



White Paper

Effect of the RethinkEd SEL Curriculum on Student SEL Competencies

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Executive Summary

This study sought to evaluate the effects of the Rethink Ed Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum on student positive social behavior, problem behaviors, emotional well-being, identity and agency, and school connectedness. Student self-assessment and teacher behaviorally anchored ratings of students in the RethinkEd SEL platform were used to measure differences from pre (Fall 2020) to post (Spring 2021) of SEL competencies, skills, and behaviors. A Control group (no student engagement with RethinkEd SEL platform) was compared to a SEL intervention group (students who engaged with the RethinkEd SEL platform), using a quasiexperimental research design. Students in the SEL group demonstrated significantly more improvements in most content areas within both the self-assessment and teacher observation ratings, while the Control group showed no significant improvement in most content areas within both measures. This research shows promise for improving student SEL competencies, skills, and behaviors through student engagement with the SEL curriculum.

KEYWORDS

Social Emotional Learning, SEL, Research, Student Self-Assessment, Behaviorally Anchored Ratings, Teacher Observation, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision Making, Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Self-Confidence, Understanding Norms, Perspective Taking, Social Behavior, Problem Behavior, Emotional Distress, Identity and Agency, School Connectedness, CASEL

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Importance of Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has shown to be effective in numerous research studies for improving academic performance, behavior, social interactions and relationships, and emotional well-being (Durlak, Weissberg, Dyminicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). During the COVID-19 pandemic, SEL has become an even greater urgency for school districts and might be the most important component of remote learning and returning to school. Many experts argue that teaching and learning during these times are not possible without making SEL the top priority (e.g., National Education Association, 2021).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2021a) highlights the significant impact that SEL can have on feeling stressed, isolated, or anxious and how it can help build resilience, empathy, and support systems for those experiencing loss or difficult situations. Building a strong foundation of SEL for students and adults creates a united community and strengthens connectedness.

While face-to-face social interactions are preferable, it is essential to have reliable and effective tools to provide SEL training and supports through technology and remote implementation. During the pandemic, educators have utilized RethinkEd's SEL platform in-person (when schools were open) and through remote group instruction and independent learning activities. This flexibility allowed schools to have continuity and consistency while letting their students, staff, families, and community know that support systems were available throughout the school year for developing and strengthening SEL knowledge, skills, and behaviors. engagement, motivation, and overall well-being, which can lead to more learning and better academic outcomes.

RethinkEd's SEL Solution

The RethinkEd Student SEL Self-Assessment and the Classroom Rating Scale were created, developed, and tested by the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) and are based on the CASEL framework. In the Student SEL Self-Assessment, students rate themselves on 45 items using a 5-point rating scale (1- Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Neutral; 4-Agree; 5-Strongly Agree). Items are scored into 5 categories and a total score. The Total Score is an overall indicator of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competency.

It is the average of the five sub-scores: Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision Making, Self-Awareness, Self-Management, and Social Awareness. Scoring is based on percentage of agreement for each statement: 1-Very Low (0-32); 2-Low (33-45); 3-Average (46-54); 4-High (55-64); 5-Very High (65-74). The Classroom Rating Scale is completed by the teacher, using a behaviorally anchored rating scale to rate the student with pending, low, average, or high scores on 8 CASEL dimensions including Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision Making, Self-Confidence, Emotional Awareness, Emotion Regulation, Self-Regulated Learning, Perspective Taking, and Understanding Norms.

The RethinkEd SEL curriculum was developed by experts in the field and is grounded in the five core competencies of the Center for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019). The program provides educators key SEL skills competencies and students with efficient, targeted instruction of the elements and indicators of each CASEL competency. This program draws from the applied learning and social psychology literature, with each module including an introduction to further promote teacher commitment, direct context instruction, and direct skill assessment. Practical and targeted examples of applications, skills with different learners, peer groups, and parents are provided as part of each module. RethinkEd's comprehensive K-12 student SEL curriculum aligns with CASEL's core competencies and includes lessons that promote awareness of self and others, self-management, social skills, social awareness, and self-care. The curriculum was developed by a team of experts in education, psychology,



mental health, and SEL. There are 390 lessons for general education (Tiers 1 and 2) and for each content area, there is a lesson for every grade level with lessons scaffolding through grade levels focusing on developmentally appropriate learning objectives for each grade. Lessons were implemented as a group activity during a designated time of the day and independent learning assignments that students could do on their own. Lessons consist of 3 components:

