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## **Social and Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom**

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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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Education

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## **Introduction**

Picture this: there are two high school students. The first student can regulate their emotions in the classroom if they are agitated, and they can control that and continue their work without disrupting the class. The other student would display their emotions outwardly to the class. This might look like sighing, arguing with another student, and talking back with the teacher. Student number 1 can converse appropriately with their classmates during group work, allowing everyone to have a turn to speak, listening to their classmates' ideas and opinions. Student number two interrupts classmates, uses inappropriate language, and does not give their classmates the attention they deserve. This student cannot differentiate between the language they use in a school setting versus the language they would use with their friends outside of school. These are examples of how some students may struggle with skills that they get from social and emotional learning (SEL). When students are participating in strategies to help foster social-emotional competency (SEC), they learn how to regulate and behave in a classroom more appropriately.

The focus of my project was to answer the following question: How can social-emotional learning strategies be implemented for all students at the high school level to assist students in developing social-emotional competencies? To answer this question, I used two main sources of information: (1) a review of literature that is relevant to this topic, and (2) interviews with high school teachers who interact directly with students daily. The end goal of this project was to create a resource for teachers using information collected from both sources to make SEL accessible to students in the high school classroom.

## **Background and Definitions of Key Terms**

What is social-emotional learning? This question is important to this project. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the “process of students learning and developing social and emotional knowledge, skills and attitudes which are useful for success in school, relationships, and work” (Gresham, 2017, p.60). It involves children's ability to learn about and manage their own emotions and interactions in ways that benefit themselves and others. It is called social and emotional learning because of the skills that are coming out of it; “the term emphasizes learning and growth – providing a more positive framing than terms like noncognitive or soft skills” (Jones, 2017, p.3). SEL occurs when social and emotional skills are explicitly addressed in the school curriculum. Based on one literature review, SEL interventions increase students' academic performance, improve classroom behavior, reduce student stress and depression, and improve student attitudes (Durlak et al., 2011). SEL increases the students' abilities to process their emotions more appropriately while in the school environment. This is important because we are teaching students these skills to improve their competencies and help them grow. Social-emotional learning skills are an important part of students' academic success and will benefit them just as much as learning content. Not only will it help students in their academic success, but it also prepares them better for future interactions in the workplace.

Another term important to understand is social-emotional competence (SEC), which are the skills that increase with more SEL instruction. SEC is defined as the “ability to integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral states to accomplish goals in social contexts,” (Hart et al., 2014, p.xv). We want to instruct students in SEL because this helps build their SEC. To put this into simpler terms, in the school context, SEC it is how well students get along with peers and adults. Having this competency means students understand how to regulate their emotions appropriately based on the setting that they are in. This allows them to establish relationships that

are successful so they can realize social and academic goals at school. In other words, social competence is a result of having effective social skills.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), there are five skills which make up social-emotional competence. These include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making. Self-awareness is understanding one's own emotions, thoughts, and values. Self-management is the ability to manage one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Social awareness allows the capacity to understand the perspective of and empathize with others. Relationship building is the ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships. Lastly, responsible decision making is the skill which allows you to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations (CASEL). SEC, made up of these five skills, enables students to successfully interact with those around them and function in society. By increasing students' SEC through SEL, they are developing effective social and regulatory skills that will help them succeed in school and life.

However, according to results of a survey completed by Gresham (2017), students who are in grades 6-12, less than half of these students reported that they had social competencies, this illustrates the need for SEL instruction which builds students SEC. The goal of SEL is to get students to a place where they display these competencies and can better manage their behavior and emotions, both in and out of the classroom. These skills and programs are important but, many schools find it difficult to implement and integrate throughout the school day successfully (Bailey, 2022).

### **Rationale for this Project**

The concept of SEL has increased in importance within the last few years because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced all learning to be moved online and created limited opportunities for social and emotional learning (Rosenbalm, 2021). This impact on students and their mental health is important to note. In a study done by McGraw Hill (2018), it was found that 82% of parents found the need for SEL to be more important after the pandemic, especially during online learning where the students were not receiving any in-person interactions. There is a correlation here and why it is important to help students redevelop these skills. According to Rosenbalm (2021), now that we are recovering from the pandemic after being online for two years, it is going to take “systematic, intentional, and intensive efforts” to increase students’ SEC (p.2). For almost two years, students were in complete isolation, not in their normal setting, or unable to interact with peers and teachers. In a study done by Bhatnagar and colleagues (2022) they found that teachers after the pandemic felt the need to foster “supporting relationships with students, building trust, creating a positive classroom climate, acknowledging the trauma students had been through, and building strong home-school connections” (p.2). During the pandemic, there was so much uncertainty, and students were dealing with so many stressors, one of which included navigating the online learning environment. Students were not receiving in-person support and were unable to work on their SEC. This is why now, three years after the pandemic, it is so important that we rebuild those skills that the students missed. To do so, teachers need support to provide systematic, intentional SEL instruction along with the academic content they must cover.

