



Advances in SEL Research

Volume 4, No. 1

American Educational Research Association

November 2010

SEL SIG Program 2010: Hearts and Brains in Sync

A presenter in one of our SEL SIG symposia at AERA 2010 in Denver quoted a five year old child who wisely stated, “Your heart tells your brain to work, and your brain tells your heart to work” (Rees, 2010). Likewise, hearts and brains were in sync as participants engaged in dialogue around stimulating and emotionally powerful presentations on SEL theory, research, and practice. As Program Chair, I was privileged to work along with my co-chair, Josh Brown, and the program committee, to put together together an exciting roster of sessions for scholars, researchers, and practitioners alike. This outcome would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance of our expert reviewer panel, and I take this opportunity to publicly thank all of our 2010 SEL SIG program reviewers.

AERA assigns each SIG a certain number of slots based on our current SIG membership. For the 2010 conference, our SEL SIG was assigned 5 symposia, 12 paper sessions, which we divided into 4 roundtables of 3 papers each, and 1 business meeting. To fill these slots, the program committee received 29 paper submissions and 7 session submissions, and, thanks to the commitment of our 15-person reviewer panel, we were able to whittle these sessions down to the allotted number. It’s always difficult to have to reject papers, and our deepest gratitude goes out to all paper and session submitters, whether accepted or not.



Susan Stillman,
Program Chair

Our SIG generally groups individual papers into roundtables. This was the first year, per AERA policy, that all paper submissions were grouped by themes and assigned to a roundtable with a designated chair. Feedback on the new format was generally good regarding

the thematic dialogue, although the cavernous rooms assigned for multiple roundtables sometimes made it hard to hear our speakers. Our SIG’s roundtable themes for 2010 were: Whole School Implementation/Systemic Perspectives, Educator Development of SEL Competencies, SEL Processes and Outcomes/Classroom Level, and SEL Processes and Outcomes/Student Level. Appreciations to our twelve roundtable paper presenters for accommodating to this new format and sharing their work in an informal way geared to active discussion and questions.

Under the AERA symposia format, up to five researchers from different institutions propose collaborative sessions around a shared topic or research interest and present their findings in a unified session. We have asked our symposia chairs to elicit the PowerPoint presentations from each of their sessions, and, as we receive them, they will be posted on the Annual Meeting Tab at our SEL SIG website, http://www.aera.net/Default.aspx?menu_id=352&id=3062. Please check this site regularly for additions to our PowerPoint presentation library.

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Our annual SEL SIG business meeting was held late Saturday afternoon, May 1, 2010. The meeting began with a tribute to Mary Utne O'Brien, who passed away just before the conference. Please see John Payton's article elsewhere in this newsletter. Marc Brackett, SEL SIG Chair, welcomed participants and introduced the officers for 2010-2011, including Tish Jennings, our incoming Chair. Following several committee reports, Marc Brackett presented the SEL SIG graduate student award to Brian Barber of the University of Florida. Brian met the criteria for our SIG award for being the first student author on an outstanding paper, *Examining the Contribution of "Hot" Versus "Cool" Executive Functions for Predicting Reactive and Proactive Aggression in Elementary Students*, which was presented as part of our roundtable sessions.



Winner of the 2010 Graduate Student Paper Award, Brian Barber, with SEL SIG Chair, Marc Brackett

We were honored to have as our keynote speaker Maurice Elias, Professor in the Psychology Department, Rutgers University. As most of you know, Maurice is the director of the Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD) Lab and the Developing Safe and Civil Schools (DSACS) prevention initiative. He is one of the founding members and on the leadership team of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.CASEL.org). In addition to numerous books, journal articles, and research reports, Maurice also writes a blog on SEL for the George Lucas Educational Foundation at www.edutopia.org. Maurice's talk, entitled *Developing Safe and Civil (DSACS): Lessons Learned from Implementing School-Wide SEL/SECD for 5 Years in 250 Schools in New Jersey*, was inspiring. In his talk, he compared the synergy created by a coordinated SEL approach to weaving a warm quilt, and he shared six lessons that summarized his many years of experience. The audience participated in a brief interactive values activity and discussed the relevance of these lessons for educators working with students and school climate

issues. Maurice shared thoughts on creating caring and safe communities and urged participants to ground their programs in data, simplify by "pruning before you plant," and systematically build upon previous successes.

