

Do the Views of Students' Caregivers Align With Research on the Benefits of Social and Emotional Skills?

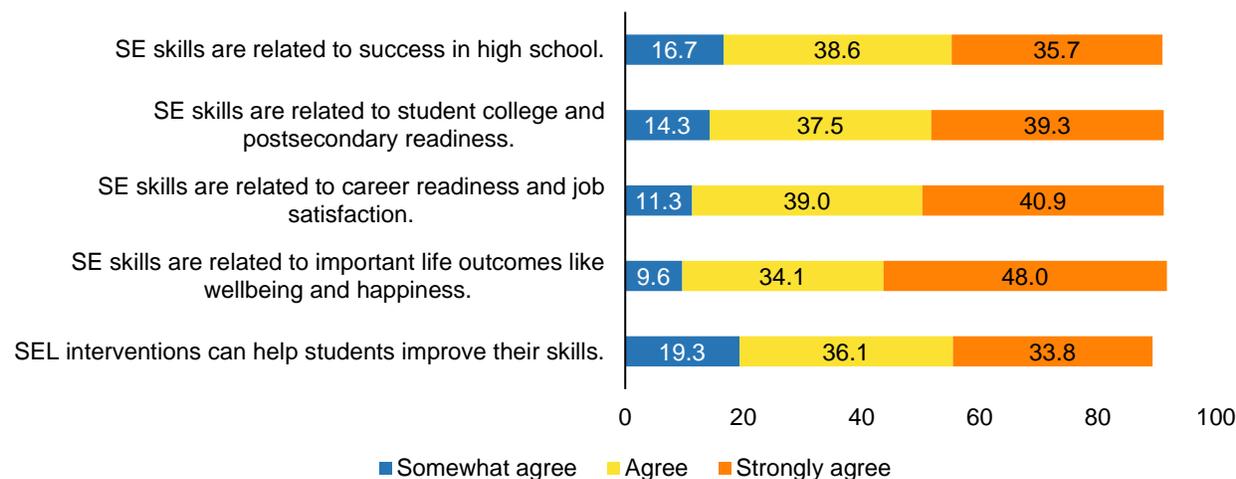
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Social and emotional (SE) skills are “individual capacities that (a) are manifested in consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, (b) can be developed through formal and informal learning experiences, and (c) influence important socioeconomic outcomes throughout the individual’s life” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015, p. 34). A robust body of research shows that SE skills are related to a variety of important outcomes, such as these:

- success in elementary through postsecondary education (Mammadov, 2021; Poropat, 2009)
- readiness for postsecondary education (Anguiano-Carrasco et al., 2022)
- career readiness and job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002)
- well-being and happiness (Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Diener & Lucas, 1999)

Fortunately, students can improve their SE skills through social and emotional learning (SEL), which refers to programming designed to develop students’ SE skills (Mahoney et al., 2018). Caregivers¹ play a critical role in SEL by modeling and reinforcing their students’ SE skill development. Caregivers may be more likely to participate willingly in SEL if they perceive SE skills and SEL interventions as beneficial. The current study examined the extent to which the views of caregivers align with the benefits demonstrated in past research on SE skills and SEL.

We emailed a random sample of 45,132 caregivers² of students who took the ACT test in April and June 2022 to invite them to participate in survey research. In each survey, caregivers were asked to rate how much they agreed with statements articulating the connection between SE skills and important outcomes (e.g., academic and workplace success). Specifically, caregivers saw the five statements shown in Figure 1, and respondents ($N = 1,380^3$) rated their agreement with the statements on a 6-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents across administrations who reported some level of agreement (i.e., somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) with each statement. As this figure shows, most respondents reported some level of agreement with each statement, with many agreeing strongly.

Figure 1. Percentage of Caregivers Who Agreed With Each Statement

Note. In the actual survey, the terms *social and emotional skills* and *social and emotional learning* were used in place of the abbreviations *SE skills* and *SEL*, respectively.

We also examined differences in average support across the five statements for various groups. Table 1 shows the percentage of caregivers who reported some level of agreement (i.e., somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) with each statement.

- Agreement was high across both political affiliations with an average of 93% of Democrats and 90% of Republicans reporting some level of support across statements. In general, average agreement was greater for Democratic than Republican caregivers, $t(585) = 2.68, p = .01, g = .22$.⁴
- Average agreement was high across the two genders examined with an average of 92% of females and 88% of males reporting some level of support across statements. Across statements, average agreement was greater for female than male caregivers, $t(1254) = 2.55, p = .01, g = .20$.
- Agreement was also high across levels of family income for each statement (average agreement between 88% and 93%). Across statements, average agreement varied significantly by yearly family income, $F(2, 1131) = 5.51, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$.
 - Post hoc tests using the Tukey HSD correction found higher agreement for caregivers from families who make more than \$100,000 yearly than those from families who make \$50,000–\$100,000, $p < .01, g = .22$.
- Average agreement did not differ significantly based on caregiver race/ethnicity, $F(4, 1140) = 1.56, p = .18, \eta^2 = .01$.

Overall, although several groups differed significantly, effect sizes were small, and caregivers generally agreed with the statements about the benefits of SE skills and SEL, regardless of their group membership. Strong agreement with these statements suggests that the perceptions of caregivers of various backgrounds align with the research-based benefits of SEL and the value of SE skills.

Table 1. Percentage of Caregivers Who Reported Some Level of Agreement With Each Statement Across Groups

Statement	Political		Gender		Family income			Race/ethnicity				
	Democrat	Republican	Male	Female	< \$50,000	\$50,000– \$100,000	> \$100,000	Asian	Black/ African American	Hispanic/ Latinx	White	Two or more
SE skills are related to success in high school.	92%	89%	87%	92%	88%	89%	93%	91%	91%	86%	93%	95%
SE skills are related to student college and postsecondary readiness.	93%	90%	88%	92%	89%	87%	94%	87%	89%	86%	94%	90%
SE skills are related to career readiness and job satisfaction.	94%	91%	90%	92%	88%	88%	94%	87%	91%	87%	94%	87%
SE skills are related to important life outcomes like well-being and happiness.	94%	90%	87%	93%	90%	90%	94%	93%	91%	89%	94%	90%
SEL interventions can help students improve their skills.	93%	88%	87%	90%	88%	86%	92%	93%	89%	85%	92%	87%
<i>N</i>	296	291	183	1,073	136	302	696	54	171	92	790	38

Note. This table shows results from relevant groups of interest. Answer choices on the survey included additional categories including a “prefer not to respond” option.

References

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Notes

¹ We use the term *caregivers* to refer to any individuals responsible for students' care, including parents, other family members, guardians, etc.

² Caregiver email addresses were collected during registration.

³ Survey respondents most likely differed from caregivers who did not complete the survey in a number of ways. For instance, average ACT scores for students of respondents were higher than the scores of students whose caregivers did not respond, $t(33605) = 8.82$, $p < .01$, $g = .25$. Additionally, family income was higher for respondents than that of caregivers who did not respond, $t(35054) = 7.63$, $p < .01$, $g = .22$. For these reasons, caution is warranted when generalizing from these results to all caregivers of ACT test takers.

⁴ Hedge's g is an effect size (standardized mean difference) that can be interpreted in a similar way as Cohen's d .



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