Now that the pandemic is over and students are back in the classroom full time, there needs to be more emphasis on the students’ SEL. 81% of parents believe that it has become even more important since the beginning of the pandemic (CASEL, n.d). Furthermore, when students

can build relationships and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across many contexts, their academic learning accelerates (CASEL, n.d). The integration of both academic and social-emotional learning at school can have a significant impact on students and will be more beneficial to them in the future. By learning these skills students will have the necessary skills to go out into the world and be successful at what they do.

### ***SEL Instruction in High School***

When we think about SEL, there is typically a focus on teaching this to students who are in elementary or middle school, but they should never stop learning these skills. Not as many social and emotional strategies are being used in high schools as there are in elementary or middle school. Currently, there are only 18 states that have SEL standards for K-12 (Zhao, 2020) which means less than half of the states recognize this as an important standard to incorporate into the high school level. Students in high school are in the stage where they are trying to figure out who they are, and what interests them. With the Covid-19 pandemic, students faced a lot of stress and anxiety, which affects how students process the information they learn in school (Camacho-Zuniga et al., 2021). The pressures of academics in high school can take away from the time for the social and emotional aspect of learning, but because of the pressure students are under making it imperative to continue these skills (Prothero, 2020).

### **Literature Review**

Due to the lack of focus on SEL in high school, a major focus of this project was to look at existing interventions and determine how teachers can use these for students in a high school classroom. There are currently many existing SEL strategies and interventions for supporting students with social and emotional learning challenges. There are programs developed and used to promote SEL for students in the ways I outline below. The research-based interventions being

identified in my literature review and are described below include: 4R's, RULER, Second Step, Positive Action as well as Check and Connect. For each, I will provide information about the grades they are used for, how they work, the outcomes for students, and any training required for the teachers. This information is also summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Intervention summaries*

Intervention	Key points	Grades used for	Training	Whole class/ individual
4R's	Teaches students specific aspects of SEL. They have bigger discussions about SEL themes after reading a book targeting SEL themes. They develop skills to help students regulate and understand their emotions.	K-8; effective in 3 and 4	25 hours of training	Whole class
RULER	Uses the concept of a charter, an agreed upon classroom list of values supported with RULER strategies. These include mood meter, journaling, and curriculum integrations.	K-8; effective in 5 and 6	Not addressed	Whole class
Second Step	Focuses on teaching students about learning empathy, emotional regulation, friendship skills, and problem solving.	Pre-K-8	Not addressed	Whole class
Positive Action	Emphasizes having a positive mindset. Focuses on self-awareness and self-management which are based on the SEL themes.	K-12 effective in 1-5	Not addressed	Whole class
Check and Connect	Students check in with a mentor assigned to monitor student performance and connect with students to give individualized attention.	K-12 effective 9-12	Yes	Individual

## 4R's

The 4R's, which stands for reading, writing, respect, and resolution (The 4Rs, 2018), is a literacy-based curriculum mostly geared towards students in grades Pre-K-8. The 4R's consists



of 7-units with 21-35 free-standing lessons. These lessons provide teachers with explicit, step-by-step instructions on how to teach specific topics related to SEC to their whole class. Each of the seven units is organized around children's books. The unit starts with reading and discussing the book, and SEL skill lessons are followed. The students practice these skills in the context of the book and have a larger discussion about it. These lessons incorporate literacy development activities like reading aloud, book talks, and sequential, interactive skill lessons to support social-emotional learning. Teachers who use 4R's are supposed to complete 25 hours of training followed by ongoing coaching to support them in correctly teaching the 4R's to their class (Jones, 2011). According to Gresham (2017), the 4Rs helps to “develop social skills related to understanding and managing feelings, listening, and developing empathy, being assertive, solving conflicts appropriately, and standing up to teasing and bullying” (p.63). Research has been done with students in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, showing that it is effective in improving those students ability to understand their emotions and show empathy to their peers (Jones, 2011).

In summary, this program is designed for whole class instruction but, as a literacy-based program, the activities are geared more towards younger students. However, the activities could be adapted to be geared more towards high school. For this program to be effective, it requires the teachers to get training on how to properly implement this into their classroom. The training time needed for this program to be successful could become a potential barrier for high school teachers.

