MODEL OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT (SECD) INTEGRATION IN SCHOOL PRACTICES

GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

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Content

The development of a child encompasses physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and moral growth. Changes occur in each of these domains, but not always at the same pace. It is important for all of us working with children to understand developmental principles, and for teachers, it is crucial to realize that the learning and socialization process of students is influenced not only by their cognitive abilities, but also by physical changes, emotional and social maturity, and the circumstances in which children find themselves.

This Guide focuses on the social and emotional development of school-age children, which we can only influence if families, teachers, and students work together.

An increasing number of violent situations, the occurrence of crisis events, the lack of mental hygiene and emotional literacy require a synergy of action from the entire society, where schools remain a place where prevention is both desirable and mandatory, along with social-emotional learning, which is possible in a school environment. The media impose a "terror of happiness" that does not allow a child to feel sad, angry, or jealous, even though these are completely normal feelings just like the happiness we strive for. Therefore, modern education and upbringing must respond to the needs of children and support their well-being and welfare, helping them articulate their feelings. How significant and possible this is, we have the opportunity to recognize in this publication.

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT (SECD) INTEGRATION IN SCHOOLS

Social-emotional character development (SECD), also referred to as social-emotional learning (SEL), involves acquiring skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes that significantly contribute to ensuring well-being and success both in school and in life. Common examples of these competencies include self-esteem and self-confidence, understanding and managing emotions, healthy relationships and communication, a sense of responsibility, and social awareness. Children acquire these competencies through interactions with parents and caregivers, teachers, and other adults they encounter, peers, as well as the communities they belong to, in various environments, including school and family.

In order to support the holistic development of children through education, SECD (SEL) must be an integral part of the curriculum at various levels of education and upbringing. Since academic and social-emotional competencies work in synergy, mutually supporting and encouraging one another, SECD (SEL) should be integrated into school life, inseparable from the educational and upbringing process, and systematically implemented in teaching, extracurricular activities, and other school events.

> *"Cognitive and character skills are inseparable. Skills give rise to skills. Motivated children learn more. Those who are better informed usually make wiser decisions. Self-control, openness, the ability to engage with others, to plan, and to persevere—these are just some of the skills that lead to a productive life."*
>
> James Heckman, Nobel Prize laureate
> Center for the Economics of Human Development,
> University of Chicago

The conceptual framework, as an introduction in the Guide you are about to read, aims to highlight the importance of addressing this topic and to provide a foundation for its greater visibility and integration into the education and upbringing system of the Republic of Serbia, especially during the first and second cycles of education and upbringing. Given that SECD (SEL) in schools improves learning outcomes and contributes to the psychosocial well-being of children, this framework is focused on providing key guidelines for:
*   the integration of SECD into school policies and practices as a theme that permeates all aspects of education and upbringing, and enhances the well-being and overall academic achievements of students.

- Creating conditions for students to achieve their full potential in terms of relevant knowledge, skills, and values that prepare them to achieve academic success and integrate into society,
- Motivating teachers, schools, and other stakeholders in education to support the development of social-emotional competencies in children with appropriate strategies, methods, and resources, and to create a safe and secure environment for learning and development.

The framework is in line with the Education Development Strategy until 2030 and the accompanying Action Plan, and works towards achieving the specific goals of the Strategy regarding the support for the development of students' character, inclusivity, and the educational role of educational institutions. It aims to increase awareness and the capacity of schools to support the social-emotional development of children, providing a structure for designing, creating, implementing, evaluating, and improving teaching and learning programs aimed at developing children's social-emotional competencies. Additionally, it promotes a child-centered approach and respect for children's rights, and its foundation is also in the relevant legal documents, primarily in the Law on the Foundations of the Education and Upbringing System, as well as in subordinate regulations, which primarily relate to ensuring the quality of work, particularly in the areas of Ethos and Student Support.

The five key social-emotional competencies in this framework are in line with the widely accepted model defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning (CASEL).[1]

Why are we addressing this topic?

The Current Context of Education in Serbia, Strategic and Legislative Framework

A key role in integrating social-emotional character development and learning into the core of the education system is played by policies, from the national level to the level of individual schools.

The Republic of Serbia is committed to European integration, and in the context of accession negotiations, it is working on aligning its legislation with the *legal acquis* of the European Union, striving to meet the sustainable development goals. Significant progress in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved through lifelong learning and education, which, among other things, builds social cohesion and promotes gender equality, human rights, global citizenship, peaceful conflict resolution, and respect for cultural diversity. Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 is crucial in this regard as it requires teaching and learning approaches that nurture a range of social and emotional (SE) competencies, including self-awareness, awareness of others, self-regulation, relationship-building skills, and responsible decision-making.[2]

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[1] Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning   https://casel.org/

The *Strategy for the Development of Education and Upbringing* in the Republic of Serbia until 2030, building upon the previous one, emphasizes that strengthening the educational role of educational institutions can still be considered a priority development direction and highlights the need for the accreditation of a greater number of quality training programs aimed at strengthening teachers' competencies to reinforce the educational function of educational institutions, as well as the continuity of collecting examples of good practices.

The *Strategy for the Development of Education and Upbringing* in the Republic of Serbia until 2020 states: 'The school influences the upbringing of students through its overall activities, through the way it educates its students, through special activities and content designed to educate students, but also through its culture (Bruner, 1996), ethos, and recognizable identity. The educational role of the school in primary education has been neglected. "If teaching is predominantly lecture-based, assessments are seen as reproducing learned content with understanding, grades are non-discriminatory (and of little value and reliability), the school is focused on a narrow cognitive aspect, rather than the holistic development of the student's character, if there is no student participation in the teaching/learning process, and no attention is given to a whole set of important goals, then it is clear that such a model can at best form a person who knows facts well but is independent, unable to connect and apply knowledge, collaborate with others, is untrained in teamwork, taking responsibility, decision-making, recognizing and approaching problem-solving, and has low motivation for learning and intellectual work." (p. 59)

The main goals of education and upbringing identified in the *Law on the Foundations of the Education and Upbringing System* (ZOSOV, Article 8), among others, include:

- Ensuring well-being and supporting the holistic development of children, students, and adults;
- Developing competencies for navigating and actively participating in a changing modern society;
- Full intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and physical development of each child, student, and adult, in accordance with their age, developmental needs, and interests;
- Developing self-awareness, creative abilities, critical thinking, motivation for learning, teamwork skills, self-assessment, initiative, and the ability to express one's opinions;
- Empowering individuals to make sound decisions regarding further education and career choices, personal development, and future life;
- Developing positive human values;
- Developing a sense of solidarity, understanding, and constructive cooperation with others, and fostering friendship and camaraderie;

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[2] NISSEM (Networking to Integrate SDG Target 4.7 and SEL skills into Educational Materials) Position Paper

- Developing competencies for understanding and respecting children's rights, human rights, civil liberties, and the ability to live in a democratically organized and just society.
- Development and respect for racial, national, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, sexual, and age equality, tolerance, and the appreciation of diversity.

Since upbringing is recognized as an inalienable and integral part of the education system in Serbia, and it is emphasized that 'everyone has the right to education and upbringing' (ZOSOV, Article 3), the educational role of the school should be continually strengthened and improved, especially in the context of modern society (i.e., globalization, economic crisis, wars, accessibility of digital content, and social networks). A narrow focus on students' cognitive achievements, with insufficient support for the holistic development of the student's character, leads to the overlooking of a whole set of important goals and outcomes of education defined by the *Law on the Foundations of the Education and Upbringing System* of the Republic of Serbia.[3]

Teacher competencies covered by the *Rulebook on the Standards of Competence for the Teaching Profession and Their Professional Development* should ensure professional standards regarding what is considered successful teaching. In addition to competencies for the subject area, subject methodology, teaching, learning, communication, and cooperation, special attention is given to competencies for supporting the development of students' character.

Competencies are defined in relation to the goals and learning outcomes and do not specifically address the competencies of teachers for implementing social-emotional learning in practice. However, the defined knowledge related to supporting the development of students' character (e.g., knows and understands the physical, emotional, social, and cultural differences among students; understands the psychological, emotional, and social development of students) and planning opportunities (such as various activities that engage all students, taking into account their individual differences in social and emotional development, methods and approaches for encouraging students' self-confidence and self-esteem) provide a good foundation for enhancing teachers' personal SE competencies and integrating SECD into school practice.

The Rulebook on Quality Standards for Institutions, within the key quality area of Support for Students, particularly emphasizes providing educational support to students, organizing programs/activities to develop social skills (constructive problem-solving, non-violent communication, etc.), and promoting healthy lifestyles, children's rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development. Additionally, the key quality area of Teaching and Learning, by emphasizing encouraging communication, teamwork, cooperation, presentation, critical thinking, planning, and setting personal learning goals, leaves ample space for SECD (SEL) and the development of necessary SE competencies. The opportunity to integrate it into regular school practice is also visible

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3 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 88/2017, 27/2018 – other law, 10/2019, 27/2018 – other law, 6/2020, and 129/2021.
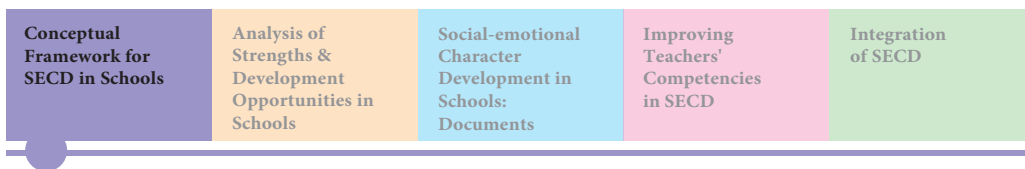
through the area of ethos, particularly in the standards that speak about establishing good interpersonal relationships and cooperation at all levels.[4]

Since the introduction of inclusive education in 2009, the Republic of Serbia has made significant progress in defining the legal framework for inclusive education, as seen in the *National Report on Inclusive Education* in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2015 to 2018. Inclusive education has been recognized as a potential for enhancing social cohesion, inter-cultural relations, and educational opportunities for all children.

However, even after 15 years since the introduction of inclusive education in Serbia, the capacities for implementation have not kept pace with changes in legislation. SECD can facilitate and support the development of schools as inclusive communities by promoting social-emotional competencies such as establishing and maintaining relationships, caring for others and the community, responsible decision-making, self-regulation, etc. With the support of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development and the Council of Europe, a *Handbook of Guidelines for the Integration of the Competence Framework for Democratic Culture* was created, emphasizing that in today's educational environment, democratic values and a focus on general and cross-curricular competencies enable a more dynamic combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, setting expectations for students to acquire, develop, and apply these values through teaching and learning.

