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Consultation to Urban Schools for Improvements in Academics and Behavior: No Alibis. No Excuses. No Exceptions.

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This article uses a multiyear case example to illustrate principles of comprehensive program consultation to low-performing urban school districts. The Plainfield (NJ) school district concluded that leaving no urban child behind required school personnel to attend to students' academic, social, and emotional development in an integrated, ongoing way. By teaming with an outside consultant, building internal capacity, and focusing intervention efforts on using an evidence-based social and emotional learning program as the cornerstone of procedures for reaching the school and community, the district was able to restore morale and move students toward positive behavior and improved academic performance. Generalizable elements usable by educators and school consultants, particularly in urban settings, are highlighted.

The Administrative Walk-Through Team visited Ms. Desantis's fourth-grade class at Jefferson School during a literacy-focused walk-through. Three students, Tierrah, Laura, and Diamond, were engaged in a peer editing process to prepare their collaboratively developed narrative fictional piece, "The Spy Cruise," for publishing. The assigned standards-based language arts task required that students write narrative fiction using a collaborative writing process.

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Plainfield school district's efforts to integrate social and emotional learning into the context of standards-based reform became alive before our eyes. We talked at length with the three fourth graders to gain a deeper understanding of their work processes as a writing team, and they helped us make the connections between these two important district reforms, standards-based language arts and social-emotional learning. The girls achieved a product that met all elements of the assigned standards-based task, but they also had a chance to build skills in problem solving and group cooperation that will make a big difference in their young lives.

The Walk-Through Team concluded that Tierrah, Laura, and Diamond might not have been able to negotiate the terrain of collaborative work without the intervention of efforts to develop their social and emotional learning skills. This example illustrates the connections between academic achievement and social and emotional learning that had previously been missing from the district's schools.

The opening vignette is the record of a walk-through in an urban school that implemented a comprehensive social-emotional approach to reversing chronic deficiencies in academic performance and positive behavior on the part of many students in that district. This article describes the consultation process that led to significant progress toward the goal of leaving no urban child behind. Using a multiyear consultation intervention relationship with the Plainfield (NJ) public schools as an example, we illustrate a number of factors important for success in challenging urban environments and provide concepts and tools that will enable other consultants embarking on similar missions to have a greater likelihood of success than otherwise might be the case.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Plainfield is a small, urban city located in central New Jersey with a population of 48,000 (Census, 2000). The Plainfield school district consists of 10 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 high school and serves a population of 7,840 students, 98.5 % of whom are children of color (95% African American and 5% Latino at the start of the consultation, gradually shifting to 70–30), and 72% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. As is often true in urban communities, Plainfield has many students who come to school with emotional and behavioral challenges that have negative impacts on their perseverance and success as learners. For too many students, these challenges disrupt their commitment and focus on being successful in school. Disaffection, alienation, anger and hostility, and emotional instability influence the academic and behavioral choices made by too many of these students. In 1996, the community, frustrated by years of low performance, decided that it was time to make some changes in the instruction and

care of children. Under the leadership of a new Superintendent (second author), Plainfield parents, community members, and district staff engaged in a dynamic community planning process that eventually shaped the vision to implement standards-based reform throughout the school district.

In recent years, school change experts have agreed that schools need unifying themes, mandates, and mottos to help simplify, focus, and sustain innovations (Elbot & Fulton, 2007; Fullan, 2004). Disunified and fragmented schools are highly difficult places to insert even the most effective programs because they are likely to be rejected in the same way that, during a transplantation process, the body will reject a healthy organ that it deems foreign.

It is important to note that Plainfield adopted a mission statement that would serve as a reveille call signaling that business as usual was no longer acceptable: "The Plainfield Public Schools, in partnership with the community, shall do whatever it takes for every student to achieve high academic standards. No alibis. No excuses. No exceptions." The phrase "No alibis. No excuses. No exceptions" became the mantra for Plainfield's reform efforts.

