

Review of School Counselors' Post-Pandemic Support of Students with Social-Emotional Learning Challenges

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Abstract: In 2020, the world faced a new normal because of the global COVID-19 Pandemic. Every nation had to make difficult decisions to protect its citizens and save its economy. Institutions, including education, suffered greatly. The Pandemic fundamentally altered the educational experience worldwide due to the shift to and from online learning (Atwell et al., 2021). School counselors became the primary intermediary between teachers, parents, administrators, and students. School counselors had to address many concerns and develop best practices in advocating for students, especially students with Social-emotional learning (SEL) needs, to establish an environment for students to flourish by setting an academic tone and designing effective school counseling programs to improve student outcomes. This literature review highlights the role of school counselors, the process and key components of SEL, and challenges faced by counselors during the Pandemic.

Keywords: school counselors, Social-emotional learning, COVID-19 (Pandemic), best practices

The Roles of School Counselors

School counselors are said to be the only individuals in the building with the training and competency to support the mental health needs of nearly 20% of students who suffer from mental illness at some point through their school-age years (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) defines a school counselor as a certified/licensed educator who improves student success for all students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses academics, careers, and social-emotional development (ASCA, 2017). The school counselor, whose position history commenced in the early 1900s, was intended to transition students from school to the labor force (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) defines a school counselor as a certified/licensed educator who improves student success by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses academics, careers, and social-emotional development (ASCA, 2017). School counseling helps individuals, through their efforts, develop their potential for personal and social happiness and growth (Parankimalil, 2015). It typically includes practices such as being more preventative, developmental, and intellectually operable (Parankimalil, 2015).

The counselor's goals are to lead, endorse, and collaborate to advance parity and access for all scholars by linking their school counseling design to the school's academic objectives and development strategy (American School Counselors Association [ASCA], Association, 2023). According to the American School Counselors Association (ASCA), School counselors are expected to uphold the ethical and professional standards of ASCA and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: define, deliver, manage, and assess (Association ASCA, 2023). Other attributes of school counselors, as advocates for students, are that they help all students with academic achievement strategies, manage their emotions, and regularly incorporate their interpersonal skills. Further support for students is provided as the school counselor assists them with planning for other levels of education and future careers. School counselors also have responsibilities in the classroom by providing lessons based on student achievement guidelines. Short and long-term counseling is provided for students, and they collaborate with families, teachers, the community, and administrators to support their success. School counselors' duties include advocating for students at individual education plan meetings and establishing student-focused meetings with other stakeholders. School counselors support the rationale of the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) domain to assist students with developing a mindset and behaviors for the students' success at all grade levels, enhance the learning process, and create a culture of academic readiness.

School counselors have the requisite educational background and skill set to use group counseling interventions within school settings to meet an array of student developmental needs (ASCA, 2019). This aspect can be bolstered as the ideal situation for students to adopt the behaviors of others, a behavior model of social learning theory, as proposed by Albert Bandura (2023). McLeod (2023) emphasized the significance of observing, modeling, and imitating behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions. The benefits of group counseling programs include addressing challenges involving aggressive behaviors toward other students, anger management, social skills, interpersonal skills, and communication (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2000).

School counselors are trained to address various student concerns, both current and anticipated, exaggerated after a crisis such as COVID-19, specifically to meet standards set by the ASCA, the Council of Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination, and Council of Accreditation of Education Programs. Similar to mental health programs, school counselors from CACREP-accredited school counseling programs are instructed in many of the same courses, such as human growth and development, multicultural, assessments for diagnostic and intervention, group counseling, and theories and techniques (CACREP, 2016, Section 2.f).

ASCA (2005) speaks to some of the resources school counselors can utilize, such as individual planning, guidance curriculum, and individual and group counseling, along with a well-implemented system of support delivery systems to increase support for students demonstrating at-risk behaviors (ASCA, 2005). School counselors are responsible for implementing curriculum, which can be used for adolescents to help coordinate important resources inside and outside the school and instruct students coping strategies for dealing with stress, conflict, and peer pressure that may result from their parental relationships as part of SEL support responsibilities.

