Common Elements of School-based Social and Emotional Learning Programs: Program Review

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About the Provincial System Support Program

The Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health works with communities, service providers and other partners across Ontario to move evidence to action to create sustainable, system-level change. With offices in Toronto and across the province, PSSP is on the ground, collaborating with stakeholders to build a better system through our work in implementation, knowledge exchange, evaluation, information management, health equity and engagement. Visit www.camh.ca/pssp to learn more.

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Executive Summary

There is growing emphasis in Ontario's mental health and addictions system on development and adherence to evidence-based standards, quality client-centered care, and implementation of evidence-based programs that ultimately lead to better outcomes across the lifespan.

Ontario's comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy, Open Minds, Healthy Minds, articulates that school-based mental health capacity is a priority area (Government of Ontario, 2011). As such, momentum is building to support and foster learning environments that contribute to student mental health and wellbeing. For instance, School Mental Health ASSIST is a provincial implementation support team designed to help Ontario school boards promote student mental health and well-being. As Phase Two of Ontario's Strategy progresses, and the recommendations of the Provincial Leadership Advisory Council are used to inform provincial policy and program direction, the use of research methods, such as the common elements approach, can support the achievement of key system improvement goals.

There is a wide array of evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs delivered across school boards and considerable variability among SEL program focus, intervention design, composition, and content (Sklad, Dieskstra, DeRitter, & Ben, 2012). Variability poses a challenge as it can contribute to a lack of alignment with provincial goals and outcomes. Educators might not know which programs to use as there are competing views about which evidence-based programs work (Carthy Foundation and Max Bell Foundation, 2013). In addition, curricula can be costly to purchase, and implementation of each of these programs requires extensive training.

This report outlines the results of a program review conducted by Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) on behalf of School Mental Health (SMH) ASSIST. The purpose was to identify common elements across a series of evidence-based SEL programs targeted at youth. The results of this work can be used to inform the development and implementation of universal, evidence-based SEL programs in schools across Ontario.

Method

This review used a deductive content analysis approach to identify common elements of SEL programs. This type of analysis entails reviewing the content of a document and classifying the information into smaller categories. In order for an SEL program to be included in the review it had to target children kindergarten to Grade 8, be universal, and be evidenced-based. In total, 15 SEL programs were reviewed and coded into common elements. The common elements were then reviewed by experts in SEL.

Results

In the first phase, fourteen common elements across the SEL programs were identified through the review. In consultation with subject matter experts, these elements were further distilled into the following six final common elements:

1. **Identifying and Managing Emotions** (self-regulation and mind-body connection)

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2. **Relationship Skills** (listening, cooperation, friendship, empathy, conflict resolution, being respectful to others, recognizing emotions in others)
3. **Positive Motivation** (growth mindset, optimism, positive attitude, grit)
4. **Stress Management** (problem solving skills, relaxation, secret calming, mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, support seeking)
5. **Self-Confidence and Identity** (mattering, assertive communication, knowing oneself)
6. **Learning Skills and Executive Functioning** (goal-setting, problem solving skills, time management, study skills, perseverance, decision-making, organization skills)

Conclusion

Evidence-based SEL programs help students develop the resources needed to thrive and prevent future behavioral and emotional problems from developing. The application of common elements of evidence based SEL programs can support an aligned and coordinated approach to supporting student well-being. SEL can prevent students from developing future problems and help them reach their full potential. This program review identified six common elements that can be used as the basis for an intervention or used to train educators as part of quality improvement efforts in classroom settings.

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Introduction

Schools are a prime setting to implement mental health promotion activities, as students across many grades can automatically benefit from activities that are integrated into regular classroom schedules. School-based mental health promotion can help prevent future problems from developing and help students reach their full potential (Sklad et al., 2012; O'Mara & Lind, 2013).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the "process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] 2016). Evidence-based SEL programs in schools help students develop the resources needed to thrive and prevent future behavioural and emotional problems from emerging. Outcomes of SEL programs include significantly improved social and emotional skills, self-esteem, academic performance, resilience and coping skills, and social development (Clarke et al., 2015; Diekstra & Gravesteijn, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Kragg et al., 2006; Langer et al., 2015; Manion, Short & Ferguson, 2013; Payton et al., 2008; Sarcassani et al., 2015; Sklad et al., 2012; Stewart & Wang, 2012; Weare & Nind, 2011).

