

EQUITY-CENTERED SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL): IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR ALL STUDENTS

SEL Issue Brief, Part 3

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The Carolina Family Engagement Center (CFEC) is committed to equity, excellence, and opportunity in education. We accomplish this through our partnerships with K-12 schools, teachers, families, community partners, and institutions of higher education to effectively share resources with each other. In this third and final issue on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), we use an equity lens to critically examine SEL in the educational setting. The [National School Boards Association](#) defines educational equity as “the intentional allocation of resources, instruction, and opportunities according to need, requiring that discriminatory practices, prejudices, and beliefs be identified and eradicated.”

Although SEL is not likely to solve all inequities that students encounter daily, it can be used as a powerful tool to improve outcomes for students. [Edtrust.org](#) advises educators and policymakers to take a holistic approach to support students and ensure that SEL practices are equitable in schools. Instead of narrowing the focus to teaching students specific SEL skills, educators should integrate SEL across the educational landscape by using evidence-based practices and intentionally creating equitable learning environments. This will involve moving beyond telling students how to behave and instead focus on providing them with opportunities to reflect on their behavior in positive and supportive environments. It will require moving beyond simply providing students with access to adequate mental health support but will instead require schools to create learning spaces where students feel emotionally and physically safe. Finally, it will involve going beyond teaching students how to empathize and respect different cultures and move toward building empathy and cultural competence in the adults who serve them.

FREE SEL RESOURCES

ANTI-RACISM RESOURCES

[Help Explaining Why “Black Lives Matter” to Young Children](#)

[How to Be an Anti-Racist Educator](#)

[How to Help Kids Understand the Black Lives Matter Movement](#)

[The Faculty Lounge @UofSC](#)

CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION

[University of Florida CEEDAR Center Pre-Service & In-Service Learning Resources](#)
and
[Culturally Relevant Multimedia Resources](#)

SEL & EQUITY

[CASEL Emerging Insights Report Advancing SEL as a Lever for Equity and Excellence](#)

[Making Equity Matter Webinar](#)

[New Teacher Center Podcast](#)

[SEL Book List](#) developed by Tamara Cox, Wren High School



FOREWORD

By Michelle Bryan, PhD

Chief Equity Officer, Associate Dean for Diversity,
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Recently, the UofSC College of Education (CoE) launched, "Leading for Racial Justice," an initiative dedicated to helping us rise to the challenge of advancing racial equity during these unprecedented times. Stakeholders from every College constituency have been invited to join one of seven communities of practice charged with bringing about substantive, systemic change in the CoE. Though united by our shared commitment to anti-racist practices, countering anti-blackness, and challenging hate, our success hinges on the willingness of each of us to build strong, respectful relationships that facilitate the critical co-examination of the root causes of inequities in our policies and practices. Such are requisite for crafting collective solutions that lead to personal, professional, and community well-being (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019). In short, we need a systemic, race conscious, SEL approach. Indeed, while our students may range from ages 17 to 71, the need for and possibilities of SEL are no less important for educational spaces inhabited by adults. That is why I am grateful for CFEC's focus on culturally sustaining, racially conscious SEL as a lever for creating equitable learning/working conditions. This focus is not only timely, but vital for bringing about the societal transformation we so desperately need.

"I am grateful for CFEC's focus on culturally sustaining, racially conscious SEL as a lever for creating equitable learning/working conditions."

DR. MICHELLE BRYAN

Jagers, R. R., Rivas-Drake, D., & Williams, B. (2019). Transformative social and emotional learning (SEL): Towards SEL in service of educational equity and excellence. Educational Psychologist, 54(3), 162-184.

Many thanks to our equitable SEL ambassadors featured in this Brief, including community partners and University of South Carolina faculty and staff who shared their perspectives:

- **Ms. Theresa Harrison** with CFEC emphasizes that educators must link equity to SEL in today's climate of racial unrest, political polarization, and a worldwide health pandemic to provide a more just education environment.
- **Dr. Michele Myers** with the UofSC College of Education warns of the harm that may occur to Black children when schools use SEL as a targeted behavior intervention and provides guidance on using SEL in an equitable manner.
- **Mr. Jarvis Jackson** with UofSC's Center for Education and Equity of African American Students uses the metaphor of the Black Panther to foster resilience in the Black community.
- **Dr. Myriam Torres** with the Latino Consortium for Immigration Studies shares her experience as a Latina as she discusses the built-in protective factors associated with growing up in a Latinx family.
- **Ms. Alyssa Raygoza** and **Ms. Jennifer Harrist** with ALL4SC point out the importance of schoolwide professional development and the power of partnerships in making SEL accessible for All children and families.