## **RULER**

Another class-wide intervention that is supported by literature is RULER. This stands for recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating. RULER consists of “anchor

tools which introduce skills into everyday classroom and school routines” and a “pedagogical approach that integrates emotions into academic instruction” (Nathanson et al., 2016, pg. 307). This intervention is used in grades K-8, with research done on the effectiveness for students in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. According to research, RULER improves students' academic performance, school climate, and teaching (Brackett, 2011). RULER ensures that not only are the academic skills being mastered, but also addresses SEC at the same time (Brackett, 2011). Through a study, students who were in the classrooms that implemented RULER had greater academic and social achievements compared to those in the classrooms without the RULER implementation (Brackett et al., 2012).

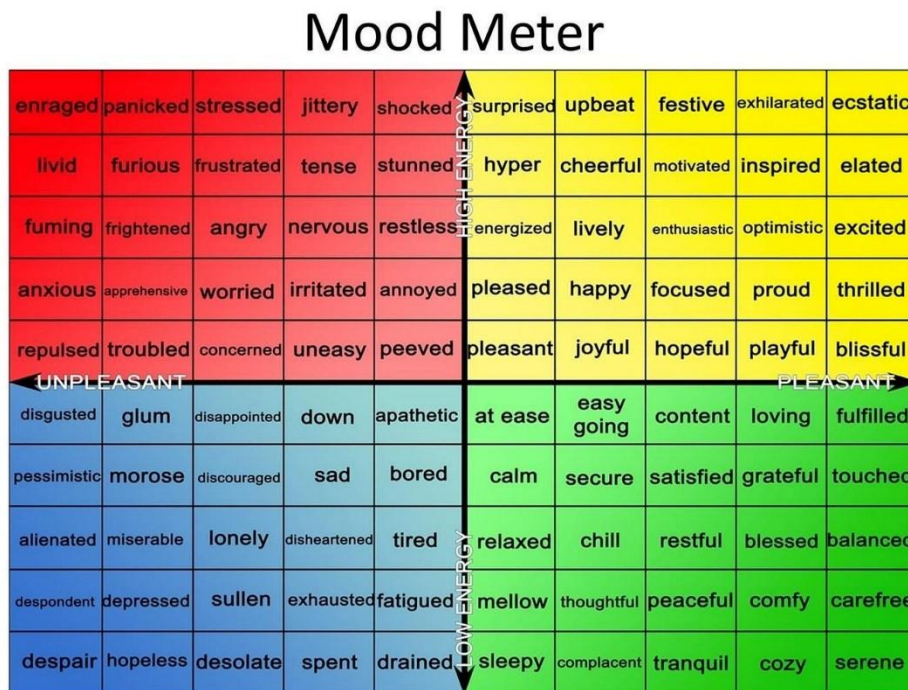
This intervention uses charters which “builds positive emotional climates by creating agreed upon norms for how we want to feel and how we can help each other experience these feelings” (Building Emotional Intelligence through RULER, 2019). Charters can be used in different situations in the classroom, making it easy to implement. Each class works together to create the charter that works best with the personalities in the class. The charters are supported by incorporating strategies such as mood meters, journaling, and curriculum integration in the classroom.

The image in Figure 1 is an example of a mood meter used in a classroom through the RULER program. To use this chart, students use the arrows going left, right, up, and down to determine their energy and pleasantness level. Once they have determined this, they can choose the emotion that they are feeling based on whether they are feeling low or high energy and pleasant or unpleasant. This grid allows students to be more specific when they talk about and determine their emotions for in-class activities. They can identify their energy levels as well as how pleasant they feel and pinpoint an exact emotion. The two axes, referred to as pleasure and

arousal, provide “conceptually separate building blocks of core affective feelings” (Russel, 1999, p.7). By finding a middle ground between the two axes, mood meters can be used along with other RULER strategies to help students better comprehend and express their feelings.

**Figure 1**

*Image of a mood meter*



<https://medium.com/mind-café/the-psychological-tool-that-helps-you-develop-robust-emotional-intelligence-61c01267e270>

In summary, this program allows teachers to work on building students' social-emotional competencies through the RULER activities while also teaching academic content. This program is a class wide approach to increase students SEC by using classroom charters and other tools and strategies to support the agreed upon classroom values. The RULER program is designed to be used in grades K-8 and is considered a class wide program because it uses strategies that can be implemented for all students.

## Second Step

Second Step is a curriculum focused on teaching skills to “enhance student social-emotional growth critical for lifelong success” (Perez-Clark et al, 2022, p.3). This program is used for those in grades PreK-8 (Gresham, 2017, p.67). The two main goals of the Second Step program include “(a) promoting interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies; and (b) reducing the development of social, emotional and behavioral problems” (Moy, 2018, introduction). Second Step is made up of 22 lessons that are organized over four units: (a) skills for learning, (b) empathy, (c) emotion management, and (d) problem solving (Low et al., 2015). This SEL curriculum uses four key strategies that include “brain builder games designed to build executive functions, weekly theme activities, reinforcing activities, and a home link” (Gresham, 2017, p.67). Second Step allows students to practice school skills with their guardians as part of the home link.

