

[Social and Emotional Development Programs Deserve a Place in Federal Education Policy, Brookings' Price Asserts](#)

Also improves academics for low-income, minority youths; Prevents dropping out; Cost effective

As Congress continues its work on reauthorizing the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, policymakers should address a crucial aspect of K-12 school improvement that has long been given short shrift by legislators and educators – the social and emotional development of children who chronically lag behind – according to a new paper by Brookings Nonresident Senior Fellow Hugh Price.

In “[Social and Emotional Development: The Next School Reform Frontier](#),” Price points to the educational successes since *A Nation at Risk* was published 3 decades ago, but notes that progress in urban districts that largely serve low-income and minority students is still stalled. He calls for an entirely new education model for poor and minority students who still lag far behind their white counterparts.

“When it comes to low-income and minority students, the bottom line, after all these years, all the interventions, all the testing and tough love, and all the investment, is encouraging yet still underwhelming....I am convinced that the futility of the prevailing approaches to ‘educating’ disengaged youngsters cries out for fresh thinking and strategies,” he writes. “Tweaking customary methods that repeatedly fall short will result in the continued ‘miseducation’ of youngsters who have dialed out of traditional schooling. Accordingly, I call for an entirely new paradigm, namely public academies devoted explicitly and unequivocally to the academic and social development of youngsters who are struggling mightily in school and in life.

“Conventional public schools focused exclusively or predominantly on strictly scholastic objectives clearly are not attuned to their needs and do not work for them, much less serve their best interests... Some educators view social and emotional development as peripheral. Others lack the time or energy to address it because of unrelenting pressure to improve test scores as mandated under NCLB,” he writes.

Price, the former president and CEO of the National Urban League, a retired visiting professor at Princeton, and the author [Strugglers Into Strivers](#), points to prevention-oriented and youth development programs in school and out that promote youngsters’ social and emotional development (SEL). These well-researched interventions range from strengthening children’s social and emotional skills and “teaching” teachers to address their pupils’ social and emotional needs, to organizing entire schools – including faculty, staff and parents – to attend to the academic and social development of the children.

Another program he discusses is residential -- the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, which is a civilian intervention devoted to turning around the aspirations and life prospects of dropouts. ChalleNGe treats academic and social development as co-equal objectives. The 22-week residential operates in 27 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, serving 5,000 students annually. Since its inception in 1993, more than 121,000 teenagers have graduated who had been disenchanted with school, truant, exhibited disruptive and violent behavior, showed disrespect for teachers, experiencing family conflict and poverty, parental and personal substance abuse, drug-dealing, gang membership, and physical abuse. Rigorous academic research by MDRC and RAND has found that the program not only boosted academic, employment and earnings outcomes, but also helped participants break bad

habits and profoundly improve their attitudes and self-confidence, while generating benefits of almost three times total costs.

Overall, a recent Teachers College study shows that “for every dollar invested in SEL programs, there is a return of eleven dollars, a rate of economic return that would be the envy even of hedge funds,” Price notes.

“Wise federal, state and local policy should reflect the reality of America’s children who remain left far behind. The smartest way to jumpstart school improvement is, at long last, to give social and emotional development its due in education policy, appropriations and practice. Congress should bear these empirically-validated and academically compelling policies in mind as they reauthorize NCLB.”

“Of course parents, churches and communities bear primary responsibility for socializing children. But if in reality they are not up to it, what then? Consigning these youngsters to academic purgatory or, worse still, the criminal justice system serves neither society’s interests nor, obviously, theirs. Research and real-world experience demonstrate convincingly that investing in the academic and social development of youngsters left way behind pays welcome dividends. SEL deserves, at long last, a prominent place in school reform policy and practice,” he concludes.

[Read the full paper.](#)