In order to support meaningful system level impact for student mental health and well-being in Ontario, SEL programs should be evidence-based and implemented with fidelity. Ideally, SEL programs should be connected and coordinated, ensuring that system-level outcomes can be measured. A common set of core evidence-based SEL elements could support the selection and implementation of SEL programs in school boards across Ontario.

A common elements approach entails identifying specific techniques or elements that occur across multiple evidence-based practices (EBPs) on a specific topic. Instead of using a specific manualized intervention in its entirety, common elements of SEL programs are taken together and used as an intervention (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, [CEBC], 2016; McLeod et al., 2016). This report presents the common elements identified in a review of 14 school-based SEL programs and a further categorization by subject matter experts.

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Method

A team of PSSP researchers, evaluators and knowledge brokers worked together to determine an appropriate methodology for identifying common elements of evidence-based SEL programs. The team adopted a deductive content analysis method.

Content analysis is the process of reviewing the content of text and classifying the information into smaller categories. According to Elo and Kyngäs, this process can either follow an inductive or a deductive process. For this review, a deductive analysis was chosen. Deductive analysis is a top-down approach that uses previous knowledge such as theories and literature reviews to structure the analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This was considered more appropriate for the current project than an inductive approach, as there was already a solid knowledge base to draw upon.

Program Selection

The content of the curricula of existing SEL programs was selected as the unit of analysis for this project. An initial list of 19 SEL evidence-based programs was developed based on the following:

- The subject matter expertise of Dr. Kathy Short, Ph.D., C.Psych, Director of School Mental Health (SMH) ASSIST and Clinical Child Psychologist.
- EENet's evidence brief on school-based SEL programs (EENet, 2016) which included an extensive evidence review by Clarke, Morreale, Field, Hussein, and Barry (2015).
- A provincial survey of non-profit sector activities which identified mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention interventions currently being delivered in Ontario (PSSP, 2016).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To be included in the review, a program had to meet the following criteria:

- The target audience is Kindergarten (K) – Grade 8
- The program targets a universal population of children, and includes a focus on addressing intrapersonal and/or interpersonal behaviours.
- The program is evidence-based as determined by its inclusion in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) directory, and/or the Canadian Best Practices Portal (CBPP).

Four programs were excluded from further analysis as they did not meet the inclusion criteria, leaving a total of 15 SEL programs for review.

Some programs reviewed were for a general population of students (not grade specific) while other programs had grade-specific curricula. Due to time and cost restraints, programs that offered individual curriculum by grade were grouped across three categories: K – Grade 2, Grades 3 – 5, and Grades 6 – 8. One curriculum from each program was randomly selected from each of these groups for analysis.

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The 15 programs (and specific curricula) selected for review were:

1. Al's Pals (general curriculum)
2. Positive Action (grades 4 and 6)
3. Tribes (elementary and middle school)
4. Coping Cat (curriculum for 6-13 years)
5. FRIENDS (Fun Friends – age 4-7; FRIENDS for Life – age 8-11)
6. Mind Up (Pre-K-2, grades 3-6 and grades 6-8)
7. Second Step (grades 1, 3, and 6)
8. Lions Quest (grades 2, 3, and 6)
9. The 4Rs (grades 2, 4, and middle school)
10. Life Skills (grades 3/4 and 6/7)
11. Zippy's Friends/ Passport: Skills for Life. Zippy's Friends and Passport: Skills for Life
12. Open Circle (grades 1 and 4)
13. The Incredible Years – Classroom Dinosaur (curriculum for 4-8 years)
14. Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (review of general program outline)
15. Good Behavior Game (general curriculum)

Manuals for 12 programs were either obtained by PSSP or provided by SMH ASSIST. Due to various challenges in procuring the actual curriculum, three programs were reviewed using publicly available information (The Incredible Years [The Incredible Years, 2013]; FRIENDS [The FRIENDS Programs International Foundation, 2015]; Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies [Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia, 2013]).

