

# *Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education: Creating a Climate for Learning, Participation in Democracy, and Well-Being*

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*In this article, Jonathan Cohen argues that the goals of education need to be re-framed to prioritize not only academic learning, but also social, emotional, and ethical competencies. Surveying the current state of research in the fields of social-emotional education, character education, and school-based mental health in the United States, Cohen suggests that social-emotional skills, knowledge, and dispositions provide the foundation for participation in a democracy and improved quality of life. Cohen discusses contemporary best practices and policy in relation to creating safe and caring school climates, home-school partnerships, and a pedagogy informed by social-emotional and ethical concerns. He also emphasizes the importance of scientifically sound measures of social-emotional and ethical learning, and advocates for action research partnerships between researchers and practitioners to develop authentic methods of evaluation. Cohen notes the gulf that exists between the evidence-based guidelines for social-emotional learning, which are being increasingly adopted at the state level, and what is taught in schools of education and practiced in preK–12 schools. Finally, he asserts that social, emotional, ethical, and academic education is a human right that all students are entitled to, and argues that ignoring this amounts to a social injustice.*

There is a paradox in our preK–12 schools, and within teacher education. Parents and teachers want schooling to support children’s ability to become lifelong learners who are able to love, work, and act as responsible members of the community. Yet, we have not substantively integrated these values into our schools or into the training we give teachers. In fact, driven by federal mandates, the primary focus of teacher education and preK–12 schools is

increasingly on linguistic and mathematical literacy. This paradox is all the more striking because recent studies have shown that research-based social, emotional, ethical, and academic educational guidelines can predictably promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that provide the foundation for the capacity to love, work, and be an active community member. Social, emotional, academic, and ethical education can help children reach the goals their parents and teachers have for them: learning to “read” themselves and others, and learning to solve social, emotional, and ethical problems.

Social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions provide an essential foundation for life-long learners who are able to love and work (Beland, 2003; Cohen, 2001; Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, when evidence-based social, emotional, and ethical education is integrated into traditional teaching and learning, educators can hone the essential academic and social skills, understanding, and dispositions that support effective participation in a democracy. In doing so they are also laying the foundation for well-being and the pursuit of happiness. As I detail below, these findings emerge from a series of research studies in overlapping fields of preK–12 education: risk prevention, health promotion, civic education, child mental health, character education, and social-emotional learning. While there are certainly important distinctions among these fields, they all suggest that there are two core processes that promote children’s school success and healthy development: (a) promoting children’s social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions throughout their preK–12 school experience, and (b) creating safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school systems and homes. I use the term “social, emotional, ethical, and academic education” (SEEA) as shorthand for sustained preK–12 programmatic efforts that integrate and coordinate these pedagogic and systemic dimensions.

In this article, I summarize what is old and new about social, emotional, and ethical education. I describe how SEEA efforts grow out of many traditions, particularly character education, social-emotional learning, and school-based mental health. I demonstrate that SEEA practices are supported by a large body of preK–12 research, and I describe how evidence-based SEEA efforts promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that provide the foundation for learning, well-being, and effective participation in a democracy. Finally, I detail how developments in research, policy, and teacher education in SEEA present both barriers and opportunities to support America’s children and our future as a nation. But to set the stage, I begin by offering a perspective on the aims of education.

### Exploring the Aims of Education

What do we really want our children to have accomplished when they graduate from high school? Educational philosophers have answered these questions in a variety of ways, ranging from national prosperity, to managerial

efficiency, to individual happiness (Dunne & Hogan, 2004; Marples, 1999; Noddings, 2003). Parents tend to answer this question in a more consistent manner. For example, the 2000 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll found that over the past thirty-two years, Americans have said the single most important purpose of public schooling was to prepare people to become responsible citizens (Rose & Gallup, 2000). When I talk with the parents I work with through the Center for Social and Emotional Education, I often ask them what they want their children “to know” and “to be” when they graduate from high school. Parents across America have consistently responded by saying, “I want my child to be responsible,” “to be a lifelong learner,” “to get a good job,” and “to have good friends and a good marriage.” Educators have also long agreed that schools should produce socially responsible, healthy, happy citizens. However, until quite recently there have been few discussions about what skills, knowledge, and dispositions are needed for children to become engaged, responsible participants in a democracy.

These discussions almost exclusively emphasize civics-related knowledge. For instance, middle school civics courses tend to focus on the electoral college, the history of political parties, or changes in voting patterns. However, I would argue that this knowledge does not promote the skills and dispositions that individuals need to be engaged members of the community, the nation, and the world. Along with an informed citizenry, a democratic society must reflect a respect for others, an ability to collaborate, regard for fairness and justice, concern for the commonwealth, as well as voluntary, active participation in society (Michelli & Keiser, 2005). Building on past work (Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004), I would suggest that the skills and dispositions listed in table 1 provide the foundation for people’s capacity to participate in a democracy. SEEA efforts promote these skills and dispositions and point the way toward achieving a sense of personal and national well-being and happiness.

Happiness is a foundational American value, but it is also a complicated notion. It can refer to both positive feelings and positive activities.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have begun to compile evidence-based findings about how to promote happiness. As Noddings (2003) recently underscored, we rarely talk about happiness in educational circles, yet happiness can be understood as an organizational goal of human life. Happy people are healthier, more successful, and more socially engaged (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). In the last decade there has been an explosion of interest in positive psychology or the scientific study of positive emotions, traits, and institutions. Research has shown that although we cannot teach children to be happy, there are three routes to happiness: positive emotion and pleasure, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2002). Recent research indicates that the most satisfied people are those who orient their goals toward all three (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). I suggest that social-emotional competencies provide an essential foundation for many, if not all, aspects of pleasure, engagement, and

TABLE 1 *Skills and Dispositions Required for Participation in a Democracy*

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<i>Essential Skills</i>	<i>Essential Dispositions</i>
Ability to listen to ourselves and others.	Responsibility or the inclination to respond to others in appropriate ways.
Ability to be critical and reflective.	Appreciation of our existence as social creatures that need others to survive and thrive.
Ability to be flexible problem-solvers and decisionmakers, including the ability to resolve conflict in creative, nonviolent ways.	Appreciation of and inclination toward involvement with social justice.
Communicative abilities, e.g., being able to participate in discussions and argue thoughtfully.	Inclination to serve others and participate in acts of good will.
Collaborative capacities, e.g., learning to compromise and work together toward a common goal.	

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meaning. In fact, preliminary findings support the notion that social-emotional competencies and well-being are significantly related (Bar-On, 2005; Brackett & Mayer, 2003).

Interestingly, pleasure seems to be the least consequential pathway to a happy, satisfied life (Peterson et al., 2005). Research has demonstrated that engagement and meaning are the most important and lasting forms of well-being. Gratification stems from doing activities we like, that engage us fully without self-consciousness, and create what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls a “flow” experience. This kind of deeply involving and gratifying experience rests on our ability to develop authentic interests, strengths, and virtues. To do so, we must develop our capacity to listen, to be reflective, and to be life-long social and emotional learners. Research in positive psychology reveals that recognizing, honoring, and developing our strengths is the most important way to instill a true sense of engagement (Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Finding a sense of meaning or purpose in life is another essential element that contributes to our feelings of well-being and happiness. Positive psychology suggests that developing such a sense rests on our ability to use our strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than ourselves (Seligman et al., 2005). Whether our focus is on children, family, disease, spirituality, social justice, or the environment, these larger domains are all socially and emotionally grounded. We care about them because we care about people. Altruistic actions are necessarily social, emotional, and ethical, as well as cognitive endeavors. They are also deeply tied to our long-term success as happy, satisfied citizens.

## Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education

Social, emotional, ethical, and academic education grows out of research, theory, and practice on a range of endeavors related to education and mental health. The two major educational traditions that provide the foundation for recent SEEAE work are character education (CE) and social-emotional learning (SEL). Theory always shapes goals, which in turn suggest methods or strategies designed to actualize the goals. As I have discussed elsewhere (Cohen & Sandy, 2003, in press), a range of theories has recently shaped goals and practices in CE and SEL: cognitive behavioral theory, brain research, systems theory, the emerging psychobiological science of emotions, developmental psychology, and facets of psychoanalytic thinking. Cognitive behavioral theory has also informed some of the most important empirical findings in SEEAE.

Regardless of the roots of specific theories, SEEAE's goals in working with preK–12 students have always focused on the promotion of social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions on the one hand, and the creation of a safe climate for learning on the other. Character education practitioners tend to highlight the importance of ethical or moral development in ways that many social-emotional learning practitioners do not (Cohen & Sandy, 2003).

Character education is an umbrella term that has historically included a wide range of positions, such as traditional character education, the caring approach, and the developmental approach. The goal of educating children to think and act in ethically “correct” ways is an anchor for all efforts that fall under this rubric. Traditional character education has highlighted the transmission of virtues or the importance of “doing good.” The caring approach stresses the importance of recognizing and developing caring relationships and infusing caring, relational, and social-emotional themes into school curricula (Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004). Developmentalists emphasize decisionmaking and social action and are most focused on the power of student participation (e.g., in creating a moral classroom or larger community).

For many decades, character education tended to focus on the importance of good character and values (e.g., honesty, respect, friendship, caring). I have been in many schools, for example, where teachers put up motivational posters each week and talked about the rewards of a given virtue or capacity. These well-intentioned efforts tended to have no impact whatsoever on student behavior (Cohen & Sandy, 2003). An example of this is an incident that occurred on a visit I made to a suburban elementary school. Over the PA system, the principal announced to the students that this week “we will be thinking about respect.” She then briefly talked about the importance of this virtue. She told me later that the school was going to put up posters about respect. Reflecting on this effort, I noted a lack of focus on the underlying skills that are needed to support the teaching and learning of respect and that there was little thought given to systemic issues that shape respectful

school climate. In contrast, however, some character education in schools has become more comprehensive over the last decade. It focuses on coordinating the systemic with the pedagogic dimensions of social, emotional, ethical, and cognitive learning (e.g., Beland, 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005a).

Like character education, social-emotional learning is an umbrella term that includes a number of positions. All SEL programmatic efforts focus on promoting students' social and emotional competencies. And, because of the significant impact of risk-prevention and health-promotion research, they all have tended to deal with behavior and skills that can be operationally defined. Many leaders in the field underscore the importance of skills-based teaching and learning, along with the value of ongoing and systematic evaluation. SEL is often associated with social-skills training programs. Many of its practitioners also ground their work in a specific curriculum. However, SEL has become increasingly associated with comprehensive, multiyear school reform efforts. These include coordinating pedagogic efforts to promote students' social-emotional competencies and systemic efforts designed to create a climate for learning. Research-based work in SEL has been led by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL's primary focus has been to synthesize empirical findings and theoretical developments to foster progress in SEL. Although their initial focus was primarily conducting and disseminating research, they have moved into practice-related initiatives designed to increase the number of schools, districts, and states that implement coordinated SEL programming. Although character educators still talk more explicitly and consistently than SEL advocates about promoting moral character, the two, in my opinion, are similar.

### SEEA: An Ancient Tradition

From the beginning of formal education three thousand years ago in Greece, Egypt, and India, the teaching of children has been first and foremost a socialization process (Nash, 1968; Padel, 1992). Interestingly, the notion that emotional learning matters is also ancient. The words "know thyself" were carved on the wall of the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi 2,500 years ago and served as an organizing idea for Greek society (Snell, 1982). Belief in the importance of environment and its power to shape human behavior — both essential dimensions of SEEA efforts — are also ancient tenets. For instance, in the last half of the fifth century BC, Hippocrates reportedly discussed how climate and geography form human character (Jones, 1923).

More recently, America's Founding Fathers believed that democracy has a special need for character education. Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, for the people; its citizens must therefore develop the democratic virtues of respect for the rights of individuals, regard for the law, voluntary participation in public life, and concern for the common good (McClellan, 1999). In the late 1800s, these ideas began to gain attention in



the area of education, overlapping with the developing progressive educational movement. And as I describe in more detail below, Dewey and ensuing generations of progressive educators developed theories and practices that continue to shape current SEEAE.

Current theory and practice in social, emotional, ethical, and academic education have been shaped by two major forces: education (assessment and pedagogy) and the impact of mental-health/school partnerships (see Cohen, 2002, for a more detailed account of the roots of SEEAE). A number of pedagogic and assessment-related developments have influenced current SEEAE research and practice. The assessment of intelligence or student achievement, for example, has determined classroom goals and practice. It is well known that current intelligence tests tend to emphasize linguistic and mathematical abilities, a single-minded focus that continues to drive federal education policy such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). But the notion that there are other kinds of intelligence and the idea that social intelligence exists are certainly not new (Thorndike, 1920). Research in intelligence has shown that we learn and organize information in multiple ways, for example, Gardner's (1983) recognition of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence and Sternberg's (1985) exploration of practical intelligence have helped legitimize educational interest in SEEAE.

With respect to pedagogy, Dewey (1916/2004) is the grandfather of current work in SEEAE. He reaffirmed the aim of education as supporting the development of the skills and knowledge needed for responsible and caring participation in a democracy. He emphasized the importance of teaching students to recognize and value human differences and to learn to solve problems in nonviolent ways. Dewey's work, and that of ensuing generations of progressive educators (e.g., from Felix Adler to Deborah Meier), focused on a series of pedagogic strategies that recognize not only academics, but also the social, emotional, and ethical domains of learning.

Mental health/school partnerships represent a second tradition that has shaped current SEEAE practice. In 1896, experimental psychologist Lightner Witmer opened the first psychological clinic in the United States. It focused on educational issues, in large part because a teacher in an experimental psychology class challenged Witmer to explain how experimental psychological findings would help children (McReynolds, 1997). Also in the late nineteenth century, Sigmund Freud initiated a similar tradition in Europe. Freud and his colleagues wondered how they could apply psychoanalytic ideas to the education of children, including their own. One of Freud's primary goals was to use the discoveries of psychoanalysis to help parents and teachers promote children's healthy development and their ability to learn. However, it was his daughter Anna Freud who put this idea into practice. A teacher and later a clinician, Anna Freud created forums where educators, parents, and mental health professionals could learn together about how social-emotional life interacts with and shapes cognitive development and learning in chil-

dren. She was one of the first to appreciate the organizing role of both conscious and unrecognized emotion in children's behavior and the implications this should have for the thinking and practice of teachers (Cohen & Cohler, 2000). There has been a series of subsequent educational–mental health partnerships and trends that underscore the importance of purposively fostering students' healthy development; among them are sex education, drug education, primary prevention research, health promotion, and the development of school-based health centers.

Mental health and physical health are fundamental cornerstones of any effort to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed in school (Hunter et al., 2005). Over the last several decades, there has been a growing awareness that students with significant social, emotional, and/or behavioral needs pose a great challenge for preK–12 educators. Without effective interventions, these two million students struggle with problems that predispose them to long-term negative outcomes (Office of the Surgeon General, 1999). In 2003, a Centers for Disease Control study entitled “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System” found that 28 percent of youth reported feeling so sad or hopeless that they stopped their normal activities. Most disturbingly, 16 percent had made a plan to commit suicide at some time during the previous year. A major national epidemiological study recently reported that about half of Americans will experience a psychiatric disorder some time in their life, and that half of these instances will begin in childhood or adolescence (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, & Walters, 2005). Another recent study confirms that many lifetime psychiatric disorders first appear in childhood (Costello, Eggers, & Angold, 2005).

Teachers and mental health professionals need to be partners to recognize and address the physical and mental health–related barriers to learning that so often derail children's development. As I will detail below, despite the importance of these findings, teacher-education programs do not train educators to recognize signs of possible mental health problems. These problems can have very real, even fatal outcomes. For example, suicide (typically associated with depression) is the third leading cause of death among adolescents and is responsible for more deaths in this age group than all other illnesses combined (Office of the Surgeon General, 1999).

