

Ready for Work?

How Afterschool Programs Can Support Employability Through Social and Emotional Learning

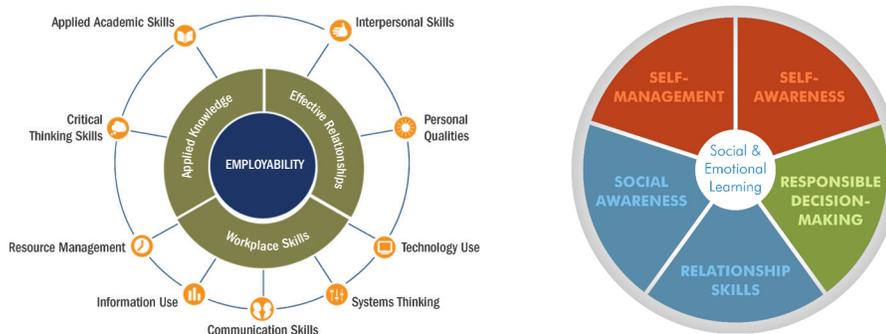
Research to Action in the Afterschool and Expanded Learning Field

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although young people need many skills to be successful in the workplace, one aspect of employability has gained attention in recent years—the need for workers to have strong social and emotional skills. Afterschool programs have a role to play in supporting the development of these skills for *all* youth. In this second brief in our series *Beyond the Bell: Research to Action in the Afterschool and Expanded Learning Field*, American Institutes for Research (AIR) defines employability skills and shares how social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices can support the development of these skills and explains why afterschool and expanded learning settings are an ideal place for this to happen.

Evidence suggests that we already know a lot about how to develop employability skills—we may just be calling them something else. School-day and afterschool programs across the country have been implementing SEL programs for years. In fact, the framework developed by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) bears a strong resemblance to the Employability Skills Framework developed by the [Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education \(OCTAE\)](#) in the United States Department of Education.

Figure 1. Side-by-Side Comparison of OCTAE's Employability Skills Framework and CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning Framework¹



As these two frameworks illustrate, there is a great deal of connection between social and emotional competencies and employability skills. For example:

- **Interpersonal skills** (OCTAE) and **social awareness** (CASEL) both require the ability to understand social norms and work with others from diverse backgrounds.
- **Personal qualities** (OCTAE) and **self-awareness** (CASEL) both require the ability to recognize one's emotions and have a sense of confidence.
- **Communication skills** (OCTAE) and **relationship skills** (CASEL) both require the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, and resolve conflicts.

Given these similarities, it makes sense that SEL programs that explicitly target the development of social and emotional competencies could also be considered workforce readiness programs. And a growing body of research is starting to show that afterschool programs are prime settings in which to implement SEL programs and practices, which, in turn, contribute to the development of employability skills.

The research is clear—employers are looking for employees who possess a broad set of skills that go beyond content knowledge. Afterschool and expanded learning programs already target many of the skills that employers want. As evidence grows about the importance of developing social and emotional competencies, afterschool practitioners should listen to youth and employers to match up employer needs with youth interests, be explicit and comprehensive about how their programming targets SEL and employability, and be open and creative in order to meet the changing demands of the workplace.

Researchers also have a role to play. Although the research on how afterschool programs can support employability skills is promising, there is not enough information about how targeted SEL practices explicitly contribute to the development of employability skills. More longitudinal and rigorous research is needed to better understand which staff practices are most able to support the development of employability skills, how afterschool participants fare in the workplace and why, and what afterschool program practices and models are connected with the development of employability skills.



Scan the code at the left to access the full brief, its accompanying planning tool, and related resources.

<http://www.air.org/resource/ready-work-how-afterschool-programs-can-support-employability-through-social-and-emotional>

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. (n.d.). *Employability skills network*. Washington, DC: Author; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2015). *Social and emotional learning core competencies*. Chicago, IL: Author. Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner.