SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

FOR Multilingual Learners

Essential Actions for Success

DIANE STAEHR FENNER

MINDI TEICH

Foreword by
Margarita Calderón

CORWIN

Thank you

FOR YOUR INTEREST IN CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Social Emotional Learning for Multilingual Learners.

LEARN MORE about this title!

CORWIN

Why SEL for MLs Matters

iStock.com/mikedabell

At a large suburban high school, students were feeling stressed out in the spring with state content assessments, Advanced Placement (AP) tests, and final exams looming large. Some support staff arranged to bring in two adorable alpacas for students to pet during their lunch period to reduce students' stress and anxiety as well as promote the importance of mental health. The school year had been marked by many challenges, including an uptick in student absenteeism, students being distracted by their electronic devices during classroom instruction, and a decreased sense of in-person social connection among peers. At the event, students formed large crowds in order to take selfies with the animals that they could share on social media. All the

while, many students who did not feel a sense of belonging at school, including many multilingual learners (MLs), chose not to participate.

What is your reaction to this story? What does it illustrate about social emotional learning (SEL) for MLs?

_____

_____

_____

_____

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter will convey a sense of urgency for the need for SEL for multilingual learners. It will include relevant research on SEL for all students as well as SEL specifically for MLs, the changing demographics in our schools, and the important role that SEL plays in teaching and learning. The chapter will examine what SEL is, what SEL is not, and will lay the groundwork for why SEL is essential right now for MLs. It will discuss the heightened need for SEL to meet MLs' unique needs due to trends in student well-being, a shift in priorities in K–12 schools, and an awareness of why SEL is crucial for MLs' success and sense of belonging in schools.

What do you hope to learn from this chapter? Set your intention here.

My intention in reading this chapter is to _____

_____

_____

_____

Since we recognize we will be presenting a good amount of material in this chapter, including research, we've developed an SEL for MLs note-taking tool (Figure 1.1) for you to jot down key ideas you've learned, your reaction to these ideas, and implications for your context.

FIGURE 1.1 ● Chapter Idea Note-Taking Tool

KEY IDEA	MY REACTION	IMPLICATIONS FOR MY CONTEXT

WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

We decided to write this book to ensure that MLs are thoughtfully included in SEL instruction. Here, we'll share three perspectives that contributed to our desire to write this book. Over the past few years as ML coaches, we have witnessed teachers who have done a magnificent job engaging their MLs, making them feel welcome, and taking the extra care to ensure their learners were an integral part of the school community. It has been inspiring to watch these teachers in action, and we have seen MLs grow by leaps and bounds in learning content and language, strengthening relationships, and increasing in confidence and self-esteem. It is so exciting to see when MLs

feel comfortable enough to take risks with grade-level content, are empowered to set goals, are in tune with their emotions, and speak up for themselves as self-advocates—especially if they are also developing their English skills. At the same time, we have also seen MLs who appear to be withdrawn, disengaged, and checked out in the classroom. As educators, we take it personally when we see a student not living up to their immense potential.

Zooming out to look at the wider context for this work on a national level, we are keenly aware that, after their families, school may likely be the community second in line in terms of importance to students. In addition, as community involvement lessens as a whole across the United States, it seems schools are being asked to do more and more to fill in gaps and create a sense of belonging that places of worship and civic engagement once held for some individuals. Beyond the outsized role that schools are asked to play to foster students' well-being, students are facing more stress than ever. The constant drip of social media, comparisons to others, pressure to achieve academically, experiences with racial injustice, and uncertainty about the future all add up to sources of unease in many students' lives. Couple our more granular classroom observations with our awareness of what has been happening with student development and our social fabric as a whole, and we felt compelled to contribute to the conversation.

Finally, possibly our most important reason for writing this book is that we are moms—each of us has three adolescent children. Prior to the pandemic, we would swap stories about challenges our children faced in school systems that felt increasingly more academically competitive and less focused on our kids' well-being. We recognized that we had privileges that included being white, fluency in English, knowledge of how school systems work through our previous roles as teachers and administrators, and the resources to allow us to advocate for our kids as well as help support them at home. We would often discuss how challenging it is when MLs face these same pressures and then some—possibly dealing with trauma, relocation, financial instability, cultural dissonance between home and school, and of course the immense challenge of learning content in an additional language. We knew that even though our plates were already beyond full collaborating with educators of MLs and with our own family lives, we felt we needed to offer our insights on how our enhanced vision for SEL can help put MLs on a path for academic success and an improved sense of well-being. We were ready to take essential actions.

SEL FOR MLs AND OUR CORE BELIEFS

In addition to what we have seen when collaborating with teachers, we have observed as well as read about many school districts implementing SEL practices in a one-size-fits-all approach, not taking into account MLs' unique strengths and needs. With the numbers of MLs increasing as the fastest-growing group in U.S. schools, it is imperative to ensure educators are intentional about including MLs in their SEL practices. Beyond the sheer and

increasing number of MLs, including newcomers, it is crucial to know what is unique about MLs on a personal level and how SEL practices must be inclusive of them. To that end, SEL is woven into our newly updated core beliefs about ML education, which follow in Figure 1.2 (Staehr Fenner et al., 2024).

1

STRENGTHS

MLs bring many strengths to the classroom.

5

ADVOCACY

MLs excel when teachers and administrators collaborate, advocate, and lead in support of their students' academic achievement and social emotional well-being.

2

CLIMATE

MLs learn best when they are taught in a welcoming and culturally responsive school climate.

Framework for
Equitable & Excellent
Multilingual Learner
Education

© Corwin, 2024

4

CONVERSATIONS

MLs thrive when their teachers include opportunities for peer learning and meaningful conversations.

