



May 6, 2026

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Chair  
Senate Labor, HHS, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Subcommittee  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chair  
House Labor, HHS, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Subcommittee  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Ranking Member  
Senate Labor, HHS, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Subcommittee  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
House Labor, HHS, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Subcommittee  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Capito, Senator Baldwin, Representative Aderholt, and Representative DeLauro:

As the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee develops the U.S. Department of Education’s fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget, we the undersigned members of the national Leading with Social and Emotional Learning Coalition encourage you to provide funding for the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program at \$269,000,000 and provide continued support for social and emotional learning (SEL) grants within the program, in line with Senator Blumenthal and Representative Hayes’ Dear Colleague Letter requests.

Congress established the EIR program under section 4611 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015 to support and validate strategies for addressing the most persistent educational challenges to student success, especially the hurdles facing our nation’s highest need and most underserved students. In FY2020, Congress created a bipartisan Social and Emotional Learning and Whole Child Initiative through appropriations that included dedicated funding for grants for evidence-based, field-initiated innovations that address student social, emotional, and cognitive needs. Prior to FY2025, Congress had funded social and emotional learning grants within the EIR program since FY2020, starting during President Trump’s first term, when bipartisan report language specific to social and emotional learning was first included. We are asking for this report language to be reinstated.

- “Education Innovation and Research (EIR). – Within the total for EIR, and including continuation awards, the agreement includes \$87,000,000 to provide grants for social and emotional learning. To fulfill the set-asides, the agreement supports the prioritization of high-quality social and emotional learning proposals for both the early-and-mid-phase evidence tiers.”

## EIR Social and Emotional Learning Grant Examples

The EIR program has supported investments in social and emotional learning to improve student achievement and meet the social and emotional needs of students. These investments include grants that accelerate academic outcomes in specific subject areas; grants that provide teacher professional development to support student academic, social and emotional needs; grants focused on evidence-based strategies to address chronic absenteeism and improve school climate and student engagement; and grants that foster students' college and career readiness. As states work to improve literacy, attendance, and academic engagement, many have identified social and emotional learning as a key strategy to address these needs, benefiting from EIR SEL grants as a funding stream to develop, test, and scale innovative approaches. For example:

- **Tennessee** is working to increase students' literacy progress by using an evidenced-based tutoring strategy and fostering trusted and safe learning spaces for students through Tutor901: High-Impact Tutoring for High-Needs Students, which will serve an estimated 1,500 students.
- In **Alabama**, schools are using grant funds to increase 8th graders' social and emotional skills and improve their academic outcomes, as captured through attendance and course grades, to prepare them to successfully navigate the transition to high school.
- In **Ohio** and **Michigan**, funding supports Thinking Pro, a program intended to accelerate social, emotional, and academic development in high school English language arts classes. The program, which will serve an estimated 10,383 students, includes a specific focus on reading comprehension and critical thinking, among other things.
- An estimated 640 students in **Wisconsin, New York, California, Oklahoma** and **Washington** are participating in a Tier 2 reading intervention for middle school students who read below grade level. The program also integrates the use of positive behavioral supports to promote students' reading motivation.
- Partners in **Maine, West Virginia, and Illinois** are using the grants to improve social and emotional and math outcomes for high-need rural and urban students by developing both social and emotional skills and rigorous academic learning.
- School districts in **Tennessee** and **Washington State** are implementing a family-focused peer support model that addresses chronic absenteeism by working with families and coordinating supports that strengthen students' self-management, school connectedness, and academic engagement.
- Research Triangle Institute in **North Carolina** is implementing the Speak to the Potential, Ability, and Resilience Inside Every Kid (SPARK), a mentoring intervention program for middle-school students being used in **Illinois, Virginia, and Texas** to help about 4,400 students develop vital social and emotional regulation skills. SPARK has been found to have positive effects on communication, decision-making, problem solving, emotional regulation and resilience.
- Teachers in **Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma** and **Kansas** receive training to support 25,200 middle school students to use prosocial behavior and promote relationship skills. These students are more likely to have social and academic success, and their teachers are less likely to experience stress and burnout.
- Schools in rural **Alabama**, northern **California**, and **Texas** are building capacity for and training local coaches on a whole child model that aims to help 19,959 students develop social and emotional skills, increase academic engagement and achievement, reduce disciplinary incidents, and improve teacher-student relationships.