Social-emotional competencies, key competencies for lifelong learning, and general cross-curricular competencies overlap significantly and serve as the foundation for personal and professional development.

Social-emotional competencies support the development of key lifelong learning competencies and general cross-curricular competencies by helping students better understand and manage their emotions, work in teams, make responsible decisions, increase motivation for learning, and apply new knowledge and skills. At the same time, when the teaching and learning process is directed towards acquiring general cross-curricular competencies and key lifelong learning competencies, which encompass important aspects such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, the development of essential social-emotional competencies is supported.

Orienting the educational process towards developing general cross-curricular competencies and key competencies for lifelong learning is not possible without relying on and taking a systematic approach to improving the social-emotional competencies of both teachers and students. These competencies, as an important domain of lifelong learning, contribute to social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, enabling individuals to effectively adapt to new situations and the challenges of the 21st century.

A systematic approach to SECD in schools contributes to fostering the development of social and civic competencies for lifelong learning (active, effective, democratic, and

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[4] *Law on the Foundations of the Education and Upbringing System,* Articles 11 and 12

constructive participation in social and work life in diverse communities) and helps build competencies for democratic culture.[5] Social-emotional competencies, which include abilities such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making, play a key role in the development of democratic culture and in achieving the goals of sustainable development. These two groups of competencies are interconnected and mutually supportive. For example, developing social-emotional competencies can help students better understand and appreciate the values of democratic culture, while developing competencies for democratic culture can help students develop important social-emotional skills such as empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

The tragic events in early May 2023 at the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School in Belgrade and in Mladenovac, Serbia, clearly highlighted the priority of reflecting on how schools can provide a safe and supportive environment for the learning and development of all children. Considering the numerous and challenging expectations placed on schools in general, and especially in crisis situations, it is believed that social-emotional learning programs can help empower schools for preventive and educational work in the area of social-emotional development of children and the educational role of schools.

At the beginning of the 2023/2024 school year, the Ministry of Education of Serbia created Guidelines for organizing and implementing educational work in elementary schools for the 2023/2024 school year, with the goal of supporting the organization of activities through which, by actively involving students, the primary focus will be on developing positive human values in students, as well as improving relationships based on mutual respect, cooperation, and solidarity, while respecting diversity.

In order to strengthen and provide support to employees in the education system, as well as to employees in other systems and organizations whose professionals provide psychosocial and other forms of support to children and adults for overcoming a crisis and/or traumatic event they have been directly or indirectly affected by, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and other partners, the following publications have been developed or translated:

- *Mental Health in Schools: Why it is Important, How to Recognize Problems, and How to Respond Manual*
- *Psychological First Aid in Schools Guide*
- *Skills for Psychological Recovery Guide*

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[5] *Guidelines for the Integration of the Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture in Schools Manuals.* Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Republic of Serbia.

The Importance of SECD - Who Benefits?

Benefits for children

When children are aware of their emotions, they have the opportunity to learn how to cope with them and understand the feelings and emotional states of the people around them. This is the foundation for empathy and the development and maintenance of quality relationships, but it also helps children persist through challenging tasks, achieve their goals, and effectively seek help when needed. Although children who are able to self-regulate and successfully manage their emotions tend to have better academic outcomes and fewer disciplinary problems, SECD is not only related to progress in academic skills but also to the overall development of the child. In crisis situations, SECD has proven to be vital in supporting students to overcome challenges and difficulties.

Numerous studies on preventive programs in schools aimed at developing children's social-emotional skills have shown that SECD (SEL) is extremely important for moral reasoning, civic awareness, motivation for academic and other achievements (Elbertson et al., 2010). Social-emotional competencies are a prerequisite for the development of thinking and learning skills (Brendtro et al., 1990; Elias et al., 1997, according to Elbertson et al., 2010) and are associated with skills important for adult life and workplace success, such as problem-solving skills, interpersonal and communication skills, decision-making, and integrity (Elbertson et al., 2010).

One of the most extensive studies on the impact of SEL was a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs conducted in schools over 30 years, involving approximately 270,000 students aged 5 to 18 years. This study (Durlak et al., 2011) showed that interventions related to social-emotional competencies lead to: a) improvements in social-emotional skills (by 23%), b) enhanced academic achievement (by 11%), c) reduced levels of stress in students (by 10%), d) improved prosocial behavior (by 9%), e) reduced "problematic" behavior among students (by 9%), and f) improved attitudes toward themselves, others, and school (by 9% more than students who did not participate in these programs).

A **safe and organized environment** that encourages positive behavior in the classroom is **recognized as a necessary condition for children's academic success** (Marzano, 2003). Social-emotional competencies such as self-regulation, the ability to manage one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior, have been linked to academic success in many studies (e.g., Oberle et al., 2014).

Students who show greater self-awareness and self-confidence in their learning abilities tend to work harder and are more persistent when faced with challenges (Aronson, 2002; according to Durlak et al., 2011; Dweck, Walton, and Cohen, 2014).

Students who set high academic goals for themselves, possess greater self-discipline, are self-motivated, manage stress effectively, and approach tasks in an organized manner,

tend to study more and achieve better grades (Duckworth and Seligman, 2005; Elliot and Dweck, 2005; according to Durlak et al., 2011).

Students who use problem-solving skills to overcome obstacles and make responsible decisions regarding their learning and homework tend to have better academic performance (Zins and Elias, 2006; according to Durlak et al., 2011).

Benefits for parents

Parents and guardians are the first teachers to their children. They are the ones who initially teach children life skills and have a deep understanding and knowledge of their development, experiences, the culture they grow up in, and learning-related needs. These insights and perspectives are crucial for SECD (SEL).

SECD (SEL) can help parents better understand their children's emotional needs and how those needs influence their behavior. Parents can use these strategies to support their children in developing essential life skills, such as managing emotions, problem-solving, building positive relationships, and making responsible decisions. It is also important to note that SEL can help parents apply positive parenting strategies, which can contribute to fostering positive family relationships.

Research indicates that social-emotional building programs are more effective when they are extended to the micro-culture in which a child grows up. There is a much higher likelihood that families will establish partnerships with schools when the norms and values of the school respect and acknowledge their personal experiences. Schools need decision-making processes that ensure families, particularly those from marginalized groups, are involved in the planning, implementation, and continuous improvement of SEL programs. Schools can establish partnerships with families in various ways, including creating ongoing two-way communication and supporting parents and guardians in understanding child development. This, in turn, enables teachers to understand the background and culture of the family, providing opportunities for families to engage in school life and develop their parenting skills.

Benefits for teachers

Research has shown that teachers who are able to recognize, understand, label, and express their emotions, and who can manage them—i.e., those who nurture social-emotional skills in their personal lives—are the following:

a) **less likely to experience burnout syndrome** (Brackett et al., 2010),
b) **improve their mental health and are more professionally effective,** which has a significant impact on students' academic success (Oliviera et al., 2021),
c) **build stronger relationships with their colleagues** (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), which forms the foundation for productive collaboration. Teachers who develop better communication and mutual trust **more often learn from each other**, remain in the teaching profession, and have a more positive impact on students' achievements (Quintero et al., 2017).

d) **have more empathy and patience**, encourage healthy communication, and create a safe learning environment (Brackett et al., 2008), thus reducing the amount of time needed to manage classroom behavior, ensuring more time for teaching and learning,

e) are more successful in teaching their students social-emotional skills and **demonstrate these skills by example,** serving as role models for students (Brackett et al., 2008; Berman, Chaffee, & Sarmiento, 2018),

f) **establish and maintain better relationships with students** (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), which improves their ability to "manage the classroom" (Durlak et al., 2011) and leads to fewer discipline problems (Marzano & Marzano, 2003),

g) **contribute positively to the overall school climate** (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Berman, Chaffee, & Sarmiento, 2018).

Benefits for schools

SECD (SEL) has numerous implications for the development of a positive and supportive school ethos that promotes the holistic development of students. It fosters inclusion (Durlak et al., 2011) by encouraging empathy, understanding, and respect for different perspectives, thus contributing to an atmosphere where every student feels accepted and valued, regardless of the differences among them.

It also promotes emotional intelligence (Brackett, M. A., & Katulak, N. A., 2006), which enables students to build constructive relationships with others, resolve conflicts non-violently, manage their emotions, and self-regulate their behavior. SEL programs reduce the likelihood of antisocial behavior (Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M., 2012) and foster connections between students, teachers, and parents, creating an atmosphere of belonging and support within the school (Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.)., 2004). Ultimately, SEL contributes to the implementation of values such as integrity, fairness, inclusivity, and respect, which become integral parts of the school ethos (Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., ... & Shriver, T. P., 1997).

Benefits for communities

Well-designed and thoughtfully implemented programs have long-lasting effects on students, lasting for more than one or two decades after their participation. Social-emotional skills in childhood are predictors of academic success and success in adulthood (Caprara et al., 2000), including physical and mental health, substance dependence, and overall well-being (Moffitt et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015), higher education, better employment, and a lower likelihood of engaging in criminal activities (Jones et al., 2015). Investing in high-quality programs for all children can increase the number of productive, well-adjusted adults and bring economic benefits in the future (Jones et al., 2017).

SECD and Improving the Quality of Academic Performance

Professional competencies of teachers include the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that ensure successful communication with students, parents, colleagues, as well as providing appropriate support for the development of students' character.

Teachers should create a positive atmosphere in the classroom, respond appropriately to different emotions and behaviors of students, professionally develop themselves, and reflect on ways in which they can influence the development of social-emotional knowledge and skills in students, while nurturing common values.

All areas of school work quality, especially teaching and learning, student support, and ethos, enable social-emotional learning to be planned and systematically integrated into the school community through regular instructional and extracurricular activities in accordance with the goals of education and upbringing, as well as the identified or expressed needs of teachers, students, and families.