### Contemporary Best Practices in SEEAE

In order to protect and support children and to increase clinical and political efficacy, advocates of SEEAE must marshal the results of four new research-related developments. First, longitudinal research has revealed that social and emotional competencies are predictive of children's ability to learn and solve problems nonviolently (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). These same competencies are predictive of healthy marriages and the ability to work in adulthood (Bar-On, 2003, 2005; Goleman, 1998; Gottman, 1994; Heath, 1991; Val-



liant, 1977, 1993). We now have a clear sense of which of these competencies are most important to focus on.<sup>3</sup>

Second, research has recently shown that social and emotional capacities are just as brain-based as linguistic and mathematical competencies (Bar-On, Tranel, Denburg, & Bechara, 2003; Bar-On & Cohen, 1995; LeDoux, 1998). Third, research has underscored the fact that the vast majority of children can learn to become more socially and emotionally competent (Cohen, 1999a; Elias et al., 1997). Sadly, children with severe autistic disorders do not seem able to learn socially and emotionally, nor do children or adults who suffer injury to the neural circuitry thought to govern social-emotional competence (Bechara, Damasio, & Bar-On, in press). However, even those with high-functioning autism and Aspergers disorders are able gain competence with sustained teaching and opportunities to practice (Sicile-Kira & Grandin, 2004).

Finally, a series of studies in various fields (e.g., risk prevention, health promotion, character education, mental health, and social-emotional learning) have identified two core processes that characterize effective social-emotional and academic educational efforts (Cohen, 2001; Zins et al., 2004): (1) creating long-term educator-parent partnerships to create safe, caring, participatory, and responsive schools and homes; and (2) purposively teaching children to be more socially, emotionally, ethically, and cognitively competent. When we integrate these two overlapping processes into school life, we give students the wherewithal to become real learners, to be related members of the community, and to participate in a democratic society (Cohen, 1999a; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003; Zins et al., 2004). Underlying this assertion are the findings of a number of recent research reports, including the American Psychological Association's 2003 Presidential Task Force on Prevention: Promoting Strength, Resilience, and Health in Young People, which concluded that we now have the knowledge and guidelines needed to implement effective educational and health/mental health practice and policy (American Psychological Association, 2003; Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005a; Durlak & Weissberg, 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003).

These two dimensions — pedagogic and systemic — are overlapping but also quite distinct. Promoting social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions represents an individual developmental process. Interventions designed to create a safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school represent a systemic process that creates the optimal foundation for learning and development.

School-based mental health work provides a number of additional guidelines for creating safe, caring, participatory, and responsive environments (Hunter et al., 2005; Robinson, 2004; Weist, Evans, & Lever, 2003; Weisz, Sandler, Durlak, & Anton, 2005). Recent national studies have underscored the importance of our schools of education and our preK–12 schools addressing the educational needs of at-risk youth, for example, as a way of ben-

efiting all students in the classroom (Chesapeake Institute, 1994; Office of the Surgeon General, 1999, Osher, 1994). The six principles listed in table 2 characterize evidence-based psychoeducational approaches to effective collaboration between educators and mental health professionals (Hunter et al., 2005).

Current SEEAE efforts and child mental health work overlap. Certainly, SEEAE systemic and pedagogical primary prevention efforts are aligned with guidelines number 3 and 6 in table 2. Similarly, the periodic need to evaluate authentic learning (and to create baseline measurements), which is characteristic of all evidenced-based SEEAE and school-based mental health work, mirrors guideline 5 in table 2. In theory, SEEAE efforts provide an organizing and comprehensive framework within which students' educational and mental health needs are met. In practice, they vary widely when it comes to recognizing individual student difficulties (guidelines 1 and 2) and addressing those problems as soon as possible (guideline 4). There is still much work to be done. However, a major thrust of SEEAE's current research is to find ways to integrate school-based mental health findings into its practice and theory.

There have been a number of attempts to define the core principles and practices characteristic of effective social-emotional learning and character education.<sup>4</sup> With more or less detail, all of these models and linked sets of goals are grounded in the long-term coordination of the two core processes described above: systemically working to foster safe, caring, participatory, and responsive schools, homes, and communities; and promoting core social, emotional, ethical, and cognitive competencies for children and adults.

### Putting SEEAE into Practice

There are a number of ways that educators and school-based mental health professionals translate these systemic and pedagogical goals into school practice. No curriculum or "best package" can adequately address the complex issues involved in these interventions. Few of even the best evidence-based SEEAE curricula, for example, incorporate important mental health guidelines and/or the systemic dimensions noted above that directly affect how safe people feel in school.

Virtually all researchers and evidence-based practitioners support the notion that social, emotional, and academic educational efforts involve five major steps, as presented in table 3 and described below (e.g., Beland, 2003; Cohen, 2001; Elias et al., 1997).

#### *Step 1: Planning, Discovery, and Community-Building*

SEEAE efforts are designed to color and shape all aspects of school practice and should involve all members of the child's world to ensure that he or she hears the same message, with a common vocabulary and related learning goals. The initial consensus-building process is critical to any program's suc-

**TABLE 2** *Six Principles for Effective Collaboration between Educators and Mental Health Professionals*

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1. Comprehensive student screening for emotional, behavioral, and learning difficulties.
  2. Full assessment of at-risk individuals and their environments.
  3. Schoolwide early intervention efforts that focus on prevention of more serious behavioral problems.
  4. Comprehensive intervention carefully matched to the needs of the individual student.
  5. Evidence-based intervention strategies that are continually monitored for effectiveness.
  6. Educational programs in which parents play an active and ongoing role.
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Source: Hunter et al. (2005)

**TABLE 3** *The Five-Step Process of Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education.*

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1. Initial planning, discovery, and community-building.
  2. Creating a climate for learning or systemic interventions designed to foster safe, caring, participatory, and responsive schools, homes, and communities.
  3. Creating long-term school-home partnerships
  4. Pedagogy, or the process of teaching students to become more socially and emotionally competent and ethically inclined.
  5. Evaluation.
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cess. What do school staff, parents, and students believe school should be? What skills, knowledge, and dispositions should all students and adults learn? What is our vision for school?

One useful method of fostering a collaborative plan is to formally or informally evaluate what is and is not working. School personnel, parents, and students can jointly reflect on current practices and then use this information to prioritize goals and develop an action plan. This allows all members of the community to recognize people's needs and define goals.

The following is an example of the kind of joint reflection that schools need to engage in, taken from a recent twelve-school study using the Center for Social and Emotional Education's Comprehensive School Climate Inventory.<sup>5</sup> In most of these schools, staff members and parents reported that bullying was a minor problem, sometimes stemming from differences like race or sexual orientation. However, virtually all students reported that bullying was a major issue. These findings set in motion a process that represented

potentially important systemic interventions, providing an opportunity for educators and parents to reflect collaboratively on what contributed to their misperception. It also provided an opportunity to position students as teachers to the adults. A growing body of research about bully-victim behavior suggests that it is not enough to focus on the bully and/or the victim (Devine & Cohen, in press), but that everyone in the school community must understand that there is always a “witness” — a passive bystander who colludes with the bully-victim behavior, or an “up stander” who directly or indirectly confronts the bully-victim behavior. A coordinated and evidence-based action plan to address bully-victim-bystander behavior includes multidimensional interventions: a data-driven educational–mental health partnership that helps the school identify students who act as chronic bullies or victims and provides interventions; a schoolwide effort that allows all members of the community to articulate a shared vision about what kind of school people want; ongoing opportunities for students to talk about bully-victim-bystander behavior and, importantly, to practice the skills needed to directly or indirectly be an “up stander”; ongoing recognition of and reinforcement for students who are up standers; and ongoing evaluation to ensure that the school is acting to reduce bullying and to create a caring, safe, responsible school environment.

Growing out of this initial evaluation is the collaborative development of an action plan. Research and practice have shown that it is extremely important to have an SEEA coordinator designated to shepherd the multiyear process. Action plans need to specify short- and long-term timelines, as well as the resources needed to support the plans. Schools also need to develop a sustained professional development and supervisory process that take into account teacher turnover and the particular program. Plans for periodic evaluations and revision need to be explicitly detailed. Action plans must include a sustained awareness of programmatic efforts and the curriculum available to support SEEA-informed systemic and pedagogic practice.<sup>6</sup>

### *Step 2: Creating a Climate for Learning and Safety*

Systemic intervention to create a safe, caring, and responsive school climate is the unifying goal for evidenced-based work in this area, as it provides the platform upon which we teach and learn. Research reveals that eleven factors define the climate of a school: structural issues (e.g., size of the school); environmental (e.g., cleanliness); social-emotional and physical order and safety; expectations for student achievement; quality of instruction; collaboration and communication; sense of school community; peer norms; school-home-community partnerships; student morale; and the extent to which the school is a vital learning community.

There is also powerful evidence that school climate affects students’ self-esteem (Hoge, Smit, & Hanson, 1990) and self-concept (Cairns, 1987; Heal, 1978; Hoge, Smit, & Hanson, 1990; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997; Reynolds, Jones, St. Leger, & Murgatroyd, 1980; Rutter, Maughan,

Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979). School climate also colors school-based risk-prevention efforts. Effective risk-prevention and health-promotion efforts are correlated with a nurturing school climate (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Greenberg et al., 2003; Najaka, Gottfredson, & Wilson, 2002; Rand, 2004; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). It also promotes academic achievement (Freiberg, 1999; Good & Weinstein, 1986; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1989; Madaus, Airasian, & Kellaghan, 1980; Rutter, 1983; Shipman, 1981). As a result of these findings, fostering socially, emotionally, and physically safer schools has become a primary focus of the U.S. Department of Justice and virtually all state education departments. This is exemplified by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (2004).

There is a variety of ways schools can intervene systemically — in the classroom and/or on a schoolwide basis — to foster the desired environment. Evaluating school climate can be a powerful first step that forces us to question the very basis of what we are doing. This kind of comprehensive evaluation can become a springboard for community discovery, reflection, analysis, and planning. Discovering problems like bullying, as described above, creates an opportunity for schools to address the issues that can undermine learning and healthy development (Slaby, Wilson-Brewer, & Dash, 1994; Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, & Hess, 2001).

Coordinating risk-prevention and health-promotion efforts is another substantive systemic intervention. Many schools have programs designed to minimize risk from substance abuse, AIDS, or unresolved conflict, and to promote good health. But these efforts are typically fragmented and short term. Given the opportunity to meet periodically to discuss goals and methods, program coordinators can develop a shared vocabulary and thus help all involved work to recognize and reinforce each other's efforts while developing data-driven methods that support learning and teaching.

When the school values community service and service learning, it broadcasts the fact that the staff members care about helping the community and/or the environment. Vital community service and service-learning programs are one of the most important predictors of successful SEEAE efforts (Elias et al., 1997). Service learning is a pedagogic method that seeks to engage students in active civic participation through organized service experiences. Effective service-learning work meets real community needs and can strengthen the course curricula. It should be varied and should provide rich and ongoing opportunities for students to reflect on the significance of their service (Berman, 2005).

Service learning also supports the ethical goals of character education by developing sensitivity to culture and social justice issues, as well as awareness of the value of collaboration. We can ask students in social studies or biology classes to investigate why so many people have to come to soup kitchens, for example, or why the town's pond is polluted. Integrating social, emotional, ethi-

cal, and cognitive learning tends to dramatically enhance student engagement and civic participation (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005). Service learning compels students to think about the skills and knowledge needed to actually improve life in their neighborhood and about the opportunities to do so. In Hudson, Massachusetts, for example, students have been studying and working to clean up a local river. This multiyear effort has actually significantly improved the ecological conditions of the river and garnered state attention. Whatever its focus, effective service learning must meet real community needs, be integrated with academic instruction, and include time for student reflection. Essentially, it is a powerful form of social-emotional education in action.

*Step 3: Creating Long-Term Home-School Partnerships*

Compelling research shows that parent involvement is a vital contributor to children's school success (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005b; Henderson & Bera, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The student's family is his home base, where he learns about self and others, about relationships, needs, values, methods of solving problems, and much more. SEEAE efforts are undermined if a child learns about nonviolent problem-solving and conflict resolution at school, but sees something different at home. Therefore, vital school-home partnerships are an essential facet of any effective school reform effort (Melaville, 1999; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). Supportive home-school partnerships that promote children's healthy development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) involve two major elements: parental involvement in the child's life at school and shared responsibility for decisionmaking. There are many ways parents can get involved with their child's schoolwork (Redding, 2000), and under the leadership of the school principal they can also participate in decisionmaking and share responsibility for school-home values, plans, and practices.

Fostering ongoing authentic partnerships is a complicated and serious challenge. In general, parents are not involved with educators in planning and decisionmaking. They also may choose to have little involvement with their child's school. Some parents may not even want the school to focus on the social and emotional lives of their children. Moreover, depending on their families' cultural background and the cultural sensitivity of the school staff, some parents may feel or actually be unwelcome.

For example, we recently began to work with a school district that had a historically upper-middle-class White population. Roughly ten years ago, a growing number of relatively poor Central and South American families began to move into the area, some of them undocumented immigrants. For a number of years, the superintendent — reflecting the sentiment of the community — acted as if this growing segment of the community did not exist and made no efforts to recognize the cultural and linguistic diversity that was transforming school and community life. These immigrant parents virtually never came to school events. Many of them did not speak English. Bullying



and harassment around these cultural differences became a growing issue in the middle school. Two years ago, the school board brought in a new superintendent who was invested in recognizing, appreciating, and using diversity to promote social, emotional, and academic teaching and learning. These differences, along with the bully-victim-witness cycle, have now become an organizing focus for the school. The superintendent has sought to make cultural diversity an organizing theme for social studies and service learning. Growing out of the superintendent's wish to work with this population, the principal is beginning to work with local ministers who are involved with the expanding Latin American community. Unfortunately, school leaders do not often work to create such bridges between the school and the community, and partnerships disintegrate. But even when the school staff makes a sustained effort to welcome parental involvement, these partnerships are difficult.

#### *Step 4: Pedagogic Practice*

Pedagogically, SEEAE programmatic efforts range from a detailed, proscriptive curriculum to a point of view about relationships, learning, and teaching. Although there are literally hundreds of SEEAE curricula, a relatively small number are evidence based. Schools occasionally adopt an SEEAE curriculum that has been designed as a stand-alone course. Just as we teach language arts and social science, we can teach students to become more socially and emotionally competent as a formal course of study. At the Ethical Culture/Fieldston Schools in New York City, ethics classes are taught in K–12. In the high school, these classes are integrated into community service and service-learning efforts. In New Haven, Connecticut, every public school has social-development classes that include detailed lesson plans for every session (Shriver, Schwab-Stone, & DeFalco, 1999). From kindergarten to fifth grade, these lessons are a part of the elementary school classes. Beginning in sixth grade, students take a class in social development along with traditional academic courses (Schonfeld, personal communication, 2005). Social-emotional skills are initially taught in isolation. Just as some children need to learn the basic building blocks of reading in isolation, some need to learn social and emotional skills that way; for them it is an essential first step. Listening, for example, is something we tend to take for granted. We all can listen. Yet, when was the last time we felt that someone really *listened* to us? SEEAE curricula teach children what it means to be in a listening position: hands in the lap, both feet on the floor, looking at the person who is speaking, and listening as closely as we can. When teachers eliminate distracting factors and provide opportunities for children to practice listening this way, children's ability to listen can become more empathic and reflective (Kushe & Greenberg, 2001). These skills and dispositions provide the foundation for human relationships and for learning (Cohen, 1999b).