Second Step fosters positive SEL outcomes including increased positive social behavior, reduced conduct problems, and reduced emotional distress (Gresham, 2017). The literature provides research that Second Step is being used in middle schools to help students in understanding, managing, and expressing emotions, developing positive relationships, and making responsible decisions, which are key components of SEL (Perez-Clark, 2022, p.3). This program focuses on the lifetime effects that it has on students and does not just provide for students in the academic year that they are in. It also allows students to practice with SEL not only at school, but also at home, which is an important factor in how students are able to keep up the skills they learn.

In summary, Second Step is a curriculum which focuses on teaching students about learning empathy, emotional regulation, friendship skills, and problem solving. This curriculum is focused on students in grades K-8 but through the Second Step program website is currently

working on a high school program. I am pleased to hear that more recognition is being given to high school students through these existing programs. As mentioned above, Second Step also offers a home link for students to continue to practice their SEL skills outside of school. This offers a unique part of the intervention that the other programs do not have. This is why I have chosen to incorporate it into my toolkit, it is something that needs to be offered more.

### **Positive Action**

Positive Action (PA) is about having a positive mindset and is based on the philosophy: “You feel good about yourself when you do positive behaviors (positive self- concept) and there is a positive way to do everything” (Gresham, 2017, p.66). PA is a pre-existing program that is used in grades K-12. It is designed to be implemented throughout the school year 2-4 times per week. Each grade level has a PA kit with about 140 lessons and is designed to take about 15 minutes to complete (Stalker et al., 2018). Each lesson touches upon the key components of SEL and includes step by step scripts organized around the themes. Six themes which come from the Positive Action program website include: Self-concept, positive actions for your body and mind, managing yourself responsibly, treating others the way you want to be treated, telling yourself the truth, and improving yourself continually. Self-concept is the way that students think and feel about themselves. Positive action for mind and body gives students ways to take care of themselves to be healthy and strong. Managing yourself responsibly entails learning how to manage emotions. With understanding treating others the way you want to be treated, students learn to practice skills such as respect, empathy and friendliness. In telling yourself the truth, students learn to be honest with themselves, not blame other people, and admit to making mistakes. Finally, improving yourself continually, students learn how to set short- and long-term goals and how to make them work (Positive Action, 2019).

According to Gresham (2017), Positive Action, “promotes healthy self-concept and establishes positive actions for the body and mind for children and youth” (p. 66). This program focuses on improving protective factors including school attendance and academic achievement and decreases risk factors such as substance use and depression (Stalker et al., 2018, p. 3).

Positive action focuses on the aspect of SEL that includes self-awareness and self-management which link to the focus on the positive attitudes that students should establish towards their body and mind. In a study done with students in grades 1 and 2 which followed them through grades 4 and 5, they found effectiveness of improved student test scores, parent involvement, and lower absences. (Flay et al., 2006)

The PA program centers on encouraging positive behaviors and a positive way to do things. It can be used for grades K-12, and is focused on lessons that teachers implement surrounded by themes which help grow students SEL. This program is used as a class wide strategy, so it benefits all students. This program has a training component available through the Positive Action website and costs money, but it is not required.

### **Check and Connect**

The final program that is being used in high schools is called Check and Connect. This program matches students with a mentor who they check in with, allowing the students to form connections. Depending on the school and the intensity of the program, the mentor and students choose to meet weekly, daily, or monthly. The check portion of this program is put in place to “monitor students' performance and progress,” The connect component includes “program staff giving individualized attention” (A Summary of Findings from a Systematic Review of the Evidence, n.d, pg. 1). The Check and Connect Program is designed for students in grades K-12 who are at risk of being disengaged or dropping out (Heppen et al., 2017). It is used more at the

high school level because of the national crisis of high school dropout rates (Heppen et al., 2017, pg.1). The mentors that are hired for this program are trained to offer basic and intensive levels of intervention based on students' needs (Heppen et al., 2017). This program follows the aspects of SEL by focusing on relationship building, both with peers and adults in the school building.

Check and Connect is labor intensive and therefore can only be used with a focused number of students that need this support. This intervention would be almost impossible to provide for all students in a classroom or school accurately because of its intensity. Because of the level of involvement of this program, it will not be used in my project. This is an important intervention to touch upon because it is one of the few with evidence of effectiveness in high school. As discussed above in the Heppen article, Check and Connect focuses on students at risk of dropping out of high school. This is the biggest impact that this program has on high school students, it is related to SEL, but not as directly as some other programs.