3

LANGUAGE

MLs acquire language and content when teachers purposefully integrate language development opportunities into meaningful content instruction.

We have updated our core beliefs, originally written in 2017, to reflect our learning about MLs and their educators over the past few years. With the revised beliefs, we highlighted the importance of integrating peer learning and authentic conversations into instruction and stressed that student well-being was just as important as academic achievement. All of these updates have direct ties to SEL for MLs, and these core beliefs also underscore the role SEL plays in the educational lives of MLs. Despite all the losses we have suffered, the past few years have given us an unexpected opportunity to reflect on the current state of education to do better by our students.

URGENCY FOR THIS BOOK

We are mindful of the extra initial lift educators must engage in to implement SEL for MLs. Through our collaboration with educators in districts across the country, we know that nearly everyone seems to have one thing in common: Teachers are experiencing unprecedented amounts of stress and pressure to bring their students out of "learning loss." We are also well aware that MLs faced many additional challenges prior to the pandemic when compared to their monolingual peers. We also know that more teachers than ever before have given serious thought to leaving the profession. In addition, while MLs bring many strengths to their schools, they also can most effectively engage with content when teachers implement scaffolds and supports, which require extra time, collaboration, and planning (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017; Staehr Fenner et al., 2024). We recognize that the extra effort teachers will need to make to integrate SEL for MLs, in addition to scaffolding instruction for MLs, will result in students who feel more at ease in their classrooms, who enjoy closer relationships with their teachers and peers, and who are better positioned to learn. In terms of the urgency of SEL for ML students, just like our alpaca story, our good intentions are not enough. We will examine research findings which speak to the need for SEL for MLs framed through the many benefits well-planned SEL can bring to students.
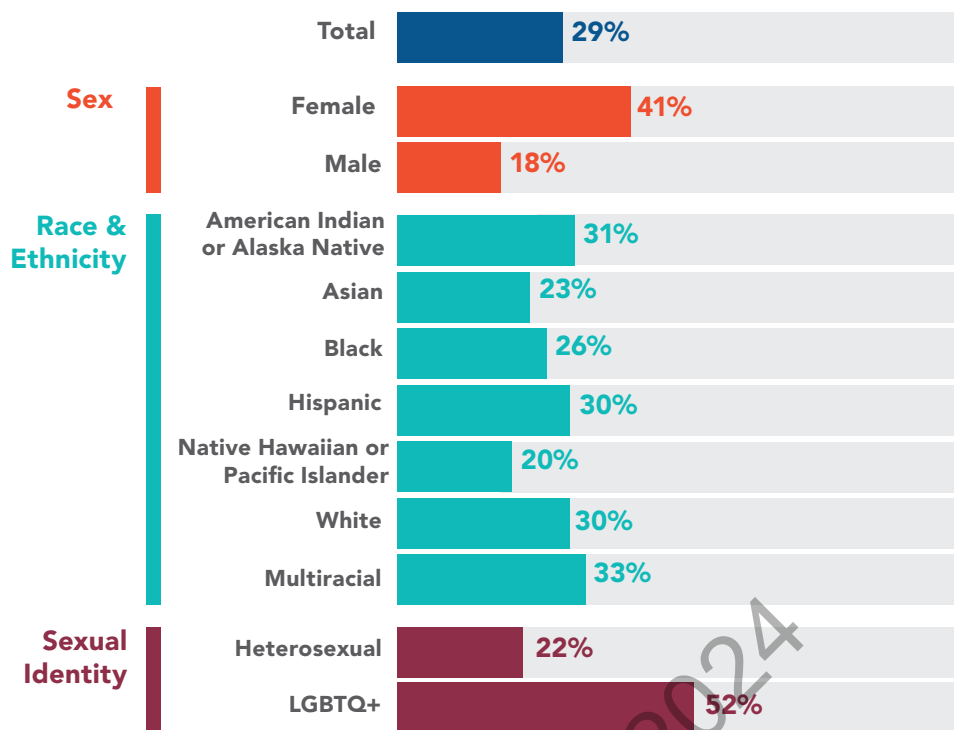
SNAPSHOT OF U.S. HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

Before we examine research about SEL for MLs in K–12, let's first let the following three pieces of data sink in to provide a context for how adolescent students in general are feeling in U.S. schools. In the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey report (2021), there were several trends and findings that we found to be extremely worrisome. In Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5, we provide you with three data sets to reflect on related to sadness, poor mental health, and suicidal ideation.
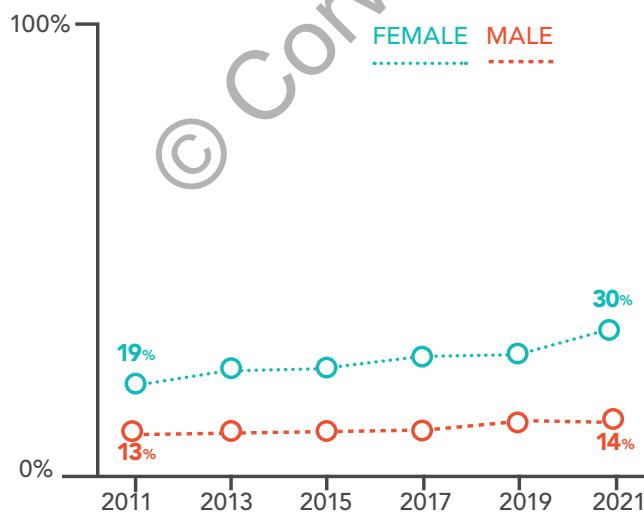
FIGURE 1.3 ● Percentage of School Students Who Experienced Persistent Feelings of Sadness or Hopelessness
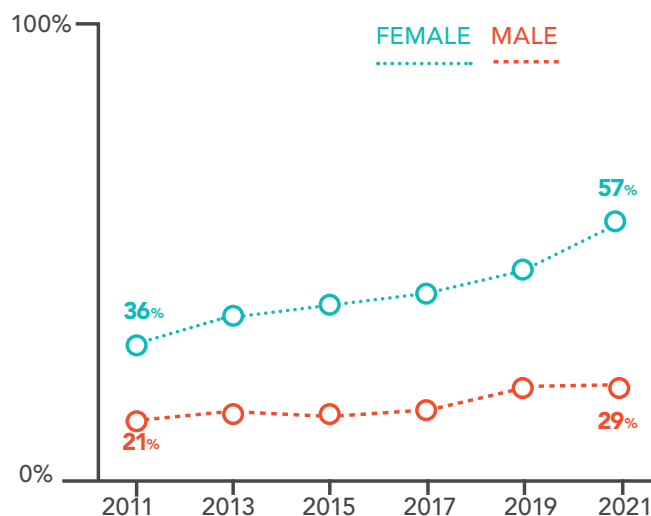
FIGURE 1.4 ● Percentage of School Students Who Experienced Poor Mental Health During the Past 30 Days