School Counselors and the Pandemic

As a result of the pandemic, it is reported that 87% of public schools reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted student socio-emotional development during the 2021–2022 school year, according to data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Similarly, 84% of public schools agreed or strongly agreed that students' behavioral development has also been negatively impacted. Specifically, respondents attributed increased incidents of classroom disruptions from student misconduct (56%), rowdiness outside of the classroom (48%), acts of disrespect towards teachers and staff (48%), and prohibited use of electronic devices (42%) to the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). As a result of the historic COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most stressful periods in students', parents', and educators' lives, schools were facing unprecedented concerns with mental health and behavioral challenges related to the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, and as students return to school.

Worldwide, students experienced the demand of government lockdowns, which led to social isolation, home challenges, death, and sickness, and other uncertainties. Additionally, students experienced mental health challenges such as depression, sleep deprivation, and anxiety, which in turn could adversely affect students' motivation for academic success and create behavioral challenges in schools (London & Ingram, 2018; Talmus, 2019).

The COVID-19 encounter required school counselors to think creatively and adapt their delivery of services in new, yet still meaningful, ways (Mariani et al., 2022). Understanding the unpleasant SEL nuisances due to COVID-19 and the impact on the student community must be defined. Identifying how support for middle school transitioning may help to employ more SEL program options to help students navigate to the next education level, assess the feasibility of what is necessary to avoid educators and parents working in silos and employ opportunities for building more resilient stakeholders for their students under collective management. Schools must clarify their position by developing and cultivating essential life skills, such as social-emotional skills.

As education experts reported, students have severe behavior problems post-COVID-19 at a rate of 56% (Schwartz, 2022). Their concern is the mental health and social-emotional well-being of their students. Drawing parallels between the most effective strategies required to assist students in determining the most effective skills needed to improve students social and emotional aptitudes and constructive human attributes like self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, strategies for SEL learning, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making that support academics and are life-long aids as outlined by (Schonert-et al., 2015), it is most critical.

Social-Emotional Learning

Education and human development have an inherent component called SEL. It is how young people and adults acquire and apply comprehension, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy characters, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals. According to Jones and Bouffard (2012), SEL can be broadly defined as “a set of skills that individuals need to succeed in schooling, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship” (p. 4). Moreover, young people can learn to empathize with others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. In the 21st century, schools must emphasize the significance of developing knowledgeable, responsible, and caring students who can work well with others, respect diversity, and possess social and emotional skills to support harmonious exchange within our society. Most importantly, SEL is the catalyst that helps to advance educational equity and excellence through necessary school initiatives. Implementing SEL initiatives is crucial for the personal success of the students (Atwell et al., 2021). Additional attributes of SEL are that it supports a positive culture and climate throughout the school if effectively integrated across its curriculum. Parents and educators recognize social learning as a benefit for students to engage in learning and preparation in and beyond the classroom. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic era and virtual classroom experience, students' behaviors shifted due to social distance learning (Atwell, 2021).

Social Emotional Learning during the Pandemic

As a result of the pandemic, public school leaders collectively agreed that there has been a destructive impact on their students' socio-emotional and behavioral development. Eighty-seven percent of public schools agreed or strongly agreed that the pandemic has negatively impacted students' socio-emotional development. Students demonstrated increased deterioration in behavioral development during the 2021–2022 school year (compared to a typical school year before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic) in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects. The behaviors attributed to these SEL concerns are:

- Classroom climate interferences from student misconduct (56 percent),
- Acts of disrespect towards teachers and staff (48 percent)
- Disruptiveness outside of the classroom (48 percent)
- Prohibited use of electronic devices (42 percent) (NCES, 2022)

This concern is also recognized by Education Weekly Research (2021) survey results that an increasing number of secondary school leaders are joining elementary school leaders in recognizing the need for evidence-based SEL programming (Education Weekly, 2021).

Between March 2020 and September 2021, there has been a dramatic SEL support increase in Grades 6-8 from 38% to 56% support nationwide; school districts have spent \$530 million between 2019 and 2020 for SEL, which has since increased to \$765 million from 2020 to 2021 (Rosen, 2022). Criticism about the systems-level understanding of historical disadvantages is increasingly absent from traditional SEL programming (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). As schools and districts determine how best to assist their middle school students' transition and staff mentorship through SEL, it is essential to note that its results are best experienced through the school counselor's guidance. The limitations in the discussion of SEL support lie in the evidence-based effectiveness of SEL programs, which have yet to be consistently evaluated.