Following the business meeting, members were invited to socialize at another venue in the hotel. For many, this annual social hour is a wonderful opportunity to meet new acquaintances, reconnect with old friends, develop professional colleagues, and continue the work of our amazing SEL SIG. The SEL SIG Program Committee would like to thank all SIG members, participants at our sessions, paper and session submitters, expert reviewers, and volunteers who came together to infuse, inspire, and challenge our hearts and brains with social-emotional learning.

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The SEL SIG newsletter is published twice annually - fall and spring



Roger Weissberg opening our business meeting at AERA 2010.

For reference, the titles and abstracts of our five 2010 symposia are listed below.

1. Assessment in Social Emotional Learning: Lessons Learned From Policy, Practice, and Research. Chair, Roger Weissberg. This symposium brought together individuals working to implement and evaluate social and emotional learning (SEL), and commonly discovering a need to better understand SEL assessment practices and possibilities. We began by recognizing the many contributions that Mary Utne O'Brien made to advance the science and practice of social and emotional learning. Then, the first paper described the origin and value of the core SEL competencies developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), and the process of developing student learning standards based on them. The second paper discussed the need for the assessment of student competencies in the context of such standards and criteria for school use. Presenters shared lessons learned by a district trying a variety of assessment approaches. The final paper used cross-sectional data to predict the average increase in standardized achievement test scores given increased SEL competence.
2. Mindfulness-Based Activities in the Classroom: Promoting Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development. Chair, Tish Jennings. Quality education supports social-emotional and cognitive development. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively. Attention and prosocial behavior are related: students who attend to social cues are more successful in social and academic settings. There are many evidence-based SEL programs designed to facilitate children's social and emotional competence. However, these programs do not provide tools for developing the focused attention that may underlie social and emotional competence. This symposium presented evidence that suggests that mindfulness practices that train attention and promote mindfulness may provide a missing component to enhance SEL program effectiveness.
3. Measuring Implementation Fidelity in SEL Programming. Chair, Susan Rivers. Implementation fidelity refers to the extent to which intervention delivery occurred as intended by design and is considered vital to the design of randomized control trials [RCT]. Implementation fidelity for SEL interventions presents many research challenges but also serves to benefit the quality of the research and our ability to test theory and models of change. This symposium explored the challenges and benefits of implementation fidelity within the context of three SEL interventions (The RULER Approach, 4Rs, and Ripple Effects). For example, implementation fidelity improves the quality of causal inference in intervention research by ruling out alternative explanations such as poor program implementation or faulty program theory. The session explored and discussed how researchers address implementation fidelity in their research to best determine the strength and impact of SEL interventions.
4. Scaling Individualized SEL Interventions: What Can Technology Add? Chair, Maurice Elias. Over the past decade, the research question has changed from whether to use technology to scale and sustain SEL, to how to do so. Addressing idiosyncratic needs for individualized SEL training of diverse students in the complex ecologies of their lives requires developmentally appropriate, contextually-sensitive, multi-dimensional approaches that would be cost-prohibitive if delivered individually by appropriately trained personnel. This symposium presented theory and empirical research on the use of technology-enabled, expert-system SEL interventions in school as individualized interventions to supplement universal programs, as tailored guidance to address personal risk factors, and as indicated interventions in discipline settings and for students with special needs. The discussant emphasized how these

approaches represent an essential maturation of SEL.

5. Students' Emotions as Predictors and Outcomes in Educational Research and Practice. Chairs, Anastasiya A Lipnevich & Richard Dean Roberts. The emotional reactions that a student experiences whenever learning is involved has become a growing area of research in education and psychology and a focus of attention for both scholars and policy-makers. The increased interest in students' affect is not surprising as the school environment creates a context for a variety of emotional experiences, each of which has the potential to influence students' learning processes and teachers' instructional practices. The symposium focused on several important affective reactions that students experience in a range of academic situations. Presenters examined students' positive and negative emotions as predictors of meaningful criteria for educational success and as direct outcomes of instructional interventions.

