

Bipartisan Legislation Makes Social and Emotional Learning a National Education Priority

Members of Congress introduce new legislation for education programs

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(Washington, DC) Congressman Dale E. Kildee (D-MI), Congresswoman Judy Biggert (R-IL), and Congressman Tim Ryan (D-OH) announced the introduction of HB 4223, the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act, new legislation that authorizes the US Department of Education to establish programs and allocate funds to:

- Establish a National Technical Assistance and Training Center for Social and Emotional Learning

Authorizes the Secretary of Education to provide technical assistance to states, school districts, and community-based organizations on the effective implementation of social and emotional learning standards and programming. The center will also provide ongoing high-quality professional development for school leaders and teachers and conduct research on best practices.

- Provide Grants to Support Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programming

Authorizes five-year competitive grants to states and school districts to work with the national technical assistance center to develop and implement social and emotional learning initiatives.

- Conduct a National Evaluation of School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programming

The Secretary of Education will conduct an independent evaluation of grantees to determine the program's impact on student achievement, attainment and behavioral outcomes.

"In today's increasingly competitive economy, our children deserve more than an academically challenging environment – they need the 21st century skills of creative thinking and problem solving," said Congressman Kildee, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education. "That is why I joined my colleagues to introduce the Academic, Social and Emotional Learning Act. This bipartisan legislation builds on recent recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) that families, schools, and communities all need to work together to create an environment that facilitates healthy development for children. By making social and emotional learning part of every child's education, we are giving the next generation the skills they need for productive and confident lives."

"There are so many bright students struggling to reach their full potential because they don't have the kinds of communication and social skills they need to excel in the classroom," said Congresswoman Biggert, a senior member of the House Education and Labor Committee and original co-sponsor of the bill. "This important legislation will help provide our children with the skills and tools to overcome social and emotional challenges, stay focused on learning, and emerge from school prepared to succeed in the world. I applaud Representative Kildee for his hard work in crafting the Academic, Social, and

Emotional Learning Act, and look forward to working with him in the future to help give students the best educational experience possible.”

“If we want to push academic performance to the next level, we need to educate the whole child,” said Representative Tim Ryan, an original co-sponsor who serves on the House Appropriation Committee. “ That means teaching kids how to appropriately handle their emotions and build productive relationships. It’s one of the most significant things we can do to support them. I wish SEL was in schools when I was growing up.”

The HB 4223 was announced Wednesday at “Social and Emotional Learning –Ready!” a leadership forum organized by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL was established in 1994 to convene experts from diverse fields to share their work and leverage the science, theory, and practice of SEL to improve pre-K-12 education. A hundred influential education, civic, and policy leaders gathered at yesterday’s CASEL Forum to discuss opportunities to improve nationwide student achievement and school success by scaling up evidence-based social and emotional learning in schools across the country.

“This legislation is a game-changer,” said Timothy S. Shriver, chair of CASEL’s board of directors. “Social and emotional learning can be truly transformative for both children and their schools. We’re so grateful to Representatives Kildee, Ryan and Biggert for their leadership in this important step toward scaling up and integrating what we know works into our education systems.”

Social Emotional Learning, or SEL, is the process by which people develop the skills to handle themselves in the world, manage relationships, and work through challenging situations constructively and ethically. A strong base of research links SEL to positive academic and behavioral outcomes:

- Better academic performance: Students who participated in SEL programs increase achievement scores an average of 11 percentile points versus students who did not participate;
- Improved attitudes and behaviors: SEL instills greater motivation to learn, deeper commitment to school, increased time on schoolwork, better behavior, and improved attendance and graduation rates;
- Fewer negative behaviors: Among students receiving SEL instruction, disruptive class behavior, noncompliance, aggression, delinquent acts, and disciplinary referrals decrease significantly;
- Reduced emotional distress: Reports of student depression, anxiety, stress or social withdrawal significantly decrease among students who receive SEL instruction.

“The social and emotional learning movement is gaining momentum nationally,” said Jennifer Buffett, Chair and CEO of the NoVo Foundation, which has made SEL a top priority. “This is a pivotal moment. As a society, we’ve put so much emphasis on mechanistic approaches to education. We can’t just keep squeezing kids in the hopes of better performance. SEL works because it emphasizes a context where children know they are seen, heard, and valued. It’s fundamental, and needs to be infused across the educational experience. The leadership these lawmakers have shown represents a major step forward toward that goal.”

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