Countless evidence-based SEL programs have been developed and implemented in schools, ranging from universal whole-class programs to targeted programs for at-risk children or those with skill deficits (Carroll et al., 2020). Adoption and support of SEL programs are due to a growing evidence base that demonstrates the important benefits of SEL programs on the development of social-emotional skills, academic functioning, mental health, and overall health and well-being of students (Dowling et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2017). In one meta-analysis of school-based universal SEL interventions, findings revealed positive outcomes of SEL related to improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). In another, more recent meta-analysis that examined the longer-term impact of exposure to SEL programming in the school revealed continued long-term benefits following program participation. Benefits were evident for social and emotional competencies, academic performance, prosocial behavior, and prosocial attitudes months and sometimes years after participating in a SEL program. Notably, findings also provide evidence that increases in social and emotional skills that result from program participation have the potential to influence psychosocial health positively (Taylor et al., 2017). While many studies have examined the effectiveness of various SEL programs and interventions, Wallender et al. (2020) note that a need still exists for research on the outcomes of universally implemented SEL programs.

Universal programs are a critical component of a multi-tiered support system, as they will have the most incredible reach and potential to prevent future problems. Evidence for the effectiveness of universal approaches to SEL is vital to inform efforts to promote the psychosocial functioning and mental well-being of students. Given the critical period of early adolescence, studies that focus on efforts to promote the development of social and emotional competencies in middle school students through SEL programs are of particular importance.

CASEL (2020) is vested in ensuring that educators and School Counselors continue to identify with the needs of students and that research is shared as to how to address the necessary self-management tools. Numerous studies have visibly represented a connection between social-emotional assistance and academics, which might augment sponsorship from school administrators, teachers, and support staff who are relevant to the application and accomplishment of such programs and help obtain vital support from parents and the community (Durlak et al., 2011). It is important to recognize that ample evidence exists to support the opinion that authentic social-emotional skills sanction prosocial behaviors at school, reducing the quantity of pupil and educator consideration focused on misconduct and permitting for better concentration on education (Bakosh et al., 2016; Cipriano et al., 2019). The most coherent skills that allowed the prospect for a capable social climate, letting learners experience protection and acceptance, all aspects favorable to the learning development (Charlton et al., 2021; Top et al., 2016) and promote student engagement are outlined in this research (DiPerna et al., 2002). SEL programs offer an opportunity for middle school students to shift their skills with this program, which teaches SEL skills through lessons with embedded content. Also, approaches demonstrated in social-emotional learning programs can be applied to rational undertakings essential to learning, such as critical thinking skills (Arslan & Demirtas, 2016). The augmentation of social-emotional skills relates to a reduced echelon of adopting symptomology, such as anxiety and depression, which can present obstacles to the learning process, such as missed school days and attention (Westhoven, 2022; Greenberg et al., 2017; Hennessey & Humphrey, 2019; Webb et al., 2019; Zolkoski et al., 2021).

There are a dense number of evidence-based SEL programs that have been enveloped and implemented in schools, ranging from universal whole-class programs to targeted programs for at-risk children or those with skill deficits (Carroll et al., 2020). Adoption and support of SEL programs are due to a growing evidence base that demonstrates the important benefits of SEL programs on the development of social-emotional skills, academic functioning, mental health, and overall health and well-being of students (Dowling et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2017). In one meta-analysis of school-based universal SEL interventions, findings revealed positive outcomes of SEL related to improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). In another, more recent meta-analysis that examined the longer-term impact of exposure to SEL programming in the school, findings revealed continued long-term benefits following program participation. [RA1] Benefits were evident for social and emotional competencies, academic performance, prosocial behavior, and prosocial attitudes months and sometimes years after participating in an SEL program.