## **Synthesis**

I have outlined above the pre-existing interventions used to promote SEL. Part of this project is to use the interventions discussed and pull aspects into my toolkit. Many of these pre-existing strategies are geared toward and most effective in elementary/middle level school being used. There is more of a focus in this grade level due to the brain's development at the students' early age, where they can learn and acquire these skills. However, for these skills to have the most beneficial effect, they must continue to be taught. Once students' brains have developed after learning SEL skills in elementary/middle, they lose their progress by the time they finish high school if this direct instruction does not continue. We cannot just teach our students these skills and expect them to last for the rest of their lives. Therefore, my toolkit will focus on providing students and teachers in high school with ways to incorporate SEL instruction.

A lot of the preexisting strategies also require teachers to incorporate a whole SEL curriculum into the content that they must teach. A lot of the time this is also done with little to no training. In an article titled *Re-imagining Social and Emotional Learning*, it is stated that teachers feel more comfortable adopting strategies throughout their classroom rather than a curriculum (Bailey, 2019). This seems to be a consistent find throughout research and shown in articles written by Barret (2018) and Mahoney (2022) as well. This approach creates flexibility for teachers and makes it easier for them to adopt these ideas into their classroom as easily as possible. This is particularly important in high school to create more buy in for both teachers and students. However, a lot of the preexisting methods described above require teachers to incorporate a whole SEL curriculum into the content that they must teach. To address this, my toolkit will provide teachers with standalone strategies they can implement into their classrooms.

### **Interviews**

Based on findings from the literature review, I conducted interviews with teachers to collect more information about the need for SEL in high school. All the teachers who participated are high school teachers; only they would know how to best bring this practice to the high school level. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, I reached out to teachers that I have had in the past and had a good relationship with. I also utilized the connections I have with districts through Assumption University and through word of mouth. I was able to conduct eight interviews through this process.

### **Participants**

As shown in the table below, the participants were chosen to represent a variety of subjects, teaching experience and vastly different school dynamics. Each participant was given a pseudonym to keep their identities confidential. As shown in the table below, participants had a



wide range of teaching experience, from 3 years to over 30. They taught across the full range of high school grade levels. They primarily taught English, but I did also have one teacher who taught science and another who taught history.

**Table 2**

*Participant Information*

Participant	Subject	Grades taught (in 2022-2023)	Years teaching	School info
Grace	Science	9-12	7	1344 students, high needs, low income. Urban high school
Ariana	History	11-12	19	1300 kids, high needs, English language learners
Jennifer	English	9 and 12	>25	~1100 kids, high needs, English language learners
Emily	English	9 and 11	22	~1100 kids, high needs, English language learners
Erick	English	10-11	3	~1100 kids, high needs, English language learners
Kathleen	English	9 and 11	10	1179 kids, high needs, low income
Caroline	English	10-12	~30	~2000, high needs, low income
Nora	English	9 and 11	14	~2000, high needs, low income

**Procedure**

When constructing the interview outline, I wanted to focus on questions which would help me develop insight about what teachers think and know about SEL. I had some questions which were based on literature and wanting to get another perspective on it, as well as questions that I was curious about after thinking further about my project. For example, I wanted to learn more about whether teachers were already incorporating SEL and what it might look like, how knowledgeable teachers were on the subject and some of the ideas they would like to see regarding SEL for their classroom.

The process of conducting the interviews began with emailing teachers and setting up a time to meet with them that best fit in with their schedule. Participants were offered the choice of an online or in person interview. Three interviews were completed online and five were in person. Jennifer and Emily were interviewed together because they were from the same school and were available at the same time; the same goes for Caroline and Nora. Before the interview, whether online or in person, the interviewees received a consent form that they signed and sent back with permission for me to record our conversation. At the time of the interview, I went over the consent form, began the recording, and gave them a brief background of my project and explained what SEL is. Then I moved on to the planned interview questions. Although I had a list of ten questions, the interviews were more conversational, and I did produce novel questions on the spot based on how each conversation went. During the interviews I took informal notes, but after they were over, I listened to the recording and took more detailed notes.

### **Data Analysis**

After all the interviews were completed and listened to, I sat down with my notes and looked for big themes or any consistencies throughout the interviews. This included pulling impactful quotes, and any reoccurring themes/ideas that came up across the several interviews. The way that I chose the big ideas was how well they would relate to or support my project. This same process also went for choosing which quotes to pull from the interviews. Any quotes that answered the questions well or that I thought would be able to support the process of toolkit development were selected. Another step I took after the interviews were over was to make a table of all the interviewees and information such as, district, grades, subject, or any special certification they have. This helped me to see the overview of each and consider how this information may relate to the answers and knowledge participants shared during the interview.