Reviewing and Coding of Curriculum Content for Each Program

The team consulted Dr. Kathy Short on the development of a categorization matrix. In deductive content analysis, the categorization matrix is a table with categories based on earlier work such as literature reviews or theories. Content from a document is reviewed and coded for correspondence with identified categories in the matrix (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). To inform the categorization matrix, Dr. Short identified three "everyday mental health" frameworks that outline SEL practice elements: (1) Towards Flourishing Everyday Strategies (Government of Manitoba, n.d.); (2) Aligned and Integrated Model for School Mental Health and Well-Being (SMH ASSIST, Internal Document); (3) Well Ahead (J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, n.d.).

The team reviewed these frameworks to identify SEL intervention elements and grouped similar types of elements. Overarching SEL categories (e.g. stress management/relaxation) were identified and a categorization matrix with nine preliminary categories was developed. These categories were used as the starting point for coding elements found in the SEL programs and were further refined as the program content was coded. The initial categories were also validated by cross-referencing with the CASEL social and emotional competencies. This step was undertaken to ensure that the common elements were articulated using standard SEL language (See Appendix A for the three everyday mental health frameworks and resulting categorization matrix).

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Two reviewers independently reviewed and coded the practice elements of one program, to test and validate a consistent review process. The validation process entailed comparing how each reviewer interpreted the practice elements and the categories that practice elements were assigned to in the categorization matrix. If it was unclear how information was coded, the reviewers discussed the item and came to an agreement on the coding to ensure a consistent approach. The remaining programs were then divided between the reviewers for independent review and coding. The validation process was conducted throughout the review and coding of the curricula.

Identifying Common Elements

To identify elements that were common among the SEL programs, the reviewers grouped together similar elements across different programs and developed an overarching summary statement. The summary statements were created by reviewing all of the data collected from the different programs to create a common element.

An element was determined "common" if it appeared in four or more of the 15 programs. This threshold was established to ensure that a broad range of SEL concepts could be captured. This threshold also took into consideration the significant variability that was found amongst SEL programs. Further, an element was only counted once for a program that had multiple curricula for different grades. This approach was taken to reduce any weighting bias that might be given to a SEL program with multiple curricula.

Expert Review

As part of a deductive content analysis approach, PSSP re-engaged Dr. Short to validate and provide feedback on the initial list of common elements based on her subject matter expertise in social and emotional learning. Working with a team of education and child psychology experts from SMH ASSIST, Dr. Short reviewed the elements and summary statements from a practice and implementation lens.

Finalizing SEL Common Elements

Expert review and the common elements generated from the PSSP review were compiled, and agreement was reached on the final set of common elements. This work included producing high-level definitions for each of the common elements.

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Results

Using an iterative process of coding and distilling, a total of 14 common elements were initially extracted from the 15 programs reviewed. Some elements have sub-elements which were integrated. For example "identify and manage emotions" includes two sub-elements. These sub-elements were combined as they are closely related. The elements and sub-elements are presented in Table 1 below. Appendix B lists the SEL programs reviewed along with their respective reference.

Table 1. Initial List of Common Elements

Common Elements
1. Identify and Manage Emotions 　i. Learn to identify emotions 　ii. Learn how positive and negative thoughts affect emotions and how to manage them
2. Stress Management Techniques 　i. Learn to identify stress 　ii. Learn coping techniques
3. Self-confidence
4. Goal Setting
5. Positive Motivation
6. Listening Skills
7. Practice Acts of Kindness
8. Cooperation Skills
9. Empathy Skills
10. Friendship Skills
11. Problem Solving Skills
12. Being Respectful Towards Others 　i. Learn that others see situations and events differently 　ii. Learn and accept diversity
13. Healthy Lifestyle Choices
14. Recognize and Identify Feelings in Others

Description of the Common Elements of SEL Programs

1. Identify and Manage Emotions

This common element is included in all 15 SEL programs reviewed. Children are taught how to recognize common emotions, with special attention given to anxiety and anger, and the relationship between body cues and emotions. Two sub-elements were combined under "identify and manage emotions" as they are conceptually connected:

　i. *Learn to identify emotions.* All SEL programs provided lessons on how to identify emotions. For example, one SEL program provided individual lessons that taught children about jealousy, nervousness, sadness and happiness. Children also learned how their bodies can provide clues about their emotions, for example, by listening to body cues children can understand how they feel.