- Johns Hopkins University in **Maryland** is piloting and studying efforts to support educators in **Indiana** to equip schools with a set of specific and measurable strategies and actions that educators can use to increase an estimated 6,400 students’ school connectedness, with the ultimate goal of student academic achievement gains, completion rates, and declines in fighting and bullying.
- The **Oregon** Research Institute is investing in a project that addresses the chronic absenteeism crisis intensified by COVID-19 in **Nebraska** by embedding mentors into high-needs urban schools. These mentors provide continuous support to 682 at-risk students, focusing on improving attendance, academic performance, and social and emotional learning.
- In partnership with the Human Restoration Project in **Iowa**, educators in **Michigan** are receiving support to focus on interdisciplinary project-based learning and feedback-driven assessment centered on improving academic achievement, social and emotional well-being, and attendance for an estimated 600 students.
- Educators in **Illinois** are refining and implementing multi-tiered systems of support and positive behavior interventions and supports in an effort to improve 34,688 students’ academic achievement, well-being, and behavior.

### **Importance and Value of the EIR Model**

EIR social and emotional learning grants are critical for supporting high-need students—as defined by grantees based on the needs of the local communities they serve—to progress academically and socially, particularly as the needs of many students, educators and families remain elevated and overall academic progress remains stagnant.<sup>1</sup> Through EIR’s model, which requires rigorous evaluation and the dissemination and scaling of best practices, these critical investments benefit not only students in the states and districts in which they are being tested and implemented, but also students in states and districts nationwide. These insights are particularly crucial now, when our nation’s education sciences research and dissemination infrastructure has been deeply impacted by staffing and organizational changes.

### **The Evidence and Relevance of Social and Emotional Learning**

Decades of research demonstrate that social and emotional learning is critical for students’ academic and holistic success and plays a vital role in supporting child and youth mental health and well-being. A 2025 meta-analysis found that students who participate in social and emotional learning interventions for a full year saw their overall academic achievement improve nearly a full grade.<sup>2</sup> This builds on a 2023 meta-analysis including 424 studies involving 575,361 students, which found that students participating in social and emotional learning at schools had higher “school functioning,” including grades, test scores, attendance, homework completion, and engagement.<sup>3</sup> The analysis also found decreases among students in aggression and bullying, anxiety, stress, depression, and suicidality. Students also felt safer at schools, reporting higher levels of inclusion, connectedness and healthy relationships. In addition, cost-benefit research shows that for every dollar

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<sup>1</sup> NAEP report card: Reading. The Nation’s Report Card. [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/reading/2024/g4\\_8/?grade=8](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/reading/2024/g4_8/?grade=8)

<sup>2</sup> Ha, C., McCarthy, M. F., Strambler, M. J., & Cipriano, C. (2025). Disentangling the effects of social and emotional learning programs on student academic achievement across grades 1–12: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543251367769>

<sup>3</sup> Cipriano, Christina, et al. “The state of evidence for social and emotional learning: A contemporary meta-analysis of universal school-based SEL interventions.” *Child Development*, 94(5), 13 July 2023, pp. 1181-1204., <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13968>

spent on evidence-based SEL programs studied, on average, there is an \$11 return on investment.<sup>4</sup>

Recent research focuses on the role SEL plays in improving literacy outcomes. The 2024 NAEP data shows troubling trends in student progress and proficiency underscoring that we are at an inflection point in the United States that requires us to support each student to learn to read fluently and well. Current research demonstrates that learning environments and instruction that are supportive of students' social and emotional development and well-being are integral to student literacy development.<sup>5</sup> Supporting the five core competencies of social and emotional learning can support students' literacy development, and vice versa.<sup>6</sup> Now is not the time to abandon investment in evidence-backed strategies that help students learn to read, particularly as social and emotional competencies underpin key reading skills such as sustained attention to text, managing frustration with unfamiliar words, making meaning through problem-solving, and understanding characters' and authors' perspectives.

LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends 2024 suggests that employers are prioritizing hiring candidates with "soft skills" or "transferable skills that allow candidates to move nimbly across roles." Employers are also seeing increasing demand for skills that young people master through evidence-based social and emotional learning like problem-solving, adaptability, and collaboration.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, parents consistently express a desire for students to learn social and emotional skills. According to polling data, 88 percent of parents want their students to learn social and emotional skills such as respect, cooperation, perseverance, and empathy.<sup>8</sup>

Many districts have developed Portraits of a Graduate, which are vision documents that are a widely used strategy for articulating a shared vision of student success. A recent report found that relationship skills, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and workforce skills (i.e., skills highly requested by employers, such as communication and adaptability) appeared in more than 95 percent of district-level Portraits of a Graduate. These social and emotional skills frequently occurred alongside academic content knowledge and technical competencies, highlighting the inextricable link between these competencies and students' ability to execute on their academic knowledge in effective ways in work and future academic environments. District-level Portraits of a Graduate show strong alignment with employer priorities related to social and emotional competencies.<sup>9</sup>

Although progress has been made through investments to date, there is much more work to be done to ensure our students get the support they need to succeed. We appreciate the role that EIR social and emotional learning grants have made to implement and scale evidence-based social and emotional learning practices to support improved student achievement and look forward to seeing the impact of ongoing investment in years to come.

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<sup>4</sup> Clive Belfield et al., "The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning" (Teachers College, Columbia University, February 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Lee, C. & Ward, A. (2024). The Role of SEL in Improving Literacy Development Introductory Brief, <https://casel.org/role-of-sel-in-improving-literacy-development-introductory-brief/?view=1>

<sup>6</sup> Ward et al (2025) How Social and Emotional Learning Supports Student Literacy, Pre K – Grade 5, <https://casel.org/how-social-and-emotional-learning-supports-literacy-pre-k-grade-5/?view=1>

<sup>7</sup> LinkedIn. (2024, October). Global talent trends. LinkedIn Talent Solutions. <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/global-talent-trends>

<sup>8</sup> "New National Survey Shows Parents More Comfortable about COVID-19 Risks and Student Well-Being in Schools." National Parent Teacher Association, 26 June 2022,

<https://www.pta.org/home/About-National-Parent-Teacher-Association/PTA-Newsroom/news-list/news-detail-page/2022/06/17/new-national-survey-shows-parents-more-comfortable-about-covid-19-risks-and-student-well-being-in-schools>.

<sup>9</sup> Plate, R., Miller A., Schu C., Schwartz H., Meyers G., Tucker A. (2026) From Vision to Action: How Portraits of a Graduate Align Social and Emotional Competencies for Future Readiness.

<https://casel.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/CASEL-From-Vision-to-Action-Portraits-of-a-Graduate-report.pdf>

Thank you for carefully considering our request. We would be pleased to discuss the social and emotional learning grants within the EIR program as the appropriations process unfolds this year.

Sincerely,

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

All4Ed

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA)

American Psychological Association (APA)

Committee for Children (CFC)

EdTrust

The Education Collaboratory at Yale

Educators for Excellence (E4E)

Equip Our Kids!

Louisiana Children's Museum

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

National Equity Project (NEP)

National Parents Union (NPU)

Respectful Ways

School Social Work Association of America (SSWA)

Social Emotional Learning Alliance of California (SEL4CA)

Social Emotional Learning Alliance for New Mexico (SEL4NM)

Social Emotional Learning Alliance for the United States (SEL4US)



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