



January 30, 2023

The Honorable Sandy Salmon
Iowa Senate Education Committee
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

The Honorable Molly Donahue
Iowa Senate Education Committee
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

The Honorable Lynn Evans
Iowa Senate Education Committee
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Re: Senate File 85 and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

Dear Senator Salmon, Senator Donahue, and Senator Evans,

I, as the CEO and President of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) am writing to express concerns with SF 85, a bill which, as written, would ban the Iowa Department of Education (the Department) from disseminating or displaying CASEL materials on its website. The information provided on the Department's website is grounded in decades of research and helps contribute to successful outcomes from students across the state.

At CASEL we conduct, commission, and synthesize academic research to continuously advance the field of social and emotional learning (SEL), while working alongside researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Among the ways we accomplish this are by [reviewing and evaluating SEL programs](#) to help educators make data-informed decisions that meet their local needs. For example, to qualify for inclusion in CASEL's Guide to Evidence-Based Programs, the criteria is closely aligned to the Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) two most rigorous tiers: Tier 1 (strong) and Tier 2 (moderate) to ensure a level of rigor and evidence of impacts. Further, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, CASEL's framework provides a foundation for communities to use evidence-based SEL strategies in ways that are most meaningful to their local context, emphasizing the need for school-family-community partnerships to decide how best to implement, teach, and assess SEL based on the specific priorities, strengths, and needs of their local schools and communities. Research indicates that well-implemented, evidence-based

SEL programs are an effective way to ensure the academic success, career readiness and overall well-being of students.¹ We also [work with partners](#) to combine rigorous SEL research with practical, actionable findings.

Perhaps the most prominent among the materials this bill seeks to remove, however, are the [CASEL 5 Core Competencies](#), the most widely-used framework for helping schools and districts make evidence-based decisions around SEL implementation. The CASEL competencies address five broad and interrelated areas of competence and highlights examples for each: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The CASEL 5 can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural and local contexts.² The impact the framework has on children is powerful. For example, according to a nationally representative survey conducted in 2020 by Tyton Partners, 99 percent of individual respondents demonstrated awareness of SEL with 95 percent of district respondents having adopted SEL practices. According to this same study, CASEL was reported as the leading framework used with 42 percent of respondents stating it as a top source of information.

Research shows that when students are supported in growing their social and emotional competence via skill development in these five areas, students are more likely to experience improved prosocial behaviors and academic achievement as well as a decrease in emotional distress.³ In fact, the research consistently shows that SEL interventions that address the five core competencies outlined above increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate. What's more, students participating in SEL programs showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, decreased drug use and problematic behaviors, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school.⁴ In addition, about 27 percent more students who experience evidence-based SEL programs improve their academic performance at the end of the program and 24 percent more have improved social behaviors and lower levels of distress.⁵ All of these demonstrated outcomes are vital for schools now, as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, given that they support student academic recovery, mental health, future readiness, and overall well-being.

¹ "Program Guide," CASEL, n.d., <https://pg.casel.org/>

² "What Is the CASEL Framework?," CASEL, August 3, 2022, <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>.

³ Joseph A. Durlak et al., "What we Know, and What we Need to Find out about Universal, School-based Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Children and Adolescents: A Review of Meta-analyses and Directions for Future Research" (Psychological Bulletin, December 2022), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366301585_What_we_know_and_what_we_need_to_find_out_about_universal_school-based_social_and_emotional_learning_programs_for_children_and_adolescents_A_review_of_meta-analyses_and_directions_for_future_research

⁴ Durlak, Joseph & Mahoney, Joseph & Boyle, Alaina. (2022). What we know, and what we need to find out about universal, school-based social and emotional learning programs for children and adolescents: A review of meta-analyses and directions for future research (in press). Psychological Bulletin.

⁵ "What Does the Research Say?," CASEL, May 26, 2022, <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>.

Finally, cost-benefit research shows that for every dollar spent on SEL, there is an \$11 return on investment.⁶

In everything we do and in all our materials and resources, our efforts are unified by a commitment to evidence-based SEL that supports all students' learning and development. By removing our materials from the Department's website and prohibiting their dissemination to education professionals, local communities will be restricted in making their own decisions about how to best support children's social and emotional learning. Further, Iowa's students may not receive the high quality SEL instruction and skill development they need for future success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Samuel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Aaliyah A. Samuel
President and CEO
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

⁶ Clive Belfield et al., "The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning" (Teachers College, Columbia University, February 2015), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/583b86882e69cfc61c6c26dc/t/59089094cd0f6810013b15ff/1493733525917/SEL-Revised.pdf>.