In the ongoing effort to integrate SEEAE into school pedagogy, we refer to programs that present a detailed perspective on child development and

on its applicability to whatever is being done in school. For example, the Social Problem Solving/Decisionmaking Program, from University Behavioral Healthcare, can be used as a stand-alone course or integrated into whatever the teacher is doing (Elias & Bruene-Butler, 1999). This program uses problem-solving and decisionmaking as the organizing focus. Children, for example, are taught to systematically consider the steps that characterize flexible problem-solving.<sup>7</sup> In so doing, a series of foundational social-emotional skills are also taught: the ability to be reflective, empathic, and control impulses. These skills are often initially taught in isolation, and then the problem-solving framework is applied to a range of academic and nonacademic endeavors. When students are studying a novel or a given period in history, for example, this framework becomes an organizing narrative. How did the central character understand the problem? What was their conscious and/or unrecognized goal? What contributed to their picking a given strategy? And so on. The Responsive Classroom approach (Charney, Crawford, & Wood, 1999) presents another point of view about learning, development, and discipline — one that can be integrated into all facets of daily school life. There are a growing number of curricula specifically designed for preschool children aged two to six (Sandy & Boardman, 2000). These efforts reflect recent research that underscores the fact that promoting young children's social-emotional competencies significantly enhances school readiness and success (Denham, 2003; Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Freedman, 2003). In addition to demonstrating that social-emotional competence has a significant impact on academic performance, Bar-On (2003) has also found that children who participate in SEEAE programs are better able to understand and express themselves, understand and relate to others, manage their emotions, and solve interpersonal problems.

Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 focused attention on the importance of reading and math in our schools, I have found that teachers are becoming more interested in how they can integrate SEEAE work into existing curricula. Many teachers are increasingly aware that it is possible to use existing language arts, social studies, history, or arts courses as a springboard from which to promote social and emotional literacy. For example, a language arts teacher I observed uses the analysis of a novel not only to sharpen critical thinking and linguistic capacities, but also to open the door to an empathic consideration of various points of view, an understanding of how these characters see a conflict, and the adaptive or maladaptive methods they employ in dealing with it. We recently worked with a middle school that wanted to infuse social, emotional, and ethical goals and pedagogic methods into language arts. The seventh-grade teachers, for example, planned to assign John Steinbeck's classic *Of Mice and Men*, a tragic and loving story of two lonely, alienated young men who drift from job to job. Lennie is a gentle giant who is mentally retarded. George guides and protects Lennie, but also depends

on him for companionship. The teachers wanted to use this book to focus on two core social-emotional competencies: impulse control and friendship-related abilities. They wanted their students to reflect deeply on how children and adolescents gradually develop the ability to recognize their impulses in socially and emotionally appropriate ways, to think about what it really means to be a friend. They also talked about their linguistic and critical-thinking goals. They reviewed lesson plans that already had detailed reading, critical thinking, and writing steps and “mini-goals,” and then added learning activities designed to promote understanding about the development of impulse control and friendship-related abilities.

Social, emotional, ethical, and academic education can also be integrated into the nonacademic aspects of life at school, home, and in the community. For example, a teacher talking with children about what kind of classroom they want, or a parent talking with their children about what time dinner should be can lead to a shared sense of what we, as a group, want. When adults and children develop a shared vision, the possibility for reflection, discussion, and learning grows. I have learned that when students are asked what kind of classroom they wanted, they talk about the importance of feeling safe. And when this becomes a shared goal of students and teachers, it helps determine behavior. If one student laughs at another’s mistake, for example, the teacher has a choice. She can focus on the offending student, or she can call on their shared vision of what the class should be and use the incident as a teachable moment. In the middle school mentioned above, a teacher told me the story of a seventh grader, Jose, who came to school looking very glum. When she asked him if anything was wrong, tears began to flow. His friend noticed and started to laugh. The teacher realized that Jose’s friend was laughing because he was shocked and anxious, but Jose thought he was being laughed at. He put his head on the desk and his body shook. The teacher apparently called “Time out! We have a shared agreement that we are all invested in making this class safe in all ways. Laughing at people is not ok.” Jose’s friend immediately said that he was not laughing at Jose. What emerged was that Jose’s uncle had been shot the night before. Over the next week the teacher used this moment to explore the range of experiences that make us laugh at one another and what it feels like when we are laughed at.

There are other pedagogical perspectives on how best to create a climate for learning and to expand social and emotional competence. Arts education, for example, provides powerful clues as to how we can use analysis and imagination about musical sounds, movement, or a drawing as a way of learning about ourselves (Burton, Horowitz, & Ables, 1999). By the same token, a psychoanalytically informed perspective about child development and learning suggests that discovering more about our unrecognized needs and motivation profoundly furthers educators’ and parents’ abilities to make sense of the world and become more effective problem-solvers (Marans & Cohen, 1999).

*Step 5: Evaluation Methods*

Evaluation provides the foundation for learning. In public education it is commonly suggested that if we do not “measure” it, it does not count. Given that a positive school climate and social-emotional competencies are associated with and predictive of success, educators have a responsibility to monitor them. There are two critical questions about evaluation: How do we use evaluations? What do we evaluate? Too often, evaluations of educators are used to grade them comparatively and not to spur authentic learning.

There is clearly a need to make judgments about performance. But when they are only used to rate teachers or schools, they typically become a source of fear and resentment. Research over the past several decades shows that when evaluations become springboards for analysis and reflection, they can powerfully enhance both adult learning and student achievement (Lieberman & Miller, 2001). We can and must make explicit connections between teacher and student performance to support collegial accountability and to couple teaching with assessment. These practices promote a vital learning community in which authentic social, emotional, ethical, and academic teaching and learning take place. This, after all, is the central goal of virtually all school reform efforts.

While there is a growing consensus that education needs to be evidence based and that assessment in theory provides an essential tool for learning, questions remain. How do we decide what data will be used to evaluate individual student progress, school climate, and the process or outcome of schoolwide efforts? How can and should we assess cultural differences? And do we have the tools to do so?

Today we have few generally accepted and scientifically sound measures of individual social, emotional, and/or ethical learning. Although there are some self-reporting measures that focus on sets of social skills, the field does not yet have comprehensive individual measures that can be easily used in the preK–12 setting. After reviewing thirty-three such instruments, Stewart-Brown and Edmunds (2003) recommended three: the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) for preschool settings, the Behavior and Emotion Rating Scale (BERS), and the youth version of the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i: YV) for primary, middle, and secondary schools. A growing number of schools and districts have issued report cards that indicate specific social, emotional, and ethical development (e.g., reflective capacities, cooperation, and inclusion/exclusion tendencies). Such subjective judgments importantly communicate that the schools value these dimensions of learning and behavior. In other words, if teachers consistently evaluate social, emotional, and ethical functioning, it sends a message that these count.

School climate has garnered growing educational attention over the last few decades. As noted above, educational research findings have underscored the powerful connection between safe, caring, responsive, and participatory schools on the one hand, and academic achievement and healthy student

development on the other. As I detail later, even though there are scores of school climate measures, surprisingly few are scientifically sound or recognize student, staff, and parent voices.

Evaluating the process and outcome of SEEAE efforts should include an action research model. Interestingly, the U.S. Department of Education's 2002 Partnerships in Character Education grants required that their federally funded studies include an action research partnership between practitioners and evaluators. Preliminary reports suggest that this partnership was extremely fruitful (McKay, personal communication, 2005). Evaluators needed to learn about school practice in a given unique school environment, and educators needed to learn more about using assessment to enhance learning and learning communities. When practitioners and researchers are members of a school improvement team, they create an authentic teaching and learning group. When they think, for example, about pedagogic and/or systemic goals, they will need to think together about which are most meaningful and how they can operationally define and evaluate them (Sangor, 2005).

The notion that we can and should use data to guide school practice is spreading and is an important and positive trend. The issue of what we measure, however, is still up in the air. Evidence-based research guidelines tend to push practitioners and evaluators to focus on experience that can be operationally defined in behavioral terms alone. However, there are many important social, emotional, and ethical dimensions to interpersonal and school life that are not simple to define operationally.