In the Beginning

Early in Plainfield's efforts to advance a systemwide approach to become a standards-driven school district, the district Administrative Cabinet recognized that it needed to address the factors that contributed to maladaptive behavior in schools and classrooms. Plainfield educators, like their peers in urban districts across the country, were confronted with relentless and formidable pressures of accountability and high-stakes testing. They were committed to school-based reform and to an extensive emphasis on literacy across the curriculum. But as they embarked on this effort, they recognized that they were not seeing the kind of progress that was necessary to truly lift their children to acceptable levels. Further, school leaders began to see signs of stress and flagging staff morale, as if literacy was the only purpose served by education. The joy of learning was being squeezed out amidst well-intentioned attempts to meet standards and in failing to recognize the demands placed on poor children in urban environments.

Poor children experience cumulative exposure to multiple environmental risks that lead to a higher rate of physical and psychological morbidity than is experienced by other groups of children (Evans, 2004). Among these risks are an increased pace of life; greater economic demands on parents; alterations in family composition and stability; breakdown of neighborhoods and extended families; weakening of community institutions; unraveling of parent-child bonds due to work, school demands, time, drugs, mental health, and economic burdens; an ongoing climate of war and terror; and continuous exposure to an array of digital media and pervasive advertising that encourage violence as a problem-solving tool and other health-damaging behaviors and unrealistic lifestyles.

Conditions such as these strongly erode the capabilities of students to concentrate on academic tasks, primarily because they engender strong emotions such as fear, anxiety, boredom, depression, despair, upset, and rage that are incompatible with effective learning and retention (Payne, 2008; Wandersman & Nation, 1998; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). For students to learn effectively in spite of such influences requires skills in emotion recognition and management and sound coping and problem-solving skills.

Reviewing the relevant literature reinforced the impressions of the Administrative Team that the current practice of increasing academic time on task, even to the exclusion of aspects of schooling such as music, art, social studies, and recess, would not lead to success for students. What they also found was work by the Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1991), Dewey (1933), Rutter (1987), Reynolds (1998), Spivack and Shure (1974), and others showing that protective processes can help offset these risks; foremost among these processes are sustained academic, social, and emotional skill-building interventions beginning in early childhood. By creating environments that would both build children's skills and the capacity to nurture skill use and growth, the Administrative Team believed that they would engage teachers, parents, other educators and caregivers, and the children themselves in a process of reclamation and resilience.

From the literature reviews, internal conversations, and discussions with colleagues in other schools, the second author, in his role as Superintendent of Schools, became convinced that social-emotional learning (SEL), popularized at the time by Daniel Goleman (1995) as "emotional intelligence," was the "missing piece" (Elias et al., 1997) in Plainfield's reform effort. Ultimately, students' interpersonal literacy mediated everything that educators hoped to accomplish in classrooms as well as how students carried their learning into other school and community settings. If students lacked emotional intelligence, to what benefit would any of their academic skills be put?

Plainfield's environment, like that of many districts, was full of caution about involvement in anything that dilutes focus from test-related academic instruction. Many staff members could recall a history of projects that were implemented during one school year and abandoned the next. Many state mandates, mostly unfunded, had come and gone, often after turning schools inside out and upside down. Some thought SEL to be another example of the "one more thing" that would follow the "here today, gone tomorrow" pattern. Others questioned the district's commitment to sustaining the literacy initiative and wondered if SEL would become the next flavor of school reform in Plainfield. The district's standards-based reform efforts were still fragile and it was necessary to send a clear and consistent message that standards-based reform was a long-term commitment that would be stronger for being integrated with SEL.