This process helped me produce themes and ideas to incorporate into my toolkit, making it the best version for teachers to use with firsthand perspective.

### **Interview Results**

The results of the interviews helped to inform my toolkit and how I think it will be useful to teachers and their needs.

### ***Importance of SEL***

When asked about the concept of SEL and the information they already have, many teachers said they want to learn more and think it is a concept which has grown in importance. For example, one of the teachers who had been teaching for 3 years at the time of the interview, Erick, said that SEL is, “important and hard to do” as he explained to me his own implementation of this concept in his classroom. When he tries to get students motivated and willing to do SEL, “once students believe it’ll make a difference, they will be on board.” This is something that is a struggle with implementing SEL in high schools: how to get student buy in. While conducting my interview with Erick he agreed that this is what he has struggled with the most when navigating SEL. One of the most challenging aspects is that once he finally gets it through to students, he must start all over because he is the only one giving them any instruction.

Next, I summarize several major themes and explain their impact on toolkit development. See Table 3 for an overview.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Main Themes and Implications for Toolkit Development*

Main theme	Interviews	Toolkit
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COVID	<i>“Made us more aware of thinking of kids and their needs, Covid-19 has had an impact on having anxiety and didn't know how to cope, they could hide behind their computer screens” - Kathleen</i>	Importance of this toolkit in general where these students need the added SEL support.
Subject-dependent	<i>“This shouldn't give them an out, I only see my students for 45 minutes a day, so SEL needs to be a recurring topic throughout the day” – Caroline</i>	Universal for all subjects so responsibility does not only fall onto the humanities (English and history).
Training and Support	<i>“Being aware and having a common language” - Jennifer and Emily</i> <i>“Teachers using more training to identify key phrases and shifts in behavior of students in the classroom” - Ariana</i>	Teacher training includes key concepts and how to use each strategy.
Strategies	<i>“Making this feel like an organic part of what we are teaching” – Jennifer</i>	Strategies rather than a curriculum or lessons for teachers to build into what they already must teach.

### ***Covid's Impact***

Consistent with the literature, a lot of teachers shared that Covid-19 had a big impact on the need for these SEL services and why this concept has grown in importance over the last few years. The teachers noticed a shift in the students' behavior that previously was not an issue they

faced in the classroom. One notable change is the attitude students have when they are presented with group work. In her high school history class, Kathleen reflected on whether students want to be isolated from their peers. When prompted to do group work, she noticed that students do not want to do it. Before Covid-19 this used to be “a fun activity, now students refuse to work with others” (Kathleen). This is a huge shift where students are missing important peer interactions if they mimic their time on Zoom being by themselves on the computer. With Covid-19 came students’ “school phobia,” said Nora, when asked how the pandemic impacted her students. We discussed that students have become so used to the idea of being by themselves, shielded by a computer, that they cannot stand the idea of being back at school conversing face to face with teachers and peers. Teachers have noticed that “things have changed with Covid-19 and all the needs that students have” (Ariana). The support that students needed 4 years ago is different from what they need right now, and this is in part due to Covid-19. This is also causing teachers to slow down their curriculum to catch up with their students' SEL needs. This is why for my project the goal is to create something that teachers can seamlessly build into their previously curated lessons.

### ***Subject-Dependent***

When conducting the interview with one of the English teachers, who is also a department chair, she expressed concern for the humanities subjects (English and history). Caroline explained to me that when in department meetings, those who teach sciences and math have said that the concept of SEL should be turned to the humanities because of content matter. Based on this conversation I want my tool kit to be universal for all subjects. The responsibility of SEL should not fall directly on the humanities teachers, especially when they only see students for a limited amount of time in the day. There should be consistent presentation of SEL

content across classes for the students to get real or meaningful instruction. Jennifer also touched upon this topic during our interview saying that this concept is thrown at the humanities because of the content they teach. In her own classroom she gives students opportunity for “reflection and writing about themselves” and as an English teacher, “this looks different because we talk about issues like race, identity and culture.” This is exactly what the science teachers think of when they are asked to incorporate something like SEL into their curriculum. This is why it is important to help the non-humanities teachers understand SEL and create resources for them to incorporate it into their classroom.