"It is critical to recognize the cultural wealth of all families and be open to building education anew."

Theresa Harrison



IF YOU ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT EQUITY, YOU ARE NOT PAYING ATTENTION

By Theresa Harrison, M.S., M.P.A.

Project Manager, Carolina Family Engagement Center (CFEC)

The coronavirus pandemic, racial unrest, and a growing polarization of our political system have created a time unlike any other in our nation's history. The veil has not only been lifted but we have become transfixed on the inequality apparent among our citizenry. Within our educational institutions we have seen clearly the impact COVID-19 has had on decisions to re-open our schools. Hybrid models have highlighted the lack of Internet access in our communities, and there have been hotly contested conversations on how, when, and where funding is spent to support those students and families most in need. Using Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) with an equity-centered lens means that educators cannot seek to enhance the SEL capacities of students and families without also addressing and eliminating existing structural barriers that may prevent them from reaching their fullest potential. This also means recognizing the cultural wealth of all families and being open to building education anew.

Equity is defined as the quality of being fair or impartial. In critiquing education and social structures, it requires understanding that families from diverse racial, social, and linguistic backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by barriers that other families can easily navigate. While many educators may purport that schools are the great equalizer, we know that institutions can compound social inequalities (i.e., gifted-talented programming, excessive suspensions). What does this mean for educators seeking to provide an SEL rich environment for the students and families with whom they work?

It means recognizing a language barrier is not a deficit or something to hold against parents, but an opportunity to demonstrate compassion for those trying to learn a new language in a new country. It means not being incensed when a concerned community member attends a school board meeting to ask questions, as they may be asking on behalf of a neighbor or church member, due to the value some cultures place on communities as an extension of the family. *We are our brother's keeper.* We want to encourage the reflexivity of educators to look at their actions and how they are actively advancing equity-centered SEL. By demonstrating empathy to ALL families, setting positive goals for ALL children, and maintaining positive relationships with ALL community members; we will meet this pivotal moment.

SEL AND THE BLACK CHILD

By **Michele Myers, PhD**

Clinical Associate Professor,
UofSC College of Education



From the scholarly literature, we are cognizant that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Some educators believe that mastery of these skills can guarantee a child's success in school and in life.

Consequently, I offer the following challenge: SEL is ineffective for the Black child when it is blinded to the systemic and racist practices (as revealed by increasing Black-White achievement gaps, over-referrals to special education, excessive suspensions, under-referrals to gifted education and honors courses, and excessive policing of Black bodies) that are evident in schools. The Black child cannot be helped with SEL prevention and intervention methods when SEL fails to acknowledge and/or discounts the assaults the Black child experiences daily.

We know that children learn when their hearts are opened, engaged, and filled with purpose. We also know that children tend to learn better when the curriculum is meaningful and relevant to their lived experiences.

Building on these key principles of how children learn, I offer the following ideas regarding SEL and the Black child:

1. We must build positive relationships with children that fully honor their humanity.
2. We are cultural beings and do not turn our cultures on and off when we enter the walls of a school. Schools should become places where the Black child's culture is seen as an asset and not a deficit.
3. Schools must acknowledge the systemic biases in our country and use SEL as a tool for social justice and racial equity.
4. We as professionals should proactively participate in ongoing professional development to become culturally competent.
5. It is not enough to be nonracist. Schools should be spaces where anti-racist policies and practices are foundational.

LESSONS FROM THE BLACK PANTHER: FINDING STRENGTH IN A STORM

By **Jarvais Jackson, M.Ed.**

Director, UofSC Center for the Education
and Equity of African American Students



The Black Panther, a fictional Marvel character, came to life in the 2018 release of the film of the same name. Staged in Wakanda, a country of peace, wealth, and love, this movie gave many people, particularly Black people, a sense of hope, joy, belonging, and a utopian place that we dream one day might become real. People around the world flocked to theaters to watch it.

Amongst the powerful imagery and careful tribute to many African countries was the main character, the protagonist, the hero, the Black Panther—T'challa. As the story unfolded, we learned about T'challa's strength, leadership, and dedication to his people and what was right.