Notably, findings also provide evidence that increases in social and emotional skills that result from program participation have the potential to influence students' psychosocial health positively (Taylor et al., 2017). While many studies have examined the effectiveness of various SEL programs and interventions, Wallender et al. (2020) note that a need still exists for research on the outcomes of universally implemented SEL programs. Universal programs are a critical component of a multi-tiered support system, as they will have the most significant reach and potential to prevent future problems. Evidence for the effectiveness of universal approaches to SEL is essential to inform efforts to promote the psychosocial functioning and mental well-being of students.

Social-Emotional Learning and Child Development

The psycho-social development of children contributes to an adolescent's ability to manage and regulate emotions and establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships (Hayden-Wade & Leslie, 2006). This matters because there is a valid necessity to cultivate the advancement of social and emotional aptitudes and constructive human attributes such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, strategies for social-emotional learning, five relationship skills, and responsible decision-making that support academics and are life-long aids (Kimberly et al., 2015[RA2]). Studies have found supporting evidence that students embody internalized feelings to cope with extreme stress; another aspect and significance of social and emotional learning (SEL) is how it grows in today's public schools worldwide. Most teachers concur that students' social and emotional demands must be addressed in the learning process.

Factors that set the premise for how the SEL research information affects the mental pallet could alter behaviors, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. Also validating this stance is authored by Andrew Gary Darwin Holmes, as reflected in his writing, "Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of its Influence and Place in Quantitative Research - A New Researcher Guide." Holmes (2020) addressed the reflexive approach, which suggests that, rather than trying to eliminate their effect, researchers should acknowledge and disclose their selves in their work, aiming to understand their influence on and in the research process. Many researchers have stressed the importance of outlining and committing to strategies for students through SEL support for Middle schoolers when transitioning to high school. The Social Theory and Quantitative research help identify, curate, and provide in studying SEL strategies.

As humans develop over a lifespan, psycho-social development involves emotions, personality, and social relationships. Since COVID-19 caused a few social and emotional disparities in our youth, schools have suffered a significant setback due to the behaviors of our students in the United States. Studies state that SEL instruction can become harmful, and studies have indicated that the most effective SEL programs incorporate culture (Jones et al., 2018). According to studies on SEL, it is an essential aspect of education responsiveness (Jones et al., 2018). [RA1] Concerning those educators who do not leverage their expertise, student support needs to be more timely, individually adaptable to individuals, feasible to implement, and place-based needs that positively affect student outcomes (Jones, 2014). Today's student body is more socially and emotionally focused on how they feel about themselves and think about one another, affecting how they learn in school. For some students, the adjustment period is insignificant and short-lived; for others, it is long-lasting.

Social and emotional learning allows students to build on their innate ability to understand themselves and others, their emotions, needs, points of reference, and others' feelings and perspectives (Taylor & Larson, 1999). There is data, but little research on pre- and post-COVID-19 effects on School Counselors' support for parents of eighth-grade students with SEL learning challenges.

Social-Emotional Learning and Best Practices

SEL employs the perspective of ensuring equitable learning for marginalized students. This is where school counselors can help address the root cause of student and adult engagement by recognizing the critical challenges of power, privilege, prejudice, discrimination, and social justice (Jagers et al., 2019).

The critical components of transitioning to this position are vital principles and classroom-based strategies that centralize and reinforce the necessary core SEL Competencies. Students experience many crises, including social, political, and ethical drawbacks. Critical components for offering supportive measures and mentorship for students are to recognize the following on behalf of the students. Jones et al. (2020) recognize equitable postures such as:

- (1.) Ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments that are respectful and affirm diverse identities.
- (2.) Acknowledging and including student cultural differences and values
- (3.) Encouraging positive identity
- (4.) Promoting student agency and voice
- (5.) Recognize bias, power, and inequality that require student support and address them. (p. 1)

All of these are necessary assertions for the SEL-inspired assistance for students.