Teachers and principals in schools where SECD (SEL) initiatives were piloted, as well as their mentors, believe that a school in which they're implemented is recognized as an institution where:

- The curricula and learning programs take into account the age, developmental, and specific needs of the students.
- They explore and respect students' interests when planning extracurricular activities.
- They set tasks that are tailored to the students' abilities, and the work methods and teaching materials are adapted to the individual characteristics of the students.
- They present ideas and original, creative solutions from the students and encourage their intellectual curiosity and free expression of thoughts.
- They show trust in the students' capabilities, and there are positive expectations from the teachers regarding student success.
- They take various measures to provide educational support to students.
- They organize programs/activities for developing social skills.
- They promote healthy lifestyles, children's rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development.
- For newly enrolled students and staff, they implement well-developed support procedures to help them adapt to the new school environment.
- They use various techniques for the prevention and constructive resolution of conflicts.
- They organize various activities for students in which everyone has the opportunity to achieve a result/success.
- Parents are actively involved (participate) in the life and work of the school.
- The principal or director ensures the conditions for staff, the student parliament, and the parent council to actively participate in decision-making to improve the work of the school.
- **The school is recognized as a center of innovation and for its educational and pedagogical activities within both the broader and narrower local and professional communities.**

SECD and Prevention of School Violence

SECD (SEL) is crucial for the prevention of peer violence in schools. Promoting skills, behaviors, and attitudes of nonviolent communication (e.g., recognizing one's own and others' feelings, understanding the connection between emotions, needs, and behaviors, self-soothing and self-control skills, assertive expression, active listening, understanding the importance of respecting others, and peacefully resolving conflicts) leads to fewer behavioral problems and better interpersonal relationships, while also contributing to the creation of a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Practice shows that by improving strategies through which teachers encourage the learning and development of social and emotional skills, the effectiveness of their work with children increases, as well as the closeness and constructiveness of their interactions. Moreover, supporting the development of social-emotional competencies in children provides teachers with the opportunity to better understand the children and build an emotionally supportive environment that positively guides their behavior, contributes to their mental health and well-being, and ensures their regular school attendance. When discussing the prevention of violence, it is important that students gain knowledge about the types of violence and the causes of violent behavior, but they also need to master social-emotional skills.[6]

The effectiveness of implementing social-emotional character development is supported by a systematic approach, which involves support from teachers, parents, and the school community in the process of creating a safe and supportive environment for learning and development. The systematic approach implies the integration of SECD (SEL) into school practices, which can be achieved through:

1. **Support from teachers and parents:** Teachers and parents play a crucial role in the implementation of SECD (SEL) programs. The best results are achieved when they are actively engaged together in supporting children in developing social and emotional skills, while continuously reflecting on and improving their own social-emotional competencies.
2. **Creating a safe environment:** Schools need to be a safe and supportive environment for all students. This includes promoting tolerance, respecting diversity, and having zero tolerance for violence, through both curricular and extracurricular activities.
3. **Development of social and emotional skills**: SECD (SEL) programs encompass activities that help students understand and manage their emotions, develop empathy, and improve their communication skills.
4. **Encouraging student participation:** Students should be involved in decisions that affect school life. This helps them feel respected and supported.

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6 *Towards a Safe and Supportive School Environment – A Guide for Schools;* Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2020

5.   Visibility of SECD at the Policy and Practice Level in Schools: SECD (SEL) should be an integral part of the school's documentation, and its effective implementation in practice requires continuous reevaluation, fostering a supportive learning environment, teaching, modeling behavior, practicing the application of learned skills, and creating conditions for meaningful participation of students and their parents. Effective implementation involves continuous professional development for teachers, establishing authentic partnerships with families and the community.

Defining Key Concepts

Social and emotional skills can be learned and acquired throughout life. In addition to everyday experiences, this is supported by research in developmental cognitive neuroscience (e.g., Diamond, 2012), which has a significant impact on the development of social-emotional character development and social-emotional learning theory and practice. Many authors emphasize the importance of early assessment of children's social-emotional competencies, considering that these "soft" but crucial skills are more flexible than various cognitive measures, such as intelligence quotient, and as a result, more receptive to change through different interventions. Since the effects in some social-emotional areas tend to fade over time, the importance of long-term support for students becomes more significant. The improvement of students' social-emotional skills (and other positive outcomes that come with them) is initiated by adults. To improve students' competencies, we must not overlook teachers, who need to be respected and supported in developing their own social-emotional competencies.

SECD (SEL) is of vital importance for schools that aim to effectively prepare all students for success in school and life. "It is a process through which children, youth, and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, show feelings and empathy toward others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL – 2018).

Social-emotional character development and learning represents the learning of various skills necessary for successfully performing life tasks and is a part of education that connects academic knowledge with skills important for success in school, family, community, and life in general.[7]

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[7] Elias, M.J.. Academic and social-emotional learning. Educational Practices Series-11. International Academy of Education: International Bureau of Education.

Diagram[8] shows the five key competencies of SEL (CASEL model):

Self-regulation – the ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations.

Self-awareness – the ability to clearly recognize one's own feelings and thoughts and how they influence behavior.

Social awareness – the ability to put oneself in another person's position and empathize with others, including those from different backgrounds and cultures.

Relationship skills – the ability to establish and maintain healthy and successful relationships with various individuals and groups.

Responsible decision-making – the ability to make constructive choices regarding one's own behavior and social interactions, based on ethical standards, concern for safety, and social norms.
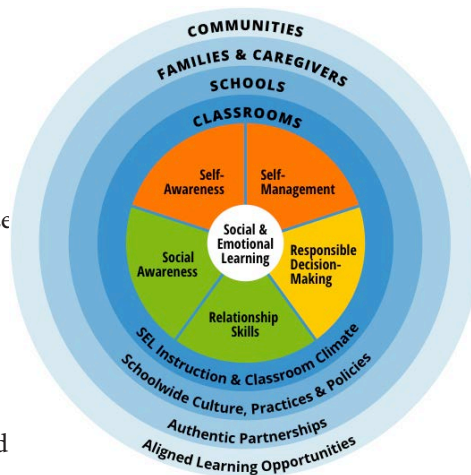
This model or framework for SEL was chosen from several high-quality models that define and classify social-emotional competencies because it provides a comprehensive and systematic approach to SEL, includes various contexts and environments important for children's learning and development (from classrooms, schools, and families to communities), focuses on the well-being of all children, and is grounded in research. Therefore, it is the most frequently used in research and practice worldwide, offering a solid foundation for ensuring a shared understanding among all education stakeholders.[9]

Teachers support the learning process of all students when they plan various forms of work and offer the possibility of choice, apply interactive methods and techniques (especially cooperative learning and peer learning techniques), and adapt them to the specific needs of the class. In this way, learning does not take place solely on a cognitive level, but students also develop social-emotional skills such as cooperation, negotiation, decision-making, problem-solving, advocating for their own ideas, teamwork, and so on.

The integration of SECD (SEL) into teaching should be part of the broader strategy of the school to support the overall development of students and implies that these skills are learned and practiced within regular school activities, not just as part of special programs or interventions. This can include strategies such as cooperative work techniques, thematic planning and project-based learning, discussions, reflections, and other teaching and learning activities, as well as extracurricular activities that support the development of social-emotional skills.

[8] What is SEL? https://casel.org/what-is-sel/

[9] A detailed review and analysis of existing frameworks for SEL available on the specialized platform of Harvard University. http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/frameworks/

Everyday school life is full of various situations, both planned and unplanned, which indicate that students need different types of support in learning, as well as in establishing and maintaining social contacts. Planned support within schools may include psychosocial support through the development of various social-emotional competencies. This type of support can be implemented during class meetings, extracurricular activities, or through organizing workshops with specific topics aligned with the needs of smaller groups of students.

Work with students and families on preventing violence and promoting anti-discrimination practices, in addition to providing information, is based on developing students' social-emotional competencies such as self-awareness and awareness of others, skills for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and responsible decision-making. Activities at schools aimed at encouraging mutual respect and acceptance, peer mediation, and non-violent conflict resolution contribute to developing the school as an environment in which every student feels safe and welcome.

In this regard, working on developing the social-emotional competencies of both teachers and students is not a secondary or irrelevant activity in the school practice. Investing effort to systematically develop these competencies contributes to improving the overall quality of the institution's work and achieving the desired outcomes and goals of education and upbringing.[10]
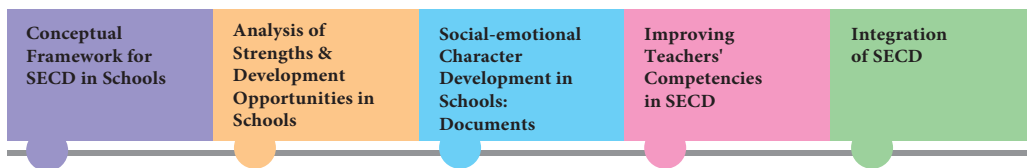
The development of systematically organized SECD (SEL) at the school level will come more into fruition when there are the following actions:

- **Creating a supportive learning environment** where all children and adults feel accepted and respected, and where they joyfully learn from one another.

- **Learning through various student activities.** The opportunity to participate and express themselves through a variety of school activities, as well as to freely play and socialize, provides an effective way to learn social-emotional skills. Play and interaction with peers allow children to explore and express their feelings, learn about cooperation, plan and decide together, resolve conflicts, negotiate, and much more, all of which contributes to the development of social-emotional competencies.

- **Integrating SEL into the teaching and learning program involves acquiring various knowledge, skills, and values** within social-emotional competencies during the teaching and learning process across different subjects, as well as carrying out targeted, specifically planned activities to practice social-emotional skills and apply them in everyday activities.

- **Supporting parents to work together with the school** in encouraging the social-

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[10] *The Laws on the Fundamentals of the Educational System*, "Article 8"

emotional development of children, both at school and in the family environment. Support for the development of social-emotional skills in children can include informing parents about the importance of building such skills, jointly developing strategies that parents can apply in the family environment, as well as supporting parents' own personal social-emotional knowledge and skills.

- **Teacher self-reflection** involves critically thinking about efforts to support the acquisition and development of social-emotional competencies within the school. Questions about their own social-emotional competencies, as well as about activities that teachers can undertake on an individual and institutional level in accordance with the insights they have gained, can provide a good roadmap.

Conceptual Framework for SECD in Schools	Analysis of Strengths & Development Opportunities in Schools	Social-emotional Character Development in Schools: Documents	Improving Teachers' Competencies in SECD	Integration of SECD

THE DEVELOPMENT PATH - HOW TO ACHIEVE SECD SCHOOLWIDE

If you are ready to begin your journey toward becoming a school that nurtures social-emotional character development / social-emotional learning, on the following pages you can read about the steps you can take, based on the experiences of schools that were involved in a SECD program in Serbia from 2022 to 2025.

Program Abstract:
In response to the current needs of schools, CIP Center for Interactive Pedagogy and Childhood Education International, with support from the Ministry of Education of Serbia and funding from the John Templeton Foundation, implemented the program "Social-Emotional Character Development in Primary Schools: A Community of Practice Framework."