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Federal Legislation on Social-Emotional Learning

In today's increasingly competitive economy, our children deserve more than an academically challenging environment—they need the 21st century skills of creative thinking and problem solving. But with 7,000 students dropping out of school every day and more than 75% of our schools reporting a violent act last year, we must do better. Fortunately, we can turn around our lowest performing schools and ensure all our children feel engaged in the classroom if we focus our efforts on the development of the whole child.

This broader approach helps create a safe and secure learning environment for our students, something

that is sorely needed in far too many of our nation's schools. I believe that investment in social and emotional learning (SEL) programs is a critical component of this strategy. These lessons are incredibly important for our children's development and have a proven record of not only improving academic performance, but reducing problem behavior such as alcohol and drug use, violence, truancy, and bullying.



Leaders in Illinois, Ohio, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and the Chicago Public Schools are already working to ensure that students benefit from these programs. But all our children across the country should have access to SEL initiatives. That is why I introduced H.R. 4223, the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act. This legislation will expand access to social and emotional learning programs that teach skills such as problem-solving, conflict resolution, responsible decision-making, and relationship building.

This bipartisan legislation builds on recent recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) that families, schools, and communities all need to work together to create an environment that facilitates healthy development for children. According to the report, the development of academic, social, and emotional skills are essential to increasing student engagement.

This legislation makes three important investments in the school climate. First, it will provide competitive grants to states and school districts to help them effectively incorporate social and emotional learning programming in the classroom.

Second, the bill will establish a National Technical Assistance and Training Center to provide support for states, school districts, and community-based organizations implementing social and emotional learning programs.

And finally, it will authorize a national evaluation of social and emotional learning programming in schools, helping monitor progress so we can better serve our children.

As our world continues to evolve and become increasingly globalized, our educational system must keep up and provide our children with the necessary skills to succeed. My colleagues and I in Congress are currently working on a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, which will play a leading role in the reauthorization, I will work to ensure our educational system focuses on the whole child, including social and emotional learning programs, to ensure the next generation has the necessary skills to succeed.

Representative Dale Kildee (D-MI)



The Positive Action Program: Brief Description and Summary of Findings to Date

The Positive Action (PA) program (www.positive-action.net), first developed in 1977 by Carol Gerber Allred, Ph.D. and revised since then as a result of process and monitoring evaluations, is based on three core elements (B. R. Flay & Allred, 2010):

1. A philosophy-grounded in Self-esteem Enhancement Theory (DuBois, Flay, & Fagen, 2009), which assumes that motivation to feel good about oneself is prevalent throughout the life span, and that people will, accordingly, use a wide range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral strategies to help acquire and sustain feelings of worth.
2. The thoughts-actions-feelings circle that is based on the intuitive idea that “You feel good about yourself when you do positive actions and there is always a positive way to do everything.”
3. Six content units - The content of all program components is taught through six units (see table).

POSITIVE ACTION TABLE	
The Six Units of Positive Action Lessons	
Unit 1	Self-Concept: What it is, how it’s formed, and why it’s important (the PA philosophy and circle).
Unit 2	Positive actions for body (physical) and mind (intellectual). E.g., nutrition (including not using harmful substances), exercise, sleep, hygiene, motivation to learn, thinking skills, problem solving, decision-making, creativity, curiosity, and study skills.
Unit 3	Social & emotional positive actions for managing yourself responsibly. E.g., self-management, self-control, managing personal resources like time, talent, energy, thoughts, actions, feelings, money, and possessions.
Unit 4	Social & emotional positive actions for getting along with others by treating them the way you like to be treated. E.g., respect, empathy, kindness, fairness, cooperation.
Unit 5	Social & emotional positive actions for being honest with yourself and others. E.g., telling self and others the truth, admitting mistakes, not blaming others or rationalizing, doing what you say you will do, knowing your strengths and weaknesses.
Unit 6	Social & emotional positive actions for improving yourself continually. E.g., setting and achieving goals, believing in potential, having the courage to try, turning problems into opportunities, persisting, broadening horizons.

