



May 19, 2025

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Senate Labor, HHS, Education
and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
House Labor, HHS, Education
and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Senate Labor, HHS, Education
and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 2051

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Labor, HHS, Education
and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Capito, Senator Baldwin, Representative Aderholt, and Representative DeLauro:

As the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee develops the U.S. Department of Education's fiscal year (FY) 2026 budget, we the undersigned members of the national Leading with Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Coalition encourage you to provide level funding for the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program at \$269,000,000 and provide continued support for social and emotional learning grants within the program.

Congress established the EIR program under section 4611 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015 to support and validate strategies for addressing the most persistent educational challenges to student success, especially the hurdles facing our nation's highest need and most underserved students. In FY2020, Congress created a bipartisan SEL and Whole Child Initiative through appropriations that included dedicated funding for grants for evidence-based, field-initiated innovations that address student social, emotional, and cognitive needs. Congress has funded SEL grants within the EIR program for the past five fiscal years starting in President Trump's first term, through report language specific to social and emotional learning. We are asking for this report language to be included again.

- "Education Innovation and Research (EIR). – Within the total for EIR, and including continuation awards, the agreement includes \$87,000,000 to provide grants for social and emotional learning. To fulfill the set-asides, the agreement supports the prioritization of high-quality SEL proposals for both the early-and-mid-phase evidence tiers."

The EIR program has supported investments in SEL to improve student achievement and meet the social and emotional needs of students. These investments include grants that accelerate academic outcomes in specific subject areas; grants that provide teacher professional development to support student academic, social and emotional needs; grants focused on evidence-based strategies to address chronic absenteeism and improve school climate and student engagement; and grants that foster students' college and career readiness. Many

states across the country have benefited from EIR SEL grants. For example:

- **Tennessee** is working to increase students' literacy progress by using an evidenced-based tutoring strategy and foster trusting and safe learning spaces for students through Tutor901: High-Impact Tutoring for High-Needs Students, which will serve an estimate 1,500 students.
- In **Ohio** and **Michigan**, funding supports Thinking Pro, a program intended to accelerate social, emotional, and academic developing in high school English language arts classes. The program, which will serve an estimated 10,383 students, includes a specific focus on reading comprehension and critical thinking, among other things.
- An estimated 640 Students in **Wisconsin, New York, California, Oklahoma** and **Washington** are participating in a Tier 2 reading intervention for middle school students who read below grade level. The program also integrates the use of positive behavioral supports to promote students' reading motivation.
- Research Triangle Institute in **North Carolina** is implementing the Speak to the Potential, Ability, and Resilience Inside Every Kid (SPARK) which is a mentoring intervention program for middle-school students being used in **Illinois, Virginia, and Texas** to help about 4,400 students develop vital social and emotional regulation skills. SPARK has been found to have positive effects on communication, decision-making, problem solving, emotional regulation and resilience.
- Teachers in **Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Kansas** receive training to support 25,200 middle school students to use prosocial behavior and promotes relationship skills. These students are more likely to have social and academic success, and their teachers are less likely to experience stress and burnout.
- Schools in rural **Alabama**, northern **California** and **Texas** are building capacity for and training local coaches on a whole child model that aims to help 19,959 students develop social and emotional skills, increase academic engagement and achievement, reduce disciplinary incidents, and improve teacher-student relationships.
- Johns Hopkins University in **Maryland** is piloting and studying efforts to support educators in **Indiana** to equip schools with a set of specific and measurable strategies and actions that educators can use to increase an estimated 6,400 students' school connectedness, with the ultimate goal of student academic achievement gains, completion rates, and declines in fighting and bullying.
- The **Oregon** Research Institute is investing in a project that addresses the chronic absenteeism crisis intensified by COVID-19 in **Nebraska** by embedding mentors with lived experiences into high-needs urban schools. These mentors provide continuous support to 682 at-risk students, focusing on improving attendance, academic performance, and social and emotional learning.
- In partnership with the Human Restoration Project in **Iowa**, educators in **Michigan** are receiving support to focus on interdisciplinary project-based learning and feedback-driven assessment centered on improving academic achievement, social and emotional well-being, and attendance for an estimated 600 students.
- Educators in **Illinois** are refining and implementing multi-tiered systems of support and positive behavior interventions and supports in an effort to improve 34,688 students' academic achievement, well-being, and behavior.