The program focused on improving the competencies of teachers in five primary schools to integrate SECD (also referred to as SEL) into their practices and to further enhance and expand it in collaboration with other schools. At the same time, program activities aim to reduce prejudices and enable parents to better understand the importance of SECD so that, in collaboration with schools, they can plan and implement activities that support the development of children's social-emotional character.

The developed resources (such as trainings, activities encouraging the development of students' social-emotional competencies, and a set of mentoring support activities for integrating SECD into school practice, with a particular emphasis on involving parents) supported the establishment of Communities of Practice in schools and the improvement of evidence-based practices through participatory action research.

Considering the numerous and challenging expectations placed on schools in general, and especially in crisis situations, we expect that this Guide will inspire schools to integrate SECD (SEL) into their regular practices as one way to ensure a safe and supportive learning and development environment for all children.

Although presented through steps, this path is not always linear. The starting point is certainly an analysis of the strengths and resources that a school has, in order to plan future activities and ensure their sustainability. Depending on needs and resources, you will revisit each of the steps if you decide to become a school that nurtures social-emotional learning as one of the ways to support children in their growth and preparation for future challenges in life.

ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS & DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

In this step, the key is the exchange within the school community on how we understand what social-emotional learning is and why it is important for us as a school community to provide the conditions for integrating SECD into everyday practice.

This may include discussions with school staff, students, parents/guardians, and other participants in the educational process about the practices and competencies we have as a school community, the resources we have at our disposal, as well as the areas that need improvement and the challenges we can expect in this process.

Below are some methodological tools that can support the assessment of the current situation and help initiate discussions about the next steps.

SECD from the Teachers' Perspective

Vignettes about SECD

One way to start a conversation with teachers about SECD is through the use of vignettes that describe situations from school life in which teachers are expected to support the development of students' social-emotional competencies.

Below is an example of one vignette, along with questions that can serve as a basis for discussion. You can also create your own vignettes based on situations that are common in your school.

A group of boys is exchanging football player stickers. Marko approaches, wanting to join the exchange, but the boys tell him they are done because the class is about to start. Marko angrily takes the remaining stickers and throws them out the window.

1. Would you react in this situation?   YES   NO
   1.2. If your answer is 'yes',
       how would you react (what would you do
       and/or say) in this situation?
2. When you react in this way (or when you don't react),
what are you teaching the children?

You can download the description of the vignette via the link.

Based on the teachers' responses, 25 strategies have been identified that teachers would use in the described situations. Below is a list of strategies that can help you analyze your colleagues' responses, as well as provide ideas for different ways of reacting.

1. Involving parents
2. Putting oneself in the other's position (including self-disclosure)
3. Seeking support from members of the school community (psychologists, counselors, class teachers, etc.)
4. Teaching values (one-way, from teacher to students)
5. Planning learning activities at the group level
6. Monitoring/Tracking the development of the situation
7. Absence of reaction
8. Reinforcing good behavior
9. Punishing bad behavior
10. Public negative evaluation of behavior
11. Encouraging students to stand up for themselves
12. Supporting the development of a positive self-image/Reassurance
13. Referring to rules
14. Providing an opportunity to correct a mistake
15. Offering alternative positive behaviors/Teaching strategies/Offering strategies relevant to social-emotional competence
16. Encouraging peer support
17. Pointing out the consequences
18. Guiding toward a solution/Guided discussion about the situation and reactions/Mediation
19. Discussion
20. Standing up for the student
21. Providing emotional support (empathy, understanding)
22. Giving negative feedback about behavior
23. Applying logical consequences
24. One-on-one conversation with the student
25. Restructuring the environment (e.g., seating arrangements)

Self-Assessment of Competencies for Supporting Social-emotional Character Development

Self-assessment of competencies for supporting SECD/SEL can help us understand what members of the school community see as the strengths of the school and what they perceive as areas where the school needs support from outside the school. At the same time, this represents the first step in planning meaningful professional development activities. You can organize the self-assessment of competencies by following the order described below.

1. Self-assessment of competencies for supporting SECD (SEL). Members of the staff individually assess their competencies for supporting it using a questionnaire, which you can view via the link in the image below. *(*Note: Questionnaire in link is in Serbian, given the audience for program.)*

In addition to the offered competencies, through discussion, you can identify and add other competencies that you, as a professional community, recognize as significant for supporting SECD (SEL).

2. Joint reflection on the school profile presentation. Based on the participants' responses, calculate the minimum score at the group level, the maximum score at the group level, and the group average, and present them as a diagram (Figure 1).

*Examples in figure below are in Serbian, as they show results from 2022-2025 program in Serbia.
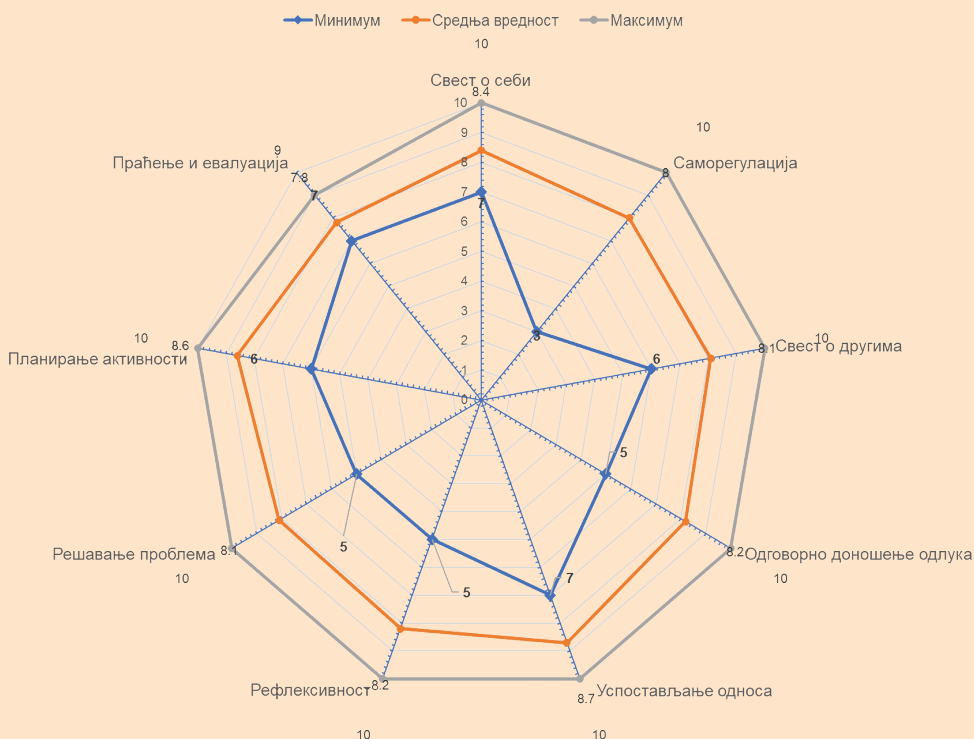

Figure 1. Example of a diagram displaying the self-assessment of competencies of the staff members at school

Invite the school staff to comment on the assessment results they find surprising, as well as to identify the areas of strength and weakness of their school.

Highlight in particular those areas where:
- the minimum and maximum are close and low, indicating the need for additional support outside the school in these areas;
- the minimum and maximum are close and high, indicating that your school could be a resource for other schools in these areas;
- there is a significant difference between the minimum and maximum scores, indicating areas where your school could benefit from horizontal learning within the school.

3. Planning professional development activities. Invite participants to propose specific forms of professional development through which they believe they could improve their competencies. Record the suggestions and incorporate them into the professional development plan..

SECD from the Students' Perspective

Self-Assessment of Students' Competencies for SECD

To plan activities that address students' needs, one of the steps could be (self)assessment of students' social-emotional competencies. For this purpose, you can use the social-emotional competency scale from the Delaware School Climate Survey (Delaware School Climate Survey – Student, 2019). As its name suggests, the social-emotional competency scale allows for student self-assessment of the development of SEL competencies. The scale consists of 16 items divided into four subscales: Responsible decision-making, Social awareness, Self-regulation, and Relationship skills.

https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/survey/delaware-school-climate-survey

You can download the student social-emotional competency scale via the link, and at the end of the scale, there are instructions for calculating the results.

From 2023-2024, the scale was used in a study involving 316 students from the third, fifth, and seventh grades in five primary schools in Serbia. As shown in Graph 1, the results suggest that older students tend to assess their own social-emotional competencies more negatively compared to younger students. They rate their competencies for responsible decision-making the highest, while they rate their competencies for establishing and maintaining relationships, especially for constructively resolving conflicts, the lowest.

You can read the research in the proceedings of the conference *Where is Education and Upbringing Heading: Using Values as a Guidepost. (*Note: The proceedings can be accessed via the link below, in Serbian.)* The mentioned results can serve as a comparison when analyzing the results of students in your school.

The results obtained in this way, via survey, can be presented to students, thereby initiating a discussion on the importance of social-emotional competencies. You can also use them to design activities that support SEL.
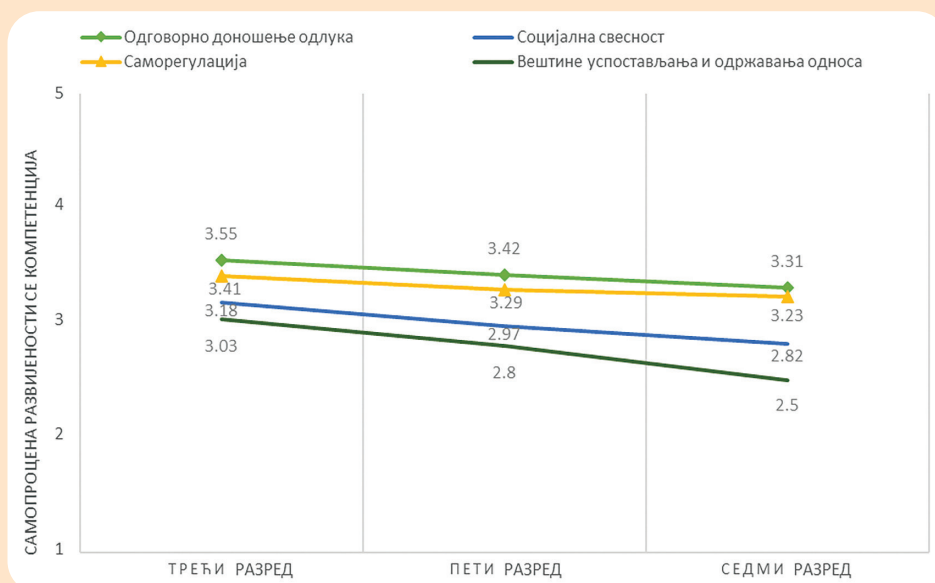
Graph 1. Self-assessment of students' competencies across different grades (taken from Jovanović et al., 2024).