Briefly, the PA program consists of a PreK-12 classroom curriculum, kits for school preparation and teacher training, school-wide climate development, a counselor’s kit, family kits, parent/family classes to teach how to use the family kit, and a community involvement kit. PA uses research-supported strategies and methods of education and behavior change, such as active learning, positive classroom management, social-emotional-behavioral and learning skills development, role-play, a detailed curriculum with almost daily lessons, school-wide reinforcement of positive behaviors, intrinsic motivation, and family/community involvement.

Early quasi-experimental evaluations of PA have been conducted in many different kinds of schools by the program’s developer, school districts and third-party evaluators. The first journal articles (B. R. Flay & Allred, 2003; B. R. Flay, Allred, & Ordway, 2001) suggested that PA could produce large effects on reducing absenteeism, violence, and other disruptive behavior and improving achievement test scores, both in the elementary schools that implemented the program and in middle schools and high schools to which the

PA students graduated (DuBois et al., 2009). The first randomized trial of PA was conducted in 10 matched pairs of elementary schools on three islands of Hawaii. After 3 years, students in PA schools were 43% less likely than students in control schools to have engaged in substance use and 52% less likely to have engaged in serious violence by grade 5 (Beets et al., 2009). Each of these effects was statistically significant. Teacher reports of these behaviors by their students were also statistically significant.

The Hawaii findings on substance use and violence were replicated and extended in an on-going randomized trial of PA in 7 matched pairs of elementary schools in Chicago, where grade 5 students in PA schools endorsed 31% fewer substance use behaviors, 37% fewer violence-related behaviors, 41% fewer bullying behaviors, and 27% fewer disruptive behaviors, compared to students in the control schools (Li et al., in press).

A paper under review examined the effects of PA on positive behaviors using data from three randomized trials: the Hawaii and Chicago trials and 3 years of data from students in 8 schools in a Southeastern state (Washburn et al., 2010). As expected from the literature, students in both C and PA schools exhibited a general decline in the number of positive behaviors that they endorsed. However, the PA intervention significantly reduced these declines in all three trials (Cohen's $d = 0.46, 0.39$ and 0.22 in Hawaii, Chicago and the Southeastern state, respectively).

In analyses of school-level data from the Hawaii trial (Snyder et al., 2010), average daily absences in P schools decreased compared to remaining stable in C schools ($b = .73, t = 3.48$) and P schools experienced greater gains in both math ($b = .63, t = 1.95, ES = .17$) and reading ($b = .60, t = 3.17, ES = .19$) percent proficiency, in comparison to C schools.

Early analyses of student, teacher, and school data from the Chicago trial (papers in preparation) found significant effects on a wide range of variables related to

4. Social emotional and character development (SECD)—(Elias, 2009) (including pro-social interaction skills, honesty, self-control, positive affect, school-related self-esteem, character, normative beliefs about aggression)
5. Behavior (including positive health behaviors, affiliation with good friends, aggression/bullying, and affiliation with good/bad friends), and
6. Attachment to school and learning (including perceptions of school climate/safety, teacher

and school attachment, respect for teachers and parents, school attendance, and standardized test scores).

The replicated findings on the effectiveness of PA from multiple trials, and especially the emerging findings from the Chicago trial, suggest that PA is, indeed, a program that is effective in the multiple domains of social-emotional and character development, behavior, and school performance. Further analyses of the Chicago data will elaborate our understanding of how the program works.

Acknowledgements: The Hawaii trial was funded by grant # R01-DA13474 from National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, and the Chicago trial was funded by grants #R305L030072 and #R305A080253 from the Institute on Educational Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Disclosure: Brian Flay is married to Carol Allred, who owns Positive Action, Inc., which sells the PA program to schools and community organizations. The potential for conflict of interest is managed by Oregon State University, and all projects and papers involve other senior researchers to ensure objectivity in the reporting of results.