The Superintendent was aware that reports of successfully sustained interventions included discussion of some kind of "buddy" or mentor as essential for success (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2008; Elias, Zins, Greenberg, Graczyk & Weissberg, 2003). The role of the mentor is someone who can "walk the talk," who knows the theory but also knows how to get it to apply pragmatically to changing local circumstances and who can help develop that capacity in local staff (Novick, Kress, & Elias, 2002). In particular, a consultant was sought out who would be able to assist Plainfield to develop and evaluate its SEL program while also being sensitive to the urban district's needs, history, and Plainfield's tenuous circumstances in particular. The district's need was matched with the local availability of a university-based consultant (first author) who was interested in and prepared to make a multiyear commitment to Plainfield's challenge.

The consultant recognized that from the outset, it was necessary to establish that SEL was vital to Plainfield's overall improvement efforts. Doing so required planning at multiple ecological levels. Plainfield's commitment to the integration of social and emotional learning needed to be systemwide and supported by board of education policy and shared decision-making governance teams at the district and school levels. The first step was the deep education of the Administrative Team.

As part of several meetings around readings, the Administrative Team reviewed the major clusters of SEL competencies identified through evidence-based research by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL): Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management and Organization, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making (CASEL, 2002; Elias et al., 1997). These competencies were required for students to enact positive role expectations in the classroom and beyond. The Administrative Team determined that the best way to bring SEL competencies to students in a developmentally sound and continuous manner was through an evidence-based SEL curriculum that could also be integrated into existing academic areas. The Team reviewed studies showing how evidence-based SEL curricula systematically build skills and provide teachers, and all staff, with a structure of language, rules, and rituals that take the place of seemingly capricious and often reactive discipline (e.g., Zins et al., 2004). In reaching out to those who had implemented such curricula, the Team came to understand that SEL lessons focus on building support and a positive, inclusive sense of community and providing the skills to enact and sustain both of these, thus allowing for a better atmosphere for standards-based learning (Elias et al., 1997). Further, the professional development involved in bringing in such a curriculum would provide teachers with the necessary ingredients for a positive shift in dynamics that needed to pervade Plainfield classrooms.

The Administrative Team also recognized that, in urban districts with a high degree of accountability for improving students' academic success,

nothing can take priority over addressing what happens in the classroom itself. At the instructional level, "adding on" to an already crowded reform agenda would be inefficient, perceived as diluting the focus on standards-based instruction, and widely seen as punitive to teachers who were already working extremely hard under highly pressured conditions. Integrating SEL into the developing standards-based environment was the only way to proceed and would have to take place initially at the level of classroom pedagogy. Standards-based instruction often is accompanied by prescriptive styles of teaching, so an SEL curriculum had to be selected that fostered classrooms in which children could feel they had an active role as producers of knowledge under the guidance of their teachers. Relatedly, the curriculum had to explicitly build the prosocial skills that would enable children to participate in and benefit from a pedagogical approach that would require a great deal of classroom interaction and a "loosening" of high degrees of often coercive teacher control. The complexity of this task requires a high degree of teacher understanding of the approach and process, patience with the inevitable difficulties of second-order change, and a support structure that could provide tangible help as the implementation process unfolded.

Therefore, an implementation process was put in place that would address the aforementioned understandings and caveats, recognizing that successful SEL skill building in urban districts such as Plainfield requires a comprehensive and continuous impact on the culture, norms, values, beliefs, and actions of the entire education community.

INTEGRATION OF SEL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INTO DISTRICT CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

During initial meetings of the Administrative Team with teachers to begin to plan implementation of SEL in Plainfield, nearly one third of the elementary and middle school teachers expressed beliefs that schools should focus exclusively on academic preparation and leave emotional support and development for families. These attitudes were confronted strongly and directly in teacher training meetings through opportunities for open dialogue among the teachers. Ultimately, teacher leaders stepped forward to take the position that it is shortsighted to ignore the connection between school success and social and emotional wellness. They cited evidence they had read, stating that improvements in academic performance are enabled when learners are less weighed down with the stresses that distract them for maintaining an academic focus (Zins et al., 2004). As Plainfield educators were given opportunities to voice their concerns, hear an alternative point of view, reconnect with their own purposes in entering the field of education, and contemplate the legacy they wanted to leave behind, the vast majority at

the elementary and middle school levels came to view social and emotional learning as a means to promote academic progress and affect positive, lasting changes that help students in both school and nonschool settings.

