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Towards an inclusive social and emotional learning☆

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the effectiveness of universal school-based SEL interventions for minoritized students in K-12 settings is an area of critical inquiry. In this paper, we draw on the evidence compiled from a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of thirteen years of universal school-based (USB) social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions for students in K-12 settings. Results simultaneously revealed that the field of SEL knows a great deal about the variation in effects of SEL programs and very little about the experiences of students with marginalized and minoritized identities within them. This manuscript details key findings and critical areas for future development in the service of gender-, racially-, ethnically-, linguistically-, and ability-minoritized youth. We begin with outlining what USB SEL interventions are and the evidence for them. We next discuss who marginalized and minoritized students are and the evidence of SEL programs effectiveness for them. We then discuss the urgent need for the SEL field to focus on program design, implementation, and research to better determine whether and how marginalized and minoritized students are benefiting from current USB SEL programming. Finally, we provide recommendations for improved research and practice to support a truly inclusive SEL hereafter.

A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of thirteen years of universal school-based (USB) social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions for students in K-12 settings simultaneously revealed that the field of SEL knows a great deal about the variation in effects of SEL programs and very little about the experiences of students with marginalized and minoritized identities within them (Cipriano et al., 2023b). In this manuscript, we detail key findings and critical areas for future development in the service of gender-, racially-, ethnically-, linguistically-, and ability-marginalized and minoritized youth. We begin by centering our discussion on who marginalized and minoritized students are. We next outline what USB SEL interventions are and the updated evidence of SEL programs effectiveness for marginalized and minoritized youth. We then present the urgent need for the field to focus on program design, implementation, and research to better determine whether and how minoritized students are benefiting from current USB SEL programming. Finally, we provide recommendations for improved research and practice to support a truly inclusive SEL hereafter.

Who are marginalized and minoritized students?

We use the terms marginalized and minoritized students and youth throughout this article. *Minoritized* refers to the experience by which a marginalized person or group experiences subordinate social status in relationship to a dominate group or its members (including by gender, race, ethnicity, language, or ability) resulting in systematic exclusion from access to social resources or are otherwise disadvantaged in relationship to a dominant group (Cipriano et al., 2023a). Minoritized status also recognizes that groups are treated as small or less than despite not being small numerically and/or socially in experience. *Marginalized* refers to groups that are excluded based on culture and identity, which include, but are not limited to, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (LGBTQIA+) community and English learners (ELs).

Gender identity, or a person's internal sense of self and gender, has historically been presented as a binary (male/female) even though there are a wide range of possible gender identities including, but not limited

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to, non-binary, transgender, or genderqueer.[3] Regarding the prevalence of genders, gender identity rates were difficult to obtain. Canada's 2022 census findings, the first country to include gender diversity data in their national census, further corroborate the importance of and the need to focus on this population in schools, as the proportion of transgender and non-binary people were three to seven times higher for school age youth than adults (Statistics Canada, 2022). Globally, two percent of the global population and up to 2.7% of school-age children identify as transgender or non-conforming (Goodman et al., 2019). More recent international polling across 27 countries estimates that 1% of all adults and 4% of the Gen Z population identify as transgender, non-binary, non-conforming, or gender fluid (IPSOS, 2021). Moreover, a 2022 Pew Research Center report found that 5% of individuals under 30 in the U.S. identified as trans or nonbinary and are more likely than older adults to be trans or nonbinary (Brown, 2022). Further, the intersection of gender and sexual minoritized identities is significant—a 2020 survey found that 26% of LGBTQIA+ youth (ages 13–24) in the U.S. identify as nonbinary (Trevor Project, 2021). Canada's 2022 census findings further corroborate the importance of and the need to focus on this population in schools, as the proportion of transgender and non-binary people were three to seven times higher for school age youth than adults.

Race is a social construct: a classification system defined by physical differences between people and often used for the purpose of maintaining a power hierarchy among groups to perpetuate systems of privilege, most specifically between people of color and those who are white (Cipriano et al., 2023a; Lanham & Liu, 2019; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). *Ethnicity* is defined as a socially constructed characterization of people predicated on having a shared culture related to common ancestry and shared history (Suyemoto et al., 2020). Ethnicity nor ethnic group membership are fixed, bounded categories; ethnic identities are understood to be malleable, open to change, and usually self-defined (Barth, 1998). The meanings of race and ethnicity has consequential psychological, interpersonal, and material impact for individuals, groups, and communities (Suyemoto et al., 2020), and although not the same construct, are often examined as such in the precedence for how race and ethnicity are presented in education research (Codiroli McMaster et al., 2019; Dixon et al., 2022). Case in point, despite the existence of hundreds of distinct racial and ethnic identities within nations (see nations in Asia, South America, and Africa as examples), the U. S. census currently recognizes only six racial categories: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; white; and 'some other' or 'multi-ethnic,' and two ethnic identities: Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino.

