



TECH Talk

How EdTech Can Support Social and Emotional Learning at School and at Home

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There is a need to move away from a narrow focus on just academic outcomes, to one that considers the long-term development and well-being of children, a whole child approach ([Association of Supervisors and Curriculum Developers \(ASCD\), 2020](#)). When we think about teaching the whole child, we should think about providing a healthy, safe, engaging, supportive, and challenging classroom experience ([The Whole Child, 2015](#)). As part of educating the whole child, we need to consider children's social and emotional learning. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning

(SEL) as the process in which individuals “manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” and includes a framework with five core competencies ([CASEL – What is SEL?, 2019, para. 1](#)).

What is the Framework for SEL?

CASEL’s integrated framework promotes intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence and includes five core competencies: 1) self-awareness, 2) self-management, 3) social awareness, 4) relationship skills, and 5) responsible decision-making. [Self-Awareness](#) is the ability to recognize one’s emotions, behaviors, and ways of thinking. It includes understanding one’s strengths and weaknesses and having a sense of optimism and confidence. [Self-management](#) is the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, as well as control stress and self-motivate. It includes the ability to set and pursue goals. [Social awareness](#) involves the ability to empathize and understand social and ethical norms for behavior. It includes recognizing available resources for support. [Relationship skills](#) describe the ability to establish healthy relationships with diverse people. It includes using appropriate communication, cooperation, and negotiation. [Responsible decision-making](#) is the ability to make good choices about social interactions, understand consequences, and consider the well-being of others ([CASEL, 2019](#)).

What Does the Research Say?

We know that intentionally incorporating SEL in schools produces positive outcomes. CASEL has engaged in over two decades of research into the effectiveness of SEL in schools. Some of the claims include, positive long-term effects on personal lives, academic outcomes, social behaviors, and the ability to reduce poverty and increase economic mobility. In addition, for every dollar invested in SEL, there is an eleven-dollar return. In this [video](#), educators and administrators discuss how implementing SEL in schools has made a tremendous impact. On a larger scale, a 2011 grant-funded meta-analysis of 213 different studies written by [Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger](#) showed that incorporating SEL programs in schools had positive benefits on students’ social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance. In a 2017 follow-up meta-analysis of 82 school-based studies involving more than 97,00 kindergarten through senior high school students, [Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg](#) asserted that there are long-term benefits of school-based implementation of SEL programs across diverse geographic contexts and age groups including social-emotional skills, attitudes, and sense of well-being.

How Can Schools Implement SEL?

[Maurice Elias \(2016\)](#) explains the seven steps to implement SEL into schools: 1) "build a school infrastructure that can support SEL", 2) "assess how well-coordinated your school’s SEL programs are", 3) "assess the school’s culture and climate", 4) "articulate shared values, themes, and essential life habits", 5) "provide consistent and ongoing opportunities for students to practice SEL skills", 6) "improve faculty readiness to teach SEL", and 7) "connect to those who are walking the walk." The first step, building a school infrastructure to support SEL, may begin by creating a committee to set attainable goals and use planning cycles with action plans that are

developed in eight-week increments of time. The second step, assessing the school's SEL programs, involves school members taking a critical look at existing programs and initiatives and making sure that there is "harmony" across the programs and that SEL is used as the "integrative glue." The third step, assessing the school's culture and climate, includes gathering and analyzing data about student, staff, and parent perspectives from surveys, walk-throughs, focus groups, and artifacts. The fourth step, articulating shared values, themes, and essential life habits, involves schools focusing on core beliefs and actions that address academic, moral, and civic development and creating mottos and mission statements that are emphasized and used every day. The fifth step, providing consistent and ongoing opportunities for students to practice SEL skills, goes beyond the mere presenting of the information to practicing and reinforcing use of the skills. The sixth step, improving faculty readiness to teach SEL, gives faculty the tools they need to understand the theory, literature, and pedagogy of SEL and to easily incorporate SEL into standards, rubrics, and mandates. The seventh step, connecting to those who are walking the walk, happens when schools or districts are connected to other schools who are actively incorporating SEL. Organizations and programs that can help are [CASEL](#), the [National Association of School Psychologists](#), [Second Step](#), [Lions Quest International](#), [Responsive Classroom](#), [Open Circle](#), [Social Decision Making/ Social Problem-Solving](#), and the [Schools of Character](#).

How Can EdTech Support SEL?

EdTech can be used to support SEL and provides the flexibility of learning at school, home, and elsewhere. There are a variety of free and low cost options for a range of ages that promote the competencies outlined by CASEL and [Elias' \(2016\)](#) fifth step, which is to provide consistent and ongoing opportunities for students to practice SEL skills. Table 1 provides a list of edtech options that support SEL and align with one of the competencies outlined by CASEL.