Some enhanced opportunities are through explicit instructions, which allow social and emotional skills and attitudes to be acquired through instructions and developmental practices that can be enhanced through SEL in addition to contextual and culturally receptive ways. Other techniques are for students to learn cooperatively and through project-based learning. Integrating academic curricula such as language arts, math, science, social studies, health, and performing arts is an integral part. Active and profound forms of learning to direct students' practices and mastery of new skills, focusing on engaging curricula that directly emphasize SEL competency's [RA1] development and employing curricula that emphasize competencies development for SEL and explicitly define and target specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge. [RA2]

The most effective way to achieve best practices for middle school students is to consistently provide ongoing planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement for all community students. Communities refer to all families, caregivers, schools, and their classrooms for self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, all under the umbrella of SEL. Schools must create a climate for all cultures, engaging all students throughout their building. Developing authentic partnerships with families and caregivers is crucial. All of these solidify the measurement of the success of SEL help and students meeting the benchmarks.

School counselors play a fundamental role in all students' academic, career, and socio-emotional development (Chandler et al., 2018). School counselors build connections with their students to understand how to influence them better. School counselors must recognize, be educated, and comprehend how to support African American learners. School Counselors are rarely, if ever, intentionally taught to recognize, assemble, and apply the depths and sources of African American students (Williams et al., 2014). Understanding the needs of all students will allow the school counselor to provide reliable assistance and encourage beneficial well-being (Rumsey et al., 2018). School Counselors can utilize resources and approaches to assist all students.

Previous studies have demonstrated that SEL effectively improves the school climate, builds relationships, and increases connectedness (Hunter, 2020). Also noted is the previous transition experience from elementary to secondary (middle and high), both of which can affect students socially and emotionally, which at periods can affect how successful the student will be in school.

It can indicate how well the student will make friends or whether the student will be academically successful. SEL is imperative during this time, as it will help address the whole child. Interventions should be designed to understand and address the child's socio-emotional, behavioral, physical, and cognitive development (Walsh et al., 2014). Studies on SEL support the need for gender-related interventions. To support and meet the socio-emotional needs of middle school students, developmental differences must be considered (Liu et al., 2016). Understanding students' needs allows the school counselor to provide better support. Sometimes, this relationship extends past the student, including the entire family. This connection allows the counselor to understand the family dynamics, increasing the ability to provide responsive services to the student and the family (Beierle, 2011). With all the available support provided by the school counselor, socio-emotional development can occur, which will support addressing the whole child.

One of the central aspects of examining SEL is the effects of intervention for middle school students that teach social skills and managing approaches to reinforce middle school students' educational journeys (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). As stated here, the main goal is to determine whether post-COVID-19 pandemic SEL is best utilized in our middle school-based intervention program (McCormick et al., 2015). Student adolescents' experiences vary, and they are vulnerable to emotional upheaval because of biological and hormonal changes occurring in this phase of their lives (Rahman, 2018). It is unfathomable to think there are no transition concerns among eighth-grade students transitioning to high school. When armed with the right tools, transitioning students can develop skills that will help them survive the process and give a greater outlook on collaborating with their parents and school counselors.

According to Denham (2018), students do better when their environments are united and receptive to their evolving needs. Scholars recognize that adolescent behavior is more complex at the high school level than the middle school level, which is one of the significant reasons behavior challenges should be addressed before the transition. Behavioral transgressions carry higher risks socially, academically, and within the community (Bohanon-Edmonson et al., 2004). Students who bully, for example, may experience an initial boost in their social influence but become primarily ostracized by the school community once they are reprimanded (Bohanon-Edmonson et al., 2004). Various situations that may occur promote conditions such as loss of academic days due to suspension or expulsion, which may put students off track for graduation. Adolescents who engage in frequent misbehavior are likelier to drop out of school than their peers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Greene, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Educators agree that SEL practices encourage students to achieve because learning is a social process, and school is the perfect platform for a highly social place. Social learning is a known event among adolescents, which means students can use their relational skills, which are great for addressing conflicts and behavior challenges, as a learning tool. The success with this life span strategy is because students had collaboration, communication, and communication practices through implementing SEL under the school's guidance. The past COVID-19 pandemic caused a loss of in-person instruction and peer social time. Now that the pandemic is over, school settings that have implemented SEL help students reduce emotional stress, anxiety, and depression.