Language learner status refers to students who are learning the native language of a region. There are many ways in which student linguistic diversity has been considered in educational research, including terminology such as English Language Learner, Dual Language Learner, and Multilingual students. In the United States, English learners (ELs) are increasing in proportion. It is estimated that 4.9 million children in U.S. public schools are ELs and they speak over 400 different languages, with the most common being Spanish, followed by Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

Students with disabilities (SWD) include those who qualify for special education under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), as well as students with a formal disability diagnosis and students with 504 plans as per Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. SWD can include students who are blind or have low vision, are deaf or have difficulty hearing, or have sensory processing challenges, as well as social processing differences such as Autism or Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (IDEA, 2018). The largest proportion of SWD are students with specific learning disabilities (SLD; Irwin et al., 2022), whom may have diagnoses such as Dyslexia, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and experience significant difficulties with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. Best available data suggest student disability incidence rates are neither insignificant nor declining—in the United States during the 2020–2021 academic year, students identified with disabilities accounted for over 7.2 million students (approximately 15% of the public-school population), reflecting a 2% increase in the students served over the last decade in American public schools (Irwin et al., 2022). International data on prevalence rates of disability among youth were difficult to obtain. A recent report by UNICEF (2021) estimates that one in ten children between the ages 0–17, which comprises about 240 million children, are currently living with disabilities. International K-12 data for students with disabilities is sparse as there is limited reporting (UNICEF, 2021).

What are USB SEL interventions and why are they important?

USB SEL refers to programs that are delivered systemically to all students in a class, grade, school, or district, not exclusively those learners with identified needs or risk factors for social and emotional support (Greenberg et al., 2003; Rivers et al., 2013), and are often implemented as Tier 1 in a multitiered system of support (Rosen, 2021). Although USB SEL programs can support a wide range of skills and strategies (see Cipriano et al., 2023b and Jones et al., 2017 for reviews), all programs converge in supporting the development of intra- and interpersonal skills that promote physical and psychological health. SEL includes fostering emotional intelligence, behavior regulation, and identity formation, the skills necessary for establishing and maintaining supportive relationships and making empathic and equitable decisions in the best interest of the entire school community (Cipriano et al., 2023a; CASEL, 2020; Greenberg et al., 2017).

There is no shortage of studies reporting the positive effects of SEL programs, with hundreds of evaluations of SEL programs conducted and more than a dozen selective meta-analyses of discrete SEL evaluations completed in the last decade alone (Durlak et al., 2022; Greenberg, 2023). In general, studies report that students participating in SEL programs demonstrate improved skills, attitudes, and behaviors, including an increased ability to manage stress and depressive symptoms, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school (Durlak et al., 2011, 2022; Greenberg, 2023; Weissberg et al., 2015; Mahoney et al., 2020). Despite varying study inclusion regarding the parameters of what SEL programs, how they are implemented, and what types of outcomes they effect, findings have contributed to national and international movements around SEL, with more than 60 countries participating in the International SEL DAY in 2023 (see selday.org) and ever-growing financial investments in SEL program adoption to support schools to thrive (Durlak et al., 2022; Greenberg, 2023).

What do we know now about SEL?

Our recent systematic review and meta-analysis of USB SEL programs for students K-12 analyzed 424 studies of USB SEL interventions from January 1, 2008 through December 31, 2020, reflecting more than 50 countries and over half a million students (Cipriano et al., 2023b, available at https://osf.io/6pqx2/). The registered report followed contemporary best practice in conducting a meta-analysis in educational research (Page et al., 2021; Pigott & Polanin, 2020), including pre-registration of data analyses plan, open science practices, and including published and unpublished formats and optimizing best available data for synthesis. We documented significant heterogeneity in what SEL programs are, how they are implemented, and the range of outcomes they affect. The review identified more than 700 discrete skills and strategies instructed in SEL programs, and organized them into

[3] This will be an endnote once pulled of GDOC for submission- For a range of gender identity concepts, readers are encouraged to view https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/GLSEN%20Terms%20and%20Concepts%20Thematic.pdf.

prominent frameworks of SEL (CASEL, 2020; Denham, 2006; Jones et al., 2017). We further disentangled program features commonly accepted as effective elements of SEL programs, including who delivers the program, if the program was Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit (SAFE; Durlak et al., 2011), and explored the role of family, community, country and adaptation in the delivery of programs. In addition, we cataloged twelve domains of anticipated outcomes of SEL programs, and investigated aspects of the measures, reporting, quality of implementation, and reported effects (Cipriano et al., 2023b).

Our report found that students who participated in USB SEL interventions demonstrated significant improvements in school climate and safety, civic attitudes, and behaviors, SEL skills, peer relationships, attitudes and beliefs, prosocial behaviors, school functioning, and academic achievement (Cipriano et al., 2023b). Students also demonstrated significant reductions in emotional distress and externalizing behaviors after participating in a USB SEL intervention. In addition, students participating in USB SEL interventions maintained improvement in school functioning, externalizing behaviors, prosocial behaviors, SEL skills, attitudes/beliefs, and peer relationships as well as a decline in emotional distress and externalizing behaviors six months or more after students completed the intervention.