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ii.   *Learn how positive and negative thoughts affect emotions and how to manage them.* Six SEL programs taught children about the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and emotions. They also described techniques to manage emotions, for example, using self-talk.

2. Stress Management Techniques

Children are taught about stress and various coping techniques in the majority of the SEL programs. This common element was the result of combining two sub-elements: i) learn to identify stress and ii) learn coping techniques. Both sub-elements met the threshold for a common element, as they were included in four or more SEL programs.

i.   *Learn to identify stress.* Four SEL programs included learning about and recognizing what is stress. For example, children are taught how to describe stress and to understand the physical sensations associated with stress.

ii.   *Learn coping techniques.* Eight SEL programs included coping techniques to deal with stress. Deep belly breathing was the most common example identified, followed by positive self-talk, and focusing on and analyzing the situation to understand the stressor.

Younger children were taught how to identify stress both physically and emotionally. Children in the older grades were taught specific coping techniques. One SEL program focused solely on anxiety and stress management and targeted children between 6-13 years of age. Thirteen programs included the development of stress management techniques (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15).

3. Self-Confidence

This common element focused on teaching children to view themselves as special and to be comfortable expressing their opinions. Children are taught how to understand and develop self-confidence. Building on that concept, children are also taught to feel comfortable expressing their own opinions and feelings. Several SEL programs also focused on assertive communication. For example, children are taught to identify and practice verbal and non-verbal assertive skills. This type of communication reinforces self-confidence. Twelve programs included self-confidence skills (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15).

4. Goal Setting Skills

Children are taught several different skills that can support goal setting. Children are taught to break a goal into smaller steps, thus making it more manageable. Children learn that goal setting can take place for physical, intellectual, social, and emotional self-improvement purposes. Finally, some SEL programs encourage children to achieve their goals once they have formulated them. Seven programs included goal setting skills (3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13).

5. Positive Motivation

Children are taught how to remain positive and the importance of maintaining a positive attitude. One SEL program teaches children to reward themselves when they do their best. Self-talk was also identified as a useful technique to maintain a positive attitude. For example, children are first taught how they can articulate self-talk and then encouraged to use self-talk on a frequent basis. Nine programs included a focus on positive motivation (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15).

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6. Listening Skills

Children are taught about the benefits of listening, the importance of being listened to by others and effective listening skills, such as, using eye contact, positive body language, not interrupting others, and asking questions. One program stated that children should learn how to practice listening well in school and the "school listening look". The school listening look refers to expectations for listening at school, such as, keeping the body calm and looking at the speaker. It acknowledged that listening behaviors are influenced by culture and differing abilities and may look different at home or at school. Nine programs included listening skills (1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15).

7. Practice Acts of Kindness

Several SEL programs explicitly articulated the importance of practicing acts of kindness. In this common element, children are taught about helping others. Most programs included a practical component, where children could practice acts of kindness. The lessons centered on children finding opportunities to show kindness, at home, school, the community or in the world. Eight programs included practicing acts of kindness (1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15).

8. Cooperation Skills

Learning to cooperate with others within a team-based environment was articulated in the programs reviewed. Children learn how to work together successfully to complete a project or solve a problem in a group setting. The programs focused on children learning and practicing how to cooperate with others, and highlighted the importance of understanding roles, responsibilities, timelines, and resources when planning a project. This element also stressed the importance of performing roles and fulfilling responsibilities as planned. Seven programs included cooperation skills (1, 4, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15).

9. Empathy Skills

This common element focused on teaching children to understand how others feel, and demonstrate acts of caring and compassion as a form of empathy. Notably, empathy was discussed in the context of bullying and students learning to understand the feelings of those being bullied and how to show compassion in response. Seven programs included empathy skills (3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15).