	Total	29%
Sex	Female	41%
	Male	18%
Race & Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	31%
	Asian	23%
	Black	26%
	Hispanic	30%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	20%
	White	30%
	Multiracial	33%
Sexual Identity	Heterosexual	22%
	LGBTQ+	52%

FIGURE 1.5 ● Percentage of School Students Who Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide

FEMALE   MALE

Female: 2011: 19%, 2021: 30%
Male: 2011: 13%, 2021: 14%

(Years: 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021)

The CDC report states, "These data make it clear that young people in the U.S. are collectively experiencing a level of distress that calls on us to act" (2021, p. 4). One action the CDC recommends is to increase school connectedness across all grades for all students, pointing out that students who are from racial and ethnic minority groups, who experience racism, and who identify as LGBTQ+ often feel less connected at school than their peers. We recognize the dire need to make changes in students' educational lives so

that they don't reach a level of hopelessness displayed in the data. While SEL in and of itself is not a panacea that will solve all students' problems, examining what we can do to better foster students' sense of belonging and well-being is a solid step in the right direction.

WHO MLs ARE

In order to focus on SEL for MLs, we first need to carefully define who we mean by MLs. There are many terms used to describe students who speak a language in addition to English (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021; Snyder et al., 2023; Sugarman, 2020). Multilingual learners, English learners (ELs), and emergent bilinguals are a variety of names for students whose parent or guardian reports their child speaking one or more languages other than or in addition to English in the home. While EL is the term still officially used by the federal government to describe these students, some argue that the term "English learner" focuses more on students' deficits of learning a language while ignoring the strength of their home language (García, 2009; Zacarian & Staehr Fenner, 2020). **We define multilingual learners as students whose parent or guardian reports speaking one or more languages other than English at home. MLs may or may not qualify for English language support, depending on their level of English proficiency** (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021; Snyder et al., 2023). In order to distinguish between MLs as a whole and MLs who qualify for ELD services, particularly in the discussion of data on a nationwide level, we use the term "emergent ML." **Emergent MLs are MLs who qualify for ELD services.**

In the United States in fall 2019, school-age MLs who qualified for language support services (emergent MLs) numbered approximately 5.1 million, making up 10.4 percent of the school-age population (National Center on Education Statistics [NCES], 2022; see Figure 1.6). In contrast, the entire group

FIGURE 1.6 ● Population of Emergent MLs and ML School-Aged Children in the United States

School-Aged Children, 2019 (in millions)
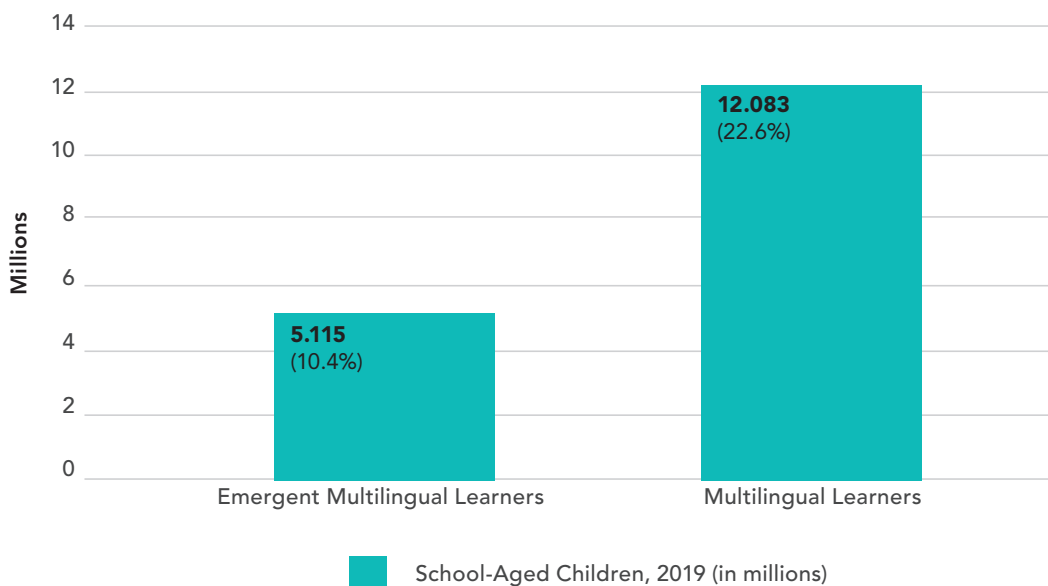
of MLs—those who qualify for language services and those who do not—encompass markedly more students. In the 2019–2020 school year, more than 12 million (or nearly 23 percent of children ages 5–17) came from a home in which a language other than or in addition to English was spoken, according to U.S. census figures. In this book, we focus on the more inclusive ML population.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MLs

As we learn more about mental health issues that are plaguing students in general, it is important to elevate the unique mental health challenges that have emerged for non-white students. The Child Mind Institute found in 2021 that non-white teens reported more concern than their white peers about nearly every issue related to returning to school in person, including the negative impact of the pandemic on their focus and academic progress, coping with loss and grief, economic struggles or food insecurity, and mental health challenges.