Following these meetings and the positive change in staff attitudes, the district undertook a detailed process of integrating SEL into instruction. The many lengthy lists of factors essential for program implementation (e.g., Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004) can make the process daunting. In such circumstances, the task of the consultant is to make the process accessible and possible for those who must implement it, balancing simplification with rigor. Based largely on the prior experiences of the consultant with SEL-related interventions, the Plainfield team conceptualized the process of integrating SEL as involving four components; subsequently, these have been borne out as relevant to other urban schools struggling with similar issues and historical factors (Elias & Arnold, 2006). These components are (a) change the classroom environment for teaching and learning by developing SEL skills via direct instruction linked to academic content areas, (b) broaden the application of SEL skills through buildingwide SEL initiatives, (c) create an integrative organizational structure linking SEL to related districtwide initiatives, and (d) systematically assess implementation and outcome.

Change the Classroom Environment for Teaching and Learning Through Evidence-Based SEL Curricula Linked to Academic Content Areas

In urban environments at least, any SEL-related curriculum that is brought in must be explicitly linked to academic content areas and the teachers' instructional process. If these linkages are not made, the curriculum or program will be disconnected from the key application contexts for the skills that the SEL curriculum seeks to impart. Therefore, from the outset, program design must be consonant with the rituals and routines of standards-based instruction while also imbuing them with an SEL pedagogy. The process of how this was accomplished in Plainfield is described next.

In the 1st year, the Plainfield SEL Team and the consultation team collaborated to design and pilot test an adaptation of the research-based Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving (SDM/SPS) curriculum. SDM/SPS uses videos and stories as stimuli for developmentally sequenced, weekly skill-building lessons integrating social-emotional and character development through a constructivist, social learning-oriented pedagogy (Elias & Bruene, 2005). The adaptation, "Talking with TJ," is a video-based curriculum that provides students with the opportunity to learn and practice prosocial skills (Dilworth, Mokrue, & Elias, 2002). The premise revolves around the fictional T J, a Black teenage girl who appears in all of the videos as a radio station disc jockey running a radio talk show. Kids call in for advice about solving typical problems faced by children their age pertaining to acceptance issues,

difficulty expressing feelings, and difficulty compromising. Through a combination of video, discussion, stories, activities, and role play, skills in the five SEL skill clusters are introduced to and practiced by the students.

Through an analysis of discipline incidents in the school district, two broad themes were identified that would bring overall coherence to the skill-building lessons. Teamwork among peers was an overall emphasis in Grades 2–3, and Grades 4–5 focused on Conflict Resolution (primarily with peers but also with adults). Implementation was gradual, taking an action-research approach so that each year's work could be used to inform expansion in a spirit of continuous improvement. Teachers in Grades 2 and 4 piloted the curriculum in six schools in the 1st year, expanding to add Grades 3 and 5 in the 2nd year while also moving to bring the curriculum to the 2nd and 4th grades in all schools. By the 3rd year, Grades 2–5 were involved across all schools. In the 4th year, sets of topical modules to build readiness skills were created and piloted for Grades K–1 as well as a supplemental small group intervention for young students with early reading difficulties. After 5 years, another problem solving-oriented, evidence-based curriculum, *Overcoming Obstacles* (www.overcomingobstacles.org), was brought in for Grades 6–12. Naturally, as mandates change, curricula and related programming must also be adapted.