### Obstacles and Next Steps

A range of factors complicates the introduction of social-emotional and academic educational innovations into our nation's preK–12 schools, education departments, and education schools. I focus on three: research, policy, and the current state of teacher education. In theory, research shapes policy, which in turn results in teacher-education requirements. In practice, the relationship among policy, research, and teacher training is much more complicated and rarely so logically related.

Some parents and educators suggest that social and emotional education has no place in our K–12 schools. From their first teacher-education classes, future high school teachers tend to focus on their academic domain. Unlike preK, elementary, and to some extent middle school teachers, high school teachers rarely discuss the interrelationship between social-emotional and cognitive development and learning. As a group, high school teachers tend to learn less than elementary teachers, and often middle school teachers, about the emerging neurocognitive research that underscores these psychobiological and social-emotional-cognitive relationships (Jensen, 2005; LeDoux, 1998, 2003). Many high school teachers understandably feel unprepared to be purposeful social, emotional, and academic teachers. In addition, they are often

pressured by principals to ensure that their high school students do well on academic tests. They often believe that they do not have enough time to cover the prescribed curriculum, let alone teach to the test or become social-emotional teachers.

On the other hand, in schools and districts that have imposed a social-emotional curriculum without first conferring with parents, some parents have felt that the school was violating their value system. This has been most explosive when the social-emotional curriculum is linked to sex education, for example.

In contrast, as I have noted previously, when school leaders ask parents and teachers what they want their children to know and be able to do when they graduate from high school, they usually talk about abilities that are fundamentally social, emotional, and often ethical in nature. In fact, virtually all parents I have talked with across America have in essence said that SEEAE is a good thing. What matters are the details: What do we actually focus on and do? How do we go about working with parents, teachers, and students to promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that support school and life success?

## Research

Since researchers have demonstrated the efficacy of SEEAE, current studies should focus on SEEAE-informed evaluation and scaling up these programmatic efforts. How can we evaluate students' developing social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions? How can we most helpfully evaluate the school as a system and the climate it fosters in the classroom? The lack of measures in these two areas often undermines SEEAE efforts.

One of the most important pedagogic challenges that SEEAE faces today is detailing socially, emotionally, and ethically informed scope and sequence: What skills and knowledge can children of given ages realistically learn and in what order? There are two sets of scope- and sequence-related guidelines. One emerges from a scope- and sequence-related synthesis of research groups and state education department's health education curriculum (Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2003). The other is linked to the important Illinois State Board of Education's (2004) adoption of social-emotional learning standards, which includes a social-emotional scope and sequence. But this remains an area that needs to be further developed and detailed to support social, emotional, and ethical teaching and learning.

There are several important emotional-social intelligence self-report measures that have been normed and used with adults, children, and adolescents (Bar-On, 2004; Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Stewart-Brown & Edmund, 2003; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, in press). There are also emotional intelligence tests that evaluate an important but demarcated set of skills, which provide a foundation for the range of social and emotional competencies that SEEAE aims to



promote (Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2004). But we do not yet have measures that evaluate the range of social, emotional, and ethical abilities and dispositions that provide the foundation for school and life success. We do have a number of the aforementioned emotional intelligence measures that correlate with academic, occupational, and social performance (Bar-On, 2004), as well as with overall subjective well-being (Bar-On, 2005).

Many organizations have begun to develop assessments related to SEEA goals. The Character Education Partnership has developed an evaluation tool kit to aid researchers and practitioners (Posey, Davidson, & Korpi, 2003). There are scores of school climate measures and violence audits, most of which only recognize student or teacher perceptions of school life. The California Healthy Kids Survey focuses on a range of issues, including substance abuse, academic achievement, learning climate, and procedures to deal with crises or violations of school rules (Hanson & Austin, 2003).

UCLA's Center for Mental Health in Schools has developed a useful set of surveys that help schools identify barriers to learning, with an important focus on the educational-mental health systems that can undermine student learning (Adelman & Taylor, 2005). The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) has garnered both the interest and backing of the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education, and of a growing number of state education departments. PBIS has been developing coordinated systems of support and accountability for both at-risk and so-called normal students. PBIS involves key stakeholders meeting three times a month to evaluate and develop action plans about schoolwide, classroom, and individual student behavior. PBIS is a data-driven process. In other words, prosocial (e.g., health promotion) and problem-related goals can be developed and operationally defined. From the beginning of this planning and evaluation process, operationally defined benchmarks are articulated to support the leadership team's understanding of the actual progress that has been made. Reflecting the state of crisis that so often characterizes urban schools, PBIS, in my experience, rarely moves into setting and furthering prosocial goals. It is difficult to effectively tackle the myriad problems that represent barriers to learning and healthy development.

There are four scientifically sound tools that recognize the roles of students, parents, and staff in creating school climate. Two measures focus on particular aspects of school climate (e.g., diversity or character education). However, the High Performance Learning Community Assessments (Felner et al., 2001) and the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI; Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2005b) evaluate a comprehensive range of factors that define school climate. The CSCI, for example, evaluates students,' parents,' and school staff's perception in four major areas: safety (physical, social-emotional); teaching and learning (quality of instruction, expectations for student achievement, leadership, professional development and social-emotional-ethical education); relationships (respect for diversity

among students and adults, school outreach to parents, school-home partnerships, morale), and external environment (quality and structure, physical plant, structure of time and space). This survey takes about twenty minutes and results in a narrative and numerical summary of findings, which become a platform for the school leadership team to dig deeper into school-climate issues. To what extent, for example, are educational, risk-prevention, health-promotion, and other SEEAE efforts coordinated and mutually reinforcing? These factors also become the foundation for understanding the findings, recognizing student voice, developing authentic home-school partnerships, prioritizing goals, and creating an evidence-based action plan. In fact, SEEAE evaluation is an essential foundation for whole-school improvement efforts.

Scientifically sound evaluation of school climate is a current focus of many state education departments. These offices have singled out evidence-based risk-prevention, health-promotion, character education, mental health, and social-emotional learning programs for attention. Increasingly, state education departments have issued lists of approved curricula in these areas, and they are now beginning to consider which measures are scientifically sound and should be used to assess program efficacy.

Another important area of study is how schools and districts can scale up SEEAE efforts. The findings of pilot projects have established guidelines for effective three- to five-year implementation planning and underscored the need for delineating critical processes that support scaling up such efforts (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005; Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). Researcher practitioners suggest that three processes are critical to social, emotional, and academic educational reform in our nation's preK–12 schools: (1) the need to teach school professionals SEEAE skills and knowledge; (2) the importance of an action research perspective; and (3) the need to better document the stories of educational innovation and scaling-up efforts so that contextual data can enrich understanding of what is required for success.

Sustainability is another critical element in scaling up any school reform effort. All too often, reform efforts are dependent on a short-term infusion of resources. "Spread" is a term that refers to the number of classrooms and schools that are affected by change. If reform is to have any meaning, the notion of spread necessarily overlaps with the emphasis on depth. Spread has to involve not only a growing number of teachers and school leaders who introduce aspects of the reform, but also the spread of altered underlying beliefs in the norms and principles of how students learn, and how and what we must teach. A shift in reform ownership is an essential foundation of true school change (Coburn, 2003). How do we create conditions in which knowledge of and authority for reform can be shifted from external experts to teachers, schools, and districts? Developing the capacity to scale up school reform — in particular, social, emotional, and academic educational reform — importantly rests on teacher education at the preservice and in-service level.

## Policy

Federal and state educational policies direct school practice and, to a varying extent, the nature of teacher-preparation programs. Although NCLB is filled with rhetoric about character education and the importance of establishing optimal conditions for learning, these are not funded priorities (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Today, NCLB is creating an imbalance in the mission of public education. On many levels — the classroom, school, district, and state — reading and math scores constitute the only information that is recognized. Educators are being pushed to raise reading and math scores without focusing on the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that provide the foundation for school and life success. NCLB includes many important and admirable goals; for example, it appropriately presses educators to have linguistic and math-related expectations that are equal for all children; to learn from and base educational decisions on data; and to take responsibility for students' language and math failures. However, the current overemphasis on test scores is inadvertently retarding academic achievement and preventing future generations of young people from developing the ability to be active, engaged members of a democracy.