Research has shown that culturally and linguistically diverse populations present higher prevalence of mental health problems and access to care when compared to the white population (Alegría et al., 2008). Individuals with lower levels of English language proficiency have been found to struggle more with mental health problems, as they are less likely to seek services (Bauer et al., 2010). These disparities suggest that culturally and linguistically diverse populations are not only at higher risk for developing problems due to the many systemic challenges they face (i.e., lower socioeconomic status, language barriers, discrimination), but they also have fewer opportunities to access the care they need to address their challenges.

As you react to this research about mental health and MLs, we must stress that we cannot and must not ask teachers to take on the role of school psychologist, therapist, and/or counselor in addition to their already heavy workload during trying times. Teachers are already asked to wear several hats; while we recognize the importance of integrating SEL into teachers' instructional repertoire, we must be cognizant of knowing how and when to leverage mental health experts' expertise and not rely on teachers to make a mental health diagnosis or provide treatment. That said, it is important for teachers to recognize signs of students in distress to be able to refer them to the appropriate professional.

WHY SEL IS ESSENTIAL RIGHT NOW FOR MLs

Despite all the strengths that MLs bring to the classroom, we are well aware of the many challenges MLs already face, including lower graduation rates, lower academic achievement for emergent MLs, and disproportionate representation in programs such as advanced placement as well as gifted and talented programs. As it did for many other students, COVID-19 exacerbated such prepandemic disparities for MLs that had already existed prior to March 2020 and also created new gaps. For example, according to

the Office of Civil Rights (2021), virtual school reduced opportunities for social and academic English language conversations and reduced access to English language development instruction. In fact, MLs have been among the group of students that was the most negatively affected by COVID's disruptions to in-person learning. In many cases, virtual learning greatly reduced opportunities for MLs to engage in English language conversations with adults and with peers and engage in intensive language instruction at frequent intervals. In addition, strains on ML family resources have made it difficult for many ML families to help their children thrive academically during the pandemic.

Beyond looking at why SEL is needed specifically as a result of the pandemic, SEL has always been essential in that it is often seen as a way to support students' well-being as a pathway to improved academic outcomes. However, when we narrow our focus to examine SEL for MLs, many SEL programs focus on skill development at the expense of exploring students' cultural assets (Jagers, 2016; Simmons, 2017). One way to elevate students' cultures is to approach SEL in the context of culturally sustaining pedagogies, which means relying more heavily on student, family, and community cultural assets to inform SEL curricula as well as instructional strategies. **Culturally sustaining pedagogies extend beyond merely tolerating students' cultural practices and shift the focus toward explicitly supporting aspects of their languages, literacies, and cultural traditions** (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Applying the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogies to the field of SEL, this translates into fostering cultural well-being, racial and ethnic identity development, and safe and inclusive learning environments (Cantor et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). While culturally sustaining pedagogies are the gold standard for SEL for MLs, we have found that the majority of the SEL frameworks and programs we have encountered do not focus on the unique strengths and attributes that MLs bring to school.

What takeaways do you have about the sense of urgency for SEL to be inclusive of MLs?

DEFINITION OF SEL

We have used the term "SEL" many times already in this chapter. To begin to make sense of research we present in this chapter on SEL and MLs, let's first pause and ensure we are using a common definition of SEL in general. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as **"the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."** We provide CASEL's definition first since it is used widely in the United States and is likely familiar to many. CASEL has also coined the term "transformative SEL" to focus on specific implementation to transform inequitable settings and systems while promoting justice-oriented civic engagement (CASEL, 2020).

While the CASEL definition and model tend to be well known in the United States, there are other models and along with them definitions of SEL that we would also like to acknowledge. The Harvard University EASEL Lab[1] compares six domains of 40 different SEL frameworks used around the world. These are cognitive, emotion, social, values, perspectives, and identity. It is important to note that there are many international SEL frameworks, including those from Lebanon, Kenya, Singapore, and India. We encourage you to take a look at them. In addition, there are many aspects of SEL beyond the CASEL definition that are important to acknowledge and reflect on, especially as they relate to students who are not white. Dena Simmons (2021) provides much to consider when conceptualizing SEL with students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). She discusses the implications of implementing SEL without consideration of racism and notes that "SEL faces the risk of becoming *white supremacy with a hug* if we do not apply an anti-oppressive, antiracist lens." She states that in school districts that are mostly BIPOC, the focus of SEL is often about compliance and control when compared to SEL for white, privileged students, in which case it tends to be used to support these students' college and career readiness. Simmons asks us to consider the connections between SEL and what educators deem as employable and professional, being sure to send students the message that their unique identities should not be diminished and that being successful can take multiple paths. Finally, she urges educators to go beyond good intentions and being empathetic to also "interrogate how such a kind field could perpetuate white supremacy culture."