Despite the success of USB SEL programs on the social and emotional development of K-12 students as a whole, it is critical to examine how marginalized and minoritized student populations, particularly those who historically have been found to be at greatest risk for diminished mental health and achievement across the academic lifespan, are faring (Cipriano et al., 2023b). The reality is that minoritized students—including those historically marginalized by gender, race, ethnicity, language, and ability (Artiles et al., 2016; Annamma et al., 2018; Cipriano et al., 2023a; Cruz et al., 2021)—have not shared equitably in benefits stemming from educational interventions and the proliferation of pedagogical 'best' practices (Artiles et al., 2016; Annamma et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Leonardo, 2009). Racist, ableist, and/or deficit orientation in programs and practices have been considered to contribute to the inequitable, inaccessible, and even punitive educational practices affecting minoritized youth (Annamma et al., 2018; Bal & Trainor, 2016; Cipriano et al., 2023a; Duchesneau, 2020). Although there is considerable momentum to implement USB SEL to transform a pathway to educational equity for minoritized youth (Aspen Institute, 2019; Farrington, 2020; Jagers et al., 2019), particularly toward the end of dismantling structural racism and the use of exclusionary practices (Duchesneau, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2020; Williams & Jagers, 2022), and despite the presumed promise of USB SEL for all students (Aspen Institute, 2019; CASEL, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2020), there remains open questions as to whether evidence-based SEL is in fact effective or even accessible to minoritized students (Daley & McCarthy, 2021; Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Hoffman, 2009; Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). It is possible that USB SEL programs are of greater utility to marginalized and minoritized students due to program focus on SEL skills in addition to other malleable factors, that include but are not limited to, fostering school safety, school connectedness, improving school climate and school functioning, in addition to reducing emotional distress. All of these factors have impacted marginalized and minoritized students, which is explained in more detail in later sections. It is also possible that USB SEL programs are not as effective for marginalized students due a number of factors that include but are not limited to: a program's flexibility to alter the curriculum and/or provide accommodations for students with diverse learning needs; the training and background of the program facilitator to instruct students with varying social emotional competencies and/or linguistic, cognitive, and physical abilities; if the pedagogical approach of the SEL program is culturally sensitive to the classroom and school population; and if program materials inadvertently inhibit students to connect to the material in a way that fosters meaningful engagement as a result of the biases embedded within.

What do we know now about marginalized and minoritized students in SEL?

Our meta-analysis of the state of the evidence for SEL for students K-12 found that it is abundantly unclear how USB SEL programs impact students with varying gender, disability, ethnic, racial, and linguistic identities and learning profiles. In fact, we had pre-registered to run moderation analysis to explain what works for whom in SEL, and this was the only set of analyses from our pre-registration we were unable to complete. Although we attend to this study limitation in brief in the stage 2 report (Cipriano et al., 2023b), we discuss the complexity of the findings in detail in this manuscript.

To begin, nearly all studies in the review reported student gender in the binary, and not a single one reported student sexual orientation. Native language status was largely overlooked (mentioned in 13% of studies), with 8 studies excluding based on language statues. Once more, only 16.5% of studies mentioned student disability status, and when disability status was reported, it was predominately categorized using general identifiers such as Special Education Needs, Individual Education Plan, and students with disabilities.

Furthermore, the complexity of racial and ethnic identity, especially in the worldwide context, was not adequately represented in the data and thus not captured in the review. Importantly, only half of the studies in the review mentioned any racial or ethnic identifiers for students. The amassed body of literature reflected studies from 53 countries, and represented language, culture, race, and ethnicity through constructs that extended beyond our registered codebook, including nationality (e.g., Leflot et al., 2013), language spoken at home (e.g., Sawyer et al., 2010), country of origin (e.g., Roberts, Gilman et al., 2011; Roberts, Williams et al., 2011), immigrant status (Beightol et al., 2012), religion (e.g., Slone et al., 2013), family size (e.g., Roberts, Gilman et al., 2011; Roberts, Williams et al., 2011), guardian status (biological mother, biological father, kinship guardian; e.g., O'Connor et al., 2014), 1–2 guardian household (e.g., Roberts et al., 2010), and guardian education level (e.g., Kyranides et al., 2018), among others. Further ecological variables related to environmental risk of a sample, such as geographic percentage of violent crime and rates of truancy were also reported.

Additionally, the complexities of ethnic, racial, and cultural indicators present in our sample are confounded with missingness and reported generalizations within studies. About half of the sample did not present any racial or ethnic identifier in text, and the ways identities were reported varied across and within countries. We cataloged examples and frequencies in Supplemental Table 9 of the registered report (available here <link masked>). Generalizations such as *minorities, diverse, other, unspecified, mixed,* and *representative* further complicated country and region-specific designations, including Aboriginal, African, Arab, Canadian, Black, Arabic, Asian, Australian, Brazilian, Belgian, British Isles, Catalan, Chinese, Cuban, Danish, Dutch, East Asian, Eastern European, European, European America, Filipino, Finnish, Israeli-Jewish, Hispanic, Italian, Jewish, Korean, Latino, Lebanese, Lithuanian, Moroccan, Middle Eastern, New Zealand, Romanian, and white. Even among studies that reported race/ethnicity of students, students were aggregated into generic racial and ethnic categories, such as "Hispanic/Latino," ultimately overlooking the linguistic and cultural variability that exists within a diverse student body. Conducting multigroup moderation by the proposed aggregated categories of racial and ethnic identities would be a disservice to the heterogeneity of identities represented in the corpus of studies and would likely result in biased interpretations due to both the underrepresentation of minoritized racial and ethnic groups and the variation of identifiers used internationally (Cipriano et al., 2023b).

Why is it important to understand marginalized and minoritized students' experiences in USB SEL?