TABLE 1

EdTech Tools that Support SEL and Align with CASEL Competencies

| SEL Competency | App | Price | Target Age | Description |
|---|---|--------|------------|--|
| Self-Awareness: recognizing one's emotions, behaviors, and ways of thinking; understanding one's strengths and weaknesses; having a sense of optimism and confidence | Emotions (Avokiddo) | \$2.99 | 4+ | Gives young children opportunities to explore feelings and emotional connections through several characters and props, activities explore the cause and effect relationship of facial expressions. |
| | Emotionary (Funny Feelings) | \$1.99 | 4+ | A great resource for children with special needs, includes descriptions of emotions and funny feelings, |

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| | | | | allows users to draw an emotionary "selfie" to show how they are feeling. |
| Self-Management: regulating emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; controlling stress, self-motivating; setting and pursuing goals | Breathe, Think, Do (Sesame Street) | Free | 4+ | Teaches young children about problem-solving, self-control, planning, and time on task; players are presented with different scenarios in which a monster character must regulate his/her emotions using the breathe-think-do technique. |
| | GoNoodle | Free | 6-12 | Short physical activities that provide children with brain breaks to increase concentration and attentiveness, activities require children to cross the midline of their bodies which engages both sides of the brain. |
| | Stop, Breathe & Think (Tools for Peace) | Free | 11+ | Emotional check-ins and personalized recommendations for mediation, sleep, breathing, and yoga. |
| | See Saw | Free | All | This service allows classroom teachers to communicate with parents and share student work. It also helps build SES by engaging students in a variety of work styles. With this program, students can demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of modes as they develop their own awareness of how they learn and communicate. |
| Social Awareness: empathizing and understanding social and ethical norms for behavior | Touch and Learn - Emotions (Innovative Mobile Apps) | \$1.99 | 4+ | Includes photographs that represent four different feelings per page, players match verbal cues with appropriate photos to help them identify body language and understand emotions |

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|--|--|-------------------------------|------|--|
| | Forest - Stay Focused (Seekrtech) | iOS: \$2; Android: Free | 4+ | Productivity app; the main purpose is to teach users to stop using phones as distractions and to be socially present; the more time users spend in real-life, the more their virtual tree grows. |
| Relationship Skills: establishing healthy relationships with diverse people; using appropriate communication, cooperation, and negotiation & Responsible Decision-Making: making good choices about social interactions, understanding consequences, and considering the well-being of others | Peppy Pals Social Skills | Free | 4+ | Includes games, books, videos; animals socialize, take care of each other, solve problems, explore emotions |
| | The Middle School Confidential Series Bundle (Electric Eggplant) | \$6.99 | 8-14 | The books/apps are designed by a teen expert, Annie Fox, and presented in a graphic novel sequence in which readers follow a group of seventh-grade friends as they navigate friendships, families, and school. |
| | Class Dojo | Free | All | This can be a school-wide or classroom teacher program that helps schools build a culture around helping students monitor their own behavior. With Class Dojo, teachers track the good things that students do through the day as well as concerns that teachers have about student behavior. Students are able to earn points for good deeds, good work, and good behavior. |

Managing Tech

Certainly, edtech is an excellent resource to help teachers and parents meet the social-emotional needs of students. However, we would be remiss to think that this is the only way to meet these needs. As a matter of fact, it is important for us to balance the use of technology with more natural ways of meeting social-emotional needs of students. Teachers and parents should be warned of over-using technology. Technology is a tool that we can use to support other methods that we use to help build SEL for students such as providing hands-on activities, outdoor learning, and creative play ([Wabisabi Learning](#)).

Benefits of Tech During Times of School Closure

In recent days, the United States has watched county after county close its doors due to the COVID-19 virus. When teachers are using edtech in their classes on an on-going basis, the transition to meeting the needs of students outside of the classroom can more easily be met. These students already know how to maneuver and access the technology, and, therefore are able to continue their learning outside of the classroom. The ability to maintain a learning schedule for children helps meet their emotional needs during times of uncertainty ([CDC, 2019](#)). If teachers have already acclimated students to using edtech on a regular basis, this need can more readily be met.

As children are home during extended breaks from school, parents can support their children and their own social and emotional learning by employing these edtech applications with their children. Time spent with children both face-to-face and with edtech learning tools may provide rare opportunities for productive, meaningful family time.

Conclusion

Students bring all aspects of their life to school. Using knowledge of students' social and emotional intelligences, teachers are able to create an environment where student focus, interests, and background merge with the information that they are teaching. This not only helps students grow academically, but it also creates a more well-rounded student who can apply academic knowledge to long-term learning. As teachers focus on the social and emotional learning of their students, as well as classroom and school culture, they can build meaningful relationships with their students, resulting in a stronger sense of well-being, increased self-awareness and self-management, and improved behavior and academic outcomes. Incorporating edtech at school and in the home can be a tool to assist teachers and parents in improving students' social and emotional learning.

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