- **Learn:** A short video (2-5 minutes) introduces the topic and SEL vocabulary, followed by group discussion questions or a brief activity or independent journaling or reflecting. Videos are animated for younger students and include a diverse group of peers for high school videos.
- **Practice:** A variety of activities allow students to learn more about the topic and engage in activities with other students (e.g., games, presentations, roleplaying, etc.) and independently (e.g., worksheets, creating videos, coloring/ drawing, etc.).
- **Dive Deeper:** In-depth (often student-led) activities meant to enhance generalization and provide meaningful discovery of each topic in a way that pertains to the students (e.g., role-playing; classroom, school, or community projects; research, etc.)

The professional development (PD) series for educators includes 30 modules for each of the content areas. Similar to the student lessons, the PD series engages educators through 3 levels:

- **Learn:** A brief video (6-11 minutes) led by a content-area expert explains the concept and how it applies to adult lives as well as students. The video is followed by reflection questions that can be used for individual reflection, journaling, or group discussions.

- Practice: Sources related to the topic are provided, including how to learn more about it and basic strategies for practicing in their every day lives and with students. Activity suggestions are also provided to assist with group discussions, role-playing, journaling, etc.
- Dive Deeper: A more in-depth library of resources is provided to enhance generalization, help educators incorporate the concepts into their own lives, and learn how to engage students in a meaningful way. Activity suggestions are also shared to assist with group discussions, role-playing, journaling, etc.

Content Areas For RethinkEd SEL Curriculum (Student Lessons And PD)

Awareness of Self & Others	Self-Management	Self-Care	Social Awareness	Social Skills
Self-Knowledge	Stress Management	Mindfulness	Cultural Competence	Fairness
Emotions	Self-Control	Self-Efficacy	Empathy	Respect
Values	Focus	Optimism	Safe & Ethical Behavior	Friendship
Wants & Needs	Problem Solving	Self-Compassion	Support Systems	Relationships
Attention Skills	Goal Setting	Self-Advocacy	Social Contributions	Cooperation
Growth Mindset	Resilience	Good Choices	Actions & Consequences	Conflict Resolution

Research Study

In this study, we sought to determine the effectiveness of the SEL curriculum on student SEL competencies through self-assessment, specifically improvements in student-reported identity and agency (i.e., self-efficacy, self-knowledge, self-confidence, values, racial identity, cultural competence), school connectedness (i.e., belonging, peer and teacher relationships, support systems), prosocial behaviors (i.e., empathy, conflict resolution skills, healthy boundaries, cooperation, social contributions, growth mindset, self-advocacy/assertiveness), and emotion regulation (i.e., emotional distress, stress management, resilience, mindfulness, optimism, coping), and self-management (i.e., problem-solving, goal setting, self-control, responsible decision making, understanding norms). In addition, we looked to evaluate the effectiveness of the SEL curriculum on the above skills and behaviors (including prosocial and problem behaviors) via teacher behavioral ratings.

As part of their regular school day either, in-person, remotely, or a hybrid of both teaching models, 21,259 students in grades 3-12 participated from 22 public school districts from 9 states in the U.S. (Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Texas, and Virginia) with 10,845 students in the Control Group (4,834 male; 5,379 female; and 632 unspecified gender) and 10,414 students in the SEL Intervention Group (3,834 male; 4,452 female; and 2,218 unspecified gender). Approximately 40% of participating students were identified as Black or African American and approximately 17% were identified as White. Other racial identities were less than 5% in each group and about 38% chose not to select a racial identity. Due to the high number of urban, Title I schools participating, it is estimated that the Free-Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) rate was approximately 70%.

A quasi-experimental pre-post design was used to assess the efficacy of the intervention compared to a non-randomized control group. Students who did not engage in

the RethinkEd platform during the 2020-2021 school year were assigned to the Control Group, and students who did engage in the platform at least 1 time were assigned to the SEL Group (average engagement was 18 logins with a range of 1-213). The RethinkEd Student SEL Self-Assessment and the Classroom Rating Scale were used to assess the pre-post differences in SEL competencies, skills, and behaviors in the 2020-2021 school year between the Control and the SEL groups.