10. Friendship Skills

Children are taught the skills to develop and maintain positive friendships such as, how to get along well with others. Three main aspects of friendship emerged from the review: (a) children being taught the positive qualities of a good friend (which includes sharing and helping); (b) children being taught how to make others feel good about themselves (which entails using kind words and saying meaningful, clear, and specific words when showing appreciation or expressing compliments); (c) children being taught to express feelings and, learn how to be assertive. Ten programs included Friendship Skills (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15).

11. Problem Solving Skills

Programs reviewed, identified different approaches and techniques for problem solving. The majority of programs teach children a stepped approach to problem-solving. For example, one program teaches children the ABCDE problem solving/decision-making method: Assess - children assess the situation and

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ask what the problem is; Brainstorm – they brainstorm possible solutions; Choose – they choose a solution; Decision – they act on their decision; Evaluate – evaluate the decision once it has been implemented.

Some SEL programs also teach children how to remain positive while problem-solving. Eight programs included problem solving skills (5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15).

12. Being Respectful Towards Others

This common element focused on teaching children how to treat others with respect and care, and express appreciation for others. Programs identified different aspects of respect. One program addressed the effects of name calling while another program highlighted that children should not belittle, or pass judgement on others. Another program emphasized that children learn the value of treating others with respect. Six programs specifically included being respectful towards others (4, 7, 9, 12, 13, 15). Two sub-elements were combined under "being respectful towards others":

   i.   *Learn that others see situations and events differently.* Six programs focused on teaching children to see the viewpoints of others. Children are taught to understand and accept that others experience situations and events differently. The overarching theme was that differences are normal.

   ii. *Learn and accept diversity.* Seven programs included a focus on recognizing that people are both the same and different from each other, with a goal of social inclusion. The programs emphasized appreciation and acceptance of diversity, particularly cultural diversity.

13. Healthy Lifestyle Choices

Children are taught how to make healthy lifestyle choices about nutrition, physical activity, alcohol, drugs and safe medicine use. Program information was tailored to the developmental stage of children. The curricula in the younger grades (e.g. one and two) teach children to ask an adult for help when using medication, and what is safe to eat, touch and smell. The harmful effects of tobacco use and alcohol are also introduced in the younger grades. In the older grades (e.g. five and six), children learn more about drugs and alcohol and how to resist peer pressure. Four programs included teaching children how to make healthy lifestyle choices (1, 3, 7, 10).

14. Recognize and Identify Feelings in Others

Building children's ability to recognize and identify feelings in others was identified in the programs. Children are taught how to use situational cues, facial and bodily expressions to identify the feelings and emotions of others. Children are also taught that others may have feelings that are different from their own, or may experience more than one feeling at a time. Seven programs included recognizing and identifying feeling in others (1, 4, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15).

Expert Review

PSSP consulted with SMH ASSIST to review and provide feedback on the initial set of 14 common elements. Subject matter experts in education and child psychology in collaboration with Dr. Short reviewed these common elements and reflected on their relevance for use in practice for addressing

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student social and emotional learning in a classroom setting. Using this lens, SMH ASSIST further distilled these elements into 6 SEL common elements for practical application in a classroom setting.

Based on a discussion with the SMH ASSIST team, *Healthy Lifestyle Choices* was omitted as the concepts addressed in this common element are included in Ontario's Health and Physical Education curriculum. Table 2 outlines the 14 initial common elements and the revised common element.

Table 2. Final Common Elements

Final Common Element	Initial Common Elements
1. **Identifying and Managing Emotions** (self-regulation and mind-body connection)	Identify and Manage Emotions
2. **Relationship Skills** (listening, cooperation, friendship, empathy, conflict resolution, being respectful to others, recognizing emotions in others)	Cooperation
	Empathy Skills
	Friendship Skills
	Listening Skills
	Being Respectful towards Others
	Recognize and Identify Feelings in Others
3. **Positive Motivation** (growth mindset, optimism, positive attitude, grit)	Positive Motivation
4. **Stress Management** (problem-solving skills, relaxation, secret calming, mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, support seeking)	Stress Management Techniques
	Problem Solving Skills
5. **Self-Confidence and Identity** (mattering, assertive communication, knowing oneself)	Self-confidence
6. **Learning Skills / Executive Functioning** (goal-setting, problem solving skills, time management, study skills, perseverance, decision-making, organization skills)	Problem Solving Skills
	Goal Setting