In conversations with state education officials, I have encountered a growing recognition that for all the concentrated reading and math interventions, children are bumping up against a glass ceiling. Policymakers acknowledge that if we do not work to create a safe climate for learning or help students develop social-emotional skills that support academic achievement, concentrated reading and math instruction will have a limited impact. Following on this logic, there have been a small but growing number of government initiatives in SEEA-related areas. The U.S. Department of Education funds SEEA-related efforts through character education grants and a range of safe and drug-free schools initiatives. In 2004 and 2005, roughly 24 million federal dollars were allocated to character education grants; \$233 million and \$234 million, respectively, went to the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and the Communities National Programs (see Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004, for a more detailed discussion of legislative developments in character education). My impression is that the major federal thrust in SEEA-related areas is to make this work evidence based and empirically grounded (McKay, personal communication, 2005). There also has been an important push to strengthen collaboration among evaluators, practitioners, parents, community members, and educators.

Despite the attention given to federal initiatives, state policies drive preK–12 educational practice and shape teacher requirements. Although a growing amount of state legislation has touched on social-emotional learning, bullying, and safety in schools, most states have limited themselves to character education.<sup>8</sup> By 2005, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, twenty-eight states had mandated or “encouraged” character education

legislation. Many of these character education acts are combined with citizenship education and/or service learning.

The Education Commission of the States recently launched a policy scan (a snapshot look at what states are recommending and/or legislating) for social-emotional learning and has reported on eight legislative acts that have mandated or encouraged SEL efforts. Three-quarters of them focus on pre-school settings and reflect the growing body of research that shows how social-emotional competencies provide the optimal preK foundation for school learning (Denham & Weissberg, 2004).<sup>9</sup> The term “social-emotional learning” is increasingly recognized and used at the state level. In 2004, the Illinois state board of education adopted a plan to establish development standards in this area, with the result that every school district is now required to develop a policy for incorporating social-emotional learning into its education program. In 2003, Louisiana also established a program for educational accountability that requires the state education department and local school boards to define goals, objectives, and educational programs for the “physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development” of students (Louisiana Revised Statutes, 2003).

Bullying became a subject of vital interest to the American public, and to SEEA advocates in particular, after the school shootings of the late 1990s. There is a growing body of research in this area that demonstrates how shockingly prevalent verbal and physical bullying have become. Studies indicate how toxic the bully-victim syndrome is, individually and systemically, and point to the strong likelihood that school bullies will develop increasingly problematic psychosocial problems over time (Ferrell-Smith, 2003; U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). As a result, seventeen states have enacted antibullying legislation (Dounay, 2005). Antibullying legislation varies in content and approach in a number of ways: definitions of bullying, level of state support, local board requirements, student services, school intervention strategy, curriculum, reporting requirements, student and parent rights, and teacher professional development provisions.

The Education Commission of the States suggests that comprehensive antibullying policies need to include the following components: a definition of bullying, prohibition of student bullying, information about antibullying policies for students and others, lines of communication that enable students and parents to report bullying incidents, a mandate that school personnel report these incidents and administrators investigate them while providing immunity to those who report. I suggest two additional components. First, effective bullying prevention needs to involve both individual and schoolwide efforts. In addition to addressing the needs of individual bullies and their victims, effective strategies must consider witnesses to these incidents. Are they passive bystanders and, hence, colluding with the behavior? Or are they upstanding members of the community, active and responsible enough to make their feelings known? Second, antibullying efforts cannot focus on the

students alone. Adult bullying is prevalent and creates problematic models for students. When invited to work with the bully-victim-bystander problems in schools, I often hear from parents and educators about the degree of adult bullying, whether teachers bullying students, parents bullying teachers, or administrators bullying teachers. Clearly, any campaign to combat this behavior has to be a multipronged effort.

Safety in the schools is another matter that has caught the eye of state legislators. Some states have enacted laws explicitly framed to safeguard the safety of students. Legislators too often only focus on crime prevention and punishment, for example, metal detectors and penalties. The issue is increasingly cloaked in statutes focused on conflict resolution, violence prevention, and mental health. Wisconsin, for example, now requires that teachers seeking licensure demonstrate competency in resolving conflicts between pupils and between students and staff; they also must be able to help students learn methods of peaceful conflict resolution. Many states, like New York, have issued legislatively linked guidelines for effective violence prevention, an effort that is synonymous with evidence-based social-emotional and academic educational efforts (Fuchs-Nadeau, LaRue, Allen, Cohen, & Hyman, 2002).

It is difficult to generalize about SEEA and state legislation, as there are so many different policies and definitions of these programs. Unfortunately, at the state level (not unlike the level of the school building), educational, risk-prevention, health-promotion, bully-prevention, safe schools, civics education, and mental health efforts are typically fragmented. A few states, such as Ohio, have made a concerted, multiyear effort to coordinate these activities.

Most educational standards include language and mandates that are supportive of SEEA efforts. In fact, there is a great deal of overlap between SEEA efforts and curriculum standards (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Siegel, 2005). The 2000 National Educational Goals, for example, specify that “all children in America will start school ready to learn” and that children will develop “social and emotional competencies which contribute to a readiness to learn.” Three current standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education’s standards are aligned with social-emotional learning (Patti, 2006).<sup>10</sup> Yet at the end of the day, we evaluate students’ math and reading scores. Many policymakers largely ignore the two core dimensions that characterize effective, evidence-based SEEA efforts: students’ social, emotional, and/or ethical development, as well as school climate.

## Teacher Education

Today, evidence-based findings on the implementation of social, emotional, and academic learning are not integrated into teacher-education programs, which is a problematic and curious state of affairs for three overlapping reasons. First, although a series of national educational organizations have affirmed the central importance of being reflective educators, we are not trans-

lating this goal into teacher training in substantive and ongoing ways. Second, a 1999 national study of leading educators revealed that despite its absence, there is overwhelming support for the notion of social, emotional, ethical, and academic education. And, finally, as has been noted, the evidence-based SEEAE implementation guidelines that now exist will predictably promote school success and life success.

In 1999, the Character Education Partnership and the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University (Nielsen-Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1999) conducted a national survey of six hundred education school deans to learn their views on character education and what their institutions were doing in this area. They found that over 90 percent of respondents supported the need for character education in America's preK-12 schools and that less than 25 percent of them believed that it was emphasized enough within their programs. Only 13 percent said that they were satisfied with their efforts in this area. While there was little consensus about what character education is and how it should be taught, over 66 percent of the deans favored making it a requirement for state certification. More than 80 percent reported that they wanted to learn about best practices; 68 percent wanted to see samples of course syllabi; and more than 66 percent wanted to learn about related books and resources. A 2000 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll confirmed that educators support SEEAE goals. Seven hundred of the one thousand American educators surveyed thought that the primary purpose of schooling was to provide a "balanced education," teaching and learning about academic and social "basics," in and outside of the classroom (Rose & Gallup, 2000). Despite this consensus, few education schools actually integrate ethics and character education into their teacher-preparation efforts (Bohlin, Dougherty, & Farmer, 2002). Many programs have only one professor who included these issues in an elective course. Some teacher-education efforts have, of course, integrated the research-based findings and practices that characterize effective SEEAE today.<sup>11</sup>

Conflict resolution (CR) represents an important precursor to current SEEAE efforts and is incorporated into virtually all SEEAE programs (Cohen, Compton, & Diekmann, 2000). Taking their cue from recent SEEAE-informed research, current school-based CR efforts (like Educators for Social Responsibility's Resolving Conflict Creatively Program) have increasingly focused on systemic issues such as school climate, as well as individual skill-based teaching and learning.<sup>12</sup> In 2004, the City University of New York and the Center for Social and Emotional Education developed a new four-course, graduate-level sequence in social, emotional, and academic education.<sup>13</sup>

Many educational and school-based mental health networks, under a range of labels, are increasingly aligned with SEEAE efforts. For example, the American Association of Higher Education has two "communities of practice" (in democratic dialogue and cognitive-affective learning); the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's networks include affective factors in



learning, health in education and multiple intelligences. The American Educational Research Association has special interest groups in classroom management, conflict resolution and violence prevention, cooperative learning, democratic citizenship in education, and family-school and community partnerships. Other networks, such as the National Network for Educational Renewal, are explicitly focused on turning education colleges that are in partnerships with preK–12 school districts into forums where students can learn the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for effective participation in a democracy. It is unclear what these educational networks actually do. Clearly, they raise awareness to allow professionals to let one another know about new ideas and meetings. There are also a growing number of resource guides for professors (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita, 2004; Cohen, 1999a, 2001; Haynes, Ben-Avie, & Ensign, 2003; Pasi, 2001; Patrikakou et al., 2005; Zins et al., 2004).