Research Results

Paired t-tests were used to compare pre to post changes for both groups. No decreases in score averages were observed for either group. Students in the SEL group showed significantly more improvement in all SEL content areas ($p < .01$) and overall ($p < .01$) from pre- to post-intervention. In comparison, students in the Control group did not show significant improvement overall or in 3 out of the 5 content areas but did show improvement ($p < .05$) in Responsible Decision Making and Self-Management. This suggests that engagement in the RethinkEd SEL curriculum may lead to more improvement in student perceptions of their SEL competencies. For both pre and post-scores, standard deviations were low (below 1) (0.86-0.98) for both groups in all content areas indicating that the values were close to the mean (i.e., expected value) and that there was not a significant difference in variability in either group.



Student SEL Self-Assessments		Responsible Decision Making	Relationship Skills	Social Awareness	Self-Awareness	Self-Management	TOTAL
Control- PRE	Mean	2.66	2.63	2.54	2.59	2.61	2.53
	Standard Deviation	0.87	0.87	0.93	0.89	0.86	0.85
Control- POST	Mean	2.69	2.65	2.54	2.61	2.63	2.55
	Standard Deviation	0.88	0.9	0.94	0.9	0.87	0.86
	Pre-Post Significance	p<.05	NS	NS	NS	p<.05	NS
SEL-PRE	Mean	2.67	2.65	2.57	2.61	2.63	2.56
	Standard Deviation	0.89	0.91	0.97	0.9	0.89	0.86
SEL- POST	Mean	2.71	2.69	2.63	2.65	2.67	2.61
	Standard Deviation	0.91	0.91	0.98	0.91	0.89	0.89
	Pre-Post Significance	p<.01	p<.01	p<.01	p<.01	p<.01	p<.01

To further evaluate student SEL skills and behaviors, teachers were asked to rate each student in 8 different SEL areas in the fall and spring of the 2020-2021 school year using the Classroom Rating Scale in the RethinkEd platform. Using paired t-tests, students in the SEL group showed significant improvement in 7 out of the 8 content areas with $p<.01$ significant increases in Relationship Skills, Self Confidence, and Emotion Regulation, and $p<.05$ significant increases in Responsible Decision Making, Emotional Awareness, Perspective Taking, and Understanding Norms. There was no significant change for Self-Regulated Learning. Students in the Control group did not show significant increases in any of the 8 content areas but did show significant ($p<.01$) decreases in average scores for Self-Regulated Learning and Understanding Norms. This data supports the Student Self-Assessment outcomes and suggests that students engaging in the SEL curriculum show greater improvement in their SEL competencies from their own perspective (via self assessment) and from the perspective of their teachers (via behaviorally anchored ratings).

Red p values indicate decrease in average score from pre to post.

Classroom Rating Scale		Rel. Skills	Resp. Dec. Making	Self-Conf.	Emot. Awar.	Emot. Reg	Self-Reg. Learning	Persp. Taking	Und. Norms
Control- PRE	Mean	2.55	2.39	2.56	2.3	2.32	2.55	2.2	2.63
	Standard Deviation	1.28	1.3	1.25	1.35	1.34	1.24	1.21	1.35
Control- POST	Mean	2.68	2.44	2.27	2.27	2.38	2.33	2.36	2.38
	Standard Deviation	1.16	1.19	1.11	1.18	1.23	1.17	1.25	1.28
	Pre-Post Significance	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	p<.01	NS	p<.01
SEL- PRE	Mean	2.45	2.31	2.47	2.35	2.25	2.54	2.12	2.57
	Standard Deviation	1.18	1.23	1.11	1.25	1.24	1.2	1.23	1.24
SEL- POST	Mean	2.67	2.44	2.64	2.49	2.44	2.56	2.29	2.71
	Standard Deviation	1.19	1.26	1.26	1.24	1.26	1.3	1.32	1.34
	Pre-Post Significance	p<.01	p<.05	p<.01	p<.05	p<.01	NS	p<.05	p<.05

Conclusions and Future Directions

Positive outcomes for the SEL group were observed through student selfassessment and teacher behavioral ratings compared to the Control group (showed improvement in 2 areas of student self-assessment and no improvements in teacher behavior observation) using a quasi-experimental, pre-post research design. CASEL (2021b) recommends positive outcomes include at least 1 of the following: 1) improved positive social behavior; 2) reduced problem behavior, 3) reduced emotional distress; 4) improved student-reported identity and agency, 5) improved school connectedness, and 6) improved school climate. This study demonstrates improved student outcomes in the above areas, with the exception of school climate.