Chadwick Boseman's recent death was a blow to this sense of hope that many gained from the Black Panther. Still, we can learn lessons from his life. Chadwick died from colon cancer, an illness with which he was diagnosed in 2016. Since the time of his diagnosis, he acted in several film roles including that of the Black Panther. Although he was dealing with a disease that he knew would one day likely prove fatal, he stood tall and delivered to so many people the various lessons taught by sharing powerful stories. Chadwick was going through a *storm*, but he did not allow it to deter him from his *purpose*.

That is the lesson I hope that we as educators, parents, communities, and students get from his life and death. No matter the circumstance or issue, push through and continue toward your purpose. Don't allow life's happenings to take you down. Don't allow your struggles to distract you. In the movie, the Black Panther received his powers from a heart-shaped herb. I challenge you to find the heart-shaped herb in your life and continue to show your Black Panther strengths through the toughest times or when others need you.

THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES: WORKING WITH LATINX FAMILIES AND BEING A LATINA WITH A FAMILY

By Myriam E. Torres, PhD

Director, Consortium for Latino
Immigration Studies & Clinical Associate
Professor, UofSC Arnold School of Public Health



We, Hispanics, Latinos, or Latinx (or any term each one of us most identify with), comprise almost 20% of the U.S. population and 6% of the population in South Carolina. As you know, we are a very diverse group of people. We, or our ancestors, come from different parts of the world, have different cultures and languages, are represented across all occupations, and bring with us different and multifaceted life experiences. The growth of the Latino population in the U.S. is due more to births than to immigration and is, in general, younger than any other race or ethnic group in the U.S., with approximately 60% of Latinos being younger than 34 years old.

Like any human being, we have multiple strengths. One is raising our children with the possibility of being bilingual and bicultural. Some of us add more languages to the mix with the understanding that learning languages should start in infancy to avoid the difficulties of mastering them when we are older. We are hardworking, loyal, and most of all, good people who want to help others and raise our children with strong values. Our children mean the world to us, so we want to do what is in our power to support them. Furthermore, we are family-oriented and, in cases where our extended families do not live in the U.S., we maintain relationships through use of cell phones and social media. We talk with our multi-generational relatives regularly and ask for advice raising our children and navigating the new culture.

We also encounter some challenges. Many of us are not fluent in English - not because we do not want to learn the language, but because we are unable to attend classes due to our work hours and childcare needs, among other reasons. The school systems where we come from are different than the educational system in the U.S. We are ready to support any school activities our children have, but sometimes we are not aware of what is happening because we get information in English and do not know exactly what to do. Still, we appreciate the school's patience in explaining school routines and activities and make an extra effort to communicate in our home language. Finally, we are very grateful to all educators and helpers who are trying to work with us, so our children can be successful in the United States!

THERE IS NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CROSS-SECTOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY TO MEET EVERY CHILD'S SEL NEEDS

By Alyssa Raygoza, M.Ed.

Graduate Assistant, ALL4SC



By Jennifer Harrist, M.Ed.

Project Manager, ALL4SC



NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

Life in 2020 is nothing like normal. The emergency of an ongoing pandemic has traumatized communities across the country, and there is an urgency to protect our students at all costs. The protective response to COVID-19 has hit our nation's education system with unforeseen circumstances impeding a return to school for the 2020-21 school year. Without hesitation, we must take great strides in making the lives of children a leading priority, ensuring that we assist in building resiliency to look past current state of affairs. In a [recent study](#) conducted by faculty and students of UofSC, the majority of South Carolina teachers interviewed told of the need to preserve students' well-being and zero-in on their social emotional needs.

However, doing that alone is a very tall order for teachers who are inundated with countless responsibilities and are already overworked. [ALL4SC – Accelerating Learning and Leadership in South Carolina](#) – is at the forefront partnering with school districts, communities, and experts at the UofSC to develop, implement, and marshal the assets of a research university to support a whole-child model of teaching, learning, and caring. This university-assisted strategy focuses on the transformation of South Carolina's schools and communities that educators and community members deem critical, such as meeting the social and emotional needs of our youth.

In partnership with United Way of the Midlands and National University's Harmony and Inspire social-emotional learning tools, ALL4SC is developing a cross-sector social and emotional learning (SEL) community to support students, teachers, and families. This [pilot program](#) will provide training and on-going professional development to educators and before-/after-school service providers around evidence-based practices to support students and families at both school and home.

Over the next two years, ALL4SC aims to expand this partnership to additional counties and schools across South Carolina, with a goal to provide evidence based SEL practices for every student, family, and teacher. Because teachers and families are the backbone to every child's education, it is important to move the daily practice of social-emotional learning out of the formal environment of the classroom and into everyday life.