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School Climate: Research and Practice Trends

Educators have appreciated and studied school climate for over one hundred years (Perry, 1908). Over the past two decades, there has been a growing body of empirical research that has underscored the importance of school climate. In this note I will summarize current thinking about definitions, research findings, and practice trends.

There is not an agreed upon national definition of school climate. The National School Climate Council (2007) defines school climate and a positive, sustained school climate in the following ways:

School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school as well as the care of the physical environment.

Although some scholars and researchers have suggested that "climate" and/or "culture" and/or "supportive learning environments" and/or "conditions for learning" be used in somewhat different ways, the Council suggests that these are best understood as

overlapping terms (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/council.php).

In summary, empirical school climate research has shown that:

- School climate has a profound impact on individual experience. Two aspects of school climate (commitment to school and positive feedback from teachers) have been shown to affect students' self-esteem. School climate is also correlated with student self-concept.
- School climate is associated with rates of student absenteeism as well as being predictive of rate of student suspension. In an overlapping and important manner, school climate is highly correlated with graduation rates.
- A growing body of research indicates that positive school climate is a critical dimension linked to effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts.
- Positive school climate fosters greater attachment to school (school connectedness).
- Positive school climate is correlated and/or predictive of increased academic achievement.
- School climate is a major factor that determines teacher retention rates.

For a detailed summary of school climate research see: Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009 and Cohen & Geier, 2010.

There is growing interest in school climate from building, district, state, and national educational leaders. I suggest that this is important because comprehensive school climate surveys—by definition—recognize the social, emotional, civic, and ethical as well as intellectual or 'academic' aspects of student learning. They also recognize how the adults—parents and school personnel—perceive the schools strengths and needs. Hence, school climate reform is a data-driven strategy that recognizes, supports, and helps to coordinate SEL and the range of overlapping prosocial educational efforts (e.g. character education; developmental assets and 2 out of the 3 sets of "21st Century Learning Skills), risk prevention, and health-mental health promotion efforts. School climate standards (www.schoolclimate.org/climate/standards.php) and improvement efforts support students, parents, and school personnel learning about the schools strengths and needs and then working together to promote safe, supportive, engaging, helpfully challenging schools: mobilizing the "whole village" to support the "whole child."

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Sports, Positive Behaviors, and Choice Times

In recent years there has been a great deal of talk about sports and the opportunity they present to further develop SEL skills and reinforce positive behaviors in kids. At our organization, WINGS for Kids, we see sports as a vehicle in which we can better connect with, build character in, and introduce SEL skills to the 450 kids we serve in grades kindergarten through sixth grade.

This is why we offer a number of sports activities as part of our kids' "Choice Times" as we call them—nine week-long activities kids select based on their interests—all of which are intended to infuse SEL goals and objectives into everyday fun activities.

The following are ways in which we reinforce SEL skills through sports:

1. Responsible decision-making: Every athlete has his or her strengths and weaknesses. While it may be easy to continue focusing on the "fun" skills, which come easier to the player, WINGS emphasizes the need for kids to understand their weaknesses on and off the team



and have the courage to commit to strengthening these weaker skills. By focusing on weaker areas, kids learn how to be a stronger team player and individual.

2. Relationship skills: Athletes have to show respect for the coaches, umpires, and athletes and take ownership of their actions in the same way that individuals must show respect for others in everyday life. Sports provide a perfect setting for us to reinforce the importance of building healthy relationships. Kids learn they will not play if they do not show sportsman-like behavior, and they learn the importance of working together. No team can win if only one person is doing the work.
3. Self-management: It's easy for kids and athletes to get distracted. WINGS teaches kids they have the power to manage their emotions and stay focused even in stressful situations. If, for example, kids don't agree with a call or they find themselves frustrated at the way they have played, we teach kids to remain in control of their emotions in a positive way in order to stay on track.
4. Social awareness: When kids are part of a team it's important that they recognize the needs of others around them. Some players may need encouragement after a bad play; others may need silence in order to focus. Being a part of a team teaches kids how to be socially aware of their surroundings and positively contribute in a team setting.
5. Self-awareness: Sports can be tough. It takes dedication and determination to succeed, and there are times when players simply are out-matched or have a bad day. It is important for kids to learn how to focus on ways to encourage themselves to be a better player. For example, if a kid misses 8 of the last shots he/she has taken in a basketball game, they must learn how to self-encourage by realizing "I am a good player; I just need to follow through next time. I can do this." By showing this sort of resolve in a sports setting, kids learn it is essential to be their own biggest fan in everyday settings.