Indeed, anyone planning to bring a program into urban schools now must recognize the necessity of integrating that program into the vast number of existing mandates facing urban districts. Integration of this kind requires adherence to the principle of adaptation of an intervention rather than fidelity (Diebold, Miller, Gensheimer, Mondshein, & Ohmart, 2000). Of course, that adaptation must be guided by the preservation of the key elements of effectiveness (if known), the dosage strength, and local contextual sensitivity. Literacy development required the integration of the SEL curricular lessons with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and the specific Whole School Reform pedagogy used in Plainfield to teach reading skills. During the mandatory 2.5-hr daily morning literacy block, which focused largely on building students' decoding, phonemic awareness, and writing skills, at least one story per month was selected with SEL themes matched to the SEL lessons. These books were drawn from lists of SEL and character development-oriented titles compiled by Plainfield school librarians. At the same time, the SEL lessons themselves included stories that provided whole class, subgroup, and paired reading practice; writing activities; and interpersonal and media literacy development, restoring a few whole language elements into the mix of what was being presented to children in accordance with Plainfield's instructional preferences. As the curricular approach moved into the middle and high schools, SEL was integrated with the existing social studies curriculum (especially through current events, civic development, and service learning) and the visual and performing arts curriculum with its strong emphasis on group work and presentation skills (Elias et al., 2006).

Further alignments took place when the Board of Education passed a districtwide SEL policy stating the importance of SEL as part of the core mission of academic education. Specifically, the five skill areas of SEL were aligned with academic standards explicitly named and monitored in the six district goals and the implementation process was aligned with four goals of the Plainfield Accountability System for school administrator performance.

Generalization Through Buildingwide SEL Initiatives

Although a curriculum provides skills, internalization of skills and experiencing a new, positive climate requires opportunities to enact skills in contexts other than during formal lessons. The implementing teams in the Plainfield schools exhibited great creativity in carrying out SEL activities that had buildingwide influence. These included (a) selecting the "Principal's Book of the Month" so that most had SEL-related themes; (b) modifying quarterly writing assessment prompts to include SEL-related topics; (c) incorporating SEL into basic literacy and mathematics routines to promote more engagement and deeper learning (see Table 1); (d) initiating morning greeting and daily positive recognition programs; (e) increasing opportunities for school and community service; (f) scheduling ongoing SEL-related bulletin boards and assemblies; and (g) implementing the Laws of Life Essay, to be described next.

The Laws of Life (LOL) Essay (www.lawsoflife.org) is distinctive in the number of relevant program elements it integrates at multiple levels. It incorporates character development, social and emotional learning, broad and inclusive positive student recognition and celebration, whole school programming, language arts literacy, and family and community involvement. In the 3rd year of the consultation, for a 6-week period, 5th-grade students engaged in writing essays pertaining to the core values by which they conduct their lives. One hundred percent of all district 5th-grade classes participated with 94% of all 5th-grade students submitting an essay. Middle and high school students were trained to review and judge the essays and to identify the top 40, from which each school selected several as winners that were celebrated with special programs for parents and students. The district process culminated with a celebration banquet that was attended by over 250 community members, parents, students and staff. In Year 4, LOL was expanded to include district 8th graders. The celebrations by parents, schools, and community expanded as well. From the 5th year through to the present writing, LOL has included 5th-, 8th-, and 11th-grade students. Additional opportunities for children to generate Laws of Life Logos and Slogans were added into Grades 6 and 9, respectively, and in Grades 10–12, Laws of Life was integrated into visual and performing arts, especially the dance curriculum (Laws of Life choreography) and Laws of Life graphic arts (Elias et al., 2006). A diverse range of community members and leaders shared the

TABLE 1 SEL Competencies and Standards-Based Literacy and Math Rituals and Routines