Discussion

The purpose of this review was to identify common elements of social and emotional learning programs designed for children in classroom settings. Using a deductive content analysis approach, PSSP reviewed 15 programs, coded the identified curricula, and consulted with experts. The review team initially identified 14 initial common elements which were further distilled to create six common elements that describe a range of practices that support the implementation of social and emotional learning in a classroom setting. Below are key recommendations and discussion regarding enhancing the six final elements:

1. Include a focus on how thoughts impact emotions in Identify and Manage Emotions.

2. Include reference to Practice Acts of Kindness and Problem-Solving Skills in Relationship Skills.

3. Include Learning that Others See Situations and Events Differently, and Learning About and Accepting Diversity, within Relationship Skills.

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4. Articulate elements in the Relationship Skills to prevent specific elements from being overlooked due to the broad nature of this element*.*

Recommendations for the Six Final Common Elements

To ensure common understanding between the programs reviewed and concepts in the final common elements, self-regulation (a sub-element in the Identifying and Managing Emotions) should include a focus on how positive and negative thoughts impact emotions and how to manage those thoughts. One program described this as the "Thoughts-Actions-Feelings" Circle, which teaches that positive thoughts lead to positive actions, and positive actions lead to positive feelings about oneself. Self-regulation is a multi-dimensional concept and should be reflected in the way it is articulated in the programs.

It is recommended that the sub-elements Practice Acts of Kindness and Problem-Solving Skills should be included in the Relationship Skills as several SEL programs explicitly articulated these concepts. Problem Solving Skills is also recommended for inclusion in Relationship Skills since children are taught how to resolve conflicts using problem solving approaches within an interpersonal context.

Considering Ontario's multicultural and diverse population, and the importance of providing SEL programs that are equity-focused, it is recommended that the sub-elements, Learning that Others See Situations and Events Differently, and Learning About and Accepting Diversity, should be included, and be more clearly articulated in Relationship Skills. Both of these concepts closely align with Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy which is designed to support a publicly funded education system that gives all students the opportunity to reach their highest potential (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Relationship Skills is very broad and incorporates a number of common elements. There may be some risk that specific elements (e.g.: listening, cooperation) may be overlooked. It could be useful to ensure that each element and concept that makes up Relationship Skills is clearly articulated since each element was identified in multiple programs.

Some of the initial common elements appear multiple times in the final common elements, for example, Problem-Solving appears in Stress Management, Learning Skills/Executive Functioning, and should be included in Relationship Skills. It is also apparent that the final common elements are not mutually exclusive but are interconnected and reinforce each other. For example, teaching children Positive Motivation, feeds into Learning Skills/Executive Functioning and also contributes to Self Confidence and Identity*.*

Application of SEL Common Elements in Ontario Schools

The results from this program review provide a foundation for use of the SEL common elements across Ontario's education sector. Results could support the sector in moving towards a more consistent and aligned approach to building the social and emotional learning skills of students across the province. Some of the strengths of taking this approach are:

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1. Educators can be trained in the application of common elements instead of building capacity in different evidence-based programs. This reduces the amount of time that teachers have to spend in training sessions, and lessens the cost of having to purchase multiple programs.

2. There is less complexity in having a workforce trained in the use of common elements versus multiple evidence-based programs. Each evidence-based program may require different paperwork, fidelity monitoring, and oversight (CEBC, 2016) which can make it challenging to provide implementation and evaluation supports that are useful across multiple programs and schools.

The final common elements could reduce the need to use multiple SEL programs since the common elements cover a broad range of social and emotional skills which were consistently found in the programs reviewed.

Limitations

There are some limitations with the review. With respect to the methodology, each program, with the exception of the first program, was coded and reviewed by one reviewer; this decision was made due to time constraints. This may have impacted coding of the SEL programs due to each reviewers interpretation of the curricula content which may have resulted in elements being assigned differently. However the categorization matrix was developed to support the consistent alignment and coding of practice elements.