The range of potential benefits for marginalized and minoritized

students participating in USB SEL programs is arguably as wide as the persistent disparities in social, emotional, and/or academic outcomes between gender-, racially-, ethnically-, linguistically-, and ability-minoritized youth and their peers (Barnes et al., 2023; Cipriano et al., 2023a;b; Daley & McCarthy, 2021; Gregory et al., 2023; Hoffman, 2009). And, although the experience of school is unique and varied, marginalized and minoritized students are more likely to experience barriers in areas of development targeted by most SEL programs. For example, non-cisgender students and students with disabilities are significantly more likely to experience feelings of anxiety, stigmatization, peer rejection, and bullying victimization (Daley & Rappolt-Schlichtmann, 2018; Eisenberg et al., 2017). Further, racially-ethnically- and linguistically minorized students are not only more likely to experience microaggressions, or subtle, indirect, or unintentional discriminatory attacks at school, than their white, mono-lingual peers, but they also are more negatively affected by them and the interpersonal stress they induce (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017; Lui & Quezada, 2019; Steketee et al., 2021).

We also know that USB SEL programs do not universally account for marginalized and minoritized students. Non-cisgender students have varying levels of characteristics that ultimately shape how they interact with and develop skills from SEL programming (Cipriano et al., 2023a). Though developmental differences in the expression, internalizing, and regulation of emotions from primary through secondary school have been well-documented for both girls and boys (Card et al., 2008; Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; López-Pérez & Pacella, 2021), these analyses obscure differences as a result of more nuanced gender presentation. Further, there was limited mention of disability classifications including Learning, Emotional or Behavioral, Physical, or Developmental Disability, or by fewer specific diagnoses, all of which can influence how a student with disabilities interacts with and benefits from SEL programming. Learning activities in SEL often require skills such as reading and writing, which can be a barrier to access for some learners. Likewise, students who have experienced peer rejection may feel uncomfortable with activities that require direct interaction with peers or self-expression in groups - activities typical to SEL.

To advance equitable and inclusive best practices in USB SEL interventions, we must carefully attend to the discourse that SEL interventions, however inadvertently, could be exclusionary. For example, it is critical to deeply examine if and how SEL programming could be reinforcing overt stereotypes in expressing gender- e.g., boys don't cry, or culture-normative criteria for the way a student 'should' feel or express emotions-e.g., good students are quiet (Zieher et al., 2023). Furthermore, program developers and researchers must investigate whether current SEL programming relies only on the use of ableist and monolinguistic approaches to teaching social and emotional competencies (i.e., the reliance on verbal, extemporaneous conversation to be a productive mode for social-emotional skill building; Cipriano & Strambler, IP).

The urgent need to understand how USB SEL programs impact marginalized and minoritized students

Today, youth worldwide are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic alongside long-standing conflicts around the globe, children are at increased risk of diminished social-emotional well-being. Since early 2020, clinical depression and anxiety among youth worldwide has nearly doubled that of pre-pandemic prevalence rates (Racine et al., 2021). Nearly 90 million boys and almost 80 million girls between the ages of 10 and 19 have a diagnosed mental disorder, with depression and anxiety representing two-fifths of these diagnoses (UNICEF, 2021). Perhaps unsurprising but evermore devastating, suicide rates among youth are at an all-time high as it is the fifth most reported cause of death among youth ages 10–19, the fourth leading cause of death among boys ages 15–19 and third most for girls (UNICEF, 2021). Compared to international data, suicide rates in the U.S. are more pervasive among younger people, as it the second leading cause of death among children ages 10–14 (CDC, 2022).

Marginalized and minoritized students in the United States are at an additional risk for poor social and emotional well-being. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has noted an increase in poor emotional well-being and thoughts of suicide among students over the decade from 2011 to 2021 (CDC, 2023). In 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) declared a "National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health." This declaration was significant in that it not only recognized the emotional toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, but also acknowledged the impact that racial injustices have had on our nation's traditionally marginalized youth. The declaration noted that, "more than 140,000 children in the United States lost a primary and/or secondary caregiver, with youth of color disproportionately impacted" and emphasized that "inequities that result from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate impacts [of mental health challenges] on children from communities of color" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021, n.p.). Unsurprisingly, racism has been linked to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptomatology among Black Americans and can be triggered by both verbal and nonverbal interactions (Williams, 2013, 2015). Importantly, it is well established that individuals who are not the direct target of racially motivated aggressions are at risk of emotional trauma from the racism manifestation (Bor et al., 2018; McGhee, 2021). For example, Bor et al. (2018) explored the emotional impact that exposure of police killings of unarmed Black Americans had on Black adults who lived in a state in which a police killing occured and found that "police killings of unarmed black Americans could contribute 1.7 additional poor mental health days per person per year, or 55 million.excess poor mental health days per year among black American adults" as a community (p. 307). In other words, the existence of unarmed police killings is likely to cause Black Americans to experience poor mental health on more days than if they had otherwise not occured, even when individuals are not directly involved. Importantly, these are estimates from the United States *prior* to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar findings have been found among inner city youth who were exposed to nearby police violence. In a study investigating the emotional and academic impact of police violence that occurs near inner city youth, Ang (2021) found a decline in grade point average (GPA) among Black and Hispanic students in addition to increases in school dropouts, and a reduction in college enrollments. Unfortunately, the impact of fatal police shootings on inner city youth, particularly among Black and Hispanic students, is likely to go unchanged without further intervention. Over the last six years fatal police shootings have risen, with 2022 being the deadliest year and more than half of fatal police shootings are younger individuals between the ages of 20 and 40, with Black and Hispanic individuals being more likely to be killed (Washington Post, 2023).