A Conversation about Values with Students

"How to start a conversation with students about values?" "How can you create a space for students to express their views on values, while also allowing them to hear others?" "How can you, as a teacher, lead a conversation on this sensitive topic?" One way to initiate a conversation about values is through the use of photographs as a medium. Below is a proposed activity and a photograph you can use to start the conversation.

Use the example discussion questions prompted by photographs shown to students:

- Look at the photograph provided below, what do you see here? What is shown in the photograph?
- How do the characters in the photograph feel? What are they thinking about?
- If you were to tell a story about this photograph, how would that story unfold? What is happening here? Why is this happening?
- What would you say, does this photograph depict something good or bad? Why?
- How would you name this photograph?
- Do you think this photograph represents a fair or unfair situation? Why?
- Do you think this photograph represents belonging or exclusion? Why?

The process for the activity, which you can access via the link on this page, describes how, within the framework of the project, we initiated a conversation and explored how third, fifth, and seventh-grade students understand social justice and inclusion, as well as where they recognize that these values [of social justice and inclusion] are nurtured in the school they attend. The guide includes a description of three types of activities in which we used photographs to stimulate a conversation about values: discussion prompted by photographs, photo-expression, and photo-journalism. *(*Note: Documents in links are in Serbian.)*

SECD from the Families' Perspective

Family Partnerships in Supporting SECD

A significant step in the development and implementation of SECD (SEL) support programs is establishing a partnership with the students' families. This involves building a shared understanding of what SEL is, agreeing that SEL is crucial for the development and learning of every child, as well as defining the roles of the family and the school in this process. The questionnaire provided below can be a useful tool for understanding the parental/guardian perspective on the implementation of SEL in the school, and the results of the questionnaire can be used to identify topics for discussion.

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the statements regarding the role of the school in SECD (SEL) in the questionnaire provided at the end of the text:

	I completely disagree	I somewhat disagree	I somewhat agree	I completely agree
I feel that my child's school and we (the parents) have the same goals regarding SECD / SEL for students.	1	2	3	4
The school works on my child's social-emotional skills, which I do not see as overly important.	1	2	3	4
The school does not address the aspects of SECD/SEL that I, as a parent, would expect from the school.	1	2	3	4
The school provides me with support in parenting when I need it.	1	2	3	4
I feel that I can consult with the school staff on how to address my child's emotions.	1	2	3	4
I feel that I can consult with the school staff on how to support my child in building good relationships with others.	1	2	3	4

The questionnaire in electronic format can be downloaded via the link
(*survey in Serbian*):

Support for the Development of Parental/Caregiver Competencies

For most schools, social-emotional character development and social-emotional learning may be new terms, but it is certainly not a new practice. The school context is a social context, which means that it forms a complex network of relationships between different actors. At the same time, it is also the context in which we bring,

experience, express, and recognize different emotions, and learn how to cope with them.

Below is an example of a questionnaire that you can use to check with parents or primary caregivers how activities related to social-emotional learning have contributed to the development of their competencies to support the social-emotional learning of children.

To what extent has participation in activities related to SECD contributed to you, as a parent or primary caregiver, having the confidence to:

	Not contributed at all	Contributed only a little	Contributed somewhat	Contributed a lot / greatly
....talk to your child about emotions?	1	2	3	4
...support your child in establishing and maintaining friendships with peers?	1	2	3	4
..teach your child to understand others' perspectives and empathize with them?	1	2	3	4
...teach your child to recognize when something is unfair and why it is unfair?	1	2	3	4
...teach your child to be aware of the consequences of their decisions/actions?	1	2	3	4
...boost your child's self-confidence?	1	2	3	4
...teach your child how to express emotions in a way that doesn't harm anyone?	1	2	3	4

The questionnaire in electronic format
can be downloaded via the link
(*survey in Serbian*):

SECD IN SCHOOLS: DOCUMENTS

Considering that social-emotional character development (or social-emotional learning) contributes to improving prosocial behavior and the overall development and success of students, as well as reducing the frequency of problematic and risky behaviors, it is important for it to be planned, supported, and integrated into all aspects of the school's work, from planning to implementation to evaluation.

Developing social-emotional competencies should be recognized in the school's strategic decisions, through the development plan, defining priorities and directions for growth, and through measures related to violence prevention, such as increasing cooperation among students, teachers, and parents, preventing student dropout, involving parents in school activities, fostering collaboration, networking with other institutions, and more. SECD (SEL) can be incorporated into the school's mission and vision.

> **Mission:** "Our school is dedicated to creating a supportive and inclusive environment where every student can develop their academic, social, and emotional skills. Through the integration of social-emotional learning into all aspects of school life, we aim to empower students to become responsible, empathetic, and self-aware individuals ready to face the challenges of the future."

> **Vision:** "We see our school as a community where the values of respect, cooperation, and responsibility are nurtured. Social-emotional learning is a key element of our approach to education, enabling students to develop the skills necessary for success in life and work. Our goal is for every student to feel a sense of belonging, support, and encouragement to reach their full potential."

The development plan also serves as a foundation for creating the school curriculum and the annual work plan. The specific characteristics of the school, recognized needs, and the ways in which the school will address them should be reflected in the school curriculum, particularly in the programs for protection against violence, abuse, and neglect, the program for preventing discrimination, the programs for preventing other forms of risky behavior, the extracurricular activities program, the family cooperation program, and so on.

In a school's Annual Work Plan, through the operationalization of activities, specific actions for the school year are planned (professional development in this area, activities for children, parents, etc.). Integrating Social-Emotional Character Development into teaching and learning programs, as well as extracurricular activities, is essential if we want to address some of the pressing issues that schools face. Active involvement of families, the community, and students in these processes is crucial for understanding the significance of social-emotional learning for overall development and academic achievement.

IMPROVING TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES IN SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Professional development in the domain of SECD involves enhancing teachers' competencies in:

- Supporting the development of students' character through modeling desired behavior, strengthening the participation of children and parents
- Integrating SECD (SEL) into daily practice (teaching, extracurricular activities, family cooperation, and communication across the school) by creating a supportive and safe learning environment and planning activities to enhance students' social-emotional competencies
- Monitoring, (self) reflection, and reassessing SECD (SEL) practices and their effects to align the educational process with current needs
- Documenting innovative practices for integrating SECD (SEL) into school policies and practices based on (participatory) action research
- Developing these competencies in teachers primarily relies on identifying their own social-emotional competencies and assessing areas where further professional development can be directed.

SELF-REFLECTION
Tools for self-reflection can be of great help in this process.

In the Teacher Self-Reflection Tool, you can find numerous ideas and prompts for reflecting on yourself as a teacher through five areas: self-examination, fostering a supportive environment, teaching, modeling behavior, and practicing the application of what has been learned. *The links below of the resources are in Serbian given the nature of the audience members for the program.*

SELF-EXAMINATION
It considers how personal identities, ways of thinking, feelings, and actions encourage or inhibit a fair and inclusive learning environment.

FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
It provides insight into how to create a learning environment where all community members (students, parents, all school staff) are respected, can experience a strong sense of belonging, make decisions independently, and engage in various activities to achieve their goals.

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TEACHING
It answers the question of how to teach students skills, strategies, and terminology related to SECD in ways that involve collaboration with families and students, while respecting their contributions.

MODELING BEHAVIOR
It provides insight into how to model social-emotional skills and ways of thinking through demonstration, providing examples, and offering specific instructions.

PRACTICING THE APPLICATION OF LEARNED SKILLS
It explores opportunities to support students in practicing, generalizing, and applying social-emotional skills and ways of thinking in various complex, new, planned, and unplanned situations.

Based on self-assessment, create a plan for your professional development in this area. You can use the following template for planning:

List one or two activities that you can start immediately, **with no support or with very little support.**

1.

2.

List one or two activities that you can start **with some support.**	What kind of support do you need to get started? (Time, resources, collaboration…)
1.	
2.	

One activity that is important to you, but for which **you need significant support to start.**

1.

List one or two activities that you can **start with some support**.	What kind of support do you need to get started? (Time, resources, collaboration…)

Self-assessment is a good foundation for initiating change both personally and institutionally, but the key is the commitment of the entire school, which shows a clear orientation towards social-emotional character development as a way to enhance the educational role of the school.

Training for Implementation of SECD Programs in Schools

In order to enhance teachers' competencies in the application of SECD /SELj training eWjWare available (listed in the programs of public interest approved by the minister of education's decision, <u>Decision number: 22 −05-00350 2023-16</u>), with a total duration of 48 hours.

23−Module 1: Social-Emotional Character Development (SECD) in Schools – Online training for 16 hours over 2-week period
24−Module 2: SECD as Support for Child Development – In-person training – 2 days, 16 hours
25−Module 3: The Role of Critical Thinking, Adopting Democratic Values, and Developing Prosocial Behavior in Children – In-person training – 2 days, 16 hours

The noted training series first cover a range of theoretical and research-based arguments on why it is important to address this topic, as well as which strategies are most effective in promoting social-emotional competencies in students and how to integrate activities in this domain into the regular policies and practices of schools. The knowledge shared emphasizes that social-emotional learning is a lifelong process, and the training encourages reflection on improving one's own social-emotional competencies, as well as how these can be encouraged in children.

Training series can have a long-term positive impact on the entire school community, improving both academic and social aspects of school life. In addition to the aforementioned benefits, social-emotional character development programs promote social awareness and empathy, helping students appreciate diversity and develop a sense of belonging within the school community.

Self-assessment is a good foundation for initiating change both personally and institutionally, but the key is the commitment of the entire school, which shows a clear orientation towards social-emotional character development and learning as a way to enhance the educational role of the school.