EIR SEL grants are critical for supporting high-need students – as defined by grantees based on the needs of the local communities they serve - to progress academically and socially, particularly as the needs of many students, educators and families remain elevated and overall academic progress remains stagnant.¹ Through EIR's model, which requires rigorous evaluation and the dissemination and scaling of best practices, these critical investments benefit not only students in the states and districts in which they are being tested and implemented, but also students in states and districts nationwide. These insights are particularly crucial now,

¹ NAEP report card: Reading. The Nation's Report Card. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/reading/2024/g4_8/?grade=8

when our nation's education sciences research and dissemination infrastructure has been deeply impacted by staffing and organizational changes.

Recent Nation's Report Card (NAEP) scores show that students have fallen further behind academically and that achievement gaps have widened for students. The world of work is also rapidly changing, as are the skills employers are looking for in candidates. SEL is more important than ever as it creates the conditions that enhance student academic performance and workforce readiness, in addition to supporting student mental health and well-being.

Decades of research demonstrate that social and emotional learning is critical for students' academic and holistic success and plays a vital role in supporting child and youth mental health and well-being. According to a 2023 meta-analysis including 424 studies involving 575,361 students, students participating in social and emotional learning at schools had higher "school functioning," including grades, test scores, attendance, homework completion, and engagement.² The analysis also found decreases among students in aggression and bullying, anxiety, stress, depression, suicidality. Students also felt safer at schools, reporting higher levels of inclusion, connectedness and healthy relationships. Similarly, a landmark 2011 meta-analysis found that social and emotional learning increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate in SEL.³ In addition, cost-benefit research shows that for every dollar spent on evidence-based SEL programs studied, on average, there is an \$11 return on investment.⁴

Recent research focuses on the role SEL plays in improving literacy outcomes specifically. The 2024 NAEP data shows troubling trends in student progress and proficiency underscoring that we are at an inflection point in the United States that requires us to support each student to learn to read fluently and well. Current research demonstrates that learning environments and instruction that are supportive of students' social and emotional development and well-being are integral to student literacy development.⁵ Supporting the five core competencies of SEL can support students' literacy development, and vice versa.⁶ Now is not the time to abandon investment in evidence-backed strategies that help students learn to read.

LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends 2024 suggests that employers are prioritizing hiring candidates with "soft skills" or "transferable skills that allow candidates to move nimbly across roles." Employers are also seeing increasing demand for skills that young people master through evidence-based SEL like problem-solving, adaptability, and collaboration.⁷ Furthermore, parents consistently express a desire for students to learn social and emotional skills. According to polling data, 88 percent of parents want their students to learn social and emotional skills such as respect, cooperation, perseverance, and empathy.⁸

Although progress has been made through investments to date, there is much more work to be done to ensure our students get the support they need to succeed. We appreciate the role that EIR SEL grants have made to implement and scale evidence-based social and emotional learning practices to support improved student achievement and look forward to seeing the impact of ongoing investment in years to come.

² Cipriano, Christina, et al. "The state of evidence for social and emotional learning: A contemporary meta-analysis of universal school-based SEL interventions." *Child Development*, 94(5), 13 July 2023, pp. 1181-1204., <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13968>

³ <https://casel.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/impact-enhancing-students-social-emotional-learning-meta-analysis-school-based-universal-interventions.pdf>

⁴ Clive Belfield et al., "The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning" (Teachers College, Columbia University, February 2015).

⁵ Lee, C. & Ward, A. (2024). The Role of SEL in Improving Literacy Development Introductory Brief, <https://casel.org/role-of-sel-in-improving-literacy-development-introductory-brief/?view=1>

⁶ Ward et al (2025) How Social and Emotional Learning Supports Student Literacy, Pre K – Grade 5, <https://casel.org/how-social-and-emotional-learning-supports-literacy-pre-k-grade-5/?view=1>

⁷ LinkedIn. (2024, October). Global talent trends. LinkedIn Talent Solutions. <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/global-talent-trends>

⁸ "New National Survey Shows Parents More Comfortable about COVID-19 Risks and Student Well-Being in Schools." National Parent Teacher Association, 26 June 2022, <https://www.pta.org/home/About-National-Parent-Teacher-Association/PTA-Newsroom/news-list/news-detail-page/2022/06/17/new-national-survey-shows-parents-more-comfortable-about-covid-19-risks-and-student-well-being-in-schools>.

Thank you for carefully considering our request. We would be pleased to discuss the SEL grants within the EIR program as the appropriations process unfolds this year.

Sincerely,

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

All4Ed

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

American Psychological Association (APA)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA)

Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE)

Committee for Children (CFC)

Confident Parents, Confident Kids

edWeb.net

International Literacy Association (ILA)

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

National Equity Project (NEP)

National Parents Union (NPU)

Pure Edge, Inc.

Respectful Ways

School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA)

SEL Providers Association (SELPA)

Social Emotional Learning Alliance for the United States (SEL4US)



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