Students are not solely impacted by what is happening outside of their classrooms; learning environments are also targeting Black youth, with race and racism rising to the forefront of education discourse. Recently, there have been politically motivated attacks targeting the teaching of African-American history in U.S. schools, with particularly the content that is being taught in Advanced Placement African American Studies courses being under attack. There have also been renewed criticism of the 1619 Project, a movement to elevate and explain the legacy of slavery contemporarily in the U.S., and lift up the invaluable contributions of Black Americans in American society (The 1619 Project, n.d.). Unfortunately, teachers have reported increased restrictions on their instructional practices particularly from teaching about race and gender in light of these and related attacks (Woo et al., 2023). Once more, these limitations are likely to impact students more than just academically; threats to a student's sense of belonging and feelings of inclusion undermine student socially and emotional development as well (Cipriano et al., 2023a; Woo et al., 2023). The current attacks on

Black students demonstrate an unjust, exclusionary, and dangerous message to Black Americans, their cultural-historical identities are insignificant to American society, culture, and history.

In addition to racial injustices, there have been renewed attacks on LGBTQIA+ rights in America. At the time of this manuscript preparation, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) identified almost 400 proposed bills nationwide that the organization deems to be "anti-LGBTQ" legislation (*see* https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights) targeting free speech, education, civil rights, healthcare, and more. In addition, there are new and ongoing state-level restrictions on how schools teach and talk about gender identity and sexual orientation in K-12 public education (*see* Rosky, 2017; Ridings, 2020). For example, in 2022, Florida passed the Parental Rights in Education Act (currently referred to as "Don't Say Gay"), which prevents the teaching of sexual orientation and gender identity among students in kindergarten through third grade (Swidriski, 2022). In other states, such as Texas and Alabama, existing laws require teachers to teach students that "homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public" (Rosky, 2017, p. 1470). In early 2023, the CDC revealed a devastating report on youth mental health and suicidal thoughts and intentions which found that more than two-thirds of LGBQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning, Other Non-Heterosexual Identity) students in 2021 had continuing feelings of "sadness or hopelessness," more than a fifth of these students "attempted suicide," and more than a third of high school-aged LGBQ+ youth made a plan to commit suicide (pp. 59, 65). New and existing educational laws that target sexual orientation and gender identity in a negative light are likely to exacerbate an already alarming decline in the social and emotional well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth.

LGBTQIA+ youth are not the only group to be more susceptible to diminished mental well-being. In 2021 alone, Black students were at an increased risk of attempting suicide compared to other students, a tenth of female students attempted suicide, and Hispanic and multiracial students reported being more susceptible to having long lasting feelings of "sadness or hopelessness" (CDC, 2023, p. 59). Although data on suicide rates for students with disabilities is absent in this report, the CDC has reported in the past that adults with disabilities are three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts compared to people without disabilities (Center for Disease Control CDC, 2022). The CDC also found that marginalized and minoritized students are likely to view school settings as unsafe places. School connectedness, which the CDC (2023) defines as students having "the feeling…that people at their school care about them, their well-being, and success," was low among racial and ethnic minorities, LGBQ+, and female students (pp. 4, 72). Further, almost 25% of LGBQ+ students reported being bullied at school. As a result, the social and emotional outlook for marginalized minoritized students is deeply concerning and is under threat by a multitude of factors, many of which are outside of the students' control.

USB SEL interventions have demonstrated improvement in many areas that marginalized and minoritized youth can benefit from, particularly decreased emotional distress, better peer relationships, improvement of attitudes toward self and others, social behaviors, and significant advancement in school climate and safety (Cipriano et al., 2023b). Despite the success of SEL programs on the social and emotional development of K-12 students, there is little attention given to discrete populations of students, particularly those who historically have been found to be at greatest risk for diminished mental health and achievement across the academic lifespan. In other words, the very students that may benefit most from USB SEL programming are the groups we know the least about. To advance equitable and inclusive best practices in USB SEL interventions, we must carefully attend to the discourse that USB SEL interventions, however inadvertently, could be exclusionary in their practices and impacts. It is therefore necessary that we, as a field, evaluate current USB SEL programs, and those in development, to determine not just their efficacy with marginalized and minoritized students, but also how students receive and interact with program content in order to ensure meaningful and impactful engagement.

Towards an inclusive universal school-based social and emotional learning

Considering the aforementioned literature documenting critical areas of social and emotional need in support of gender-, racially-, ethnically-, linguistically-, and ability-minoritized and marginalized youth, we offer evidence-based suggestions for future program design, practice, research, and advocacy towards an inclusive SEL.

USB SEL program design

Ensure flexibility in program design and implementation

Students embody a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. These diverse experiences shape a person's knowledge, how they function in a learning environment, and how they grasp academic concepts. Essentially, each student has a different learning profile. Some may learn through multimodal learning resources; others may grasp academic concepts by listening to a lecture and reading a textbook. There is no one teaching method that can satisfy the needs of every student. Teaching USB SEL content therefore must be flexible and adaptable. SEL curricula and learning materials must reflect a diverse student body in order to foster meaningful engagement. This includes flexibility in how the SEL program is implemented as well as providing accommodations for varying learning needs.