Participants' feedback on the training: *"Well-designed, based on a rich body of literature and research from various authors in the field of psychology; I was 'forced' to think a lot about myself, about the children, and about my actions; Excellent topic, I haven't attended a seminar that felt so relevant and truly necessary in contemporary society; I am glad to know that what I have always believed, which is that social-emotional learning is crucial for the development and well-being of every individual, is now coming into focus because our middle-generation teachers only learned about cognitive abilities; Professionally, this training came at the right time, as I am facing various challenges in the school where I work, as well as in the schools I collaborate with in providing support for inclusive education. It's truly valuable!"*

Training series aimed at enhancing teachers' competencies in this area are not sufficient on their own. They can initiate the process of change, but for the transfer of knowledge and the establishment of SECD (SEL) practices, it is necessary for schools to implement other forms of professional development, such as:

- Horizontal learning at the school level or between schools that decide to integrate SECD (SEL) into everyday school practices and curricula, as well as establishment of a Community of Practice (CoP) focused on SECD (SEL).
- Conducting Participatory Action Research (PAR) to ensure that changes in practice are based on authentic needs and evidence.

The support of mentors through the program "Social-Emotional Character Development in Primary Schools: A Community of Practice Framework:"

The comprehensive goal of the mentoring support was to establish a learning community (CoP) at the school level in order to integrate Social-Emotional Character Development into school policy and practice and support schools in developing innovative practices in this field.

The mentoring support was focused on:
- Planning and implementing activities to enhance one's own capacity for integrating SECD into regular school practices.
- Recognizing, developing, describing, and disseminating innovative practices in the field of SECD.
- Monitoring, documenting, and evaluating one's own progress.

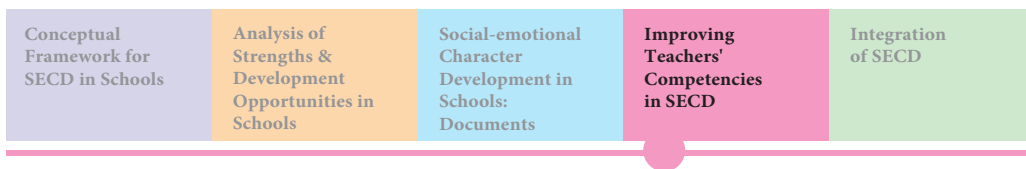## *Building a Learning Community through Participatory Action Research (PAR)*

According to the Regulation on Continuous Professional Development and Advancement in the Teaching, Educator, and Professional Associate Titles ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia," No. 109/2021), participation in professional learning communities is one of the recommended forms of professional development at the institutional level.

Learning communities, or Communities of Practices (CoPs) are environments where teachers and school management continuously seek new knowledge and share their insights with each other (Astuto, 1993). It is a gathering of teachers, regardless of their work experience, aimed at acquiring new information, reflecting on previously acquired knowledge and beliefs, and relying on both their own and others' ideas and experiences to work on specific content with the goal of improving practice and enhancing student learning (Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 2011). Within the learning community, teachers: a) have the opportunity to critically reflect on their own practice, b) provide feedback to other community members on the quality of their practice, as well as specific ideas on how to improve their practice, and c) motivate other teachers to improve the quality of their work in order to enjoy their jobs more.

The benefits that the whole school gains from learning communities are numerous (Hord, 1997). Teachers show greater satisfaction, enthusiasm, and less absenteeism; they better adapt to students' needs; they are more likely to introduce significant and long-lasting changes; they work more devotedly to achieve the school's mission; they have an increased sense of shared responsibility for the development and learning of all children; they better understand the content being taught and their role in helping students achieve the set learning goals; they encourage lifelong learning and continuous professional development. As for the school, learning communities greatly impact the change in the school culture by having teachers share and agree on educational values and goals, set norms for continuous learning and progress, show dedication to their work, and take responsibility for the learning of their students. They collaborate with one another, maintain collegial relationships, have opportunities for reflection on their practice, and jointly explore and share their experiences from professional learning and personal development (Caine & Caine, 2010).

Learning Communities - What do the Mentors Say?

- Teachers have connected with each other and started collaborating.
- Teachers are expanding the practices they developed in their own. classrooms and sharing them with other colleagues.
- Classes have begun to connect and plan joint activities.
- Teachers are learning from one another.

Recommendation:

The strengthening of the learning community could be contributed to by meetings of various professional bodies within the school (subject councils/committees, class councils, different teams) dedicated to the exchange of experiences and showcasing examples of good practice in the field of SECD.
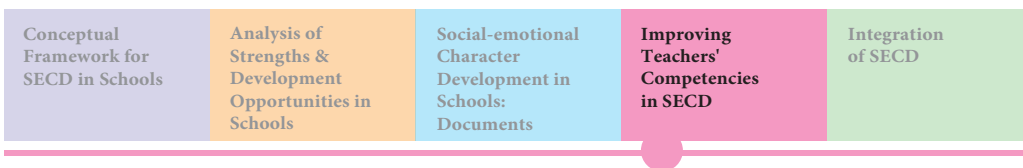
Participatory Action Research (PAR)

According to the *Regulation on Continuous Professional Development and Advancement in the Titles of Teachers, Educators, and Professional Associates* ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia," No. 109/2021), employees in education and upbringing have the right and duty to participate every school year in various forms of professional development within the institution, and one of the recommended forms is participation in research activities. Additionally, "Practitioner research is seen as one way for teachers to improve their professional reputation and status" (Radulović, 2011); to engage in professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009; Stanković et al., 2013); to innovate teaching and school practices (Malinić, Đerić & Šefer, 2017); and to build a knowledge base on teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 1996; Maksić & Đerić, 2016). In recent years, there have been increasing domestic publications addressing the idea of teachers as researchers in our environment, as well as specific recommendations for conducting such activities in schools" (Maksić & Đerić, 2016; Radulović, 2016; Stanković et al., 2013).[11]

- Action research is based on the participants' motivation to initiate a process of change and engage in the transformation of professional practice (Elliot, 1991).
- Action research begins with a question arising from educational and developmental practice.
- Action research consists of cycles that continuously repeat, relating to planning, action, monitoring the process and effects of the action, and new planning based on the outcomes of the previous action (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a type of qualitative research that involves collaboration between researchers and research participants in the process of understanding various issues in their environment, with the participants taking

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11 Ivana Đerić: Teachers and Students as Researchers in Schools; Research in Schools, Institute for Pedagogical Research, 2018.

action to initiate change. It is participatory because it involves those for whom the research problem is relevant, and it is action-based because it aims at achieving some positive change. PAR represents a process of critical research by reflective practitioners who contemplate their own practice and are involved in participatory problem-solving and continuous professional development. PAR belongs to the group of so-called emancipatory research, as it involves research in collaboration with specific groups, rather than research on or for them.

One Example of PAR in the Field of Teaching and Learning[12]

Problem: Students do not recognize the importance of learning for personal development.

Research Objective: To investigate why students do not see learning as valuable (why they don't see the purpose of learning, why they learn, which content they perceive as important for personal development, what they need – which content, which learning methods – to realize that it makes sense for them, and what and how they would like to learn).

Participants in the Research: Members of the Student Parliament, students from Grades 1-4, students from Grades 5-8, teachers.

Instruments Used in the Research: A questionnaire for focus groups of students designed by members of the Student Parliament with the support of teachers.

Procedure: The members of the Student Parliament created questions for younger students and for their peers, and in collaboration with teachers, they selected questions for the focus groups of students. The members of the Student Parliament led the focus groups with the support of teachers.

Implementation of a Lesson Focused on Developing Social-Emotional (SE) Competencies	The activity was designed based on the conclusion of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) that students would enjoy learning in a more engaging way. In order to implement new learning techniques, teacher Ljiljana Pavlović conducted a lesson on the text *The Tortoise and the Hare* in the third grade, during which the technique of transformative dialogue and the "Feelings Cube" technique were applied.
Creating a SEL Corner in the Classroom	The activity was designed based on the conclusion of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) that students would like to have a place for rest and relaxation during lessons and breaks. Accordingly, a corner was created in the classroom for students in Grades 1-4.

12 The authors are Ljiljana Pavlović, Filip Paunović, Saša Dragojević, and Sofija Milenković from the Veljko Dugošević Primary School in Turija, Serbia.

	A SEL corner was created where students can go when they need to relax and be alone, regulate their emotions, and calm themselves before returning to learning.
Activity: "To Praise Myself"	The activity was designed based on the results of the Participatory Action Research (PAR), which showed that students appreciate being praised and that the successes of their peers motivate them to work and make progress in learning. A bulletin board was created in the school hallway, displaying the names of all students who are praised during the school week for their effort in class, along with an explanation of why they are being praised. The names of the students change every week, ensuring that all students are praised.

What did I learn about my students through the PAR process?

- Students are motivated when what they learn is connected to their lives.
- Although students differ greatly from one another, they all have similar needs: to be accepted, respected, to experience success, to receive praise and encouragement, to socialize, and to feel safe and happy in the school environment.
- Students are motivated to learn and work together; peer support is beneficial for them.
- Students are competent in exploring various aspects of school life, they are mature, and fully "up to the task."

By participating in participatory action research, teacher-researchers reflect on the existing situation and problems in the school, test possible solutions to these problems, collaborate with colleagues during the process, and share the results they have achieved. This contributes to the advancement of professional knowledge both within their own school and in the local and wider community. Throughout the research process, teachers actively improve their practice, collaborate with colleagues to ensure that the change is sustainable, collect, use, and exchange research results, and contribute to the creation and dissemination of new professional knowledge.

In this way, PAR becomes a means of building a stable learning community: cooperation and trust are developed within the school, teachers gain self-confidence, feel professionally fulfilled, and are proud of their profession, while the schools themselves become more open and develop into a more positive school climate.

PAR as a process of learning about oneself and others – What do teachers say?

That education is a permanent process and never ends – that I can constantly improve myself and continue to develop.

That my previous work in teaching is the right path to building relationships and working with children; I have confirmed my belief, which I have nurtured since the beginning of my career, that a lot of investment and giving, understanding and sacrifice, cooperation and collegiality, kindness and goodwill, knowledge and responsibility, and above all, love for the job, are necessary for me to be successful and, most importantly, satisfied in what I do.

What have I learned about myself as a teacher?

That I have some talents I hadn't noticed before, I have strengthened both professionally and emotionally, and my self-confidence has grown.

That I can more successfully and efficiently encourage students to develop quality cooperative relationships, to understand different opinions in achieving goals, and to align their own needs with those of others.

That they are dedicated to their work and do it with love and enthusiasm.

What have I learned about my colleagues ?

That I can learn a lot from them.

That I know I can rely on colleagues who are open to collaboration.

That we are all different, but I was lucky to collaborate on this project with colleagues who are the best in their field, who love what they do, and who are true professionals.

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How has the experience of PAR influenced your practice?