In spite of these, a glaring gap remains between what we know and what is actually done to help teachers learn to integrate SEEA into classrooms. Few courses provide educators with theoretical or practical knowledge about evidence-based work in character education, mental health, or social-emotional learning. The rare exceptions to this indictment exist at universities where individual faculty members have sufficient prestige or resources to influence curriculum. As a general rule, however, education schools do not yet embrace social, emotional, and ethical learning as a vital dimension of school life. Another obstacle to SEEA is that educational leaders and policymakers over the last one hundred years have drawn that line between cognitive or academic teaching on the one hand and social, emotional, and ethical teaching on the other. Educational leaders and policymakers tend to differentiate between student learning and mental health issues. Current federal and state educational legislation has dramatically exacerbated this unfounded separation, which I view as a social injustice for our nation's children.

## Conclusion

The American people have expressed their conviction that the primary purpose of public schooling is to prepare children to become effective and responsible citizens (Rose & Gallup, 2000). The United Nations puts it another way: its 1948 Convention on the Rights of the Child decrees that governments are obligated to ensure that every child has equal access to a quality education adapted to meet the child's needs (United Nations, 1948). In fulfilling that obligation, schools must respect the inherent dignity of the child, create an environment of tolerance in the classroom, and bar practices or disciplinary policies that harm or humiliate. This kind of education will enable children to realize the very fullest of their potential and, in so doing, to become lifelong learners and active participants in society. For our country's future, and for social justice, it is essential that all children, particularly the disadvantaged and the poor, have the opportunity to develop the social-emotional

competencies and ethical dispositions that provide the foundation for the tests of life, health, relationships, and adult work. Our nation's current dramatic overemphasis on linguistic and mathematical learning is shortsighted and misguided.

Educational and school-related mental health developments occur in a larger societal context. In a variety of ways, social unrest has forced society to develop new resources and to address social injustice. For example, the unrest that characterized America in the late 1800s gave rise to the settlement movement.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, unrest in the 1920s led to the establishment of community mental health clinics that in turn began to create partnerships with local schools. Larger societal trends in later years, like the civil rights and women's movements, cast a glaring spotlight on the discrepant ways that people of color, women, and children are treated in America. This gave rise to a national need, legislatively and educationally, to think about tolerance and how it should be taught. It also forced recognition of the blatant and subtle ways that students and adults bully the weak and discriminate against each other. Religion is another societal force that has historically shaped educational goals and methods. Religion has powerfully underscored the importance of "doing good" and following the golden rule, which suggests that we treat others as we want to be treated.

But today, differences, religious or otherwise, are ripping peoples and the world apart. From ancient times to Iraq today, people have tried to solve differences with physical force. Instead of talking about needs and working to collaboratively solve problems nonviolently, America today is tragically caught in a cycle of misunderstanding, violence, and despair. What can we do to promote children's understanding of diversity, fear, conflict, and community? What we can and desperately need to do is teach children the skills and dispositions that provide the foundation for collaboration and democracy.

Yet in the United States today, people seem increasingly disconnected from civic engagement, the political and social issues that divide the country grow in bitterness, and compromise is looked upon as a dirty word. Has our system of education failed? Has the research showing that social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions provide the essential foundation for participation in a democracy, as well as the pursuit of well-being, been ignored? Not entirely. However, if federal and state policymakers and education schools continue to ignore the importance of social-emotional competencies, I believe that this amounts to a violation of human rights. Our children deserve better. The country deserves better.

## Notes

1. Ethical functioning is usually conceptualized in terms of development, thinking, and/or behavior. It does not tend to be conceptualized as a competence or as the ability to do something well. However, interrelationships between social-emotional capaci-

ties and ethical dispositions are critical. Children can learn the social-emotional skills needed to recognize, for example, that someone is in distress. But whether and how children act on this understanding is a result of both skills (e.g., empathy and communication) and ethical dispositions. Sociopaths, for example, are often very skilled socially.

2. Interestingly, the empirical study of positive psychology is quite recent. Freud and ensuing generations of clinicians showed that the pursuits of pleasure — and the avoidance of pain — are major motivational forces in human life. Only in recent years have well-being and happiness begun to be studied in systematic, sustained, and empirically sound ways.
3. For decades, many parents and educators have known that children's social, emotional, and ethical competencies are more predictive of life satisfaction and success than grades or SAT scores. But it is only in the last fifteen or twenty years that researchers have confirmed this and helped us to understand specifically which competencies are most predictive. Different researchers have used somewhat different terms and models in their work. Elsewhere I have reviewed various models of social-emotional competencies and intelligence (Cohen & Sandy, 2003, in press).
4. The Character Education Partnership's eleven key principles underlie its work (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1996). Cohen (2001) suggests that there are five. A review of evidence-based programs by CASEL (2003) concluded that there are seven core dimensions to successful SEL programming. And Elias (2003) summarizes his understanding of the ten key facets of effective academic, social, and emotional learning.
5. For further information on this inventory, see <http://www.csee.net/climate>.
6. Although many character education and social-emotional learning programs are largely ineffective, a number of excellent research-based curricula exist (Beland, 2003; Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2005; Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).
7. Some of the questions we may ask are: What is the problem? What is a sensible goal? What is the range of strategies we can use to actualize this goal? How do we utilize this strategy? How can we evaluate the results of our implementation of the strategies?
8. I suspect that there are more character education policies than social-emotional learning policies because the former has been recognized for many decades. However, what is most important is that current SEL and CE efforts are now grounded in evidence-based pedagogic and systemic practice designed to promote social and emotional competencies and ethical dispositions, as well as creating a climate for learning.
9. Six states now have statutes that encourage or mandate social-emotional learning in preschool years.
10. The three standards are: candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions; field experience and clinical practice; and diversity.
11. The Bohlin study (2002) identified three that appeared to have done so (Boston University; California State University, Fresno; and the University of St. Francis). At least a dozen education schools have promising practices in the following areas: mission statements that highlight character; courses on character education; ideas for shaping a moral ethos; models of service learning within the context of teacher education (Bohlin et al., 2002).
12. The first master's program in this area was Lesley University's Conflict Resolution and Peaceful Schools program, which prepares educators for social, emotional, and ethical teaching and learning.
13. At the Center for Social and Emotional Education, we are gathering information about teacher-education efforts in these areas and posting information about syllabi, relevant research abstracts, and other resources for professors; available at [www.csee.net/ser](http://www.csee.net/ser)

vices/professors.aspx. I request that readers let me know about efforts that they are involved with to advance SEEA-related efforts.

14. Growing out of the English settlement house movement, the pre-World War I settlement houses were established by wealthy individuals who wanted to help with the social disorganization that was rampant in those years. American settlement houses were often affiliated with universities, social research centers, and social action sites. They developed a range of social service programs. One of their programs involved a visiting teacher, a forerunner of the school social worker. These visiting teachers sought to understand and coordinate life in the classroom, the home, and the community.

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