In regards to the common element approach, there is some research on the identification and selection of common elements from evidence-based interventions (e.g., McLeod et al., 2016), but to our knowledge, the content analysis of universal education programs has not been well evaluated.

Finally, a disadvantage of the common elements approach is that the evidence for the effectiveness of an individual common element is limited. It is not known how much impact an individual element has, as studies have typically focused on interventions as a whole. Strong evidence for individual components would require conducting what researchers call a dismantling study (CEBC, 2016) which is beyond the scope of the present project. As noted by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, research on use of the common elements approach should continue, as the approach has potential merit (CEBC, 2016).

Conclusion

Evidence-based SEL programs in school settings help students develop the resources needed to thrive and prevent future behavioral and emotional problems from developing. However, there is considerable variability among SEL programs and the implementation of an evidence-based program purchased for use in a school can be costly. Identifying common elements to social and emotional learning is one method to address these challenges. This approach entails identifying specific techniques or elements that can used across multiple evidence-based practices (EBPs) for a specific topic.

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Despite some of the limitations addressed, the use of a common elements approach has several advantages. One advantage is that it may be possible to train educators to use the final common elements as part of quality improvement efforts in a classroom setting. These six common elements can also be taken together and used as an intervention, though evidence is currently limited for this approach. In order to ensure that the common elements support the development of a child's SEL an evaluation study could be conducted in Ontario. An approach like this could provide a path towards greater provincial standardization, but allow for the flexibility and variation necessary for Ontario school boards and educators to respond to local and regional context.

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Appendix A: Preliminary Categories for the SEL Common Elements Analysis

To support the exploration of the common elements in effective SEL programs we consulted with Dr. Kathy Short, SEL subject matter expert, and asked her to identify any specific elements that we should target in our review. Dr. Short identified three "everyday mental health" frameworks/ approaches/ strategies that outline some central elements of SEL practice (first three cells). The frameworks were reviewed to distill SEL intervention. After distilling common elements across each framework, similar types of elements were grouped in the table and summarized. Categories of common elements were then developed as an easy reference for the review of SEL curricula. These categories were used as the starting point for grouping elements from the SEL programs.

Towards Flourishing (Everyday Strategies)	Aligned & Integration Model (AIM) for School Mental Health & Well-Being	Well Ahead	Summary (Developed internally by PSSP)	Categories (Developed internally by PSSP)	Notes
This is an initiative which promotes the mental well-being of parents and their families through the development and addition of a mental health promotion strategy to Manitoba's Families First Home Visiting Program. Based on consultation with experts and review of the literature, Towards Flourishing identified simple, every day, scientifically proven, strategies to improve mental health in its *Everyday Strategies* resource. These strategies are presented below:	School Mental Health- ASSIST convened a special interest group and from that discussion developed practices/themes that aligned with tier 1 of the AIM model (see first of the AIM framework). Presented below are the everyday practices that promote mental well-being that emerged from that process:	This is an initiative in British Columbia. The first year focused on **'everyday practices that make a difference'**: sustainable, scalable approaches to advancing student wellbeing that don't require major resources to implement; that fit naturally within the role and skill set of educators and school partners; and that build upon existing assets and capabilities. Summarized below are everyday practices identified by *Well-Ahead* for integrating well-being in schools:			
Creating a vision	Envisioning a positive day Goal setting for positive behaviors		These activities are focused on setting positive and hopeful intentions.	Envisioning Optimism/Hopefulness	