- It gave me ideas for new topics in working with students.
- The teaching is more creative and interesting, the lessons are different, students are more active, relaxed, and engaged.
- We are more relaxed during lessons, and our relationship has become closer.
- Cooperation with parents who participated in the PAR is much better, and I believe that PAR significantly contributed to strengthening the collaborative relationship and mutual trust.
- Greater involvement of students in planning, organizing, and implementing agreed activities.
- Better communication, problem-solving, and negotiation, along with more effective collaboration with others and resolving issues and challenges at school.

INTEGRATION OF SECD INTO THE DAILY PRACTICES OF SCHOOLS

SECD (SEL) integration involves the engagement of the entire school community to embed its principles into all aspects of school life. This approach provides a learning environment that promotes fairness and inclusion for all.

Indicators of SECD / SEL integration at the school level [13]

CLASSROOM	Explicit, clear, and direct instructions related to social-emotional learning	Students are always provided with various opportunities to improve, practice, and deepen their understanding of social and emotional competencies, which are developmentally appropriate and in accordance with the culture they come from.
	Social-Emotional Character Development (SECD) / Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) integrated into academic learning/ school teaching	The goals of SECD / SEL are integrated into both curricular and extracurricular content, as well as into the teaching strategies for all subjects, so that teachers, along with educational planning, also plan SEL goals and outcomes; apply learning techniques that encourage the development of SEL competencies (such as small group work, presentations, debates, student projects...); teach students the necessary social-emotional skills in accordance with the context; encourage students to plan independently, set educational and other goals, make choices, and make decisions; foster the exchange of ideas, creativity, and critical thinking, and are non-directive, etc.
SCHOOL	Student Participation	School staff respect and support a wide range of student perspectives and experiences by involving students in the decision-making process that concerns them. In this way, students have

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[1]Adapted from: Indicators of Schoolwide SEL (2021), Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/the-casel-guide-to-schoolwide-sel-essentials/

COMMUNITY		opportunities to solve problems, participate in decision-making, and be leaders, for example, by consulting with children in various situations of school life, expanding the role of the student parliament, developing various forms of peer support, and so on.
	A supportive atmosphere in the classroom and in the school	The learning environment in the classroom and in the school as a whole is supportive, culturally sensitive, and focused on building relationships and community.
	Focus on Adult Social-Emotional Character Development & Social-Emotional Learning	Staff have opportunities to regularly improve their social-emotional competencies, collaborate with each other within one or more schools, and build a learning community based on trust and mutual understanding.
	Supportive discipline	The policy and practice of establishing and maintaining discipline are based on teaching and restorative practices, developmentally appropriate, and applied fairly.
	A continuum of integrated support for students	SECD/SEL is an integral part of various forms of educational support available to address the diverse needs of students..
FAMILY	Authentic partnership with families	Families and school staff have regular and meaningful opportunities to build mutual relationships and collaborate in supporting the social, emotional, and academic development of students.
	Alignment and partnership at the community level	There is alignment between school staff and community partners regarding a shared understanding of concepts, strategies, and communication about initiatives and activities related to SECD/SEL, including those taking place outside of school.
	Systems for continuous improvement	Data on the implementation and outcomes of SECD/SEL are collected, analyzed, and used for the continuous improvement of policies and practices in the field of SECD/SEL.

Reflection and Planning

It is believed that integrating SECD / SEL into an educational institution requires at least two to three years due to the complexity of educational institutions systems and the teaching profession. This time is necessary for teachers to master the required competencies to promote SEL in the teaching and learning process, during other school activities, and to build self-confidence for this type of work with students. In addition, time is needed for SEL to be integrated into the functioning of the school as a whole, which involves:

- A strategic approach to the development of the school as a community, planned and continuous work over an extended period of time.

- Enhancing teachers' competencies to work directly with students to foster their social-emotional competencies involves a process of teaching, practicing, and modeling these competencies, with constant reassessment and reflection by teachers on the outcomes.

ПОДУЧАВАЊЕ

ПРЕИСПИТИВАЊЕ И ПОДСТИЦАЈНО ОКРУЖЕЊЕ

МОДЕЛОВАЊЕ

УВЕЖБАВАЊЕ

Интеграција СЕУ на нивоу учионице - Области за промишљање

In the process of reflection, the teacher aims to understand how:

- His/her personal identity, thinking patterns, feelings, and behavior either encourage or hinder the development of a stimulating, fair, and inclusive environment in the school;
- To collaborate with families and students, respecting their contributions, and follows the principles of Universal Design for Learning when enhancing students' social-emotional competencies;
- To model social-emotional skills and behavior through demonstration, providing examples, and offering specific instructions;
- To enable students to practice, acquire, and apply social-emotional skills and ways of thinking in various complex, new, planned, or unplanned situations, etc.

The integration and implementation of SECD (SEL) is based on a whole-school approach and needs to be supported by teachers who are ready to teach and nurture happy, healthy, safe, and engaged students. It is not just a program or strategy at the level of one classroom. It is necessary to plan multi-layered, diverse methods of support for the development and nurturing of social-emotional competencies intended for all students, smaller groups of students, or individual students, as shown in the image on the next page.

Layered Supports for Developing SECD Competencies
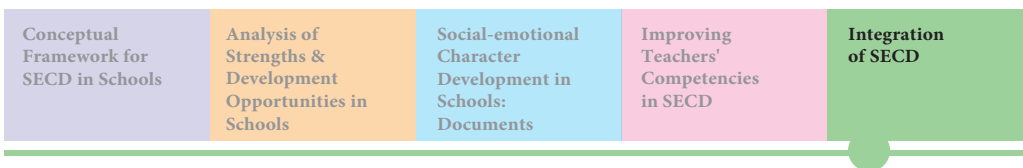
A checklist for assessing the status of SEL integration into everyday practice can also be helpful, which you can download via the link in the image to the right. *(*Note that the document in the link is in Serbian due to the audience members of the program.)*

Care for the social-emotional well-being of all students, their families, and staff becomes visible and recognizable by supporting the development of social-emotional competencies in students in various ways, through diverse activities, in different situations of school life, by improving the quality of interpersonal relationships, motivation, the sense of belonging, and participation in the school community.

In the school space, boards with important knowledge and information related to social-emotional functioning can be seen, intended for students, parents, and teachers, as well as areas that allow for unobstructed communication, dealing with one's own and others' emotions, and enhancing social-emotional competencies. Such care for the development of social-emotional competencies can greatly contribute to safe, respectful, and responsible student behavior in the immediate physical environment at school and outside of it, as well as in the digital environment, which is now an integral part of life as a new reality.

SECD in Partnership with Families

During childhood and early adolescence, children acquire many knowledge, skills, and adopt attitudes that are an integral part of social-emotional competencies. They learn how to recognize their own and others' emotions, how to manage emotions and control impulsive behavior; about themselves and their own identities; how to achieve autonomy and independence in self-care, decision-making, planning, and goal achievement; establish and maintain positive relationships; understand the perspectives and opinions of others; show empathy, accept and understand moral and ethical behavior; develop the ability to cope with challenges and difficulties, and similar aspects.

Parents are role models for children, and they learn from them. As the first teachers of

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their children, parents can receive support from teachers in fostering the social-emotional development of children by providing them with resources, strategies, and information, establishing partnership relationships, and empowering them in their parental role.

Through the program "Social-Emotional Character Development in Serbian Primary Schools: A Community of Framework," the following resources for parents were developed to support the development of children's social-emotional character competencies and skills. They can be accessed via the links below. (*Note: Resources are in Serbian due to members of the program.)

- Brochure for families: Social-Emotional Character Development of Primary School-Aged Children - Tips and suggestions for parents to support the development of children's social-emotional competencies and charcter.

- Messages for parents about supporting children's psychological resilience.

- Five workshops for parents were created. Each workshop includes a brief scenario that can be implemented in a 45-60 minute session, with additional materials for parents and a list of necessary resources for implementation. Topics include: What is social-emotional learning; How to cope with stress; Respecting diversity; Life values; Values in action.

Establishing a partnership between parents, caregivers, teachers, and school staff, based on mutual respect, collaboration, and support, is key to supporting the development of children's social-emotional competencies. Some of the activities that teachers and school staff carry out in schools can also be implemented in the family environment (such as relaxation techniques in stressful situations).

For example, both the family and school staff can help the child to:
- Help them recognize and connect different situations, behaviors, and their emotions.
- Point out socially acceptable ways to express feelings, without harming themselves or others.
- Provide support in finding ways to constructively overcome obstacles they encounter when trying to achieve something, set small and achievable goals, make plans on how to achieve them, persist in their pursuit, and know when they have succeeded.
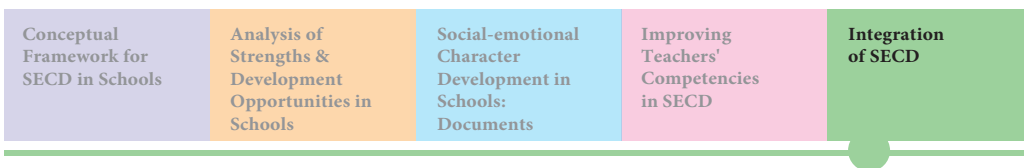
- Help through joint planning to achieve certain goals, create a plan on how to accomplish something they want, and support them in doing so (e.g., saving a certain amount of money over the next three months to buy something they want, etc.).
- Point out how to view a situation from the perspective of others (the ability to decenter, "putting oneself in someone else's shoes").
- Help them understand why respecting rules related to the well-being of each individual, as well as social norms that regulate community functioning, is important.
- Be a role model in how relationships with others are established by showing verbal and non-verbal (words, facial expressions, gestures – body movements) respect, acceptance of diversity, nurturing good interpersonal relationships, willingness to cooperate and negotiate, and listening carefully and actively to others.
- Empower the child to express their opinion and make decisions.
- Help them understand the consequences of certain behaviors for themselves and others, and encourage them to consciously choose to behave in ways that do not harm or hurt themselves or others.

Regular communication between families and schools can help track children's progress and direct support where it is needed. At the same time, teachers and school staff can support the development of parents' social-emotional competencies and inspire them to reflect on how they can improve them.

When families practice the knowledge and skills of social-emotional character development that children acquire in school, they come to a deeper understanding that learning is not limited to school situations but is also relevant to everyday life in the family and the surrounding environment.