Given the lack of attention to students with disabilities in USB SEL research, it is unclear whether these programs are providing adequate accommodations for students to participate meaningfully (Daley & McCarthy, 2021). Applying the Universal Design for Learning (UDL; Meyer et al., 2014) guidelines can help mitigate barriers to learning that some students may face as well as provide resources and tools that all students can benefit from (CAST, 2018). Our research team recently completed a practice-based analysis of typical USB SEL materials, tools, and methods using the UDL framework and guidelines. This analysis identified systematic and likely barriers to SLD participation and learning in USB SEL including barriers to (1) physical, sensory and cognitive accessibility, (2) emotional accessibility, (3) language, text and discourse, and (4) executive functioning (Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2023). Under the UDL framework, the burden of adaptation is placed on the curriculum, not the student, because in schools, variability and diversity are the norm, not the exception. Accounting for the broad range of learners in the classroom is the only way to provide all individuals with fair and equal opportunities to learn.

For example, processing speed can pose significant challenges for students when lessons and activities are done on a class-wide timetable and through extemporaneous discourse. Students with disabilities who experience challenges in their executive functions, such as working memory, attention, and planning, will experience barriers to accessing emotion regulation and self-management skills that are not sensitive to their varied levels of activity and processing levels (Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2023; Zieher et al., 2023). Increasing an activities cognitive accessibility by providing flexibility for students to process information at a pace that best works for them, teachers can diversify participation opportunities during class time and outside of it. Consider how teacher-monitored class blogging or digital chat sessions outside of class time can encourage students to share thoughts, questions, and insights on their own timescale. This kind of strategy will also support students who face barriers to self-regulation with face-to-face conversations to become more fully engaged in SEL and even take on leadership roles. Blog or chat functionality will provide students with the time they need to process, communicate thoughts and engage with peers differentially. Social skills supported on-line or through digitally mediated communication can be carried over to skills for in person social interaction, and class peers will benefit from experiencing a wider range of

perspective from their peers that may otherwise not have contributed (Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2023; Zieher et al., 2023).

Foster community and family partnerships

Despite the centering of family and community in contemporary approaches to SEL (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017), building on a longstanding literature that demonstrates how students do better when their families are involved (Pittman et al., 2020; Aspen Institute, 2019), the role that family and community play in the development of and enaction of SEL skills and the relevance and sustaining on them was limited in the recent review. Among over 400 USB SEL intervention studies, most (87%) provided no information on adaptation of content for local or school adaption, nearly half (40.8%) of studies reported no family engagement component, and nearly all studies did not have any community engagement component (85.4%). This finding is an opportunity to evolve SEL programs to incorporate culturally affirming content that upholds and sustains all student identities and cultural experiences. Further, to encourage successful student participation in SEL content, program developers can incorporate opportunities for families to join in classroom conversations and activities (Barnes et al., 2023). For example, students may be hesitant to discuss emotions or contribute to conversations around SEL content. This strategy has been helpful in increasing student engagement with learning content and invites families to contribute to their children's learning by offering knowledge (Barton & Tan, 2009). In other words, families become resources and partners in the teaching of SEL content (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017).

Social and emotional skills, whether fully, partially, or not at all developed, start in the home, and are shaped by how a family emotionally functions and communicates. A child's social and emotional development is impacted by the individual, situations, and environments that they consistently engage with (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). As a result, the family and household environment is one context through which children learn how to regulate their emotions, engage in decision-making as well as develop decision making skills and prosocial behavior (Barrett et al., 2007; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Frijda, 1988; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). It is imperative for the design and implementation of school based SEL programs to reflect on and be inclusive of the diverse family cultures and identities of the students they serve. Given the importance that the family environment plays in how children socially and emotionally develop, SEL programs will benefit from being more inclusive of the range of ways families function and teach their children to emotionally communicate, whether indirect or direct. For example, some families may not support emotional discourse in the household. As a result, program developers must be mindful that not all students will have the opportunity to practice and develop their SEL skills that are being taught within SEL curricula outside of the classroom. Thus, program developers must include families in the design of SEL curricula to better teach students how to use and transfer their newly acquired skills across contexts, particularly within challenging environments that may not be supportive (Zieher et al., 2023).

Promote diversity and inclusivity within the program developer team

It is likely that SEL programs are currently designed to promote a unilateral conceptualization and approach to emotions that are not universally applicable nor representative of how a range of cultures value, understand, and engage in social-emotional discourse and interactions. Consequently, this may result in learning materials and activities that are not culturally sensitive nor inclusive. Program development would therefore benefit from a team that can bring multiple perspectives both from a cultural and identity (i.e., sexual orientation) standpoint to the development of the program's SEL content and curricula.

Program implementation

Implement SEL programs with teachers using SAFE criteria

Findings from our recent review revealed that SEL programs delivered by teachers yielded significantly stronger effects on student outcomes compared to those facilitated by non-school personnel. Yet, only a third of programs explicitly mentioned focusing on adult development in their programming (see Cipriano et al., 2023b). Further, although more than half of the programs provided manuals on what to teach to implement the SEL program, and one time training opportunities for implementers, these resources are not explicitly designed to support the concurrent social and emotional development of the teachers who are implementing (Wanless et al., 2023). Once more, there are currently no federal or state level standards that require educator certification programs to include explicit training in SEL pedagogies (Hon et al., 2023), and sparse instruction of SEL skills for pre-service educators nationwide (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Explicit and sustained professional development programming will support quality delivery of content to all students from a variety of cultural backgrounds as well as differing intellectual, physical, and behavioral needs (Wanless et al., 2023).