SEL Competencies	Literacy and Math Rituals and Routines
I. Self-Awareness	
Identifying emotions	Students receiving feedback on their work
Recognizing strengths	Self-assessment of work products using standards-based rubrics
II. Social Awareness	
Perspective taking	Giving feedback to peers, participating in cooperative learning groups
Appreciating diversity	Collaborative problem solving, multiple approaches to generating solutions
III. Self-Management	
Managing emotions	Giving and receiving peer and teacher feedback, using feedback to support revision and correction, being accountable for the words one uses
Goal setting	Using standards-based rubrics and feedback to guide work on assignments; pacing to meet independent reading expectations
IV. Relationship Skills	
Communication	Author's chair, peer-to-peer editing
Building relationships	Paired reading, giving and receiving "warm" and "cool" feedback, collaborative writing, cooperative data collection and graphing
Negotiations	Cooperative learning groups and collaborative problem solving
V. Responsible Decision Making	
Analyzing situations	Integrating feedback using rubrics, conferencing and editing input, portfolio development, reflections, journal entries
Personal responsibility	Independent reading, reflections on feedback, pacing revisions to achieve published independent work, maintaining math assignment pads, submitting homework assignments
Respecting others	Author's chair, paired/shared reading; peer-to-peer feedback, accountable talk
Problem solving	Alternative ways to solve math problems, collaborative writing, word problems

Note. SEL = social-emotional learning.

responsibility for reviewing the student products and was trained to use a standards-based holistic scoring rubric for writing and parallel approaches for other modalities (Elias, Ogburn-Thompson, Lewis, & Neft, 2008).

There is no doubt among those involved with the SEL initiative in Plainfield that Laws of Life was a powerful, energizing, integrative force and source for celebration that provided a clear outlet and focus for children's SEL skill development and an accompanying opportunity to reflect on how their character and their SEL skills were related. Much as "No alibis. No excuses. No exceptions." became the mantra for staff, "Living your Laws of Life" became a powerful shared theme for teachers, students, parents, and the community.

Integrated Organizational Structure

Studies of enduring SEL and Character Education efforts have found that an organizational structure that integrates all related social-emotional development activity and includes an active Leadership Team with broad membership is a key element in long-term success (Vetter, 2008). Therefore, those consulting with urban schools on SEL-related interventions must attend to the issue of creating an enduring infrastructure.

Figure 1 presents the formal structure that was established to support the implementation of SEL within the elementary school curriculum. The
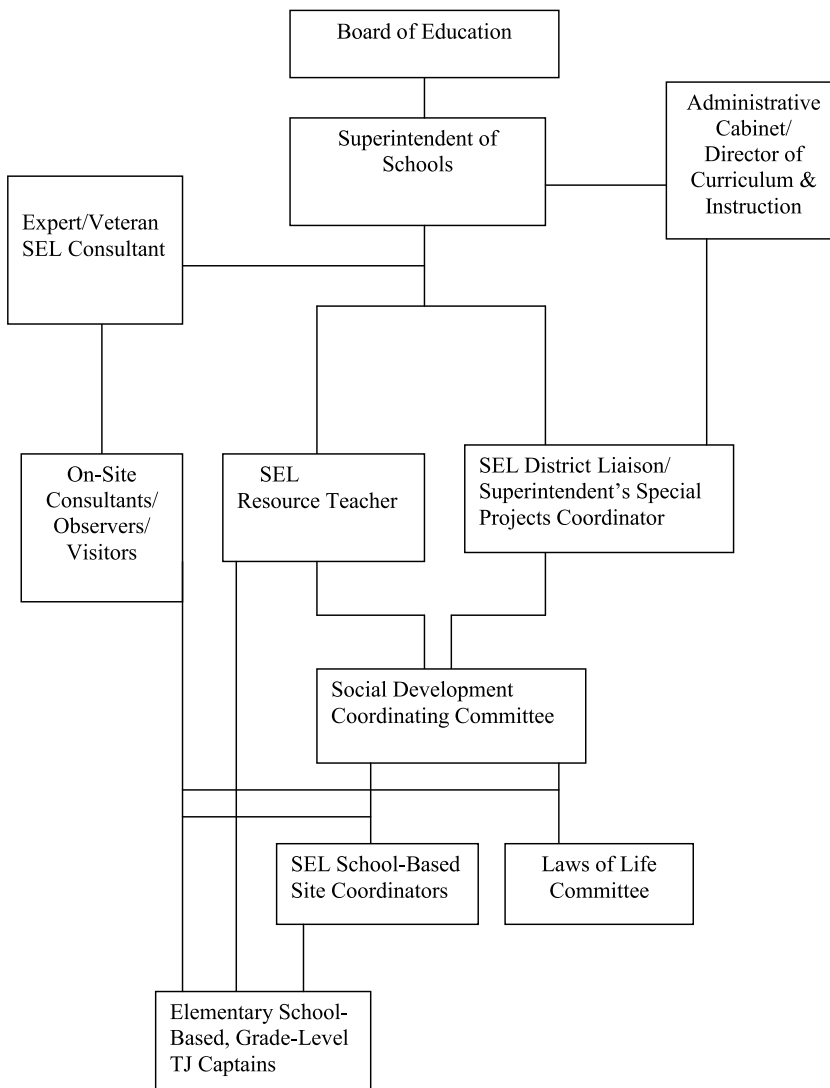
FIGURE 1 Organizational Chart of the Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).