Significant improvements in positive social behavior were observed for the SEL group via student self-assessment in the area of Relationship Skills (i.e., positive peer relations, fairness, respect, cooperation, and conflict resolution) and via teacher behavioral observation in the areas of Relationship Skills (i.e., positive peer relations, fairness, respect, cooperation, and conflict resolution) Self-Confidence (i.e., assertiveness and self-advocacy), Perspective-Taking (i.e. empathy, social contributions, and cultural competence). No significant improvements were observed for the Control group in these areas.

Significant improvements were also observed related to reducing problem behaviors in the Responsible Decision Making (i.e., self-control, problem-solving, actions & consequences, and conflict resolution) area of the student selfassessment and in the Understanding Norms (i.e., understands and follows classroom rules and does not engage in problem behaviors) content areas of the teacher observation. The SEL group did not show significant improvement in the area of Self-Regulated Learning (i.e., focus, managing distractions, etc.). The Control group also showed significant improvement in Responsible Decision Making on the student self-assessment but had a significant decrease in the teacher behavioral observation scores for both Understanding Norms and Self-Regulated Learning.

Reduced emotional distress was observed via the student self-assessment for both the SEL and Control group through improvements in Self-Management (i.e., stress management, mindfulness, optimism, and resilience). Teacher observations showed significant improvements for the SEL group in Emotional Awareness (i.e., awareness of emotions in self and others, awareness of how emotions affect their learning) and Emotion Regulation (i.e., identifying strategies to manage emotions, anxiety, and stress). No significant improvements were observed for the Control group in the teacher observations. Student-reported identity and agency significantly improved for the SEL group in the area of Self-Awareness (i.e., self-

knowledge, values, growth mindset, self-efficacy, wants and needs, and cultural competence). No significant differences were observed for the Control group.

Significant improvements in school connectedness were observed for the SEL group through the student self-assessment in the areas of Relationship Skills (including identifying and using support systems), and Social Awareness (social contributions, gratitude, and giving back). Teacher observations confirmed improvements for the SEL group in Relationship Skills and Understanding Norms which also relate to school connectedness. The Control group did not make significant improvements on the self-assessment for Relationship Skills or Social Awareness and showed a significant decrease in behaviors on the teacher observation for Understanding Norms.

One of the biggest obstacles of this research was that it was conducted during the COVID pandemic, where schools were forced to close and teachers were forced to engage students in remote learning environments. The stress and anxiety of the pandemic took a toll on many students and teaching staff. Fortunately, SEL became a priority for many Rethink Ed customers and due to the flexibility of the platform, teachers were able to engage, teach, and assess their students using the RethinkEd SEL platform. Outcomes suggest that the SEL implementation had a positive impact despite the negative impact of the pandemic for students that participated (SEL group) in almost all content areas on both the self-assessment and the teacher behavioral observation. Interestingly, the areas where the Control group showed improvement were in Responsible Decision Making and Self-Management of the self-assessment. On the contrary, the Control group showed significant decreases in their scores for Self-Regulated Learning and Understanding Norms. This contradiction in student self-assessment and teacher observation of similar skills suggests that students may have felt more comfortable as the school year progressed, but teachers observed their behavior as slipping throughout the school year.

Despite challenges from the pandemic, teachers were able to engage their students in SEL, and this study suggests that it may have had a positive impact on students' perceptions of their own competencies and on their skills and behaviors in the classroom.

These findings support the use of the Rethink Ed SEL curriculum for improving student SEL competencies through student self-assessment and teacher behavioral ratings. Students who engaged in the curriculum (SEL group) showed significant improvement in most SEL content areas using both measures compared to students who did not engage with the curriculum (Control group).

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White Paper



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About Us

RethinkEd was founded on a simple, yet powerful idea: To re-think education. To make it better and easier. To unburden school districts and empower educators. To improve outcomes and elevate accountability. To promote collaboration and inspire learning. And most importantly, to make a difference in the school day for everyone – administrators, educators, and students.

The RethinkEd solution is part of Rethink First, a global company that is transforming behavioral healthcare. Similar to Rethink First's other solutions that are innovating and improving outcomes for clinicians and employers globally, RethinkEd is pioneering EdTech with our relentless pursuit of innovative methods that put evidenced-based, data-informed, digitally delivered instruction and assessments into the hands of educators, clinicians, and parents who share our singularly minded focus: To power the potential of all children and to work together to help them succeed.

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