### ***Training and Support***

During my interview with Emily, she spoke to me about an SEL program that her school already has in place. Although that is great that her school recognizes that SEL is important and students benefit from the programs, it is just as important how schools implement them. Emily told me that they are just, “handed curriculum, no training, doesn’t always feel age appropriate, nor seems like something that seamlessly fits into the classroom.” This quote is one of the reasons I want to develop my toolkit. Schools see the need for these skills but do not support teachers in knowing how to implement SEL instruction. If teachers are expected to incorporate this into their curriculum, they should be trained in what SEL is and how to use the program. In general teachers had expressed that SEL is an important topic, and they want to implement it but first they want to know more about SEL. This will help teachers feel comfortable in teaching students.

Ariana shared a similar view to Emily in the sense that teachers need more training as well as “more professionals in the field,” and she is not the only one to share this opinion. Grace, Kathleen, and Caroline shared the suggestions of schools hiring more guidance counselors,

adjustment counselors or even more special education teachers for the building. This is not something that I can address directly in my toolkit but, I can understand where they are coming from in wanting more experts to utilize as support for teachers, as well as being able to work directly with the students.

Ariana also stated that, teachers could use “more training to identify key phrases and shifts in behavior of students in the classroom.” This is a very important point made by Ariana because with the right training and understanding of the concepts talked about above, teachers can be proactive in the classroom. If a teacher can recognize when a student might need a break or is becoming distressed, they can turn to the strategies in the toolkit to deescalate the situation. This also allows the students to make note of their behavior and when the teacher expresses their attention towards them, they may eventually be able to develop important SEC related to self-regulation.

### ***Strategies***

During interviews, teachers also provided specific suggestions regarding how they would prefer to give the SEL instruction to their students. I asked if they would prefer to be provided with existing SEL lessons/curriculum or just stand-alone strategies that can be incorporated into their teaching day no matter the content they are covering. All the teachers said that they would prefer to use stand-alone strategies as these would be easier for them to incorporate into their teaching. Jennifer said it perfectly, in making SEL feel more like an “organic part of what we are teaching.” This speaks to what a lot of the teachers in the interviews have issues with regarding existing programs that their school/district use. They are handed something with minimal previous training on it and are expected to incorporate it while also teaching content. When this is the case, students are not getting the best SEL instruction that they can.

### **Implications for Toolkit**

After reading the literature that has already been written and conducting my own interviews with high school teachers, I have learned many things which have helped me put together my own toolkit. Exploring the main themes that I took from my interviews I was able to look at what is already being used and what the teachers want and use that information to inform my toolkit. Below I outline those themes and how I intend to explore them in my toolkit.

#### **COVID**

When looking at the research about SEL I found that after dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 the need for SEL instruction has become more important. Because students missed almost 2 years of in person instruction, they lost the skills that they would have gained by having in person connections with peers and adults in the school. After being isolated in their houses only staring at a screen for 6 hours every day, students are going to need some extra support after they have gotten back. When speaking with the teachers they have noticed the effects of Covid-19 on their students. Due to the substantial impact that Covid-19 has had on students it is important to improve their skills now. Although there is not a designated spot in my toolkit for Covid-19, it is talked about in the training as being a key factor of the need for SEL.

#### **Subject-dependent**

In both the research and from my interviews with teachers I have found that there is a big focus of SEL on the humanities teachers. This is because of the content that they teach which makes it easier for them to have these conversations. Although it is easier and more natural for them to implement this into their curriculum, I do not think it should just be forgotten about in the other subject areas. The focus of my toolkit will be to create strategies that can be used across all subjects. This allows students to receive instruction in these skills not only in just one or two



classes a day. In my toolkit you will find folders which are designated by math, science, English/history. I combined English and history because you can already find the most resources for the humanities subjects. Math and science are their own folders as these teachers need more information and strategies.

### **Teacher Training**

When schools implement some SEL curriculum, teachers are not prepared to teach their students these concepts. When teachers do not understand what they are teaching to the students, the instruction is not being presented in the best possible way. One big issue that had arisen from my interviews was that teachers felt that they did not have enough knowledge about SEL to accurately teach it to their students. Knowing this information, I want to make my toolkit easily accessible with explicit instructions about how to use each strategy as well as how they benefit students. I will also include training materials so teachers can understand what SEL is before using the strategies. In my toolkit I will include a training folder for teachers to access information on SEL and how to teach it.

### **Strategies**

There is already an academic curriculum that teachers must worry about creating lessons, that SEL does not get enough attention it deserves. From my interviews I learned that teachers would rather have standalone strategies that they can easily implement into any day of their teaching. This takes the pressure off, and teachers can give a fair amount of attention to both their content and SEL. Based on this information I will be creating more standalone strategies for teachers to implement into my toolkit because this is what they are asking for. There will be a folder in my toolkit designated for strategies that teachers can implement into their classrooms.

These can be used in any classroom because these are broad strategies that are not directly linked with academic content.