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Mary Utne O'Brien 1952-2010

Mary Utne O'Brien, Research Professor in Education and Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago and CASEL's Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, passed away peacefully at home in La Grange, Illinois, on April 28. Her beloved husband, Bob, and their two children, Ingrid and Conor, were with her when she died.

Many people around the world loved, admired, and were inspired by Mary. She was a brilliant scholar and compelling communicator. She devoted her professional life to identifying and broadly sharing information about research-based practices to promote children's school and life success.

She shared her vision about education in an article called "Reimagining Education: In our dream, social and emotional learning—or 'SEL'—is a household term." She wrote:

Imagine schools where children feel safe, valued, confident, and challenged, where they have the social, emotional, and academic skills to succeed, where the environment is safe and supportive, and where parents are fully engaged.

Imagine this is not the exception in an elite or small school but in every school and for all children. Imagine the integration of social and emotional skills as a part of education at every level, from preschool to high school. Imagine it as part of district, state, and federal policies.

This is our dream for 21st-century education—and it is happening now. Through rigorous experimental and action research and partnerships with schools throughout the country, we have seen the impact of social and emotional learning not only on children's learning and development but also on school functioning. More and more schools are adopting social and emotional learning as an overarching philosophy and framework for school improvement and children's optimal development.

After many years of leading public health research studies in Chicago, Mary joined CASEL as Associate Director in 1999. Working closely with CASEL President Roger Weissberg, she quickly became a key leader not just for CASEL but for the entire field of social and emotional learning (SEL). In 2004 she was appointed as CASEL's Executive Director. When CASEL incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 2007, she became Vice-President for Strategic Initiatives, responsible for strategic planning, development of collaborative partnerships, and exploration of new projects.

Often in the SEL field we refer to people who "walk the talk." We seek educational leaders who truly understand SEL, who are passionately committed to promoting SEL as an essential element of K-12 education, and who realize that SEL is critically important to successful living and lifelong learning. Mary was one of those leaders. Through her work with CASEL and her broad involvement with colleagues in the SEL field, she engaged, motivated, and encouraged others to work at their highest levels. She was a paragon of understanding and compassion, and she created a high standard of professionalism and intellectual rigor.

In the summer of 2007, Mary was diagnosed with an extremely aggressive form of breast cancer. Typical of her boundless intellectual curiosity and impatience with simple answers, she became an avid student of cancer treatments. She was determined to live healthy and stay healthy. Her goal was to live long enough to see the discovery of new treatments that would help her to continue the life and work she loved so much.

The new treatments did not come soon enough. In the interim, Mary became a model of courage, determination, and grace under pressure—not because she consciously decided to "model" anything but because that's who she was and how she confronted every new challenge. Her wonderful sense of humor, her profound optimism, her concern for others, her involvement in the world around her, and her love of life and ideas did not flag.

Part of what kept her going was her passion for SEL, the exciting new developments in the field, and CASEL's organizational growth and success. But Mary lived a life beautifully in balance. To her, the importance of her work was exceeded only by the importance of her family. She was particularly proud of her two children, whose accomplishments gave her so much happiness, her husband, and her brothers. In their comfortable vintage house in La Grange, the O'Briens lived a life rich with friends, humor, music, travel, books, and ideas. Mary was as happy sipping a glass of pinot grigio with friends or family on their front porch on a warm summer day as she was addressing a conference room filled with educators eager to know more about how SEL can benefit children and schools.

Mary inspired others with her joy, her appreciation of life, and her vision of education as a path to success and fulfillment. To those of us who knew her well, the bright light of her spirit will continue to shine. We will honor her through our love, caring, and work on behalf of all children.

