in general (Wingert et. al, 2017).

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