

SAMPLE LETTER: SUPPORT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS PROGRAMS

Dear [Name of your Elected Official],

As your constituent and as a school psychologist, I am writing to you to ask for your support in the promotion of social emotional learning programs in schools. I urge you to consider cosponsoring and supporting the passage of the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act (H.R. 2437.) This bill was introduced by Representatives Biggert (IL-13), Ryan (OH-17) and Kildee (MI-5), respectively, in the 112th Congress. This bill seeks to increase student learning and achievement through evidenced based multi-tiered intervention systems.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning describes Social Emotional Learning (SEL) “as a process for helping children and even adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. SEL teaches the skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work, effectively and ethically.” SEL focuses on creating and sustaining primary (school-wide), secondary (classroom), and tertiary (individual) systems of support that improve the personal health, mental health, learning, and family lives of all children. I believe that parents, educators, and public policy makers need to be more informed about the variables that help create positive conditions for learning and how the opportunity to learn necessary social and emotional skills directly contribute to academic achievement. Many students struggle in school not because they are unwilling learners but because they must explicitly be taught social and emotional skills and how to cope with mental health, physical health, or environmental challenges that impact their school success. Many of these students can be successful if provided primary prevention measures or secondary interventions. Despite the challenges that many students face, they must still attend school and learn to be successful. School psychologists work everyday in schools to help struggling students succeed and overcome barriers to learning and they are often involved in the implementation of these programs in their schools. SEL involves teaching students and staff fundamental life skills such as establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, resolving conflicts effectively, calming themselves when angry, and developing concern for others. These skills help students overcome the challenges they will face in life and help them to become better students and more responsible citizens.

Several hundred well-designed studies have documented the positive effects of social and emotional learning programming on students of diverse backgrounds, from preschool through high school, in urban, suburban, and rural settings. This research also shows that well-planned and well-implemented social and emotional programming can positively affect academic outcomes. (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, et al., 2003; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). A recent meta- analysis of over 200 SEL programs indicated that students who received SEL instruction demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic achievement when compared to students who did not receive this type of instruction (Durlak et al., 2011).

The Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act would also amend Title II of ESEA to expand the availability of instruction in problem solving skills, conflict resolution, responsible decision making and self- discipline, goal setting, and relationship building. This legislation will allow for teacher and principal training in practices that address the social and emotional needs of students

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of any assistance to you.

Sincerely,
[Your Name and Address]