---

[1]http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/compare-domains/

WHAT SEL IS NOT, PART 1: A FIX FOR STUDENTS, A SEPARATE CURRICULUM, OR A DIVISIVE SUBJECT

Now that we have explored what SEL is and looked at some definitions, let's focus on what SEL is not. According to Simmons (2021), SEL is not intended to identify student deficits, fix problems, ensure compliance, or control students. We find that SEL often gets mistakenly conflated with classroom management and controlling unwanted student behaviors. Further, SEL is not a curriculum in and of itself; it should be regarded as forming the underpinning of skills that help students share, contribute to, and enhance their learning, their confidence, and their appreciation of people (Centre for Education & Youth and STiR Education, n.d.).

We cannot begin this book without acknowledging what is happening currently in some areas in the United States regarding SEL. A study by the Fordham Institute (2021) found that, in general, families—regardless of where they stand politically—want their children to learn social and emotional skills. However, the term "SEL" in and of itself can sometimes be polarizing, suggesting there is confusion about what SEL actually is and involves. As educators, it is important to be aware of what the political climate is in your context. We encourage you to follow what is happening with your district's school board as well as at the state level and also share your input on SEL for MLs if you feel comfortable doing so. Please see our final chapter for some guidance on encouraging your school or district to integrate SEL for MLs in different types of circumstances.

WHAT SEL IS NOT, PART 2: MENTAL HEALTH AND SEL

While there are commonalities between SEL and mental health, the two constructs are not synonymous. We start with a definition of mental health from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023): "**Being mentally healthy during childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems. Mentally healthy children have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and in their communities.**" Mental health is a continuum, and children who do not have a diagnosed mental health disorder can still differ in how well they are doing and coping.[2] Signs of mental health include successful engagement in productive activities, such as school and friendships, as well as healthy relationships. Hallmarks of mental health include the ability to maintain stable relationships and cope with adversity, which share elements of SEL (Sherman, 2022). In addition, psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour would like to rewrite the definition of mental health. In an interview with the *New York Times*, she states, "Too often, 'mental health' is equated with feeling good, happy, calm or relaxed."

iStock.com/art-skvortsova

---

[2]https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/basics.html

But, she continued, it's "about having feelings that fit the moment—even if those feelings are unwanted or painful—and managing them in effective ways" (Damour, para. 5, as cited in Moyer, 2023).

However, mental disorders are distinct from mental health. According to the CDC,[3] **mental disorders in children are "serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, which cause distress and problems getting through the day."** The most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children are attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, behavior problems, and depression.[4] Like many challenges, mental health challenges were exacerbated during the pandemic. While there was a decrease in emergency room visits for all ages during COVID lockdowns in 2020, CDC data tell us that visits for mental health in 2020 increased by 24 percent for children ages 5 to 11 and 31 percent for children ages 12 to 17 when compared to 2019 data (Leeb et al., 2020).

While the number of children and adolescents with mental health challenges has increased, there is a stark disparity between numbers of students who need help and resources available to support them. The Institute of Education Science (2022) shared that 69 percent of public schools reported the percentage of students who have sought mental health services increased since the start of the pandemic. In addition, the Institute of Education Sciences report that only 56 percent of public schools reported they moderately or strongly agree that their school was able to effectively provide mental health services to all students in need. For instance, the Child Mind Institute (Whitney & Peterson, 2019) reports that about half of the estimated 7.7 million children in the United States who had a treatable mental health disorder in 2016 did not receive adequate treatment. In every state, there is a serious lack of accredited professionals, including child psychiatrists, therapists, and social workers (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, n.d.). While SEL can provide tools for students to develop relationships with peers and adults as well as understand themselves and their emotions better, it is important to note that SEL is not designed to diagnose or treat mental illness.

Please pause and reflect on what you have learned so far. What are your thoughts on the following:

- The definition of SEL

_____

_____

(Continued)

---

[3]https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/symptoms.html
[4]https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html

- What SEL is and is not

_____

_____

- Implications for MLs

_____

_____

TRENDS IN SEL FOR ALL STUDENTS

Social emotional learning's reach has expanded significantly over the past decade. The number of states that have adopted free-standing competencies or standards for SEL has grown from one in 2011 to 27 in 2022. It is noteworthy that this number increased 50 percent from 2020 to 2022. In addition, 44 states offered guidance for SEL implementation in 2022, a marked increase from 25 in 2020 (Dermody & Dusenbury, 2022). Narrowing the focus to the district level, according to market research (Tyton Partners, 2021), there has been a marked shift in school districts' priorities since the pandemic began. Sixty-nine percent of districts now prioritize improving students' mental health and well-being (an increase of 43 percent), and 46 percent of districts prioritize promoting students' social and emotional competence (an increase of 23 percent). Figure 1.7, Comparison of District Priorities, outlines