The classroom is a great climate to practice the SEL tool; educators can design a curriculum where skill-building helps students learn to be self-aware and respectful of others. Intervention approaches exist versus suspension as the only resolution. Students are aware of expectations academically and behaviorally. Students can describe and label their feelings, adapt to transitions, communicate their frustration, and use the strategies taught. ASCA recommends that 80% of a school counselor's time be spent on providing students direct and indirect services. School counseling programs that follow this ASCA model assist the school by creating and delivering classroom lessons and providing individual and group counseling (Randick et al., 2018), while focusing on students' mental health and academic success after suffering from months of a crisis. year of college.

School Counselors can develop action plans aligning with the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards and include an evaluation to ensure effectiveness (ASCA, 2019; Dack & Merlin-Knoblich, 2019). They also, with school counseling support, understand SEL's goals for their grade and steadily improve developmentally. Educators state that students learn better when they are given tools to regulate their emotions. In addition to planning academic curricula, efficient middle schools emphasize social/emotional enhancement, life skills, and engagement.

Secondary school leaders must look for methods to promote a more student-friendly, responsive, and nurturing environment (Ellerbrock et al., 2014; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Schools that do not provide supportive transitioning programs may experience a loss in student achievement and lower graduation rates (Akos et al., 2015; Alspaugh, 2010). Alspaugh (2010) examined the significance of achievement loss associated with school-to-school transitions.

Citing prior academic achievement is a reliable predictor of future academic success. Smith (2005) affirmed that a student's achievement loss during the middle to high school transition is associated with attrition or lack of success encountered by one during their first year of college.

The Pandemic Challenge

The pandemic posed a significant challenge to mental health. The Center on Reinventing Public Education presented a national survey of 13- to 19-year-olds in April 2020 after schools closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. 36% stated they were concerned with their emotional health, and 40% felt adverse effects on various cognitive and emotional health outcomes, including their ability to concentrate, make decisions, and feel happy.

According to previous pre-COVID-19 research, approximately one-half of youth in the United States experienced a diagnosable mental disorder at some time in their lives, and around one-fourth experience a diagnosable disorder with severe functional impairment (Merikangas et al., 2010). Given the challenges associated with early adolescence, middle school students may be particularly at risk for developing or worsening mental health problems. Evidence suggests that virtually half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by mid-adolescence (Kessler et al., 2005). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that, beyond diagnosable mental disorders, students who do not experience complete mental health are at risk for adverse outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected more than 1.7 billion learners. More exploration is required as to the visible link between desired social-emotional help and academics, which might be amplified through sponsorship from school administrators, teachers, and support staff, who are pertinent to the application and success of such curricula and dynamic assistance for all stakeholders on behalf of the students.

Conclusion

The federal government proclaims the status of elevated academic ethics and holds schools liable by carefully gauging academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). However, youth devote a countless deal of their day-to-day lives to the school setting, and there is an increasingly identified need and demand for instruction for social-emotional skills in the school system (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Top et al., 2016; Wallace & Palmer, 2017). Schools have been progressively seen as alternative parents of a sort for children, often giving physical and mental first aid services in addition to the academic achievement that has been intensely focused on, especially since the federal passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (Jackson, 2012; Sheridan et al., 2014; Wood & Brownhill, 2018).

One of the most prominent tools school counselors use is their ability to support their students and enlist their ability to influence students to identify robust personal features and capacities for improvement. A benefit of SEL programming is that it will facilitate positive growth and development that affords middle school students understandings and prospects that (a) align with their current developmental needs by honoring their increasing desire for identity, autonomy, and acceptance; (b) prepare students with knowledge and skills in anticipation of future developmental needs; and (c) promote increased fit between students and the educational and social environments in which they are embedded (Yeager et al., 2018).

Further inquiries can be made through research about what students may experience regarding shifts in their grades and attendance. An evaluation of what occurs because of the new social opportunities, the more excellent choices for young students, and the pressures of fitting in and finding their comfortable peer groups.

The literature on students with social-emotional learning challenges post-pandemic includes physiological development, hormonal changes, modifications in the brain and sensory organs, adjustments in social skill sets, and family and school moves that must be addressed. Strategies to improve their mental health must be brought to the forefront. Reasonable thoughts and taking accountability for their actions are paramount in SEL. School counselors must recognize their responsibility in helping students understand that they have to shape their future as they guide their students intentionally.

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