

The Jesse Lewis Empowering Educators Act

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an approach to classroom instruction that recognizes the immense importance of emotional intelligence. Integrating concepts into the classroom related to self-awareness, emotion regulation, interpersonal skills, and responsible behavior can raise student achievement and promote positive social relationships.

An extensive body of research has proven the effectiveness of SEL programs. For example, a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs with a combined sample of more than 270,000 students showed that students scored 11 percentile points higher on standardized achievement tests compared to peers not receiving SEL programming.¹ A separate study found that classrooms which have implemented SEL programming provide greater levels of emotional support for students.²

The importance of training educators in SEL concepts was also highlighted in the Final Report of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, which concluded that “Social-emotional learning... works best when it is a pervasive component of the school environment that informs the culture of the school and the behavior of adult educators.” The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission was established to make recommendations intended to reduce the probability of another tragedy such as the one which claimed the lives of 26 brave Newtown residents, including six-year-old Jesse Lewis. This bill is named in honor of Jesse.

The Jesse Lewis Empowering Educators Act would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) so that existing professional development funding (Title II) could be used to train teachers and principals in SEL concepts. The legislation would:

- Define both “social and emotional learning” and “social and emotional learning programming”.
- Add training in “social and emotional learning programming” as an allowable State activity for Title II-A funding.
- Add training in “social and emotional learning programming” as an allowable LEA activity for Title II-A subgrant funding.

Congress must provide educators with the tools and training they need to integrate SEL concepts into their classrooms.

¹ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432.

² Hagelskamp, C., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2013). Improving classroom quality with the RULER approach to social and emotional learning: Proximal and distal outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51, 530-543.