Encouraging Student Participation

Integrated social-emotional character development programs can significantly encourage student participation in various ways:

- Support for student autonomy: This is reflected in the ability to make choices and decisions, initiative, willingness to be agents of change, and to actively participate in the life and work of the school. Social-emotional competencies such as a positive self-image, assertiveness, and responsible decision-making provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences, create or transform knowledge in collaboration with others.
- Active and cooperative learning: SECD supports active, participatory, and cooperative learning, based on the belief that the student is an active and constructive agent of their own learning and development.
- Support in the development of prosocial behavior: Through SECD, students can

develop prosocial behavior and a range of competencies that are important for a democratic society.

- Support in the development of communication skills: SECD can help students develop skills for clearly expressing their opinions and listening to the opinions of others.
- Support in the development of decision-making skills: Through SECD, students can learn how to function in a group, how to agree and negotiate with others, and how to find constructive solutions.

One way to encourage participation is by involving students in action research conducted at school. In the following example, the students who participated in the research were not only consulted to understand their perspective, but they were co-researchers who actively took part in creating the research instrument, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting the data, and designing actions based on the results obtained. The research process, thus, improved in quality, as did the actions that followed the results, since they were truly in the best interest of the students. Through this process, students developed a range of competencies such as communication skills, responsibility, independence, and self-confidence, and the perception of them by adults (teachers, school staff, and parents) began to change.

An Example of PAR Applied to Extracurricular Activities[14]

Problem: Students do not have the opportunity to make decisions regarding extracurricular activities and lack the competencies for responsible decision-making.

Research question: How can extracurricular activities support the development of students' decision-making competencies?

Research participants: 76 students across Grades 3-8

Research tools: Self-assessment questionnaire for responsible decision-making competencies and focus group interviews addressing decision-making questions (What kind of decisions do they make? Why are these decisions important? Do extracurricular activities help them make decisions more easily when they find themselves in such situations and how do they help? What would they like to learn about decision-making, and through which extracurricular activities would they like to learn it?)

Action plan: Based on the collected results, a plan was developed that included two extracurricular activities: the school garden and the school newspaper. In both activities, students themselves defined their work plans, divided tasks and responsibilities among themselves, carried out activities, and took care of the implementation, with the assigned teachers available to support them when needed. The teachers who worked on implementing these actions mentioned that these were extracurricular activities that had previously existed in the school, but the teachers had led the main work, while the students were the executors of activities that the teachers had designed and planned.

Outcomes of the action: The key change is that now the students made all the key decisions, created plans, and took responsibility for implementing those plans. There is a noticeable high interest among students to participate in these activities and a significantly higher level of responsibility for carrying out the plans they created themselves. Teachers report that through the daily involvement of a large number of students in these extracurricular activities, the effects of their responsible behavior are evident.

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14 The research was carried out by Natasha Ignjatović, Jovana Živković, and Danijela Milić at Radoje Domanović Primary School in Niš, Serbia.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Teachers and school staff involved in the program have experimented with various ways of promoting students' social-emotional competencies through everyday practice. Those experiences can be read on the following pages.

Developing self-awareness and awareness of others by fostering empathy, understanding, and respect for differences within the family and among friends, as well as developing teamwork skills and active listening.

Topic of the lesson: FAMILY AND RELATIVES

(24 students in Grade 2; Lesson & Subject: "The World Around Us")

The students are divided into four groups randomly, with the task of drawing a family tree on a large sheet of paper. They should draw family members as well as friends they consider close. While drawing, the students are encouraged to use phrases such as, "In my family, I feel loved when..." The teacher walks between the groups, guiding the conversation towards understanding family diversity. Once everyone is finished, a discussion follows in which the teacher emphasizes the importance of respecting diversity in family structures.

The teacher invites the students to ask questions if they are curious about something, for example: "What do you love most about your mom, grandmother, sister, grandfather... or a friend?", "How does your family spend its free time?"...

The lesson ends with students receiving small pieces of paper on which they will either draw or write how they feel when they spend time with their family. The teacher reads these cards anonymously. The conclusion is that we all have different families and friends, but it is important to respect them and care for one another.

- **Jelena Albijanić**, a teacher at Ivan Goran Kovačić
Primary School in Subotica, Serbia

Encouraging a responsible attitude towards the environment, developing respect, acceptance of diversity and friendship, fostering emotional development, respecting children's rights and equality, and creating a safe environment.

We worked on the aesthetic arrangement of the classroom and specific corners in it, with the common goal of creating a more comfortable space for each of us in the classroom. We formed groups, each of which was assigned the task of zoning the classroom into three corners: a reading corner; a relaxation corner; a corner called, "When I'm Angry."

For the reading corner, we also needed the support of parents, who helped in providing books, magazines, and encyclopedias suitable for the interests and age of the students. We created a small class library. Once a month, we discuss what we've read, and the students share their observations and impressions and suggest reading material for others. In this way, we develop communication skills and social interaction among the students.

The relaxation corner is a quiet space, slightly away from the desks, as much as the space allows. It serves for relaxation and self-regulation. It is equipped with a mat, a small lazy bag, stress relief balls, and the colors are soothing – mostly blue. The corner was originally intended for a boy with autism, but it is used by all students when they feel the need to relax or step away from a stressful situation. We talk about how this corner functions and what we can do to improve it.

"When I Am Angry" corner is a space for emotional regulation. Here, students can retreat and regulate their emotions. They can use a stress ball or a spinner, but the main activity is keeping a journal. They can write down the reason for their anger or distress, how they feel, and what they need. In this way, they learn to manage their emotions.

If they want, they can share their experiences with others. They believe it is perfectly fine for the teacher to occasionally use this corner or the relaxation one as well.

- **Mirjana Pavlović**, teacher at Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Stepojevac, Serbia

The development of self-awareness and awareness of others, self-regulation through recognizing strengths and weaknesses, self-confidence, independence, overcoming obstacles, directing and focusing attention, seeking help, problem orientation, persistence and determination, empathy, care, support, commitment, and cooperation during problem-solving.

The implemented activity was the distribution of student report cards at the end of the school year. It took place outside the school, in the People's Garden (a public green space and park) which is a relaxing and pleasant environment.

The teacher gave instructions to the students and their parents, as well as to brothers and sisters, to reflect on their experiences over the past school year—how their journey was from the first of September to the end of the third grade. They were asked to think about what was easy, difficult, challenging, what obstacles they encountered, and how they overcame them... Each person reflected on their own role, either as a student or as a family member, and then they shared their insights through a conversation in pairs with a family member.

In the next phase of the activity, the students and their parents (brother/sister) stood next to each other and tie their legs together with a ribbon, scarf, etc., so that their legs were touching. Once tied (one pair at a time), they had to run to the teacher and receive their student report card.

They received their report cards and a hug from the teacher. While running, they imagined the path as a journey through the school year. After finishing and resting a bit, they were asked to share with others how they felt throughout the entire process.

The activity connected the self-assessment of their achievements with the path taken to reach them. What could have been done differently was to extend the time frame and schedule for the activity, as the very hot weather led to a decrease in efficiency.

- **Jelena Vukadinović,** teacher at the Jovan Jovanović
Zmaj Primary School in Pančevo, Serbia

The development of self-awareness and awareness of others, self-regulation through nurturing optimism and a good mood, happiness and fun, developing collaborative relationships, and establishing good interpersonal relationships.

As part of Children's Week, the traditional dance of the students from our school was held, accompanied by the song "Jerusalema." The Dance Day "Better to Dance than to Stress" was designed as an interactive extracurricular activity, aiming to bring together students, teachers, staff, and the school principal, with participation from parents as well. The event was marked by good mood, positive energy, happiness, and fun, while also promoting the development of collaborative relationships, motivating students to engage and work in a pleasant and positive atmosphere.

Around 400 students from Grades 1-6 participated in the dance. Through dance and movement, we also nurtured tolerance for diversity (the school has a large number of students from vulnerable groups), cooperation, self-awareness, and social awareness. After the dance, the students were full of energy, eager to work, and motivated to stay for the rest of the school day. By mastering certain steps in the dance, the students practiced their coordination, strengthened their self-confidence, and built closer connections with children from other classes and grades. They also became much more capable of repeating complex movements.

- **Ivana Ilić,** teacher at Radoje Domanović Primary School in Niš, Serbia

The development of self-regulation through setting personal learning goals, recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses, planning and evaluating achievements, and managing emotions and motivation.
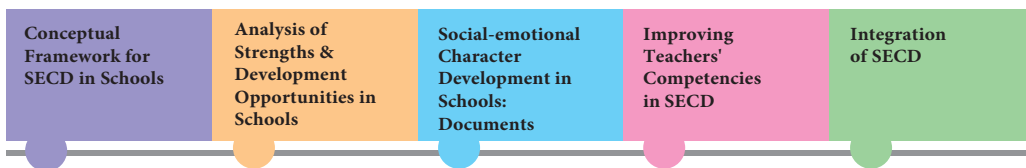

The activity "Briefing and Debriefing" within the math curriculum aims to encourage 5th-8th grade students to engage in self-regulation of learning as part of their social-emotional competencies. This model involves two key moments – the briefing at the beginning of the week and the debriefing at the end, which allow students to actively reflect on their learning experiences, set goals, evaluate progress, and discuss emotions and challenges they faced throughout the learning process.

In the briefing, held on Mondays for 10–15 minutes, students are introduced to the lesson content for the upcoming week, as well as the expected learning outcomes. This part allows students, with the support of the teacher, to set personal learning goals, identify challenges, and plan their own learning strategies. This activity encourages them to develop critical thinking and take responsibility for their own progress.

The debriefing, held at the end of the week for 10–15 minutes, provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their progress towards the goals they set. They share their impressions of the learning process, any difficulties they encountered, and ways they might overcome these challenges in the future. Through this, the debriefing enables them to independently assess their success, recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and improve their emotional and motivational management skills.

- **Nebojša Ilić,** math teacher at Veljko Dugoševic Primary School in Turija, Serbia

| Conceptual Framework for SECD in Schools | Analysis of Strengths & Development Opportunities in Schools | Social-emotional Character Development in Schools: Documents | Improving Teachers' Competencies in SECD | Integration of SECD |

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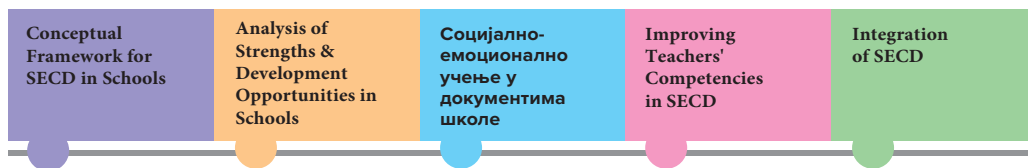
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