Use culturally responsive teaching methods

Culture plays a significant role in how individuals develop and understand emotions (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Mesquita et al., 2016). The way in which people define, understand, and use emotion words (Jackson et al., 2019) and emotional expressions (Barrett et al., 2019), for example, can vary across cultures and languages. As the world continues to become more interconnected, we must understand that the students we teach come from varied ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds, all of which shape how they learn, process, and acquire new information. Through their various socio-cultural experiences, students acquire different ways to approach and comprehend learning material. Cohen (2011) explains that "teaching consists of not in what teachers know, but in what they know how to do with students and what students know how to do themselves, with one another, with some content" (p. 51). School or non-school personnel who facilitate USB SEL programs must identify not just the learning abilities of their students, which stem from their varied experiences and cultural backgrounds, but also their knowledge on emotions (Hon et al., 2023; Wanless et al., 2023). Facilitators can utilize this knowledge to adapt to student needs, misconceptions, and comprehension of SEL material.

Facilitators who employ culturally relevant teaching practices use students' varied backgrounds and knowledge as teaching and learning resources (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Wanless et al., 2023). Culturally responsive pedagogy requires teachers or facilitators to not only incorporate the identities of students into the teaching and learning process, but to also move their knowledge outside of the classroom to understand the social environment and structures in which students grow up and learn (Barnes et al., 2023). Essentially, culturally relevant pedagogy is needed to better bridge the gap between SEL-related concepts and students' preexisting knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Paris, 2012). It is also necessary to view students as a product of their environments. Societal and communal influences shape a student's learning process. It is therefore necessary to understand the teaching and learning methods by which the child grew up. In doing this, program implementers can incorporate a student's cultural-historical background as a way of showing a connection between new and old information. This approach brings part of the student's identity into the learning process to better grasp the specific subject matter that is taught within the SEL curriculum (Barnes et al., 2023; Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2023).

Given the importance that teachers using SAFE criteria play in implementing SEL programming and the need for culturally responsive teaching methods, it is necessary for programs to provide additional

training opportunities to teachers prior to facilitating an SEL program. The majority of U.S. states do not have legislation or funding that provide professional development opportunities that educate teachers about culturally responsive pedagogy (The Education Trust, 2022). It is therefore likely that teachers will have limited knowledge on how to implement SEL content using culturally responsive teaching methods (Hon et al., 2023; Wanless et al., 2023). As a result, SEL developers must find ways to provide preservice training and in-service professional development that educate teachers, and other facilitators, on ways to adapt an SEL program to meet the needs, abilities, and cultural backgrounds of the students they are serving. This additional training will likely be useful in exposing and reducing the inherent biases that may exist among educators and other facilitators. At the same time, program developers must be mindful of the limited time teachers already have to integrate and implement SEL programs throughout the school day and how additional training opportunities may add to their already heavy teaching load.

Actively engage students in both the teaching and learning processes

It is essential that students' identities are represented within SEL content and learning materials as representation is only the beginning on the path to inclusive, active engagement. Centering marginalized and minoritized students' experiences within SEL programs is of paramount importance in understanding their effectiveness and opportunities to improve upon them. SEL programs and facilitators, whether school or non-school personnel, can elevate the identities, experiences, and cultural knowledge of each student as teaching resources (Cipriano & Strambler, IP; Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2023; Windschitl, 2002). When students are invited to become a part of the learning and teaching processes of SEL, their buy in is affirmed, and their participation is energized and can transform the content authentically in support of ensuring the cultural salience of SEL skills across students of varying socio-cultural backgrounds.

Embedded in the learning profiles of students are misunderstandings that can influence how a student responds to specific subjects that are taught within the classroom (Ball & Wilson, 1996; Porter & Brophy, 1988). Program implementers, whether school or non-school personnel, must determine students' knowledge about the SEL content that is being taught in order to better understand if any misunderstandings exist among students. Students may have previously established perspectives that can hinder them from grasping a concept even when provided with a correct answer or approach (Ball & Wilson, 1996). For example, expressing emotions in certain contexts may be frowned upon in some cultures. SEL programs should therefore encourage constant communication between the individual implementing the SEL program and each participating student to better learn their preconceived notions of emotions.

USB SEL program research

Avoid clustering students into general and over simplified categories of learners

Classifying and analyzing identities- particularly gender, race, ethnicity, and disability- as a single or dichotomized category in the context of the evaluation of a USB SEL intervention is insufficient. In our review paper, we addressed the between and within country heterogeneity in racial, ethnic, and linguistic representations, for example, by including identity codes in our data and reporting them as descriptive statistics to catalog and support operationalizing the unique variation in outcomes that can be overlooked in aggregate studies and meta-analyses rather than more traditional othering methods (Cipriano et al., 2023a,b; Conaway et al., 2022). Additional contextual factors may further contribute to and intersect with marginalized student identities, such as urbanicity (urban suburban, or rural) and socio-economic status (including proxies such as parents education, income, class of employment, employment status). Elucidating heterogeneity will increase the visibility of marginalized or underrepresented identities in efficacy research and maximize opportunities for benefiting from this work. If you are unsure how to best classify a student's identity, ask!