### **Family/At home**

Incorporating a section for parents/guardians in my toolkit will help students continue to get the SEL instruction they need. This will help the skills grow so they can use them at school or at home. When conducting my research, I found that especially after Covid-19 parents think it is important for their student (s) to receive SEL instruction. This is important for them to learn at school but would benefit them by also practicing those skills at home. This is why I wanted to be able to provide teachers with materials that they can share with families.

### **Toolkit**

A link to my toolkit is provided here:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1O9UC\\_Lp\\_eEZAbD2Y92riiBDxWoYdog3](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1O9UC_Lp_eEZAbD2Y92riiBDxWoYdog3)

In my toolkit, you will find our folders which were decided upon based on the big themes I took out of my interviews and literature review, which are outlined above. Within each folder, there are materials that you will find regarding SEL. These materials will include strategies and instructions on how to use them. Below, I include sample products from my toolkit and give a brief overview of what they are and how you might use them.

### **Subject dependent:**

Math: The worksheet shown below can be used in a math classroom and it is a reflection worksheet for students to use after learning a new topic. Math can be a frustrating subject for many students, so giving them an outlet to express concerns and also achievements make them feel more comfortable in the classroom.

Name:

Topic learning in class:

How did today's lesson/math make you feel?

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Which parts of the lesson did you feel good about/understand?

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Which parts made you feel stressed, or you would like to go over again?

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What can I do to make this more of a positive experience for you?

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Do you have any questions/comments you would like to share?

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Science: Below teachers will find a sample from a worksheet in the subfolder labeled “Science” in subject dependent. In the worksheet, I outline 3 activities that you can incorporate into science content that also encourage SEL instruction.

Activities:

1. **Socratic Seminar:** student led academic conversation
  - Provide students with a text or topic which will allow them to research and learn more about.
  - Give students time to prepare and establish seminar rules for the classroom.
  - Other students should think about questions or statements they may ask during the seminar.
  - The seminar consists of the students leading class discussion about their topic and the other students listening (some students can participate in the discussion, others can have jobs as observers, and you can rotate students as the presentations begin)

SEL incorporations:

- self-management: students will need to be able to prepare for their discussion and learn self-motivation to get their work done, having the courage to speak up in discussions and being confident in asking questions.
- social awareness: while students are presenting being respectful of their time, putting away distractions and asking respectful questions.
- relationship skills: make arguments in a respectful manner, use speaking and listening skills when students and their peers are present, working with peers during group discussion.

**Strategies:** Here is another sample from my toolkit about how teachers can incorporate general themes into the classroom. These can work for any subject because they are general themes, I also provide examples and ways that they can be incorporated.

Themes to incorporate into the classroom

- Teamwork
- Gratitude
- Self-care

- Problem solving

These can be monthly themes that teachers incorporate or just into daily lessons where they see fit. If teachers notice students need strengthening of these skills, they can pick one out and use it to guide a lesson.

Teamwork: to increase teamwork in the classroom incorporate games, or group work into daily lessons. This theme can be used in any subject area which makes it easy to collaborate between courses.

Gratitude: read a story or poem about gratitude, ask students to respond to the text by answering prompts about it. What is something you are grateful for? How do you express your gratitude?

Problem solving having students work with peers to solve a riddle, or content related question. Something to challenge them a little but also giving them an opportunity to use teamwork and relationship building (you can always mix more than one theme).

Self-care: to encourage students' self-care in your classroom have opportunities for students to put themselves first. Give each student one pass per quarter that allows them an extension on an assignment, or let the class choose days in class that you do fun activities, this could still be content related but incorporating word searches, coloring pages or trivia games. Something to break up the stress of learning material and working their brains all day.

**Family/At home**

Homework self-monitoring checklist: this form is taken from my toolkit to help students stay on track and make sure that they complete their assignments.

Use this checklist to help stay on track when completing any out of school assignments!

Behavior/task	Completed	How can I get there?
Prepare a space to get your work done.		Do you prefer a quiet place away from people? Do you have enough space for what you have to do?
Once you have a space to get all your materials laid out.		Do you need a laptop? Is it charged? Get pens, paper, pencils or worksheets.
Set a timer on your phone (30 minutes, 1 hour). Once your timer goes off take a 10-minute break and repeat till your work is done.		How much time are you going to be able to focus solely on your work?
Read the directions on your assignment		Do you understand what you are supposed to be doing for this assignment? If not refer to the worksheet "What do I do if I don't know how to answer a question?"
Once you finish the assignment put it back in the correct location.		Do you have a folder for the class? Make sure you can easily access by the time you get to school.
Check the assignment off in your agenda and move onto the next one.		





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