FIGURE 1.7 ● Comparison of District Priorities
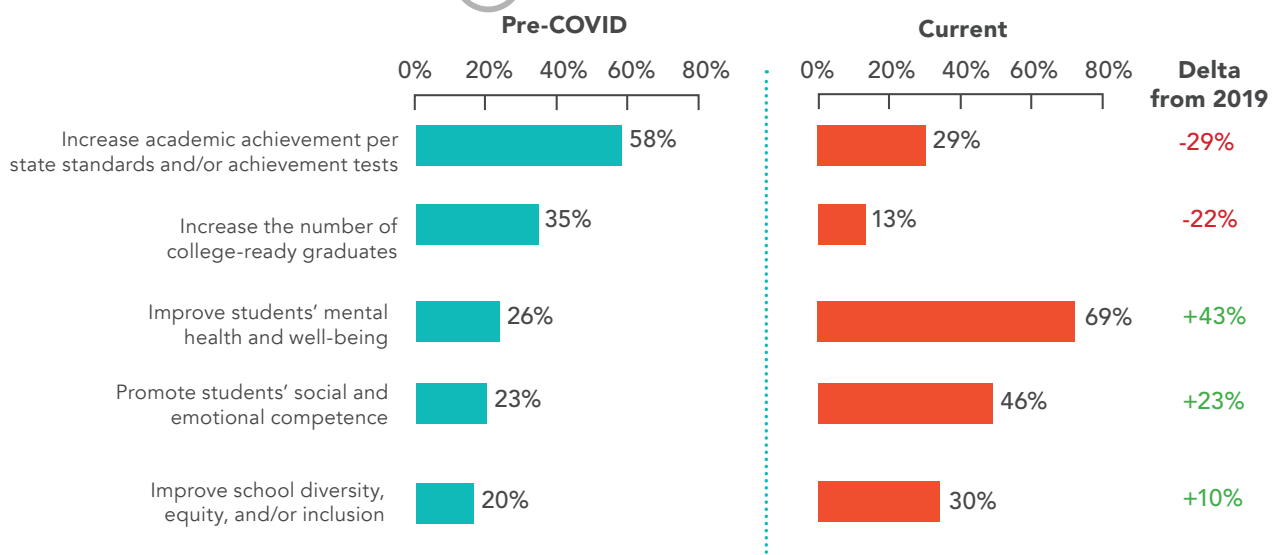
Source: Tyton Partners (2021).

differences in the priorities districts have reported before the pandemic in 2019 and in 2021. The biggest increase was seen in improving students' mental health and well-being, while the largest decrease in priorities was the importance of academic achievement as measured by state standards and/or achievement tests.

ROLE THAT SEL PLAYS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Now that we have a sense of the increased importance of SEL in the educational landscape, let's first take a look at the role SEL plays in teaching and learning for all students, including MLs. One large-scale meta-analysis was conducted on 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning programs involving more than 270,000 kindergarten through high school students. The study found that students who participated in SEL programs demonstrated the following: greater motivation to learn, improved meta-cognition, better problem-solving, deeper connection to school, greater sense of security at school, stronger sense of belonging, and fewer absences and suspensions. In addition to these nonacademic findings, these students who partook in SEL programs increased their academic achievement by 11 percentage points as compared with their peers who did not participate in SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007).

- What shifts have you noticed in terms of your school or district's priorities? What is your evidence?

_____

_____

- What is your reaction to the research on SEL and its impact on students?

_____

_____

ML ASSETS VERSUS DEFICITS

Now that you are well-versed in information regarding what SEL is, how widespread the importance of SEL is in the United States, and have read a little research on the benefits of SEL, we will examine how this learning applies to MLs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, emergent MLs are one of the fastest-growing population of students in K–12 in

the United States.[5] We "firmly believe that all educators—no matter what their title or how many years of experience they have—are positioned to serve as agents of change to promote and champion MLs' assets" (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021, p. 75). However, to be in a position to effectively serve as a champion of MLs when it comes to SEL and well-being, we first have to have a sense of what assets MLs bring to their education. We also all need to have a common definition of what we mean when we say MLs' assets, noting that we intentionally use the word "assets" in its plural form to denote that students have multiple strengths and talents. **Educators operate from an assets-based perspective when they are knowledgeable about and actively value individual students' home languages, cultures, and ways of being. They regard these gifts as foundations for future learning and well-being rather than obstacles to overcome** (adapted from Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021). This assets-based perspective extends to ML family engagement, recognizing that ML engagement may take place in ways that are not always recognized or visible (Staehr Fenner, 2014). For example, ML families may not be able to attend in-person back-to-school night or parent–teacher association meetings due to work or family obligations, but they are likely encouraging their children to do well in school and regularly voicing their support of their children's education.

Conversely, a deficit-based approach focuses on students' challenges and can result in educators as well as policymakers blaming students and families intrinsically for these challenges instead of looking outward to programmatic or systemic factors that may position ML students and families for failure instead of setting them up for success. We highlight the need to examine the importance of the programming and systems in which MLs are educated by devoting space to it in each chapter. **We define a deficit perspective as one in which educators focus primarily on MLs' challenges and see these challenges as being intrinsic, personal obstacles to be overcome.** Over the years as we have supported educators of MLs, we have gotten into the habit of always using the term "strengths and challenges" or "strengths and needs" together when describing MLs rather than only focusing on challenges or needs alone. Whenever we speak of a challenge MLs may face, we are sure to lead with at least one strength (or more) that our MLs bring. We suggest you also begin to become more aware of the language you use when speaking of MLs and get in the practice of saying "strengths and challenges" or "strengths and needs" as well! Figure 1.8 provides examples of ML strengths and challenges. We encourage you to add your own examples as you see fit.

Figure 1.9 (adapted from Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021) contrasts an assets-based approach with a deficit-based approach in four areas.

---

[5]https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/multilingualism-pathways#:~:text=The%20number%20 of%20people%20in,percent%20of%20the%20student%20population

FIGURE 1.8 ● Some ML Strengths and Challenges

ML STRENGTHS 🏆	ML CHALLENGES ⛰
• With supports, MLs' joy in learning language and content will be evident.	• Emergent MLs tend to have lower graduation rates than native English speakers.
• ML families tend to value education and respect teachers.	• Emergent MLs tend to score lower than native English speakers on content assessments.
• After MLs exit ELD services, they tend to outscore native English speakers on content area assessments.	• It is more likely that MLs' experiences may not be reflected in curriculum and materials.
• MLs and their families may have developed resilience from facing challenges.	• MLs may be more likely to have been exposed to untreated trauma and/or acculturation stress.
• Other:	• Other:

Icons by iStock.com/Enis Aksoy

FIGURE 1.9 ● Assets-Based Approach Versus Deficit-Based Approach

FACTOR/ASPECT	ASSETS-BASED APPROACH	DEFICIT-BASED APPROACH
Home language and culture	• Gifts to be recognized • Foundations for future learning	• Hindrances to overcome • Distractions to learning English and content that should be minimized
Families of MLs	• Engaged in children's education • Interact with children in their home language • Share their home cultural practices	• Blamed for students' perceived lack of academic skills, not learning English quickly enough • Not engaged in their children's learning
Connection with student learning	• Direct correlation between building instruction around students' life experience and positive impact on learning	• Disconnect between students' lives and learning
Social emotional learning	• Acknowledges what strengths students bring with them to help them connect with others, develop relationships, set goals, and thrive inside and outside of school	• Sees MLs as lacking the foundation to be fully integrated into the school community, resulting in students not feeling welcome in school

© Corwin, 2024

EQUITABLE SEL FOR MLs

While SEL is increasing in importance in the United States, there is a disconnect between SEL in general and SEL for MLs. An analysis of 33 SEL programs conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that SEL programs do not tend to be designed in a way that centers equity for students (Jones et al., 2021). These researchers define equitable SEL as "SEL that affirms diverse identities; incorporates student cultural values, practices, and assets; fosters positive identity development; promotes student agency and voice; and acknowledges and addresses persistent environmental stressors such as racism, transphobia, homophobia, and classism" (Jones et al., 2021, p. 40). As a result of a lack of a focus on equity "baked in" to SEL programs, educators who work directly with students must adapt SEL programming to ensure it is culturally relevant and accessible for diverse learners. As such, educators should approach SEL frameworks with the unique perspective of MLs in mind to ensure students' identity, culture, and context are represented and honored (Calderón & Montenegro, 2021; Honigsfeld et al., 2022).

IMPACT OF CULTURE ON SEL FOR MLs

As we consider which skills, behaviors, values, and perspectives are commonly prioritized and elevated by SEL programs and practices, it is important to understand the ways in which culture shapes our understanding of which of these skills and behaviors are considered important and appropriate, for whom, and why. Culture plays a significant role in determining areas such as behavioral norms and expectations related to interpersonal interactions, communication styles, and how we express emotion. These areas vary greatly across and within cultures by such factors as gender, age, and other facets of identity (Jukes et al., 2018; Savina & Wan, 2017). Due to the large role of culture in MLs' lives, educators must ensure that SEL curriculum provides an accurate reflection of students' cultural norms and leverages these norms through instruction. To that end, Downes and Cefai (2016) suggest students and parents be consulted as SEL curriculum is being developed.[6]

Let's take a deeper dive into how MLs' culture can have an impact on their academic performance and well-being. Niehaus et al. (2012) compared emergent MLs and non-MLs. When they have social and emotional issues, emergent MLs tend to experience more difficulties with staying on task and maintaining attention than non-MLs. They also tend to experience more anxiety, sadness, and loneliness than non-MLs. Niehaus and Adelson (2013) conducted a study of more than 1,800 Spanish-speaking MLs and students from Asian language backgrounds that focused on students' self-concept and its impact on such factors as academic performance, physical well-being, and social emotional well-being. The study found that Spanish-speaking MLs were at greater risk for internalizing and externalizing problems. In addition, MLs who spoke Asian languages tended to rate

---

[6]Please see Chapter 8 for guidance on including ML student voices in SEL decision-making.

themselves low for peer relationships (e.g., making friends and being liked by peers). In 2014, those same researchers studied how more than 1,000 third-grade MLs' perceived academic and social emotional skills relate to their academic achievement. The researchers found that more parental engagement of MLs predicted fewer social emotional concerns for MLs. In addition, fewer social emotional problems were linked to higher achievement scores. When MLs' social emotional concerns in the classroom increased, their academic achievement decreased. They experienced such internalized problems as worry, anxiety, loneliness, and sadness.

An important study by Castro-Olivo (2014) was conducted on a program called *Jovenes Fuertes* (Strong Teens) to study the effects of an adapted SEL program on Latino middle and high school-aged MLs' social emotional outcomes. The *Jovenes Fuertes* program was a validated, culturally adapted version of the *Strong Teens* program, which incorporated eight dimensions for multilingual students: language, persona, metaphors, content, concepts, goals, methods, and context. It was translated into Spanish and was delivered by multilingual, multicultural educators. The main focus of the program was to help students cope with life as an ML and with the ensuing acculturation process, and it included applications of SEL to MLs' daily lives. In particular, the study assessed the program's effects on students' knowledge of SEL and resiliency. The study's findings included that the program was effective in improving students' social emotional resiliency and knowledge of SEL. The program also provided students with valuable skills that prepared them to deal with adverse situations.

- What stood out to you in terms of research on SEL programs that are inclusive of MLs?

  _____

  _____

- Are MLs' experiences reflected in your school's or district's SEL programs and practices? If so, how?

  _____

  _____

PRIORITIZING SEL IDEAS

We have shared a lot of information with you so far in this chapter. Let's pause and reflect on where you are in your thinking. Please refer to Figure 1.1 (your note-taking tool) and complete Figure 1.10, Chapter Idea Note-Taking Tool With Sense of Urgency, which will help you rank ideas.

FIGURE 1.10 ● Chapter Idea Note-Taking Tool With Sense of Urgency

KEY IDEA	MY REACTION	IMPLICATIONS FOR MY CONTEXT	SENSE OF URGENCY*			
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4
			1	2	3	4

*1: Not urgent at all 2: Somewhat urgent 3: Urgent 4: Extremely urgent

- Which ideas stood out to you?

  _____

  _____

- Which would you like to learn more about?

  _____

  _____

- Which would you like to discuss with a colleague?

  _____

  _____

- How would you rank your sense of urgency in prioritizing these ideas?

  _____

  _____

SEL FOR MLs ENTRY POINTS

Let's now take your ideas and couple them with your current context. Please answer the following question:

How are you supporting social emotional learning for MLs in your context?

_____

_____

_____

☐ I use a packaged program my school/district purchased.

☐ I plan and teach stress management and/or mindfulness strategies to MLs.

☐ I check in with MLs informally to see how they're doing.

☐ I leave SEL up to school counselors.

☐ I am not supporting MLs with SEL at this time.

Which box(es) did you check?

_____

_____

_____

Next, since you have more information on the sense of urgency for SEL that is inclusive of MLs as well as research that undergirds this need, Figure 1.11 outlines several preliminary questions to ask yourself in order to determine what your entry point might be to begin to incorporate SEL practices for MLs at the school or district level. We have provided an example in the first row. We advise that you start small and not begin with a schoolwide SEL program or initiative at this time. We suggest that you read through the book, noting what resonated with you from each chapter so you can prioritize which SEL competencies and practices you may wish to incorporate for MLs as you examine the programmatic and systematic considerations in your context. In Chapter 2, we will delve into the five SEL competencies.

FIGURE 1.11 ● SEL for MLs Entry Points

QUESTION	MY RESPONSE	COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, OR EXAMPLES
1. Does your school or district have an SEL program for all students?	Yes	I have a starting point, but I'll want to think carefully how this program is inclusive of MLs.
2. If yes, what does the program look like or what is it called?		
3. If yes, how are MLs incorporated in the program?		
4. How many other educators in addition to you are interested in adapting SEL so that it is more inclusive of MLs?		
5. What are these educators' roles?		
6. How many new or current initiatives are there in your school or district for all students?		
7. What are the goals of these new or current initiatives?		
8. How many new or current initiatives are there in your school or district that are focused on MLs?		
9. What are the goals of these new or current initiatives for MLs?		
10. What level of stress do you think your colleagues are under?		

In addition, ask yourself these personal reflection questions:

- How valued do you feel at your school?

_____

_____

- How well do you think your expertise related to MLs is recognized?

_____

_____

- How much time and what type of structure are you given to collaborate with other colleagues to support MLs?

_____

_____

- How much choice are you given in curriculum and materials?

_____

_____

- How well do you feel your own SEL is prioritized at your school?

_____

_____

INTENTIONALLY INTEGRATING SEL FOR MLs

Let's think a little more deeply about how we can center SEL as a natural component to integrate into the school or district that will benefit students and teachers instead of one more stressful addition to educators' already full plates. We firmly believe that SEL can't be viewed as one more thing; it has to be seamlessly integrated with the school and district's vision and goals, as well as intentionally woven into the fabric of daily instruction. To do so, schools and districts need to have structured conversations regarding their vision, mission, goals, curriculum, and inclusion of diverse perspectives to determine how SEL will be integrated so that it is not a stand-alone initiative. To that end, we believe that SEL must not be a

stand-alone program during a designated period or time of day or one more box for teachers to check each day. In order for SEL to be fully integrated, we need to examine our current systems, determine what's working and what isn't, and advocate for changes in systems that do not currently position MLs for success. You can play an important role in doing so, and you will be engaging in self-reflection throughout this book to help you determine your priorities to best support your MLs.

As you think about integrating SEL for MLs into your classroom, school, or district, it is important to think about many aspects. Figure 1.12 provides several considerations to help you be intentional about integrating SEL for MLs into your school or district's instructional practices. We also suggest you give thought to who you could collaborate with as you integrate SEL for MLs. We also leave space for you to add in your own considerations, guiding questions, and possible next steps. We have completed the first row as an example for you.

FIGURE 1.12 ● Considerations for Integrating SEL for MLs: Initial Planning Phase

CONSIDERATION	GUIDING QUESTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Alignment of SEL with school or district vision	How does our plan to integrate SEL for MLs align with our school vision?	• Share the alignment with the school staff for their input • Share the alignment with ML parents for their input • Revise alignment statement
Alignment of SEL with school or district mission		
Alignment of SEL with school or district goals		
Inclusion of ML population in SEL practices		
Obtaining teacher buy-in		
Obtaining ML family buy-in		
Obtaining ML student buy-in		
Other:		
Other:		

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we laid the groundwork for the urgent need to write this book. We shared why we wrote this book and linked our purpose in doing so to our core beliefs. We underscored the sense of urgency for this book and provided a snapshot of trends in the dire state of adolescent mental health in the United States. We highlighted who MLs are and defined what SEL is and what it is not. Then, we delved into the growing importance of SEL in schools as well as research on the positive impact of SEL for students' well-being and academic success. Finally, we shared an assets-based mind-set when it comes to MLs and explored culture's impact on SEL for MLs. Finally, you were left with some tools to prioritize which areas stood out to you and reflect on some entry points to intentionally begin this work. In Chapter 2, we will focus on the CASEL SEL framework and how we have adapted it to be inclusive of MLs.

Summary of Key Ideas

- SEL has been prioritized more by school districts and states in response to events over the past few years.

- SEL is not intended to identify student deficits, fix problems, ensure compliance, or control students.

- SEL is essential for MLs' academic achievement and well-being, and we must consider the impact of students' culture on SEL for MLs.

Chapter 1 Reflection Questions

1. After reading a summary of the research related to SEL for MLs, what is your biggest takeaway?

2. What is your urgency in taking action to integrate SEL for MLs into your practice?

3. What would you like to learn more about as you read Chapter 2?