Gather qualitative data regarding student experiences within SEL programs

The field would greatly benefit from data that directly hears from students, particularly marginalized and minoritized youth, on how they interact with and respond to SEL programming. Qualitative only studies are useful for understanding the efficacy of the SEL content and learning materials that are being implemented. It is therefore necessary to gather data from students of differing identities to better understand how they comprehend and connect to the learning material. This may include observing classroom discourse in real-time as well as video recording student engagement to be used for more in-depth analysis. In addition, interviewing students before, during, and after the completion of the SEL intervention can inform program developers and implementers of the areas and skills students expect to improve upon, the challenges they face during the program, and understanding their successes within the program. Further, mixed methods studies are useful to better understand SEL outcomes. One approach, for example, can be implementing an explanatory sequential mixed methods design that gathers qualitative testimony directly from students to explain pre- and post-test outcomes (Creswell, 2015). In many ways, gathering qualitative data from students provides an immediate evaluation of the SEL program that is being implemented. Regardless of the type of research method that is used, qualitative data that gathers the voice of students is not only useful to inform the design and implementation of SEL programming to be more culturally responsive but also directly includes the very students that SEL programming seeks to serve into SEL practice. In essence, we cannot assume what students, especially marginalized and minoritized youth, would benefit from. We must learn from students and incorporate their voices into SEL programming and the field in general (Cipriano et al., 2023c).

Report on what works and what does not work

Our larger review paper examined effect sizes between published and unpublished studies and found significant differences that favor published research. Best practice in the study of educational interventions suggests that all data, including those that do not produce positive and/or significant effects, be reported to enhance methodological transparency. Advancement in SEL best practices is not only dependent on what works, but also is informed by program features (e.g., design, implementation, program content, learning materials) that resulted in unfavorable findings. In other words, the field would benefit by learning what not to do, or how to implement a specific SEL content area, or set of skills differently as a whole or within specific groups of students (i.e., students with dyslexia). Such evaluations will advance the science and practice of SEL inclusively and equitably.

Advancement in SEL best practices is arguably contingent on how we learn and grow as a field. Whether research is collected and released for the public through peer-reviewed publications or reports, books, news articles, or blogs, we as researchers have a responsibility to report on how USB SEL interventions are designed and implemented as well as if and how program effects vary for students with varying cultural, linguistic, social, cognitive, and physical backgrounds and abilities (Cipriano et al., 2023b). Mixed methods studies may be particularly important for the SEL field to begin to examine the nuances that are associated with programs as well as better understanding whether and how participating students are benefiting from them.

Where to go from here

It is evident that USB SEL programs improve the social and emotional development of students within and outside of the classroom while simultaneously improving school climate and functioning. However, when considering the ethnically, racially, linguistically, gender and ability- diverse student population that exists in the United States today as well as around the world, little is actually known whether these programs are truly universal from the synthesizable evidence. Our recommendations for research and practice outlined above center around three common themes for the field to achieve in order to move closer toward more inclusive USB SEL programming: *knowledge*, *flexibility*, and *representation*. Optimal SEL outcomes are not going to be achieved unless USB SEL programming can foster active and meaningful engagement among all student participants. As a field, we first need to examine and report on how *all* students participate in (program design and implementation) and benefit from (outcomes) USB SEL programming as well as how groups of students may differ from one another in regard to both levels of engagement and outcomes. Using this knowledge, USB SEL curricula, teaching materials, and learning objectives need to be designed in a way that allows for flexibility to be able to meet the needs, learning abilities, and identities of each student. Once USB SEL programs are flexible, student identities can be incorporated into the teaching and learning processes of SEL skills. As marginalized and minoritized youth become more represented in USB SEL programming and research, the field will benefit from new knowledge that can help shape the future directions of the field. Representation also includes diversifying the leadership within program development and research teams to ensure that all voices are represented in the design, implementation, and analysis of USB SEL programs. Developing more inclusive SEL programs is and will continue to be a cyclical process that requires constant evaluation and reevaluation of whether and how programs are designed and implemented in ways that ensure gender-, racially-, ethnically-, linguistically-, and ability-minoritized and marginalized youth benefit.

Positionality statement

The authors of this manuscript acknowledge their respective and collective identities, experiences and perspectives that contribute to their preparation of this manuscript. The authors are applied educational researchers who work at privileged universities. The first author is a white, cis gender woman with a vision disability who brings the context of being a caregiver of children with disabilities to her work. The second author is a white, cis gender man who is an older sibling to a woman with intellectual disabilities.

[1] International data on prevalence rates of disability and gender identities among youth were difficult to obtain. A recent report by UNICEF (2021) estimates that one in ten children between the ages 0–17, which comprises about 240 million children, are currently living with disabilities. International K-12 data for students with disabilities is sparse as there is limited reporting (UNICEF, 2021). Likewise, there is limited data on gender identities, which is likely attributed to the fact that Canada, in 2021, was the first country to include gender diversity data as part of their national census (Statistics Canada, 2022). Limited research estimates that up to 2% of the global population and up 2.7% of school-age children identify as transgender or non-conforming (Goodman et al., 2019). More recent international polling across 27 countries estimates that 1% of all adults and 4% of the Gen Z population identify as transgender, non-binary, non-conforming, or gender fluid (IPSOS, 2021).

Declaration of Competing Interest

We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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