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Three Good Things	Gratitude/kindness		These activities are focused on expressing gratitude and thankfulness.	Gratitude	
Nasal breathing Progressive muscle relaxation Three minute breathing	Deep breathing	Taking a pause during the school day (Mindful Pause)	These activities are designed to manage stress and develop positive coping strategies.	Relaxation/Stress Management	
Connecting with others	Connecting with others	Promoting respect, interconnectedness (Talking Circles) Re-establishing connections after the weekend (Monday Morning Connections)	These activities are geared toward increasing connections with **others.**	Social Connections	
Belonging			These activities are focused on increasing connection with **a group.** Allows the student to develop a group identity.	Belonging	
	Accepting differences		Designed to accept differences in others. Students see different sides of an issue and accept them.	Accepting/Accommodating ?	
Self-monitoring			Geared towards assessing one's behavior in relation to a goal See definition below: Self-monitoring is the process of observing ones behavior and evaluating it in relation to goals	Self-monitoring	
	Self-regulation		Geared towards recognizing and responding to one's behaviours.	Self-regulation	
		Learning about positive mental wellness (Wellness Wednesdays)	These activities educate students about positive mental health and strategies to promote positive mental health.	Raising mental health awareness/ Building mental health literacy	

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Appendix B. Social-Emotional Learning Programs Reviewed

Number	Social and Emotional Learning Program	Reference
1	Al's Pals (general curriculum)	Al's Pals Kids Making Healthy Choices (2nd ed.). (2004). Richmond, Virginia. Wingspan LLC.
2	Coping Cat (curriculum for 6-13 years)	Coping Cat. (1996).Cognitive-behavioural therapy for anxious children: Therapist manual for group treatment. Ardmore, Pennsylvania. Workbook Publishing.
3	FRIENDS (Fun Friends – age 4-7; FRIENDS for Life – age 8-11)	The FRIENDS Programs International Foundation PTY Ltd. (2015). Friends program information package and registration form. Retrieved from https://friendsprograms.com/signup/downloads/Friends-Info-Package-March-2015.pdf
4	Good Behavior Game (general curriculum)	Embry, D., Fruth, J., Roepcke, E., Richardson, C. (2016). PAX Good Behaviour Game. 4th Edition (3rd printing). PAXIS Institute
5	The Incredible Years – Classroom Dinosaur (curriculum for 4-8 years)	The Incredible Years. (2013). Classroom dinosaur curriculum: classroom dina content objectives. Retrieved from http://incredibleyears.com/programs/child/classroom-curriculum/
6	Life Skills (grades 3/4 and 6/7)	Life Skills Training. (2014). Elementary School Program Level 1, (3rd/ 4thgrade) teachers manual. Princeton Health Press. Life Skills Training. (2016). Middle school program Level 1, (6th/7th grade) teachers manual. Princeton Health Press.
7	Lions Quest (grades 2, 3, and 6)	Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence. (2015). Facilitator's resource guide (grade 6). Cambridge, Ontario. Lions Quest Skills for Growing. (2015). Facilitator's resource guide (grades 2 & 3). Cambridge, Ontario.
8	Mind Up (Pre-K-2, grades 3-6 and grades 6-8)	The Mind UP Curriculum, Brain-focused Strategies for Learning-and Living. (2011). New York, New York. Scholastic Inc.
9	Open Circle (grades 1 and 4)	Open Circle. (2015). Open Circle Curriculum. Wellesley, Massachusetts. Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College.
10	Positive Action (grades 4 and 6)	Positive Action. (2011). Twin Falls, Idaho. Positive Action, Inc.
11	Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (review of general program outline)	Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia. (2013). The PATHS Curriculum. Retrieved from http://seakproject.com/paths/
12	Second Step (grades 1, 3, and 6)	Second Step, Skills for Social and Academic Success. (2011).Committee for Children.
13	Tribes (elementary and middle school)	Tribes, Discovering Gifts in Middle School. (2007). Windsor, California. CenterSource Systems, LLC Tribes Learning Communities. (2014). Windsor, California. CenterSource Systems, LLC
14	Zippy's Friends/ Passport: Skills for Life. Zippy's Friends and Passport: Skills for Life	Zippy's Friends. (2007). Centre de recherche et d'intervention sur le suicide et l'euthanasie- Université du Québec à Montreal. Passport: Skills for Life. (2014). Centre de recherche et d'intervention sur le suicide et l'euthanasie-Université du Québec à Montreal.
15	The 4Rs (grades 2, 4, and middle school)	The 4Rs Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution. (2012). Teaching guide (grades 2 & 4). New York, New York. Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility The 4Rs Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution. (2008). Teaching guide for middle school. New York, New York. Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

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