position of SEL Resource Teacher was established and a school psychologist who had been consulting to teachers about implementing the "Talking with TJ" curriculum was given this responsibility and linked to various aspects of SEL implementation, as depicted. At the Cabinet level, the District Superintendent assigned the topic of SEL to his Special Projects Coordinator, and she was designated the SEL Administrative Liaison. In this capacity, she worked closely with both the building and district-level administrators in the Administrative Cabinet as well as SEL staff at the building level. At the building level, SEL Site Coordinators were established to help teachers with SEL implementation in the schools, and grade-level "TJ Captains" were named in each school with the responsibility of serving as a focal point of communication with the teachers about SEL curricula.

The Social Development Coordinating Committee served the role of the Leadership Team, building SEL capacity and providing support by sharing articles, research, and reports; planning and developing curricula; delivering professional development; facilitating forums; designing implementation and evaluation strategies; supporting parent education programs; presenting at workshops, conferences, and community meetings; and collaborating with a broad range of community groups. This diverse group of leaders effectively communicated the linkage between the district's academic mission and social and emotional learning far more effectively than what occurs in most central office-led change efforts.

Figure 1 also depicts the integration of the consultant into the organizational structure of the intervention. This represented an explicit statement of the consultant's lines of authority and, in this case, the direct connection to the Superintendent. It also made clear the eventual organizational functions that district staff would have to assume over time. Indeed, at each point of expansion (to middle and high school), this chart was further refined until the point at which the consultant's role was highly reduced. Note also that the consultant's visible presence across so many schools was enhanced by having trained team members, in the form of graduate and undergraduate students, on the scene in schools, assisting teachers in implementation, helping Site Coordinators with buildingwide projects, codeveloping curriculum tailored to the setting, monitoring fidelity of implementation, and aiding with evaluation logistics. (It is worth noting that the important role of on-the-scene implementation assistance can also be served by community volunteers, high school students doing community service internships, and parents, if a university or college is not proximal to one's setting.)

One factor in the effective operation of this organizational structure is that, prior to beginning the SEL initiative, Plainfield developed a distributed leadership model that significantly broadened the base of leadership in the schools and community. The investments made to distribute leadership yielded dividends for SEL efforts. The leaders for SEL integration in Plainfield—teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, school

social workers, nurses, building-based and district-level administrative per-
sonnel, and parents—acted as champions without regard to formal position
or hierarchy. They were relied upon to be effective agents of change and
were vigorously supported by the Superintendent and others in the organi-
zation's formal structure. As an example, the citywide parents organization,
Parents Empowering Parents, created in the 1990s as part of the initial
effort to recognize and reinforce the essential role of parents as partners
in children's education, strongly embraced the SEL approach. These parents
knew firsthand how emotional factors distracted children from learning. They
made SEL a multiyear focus by committing to a series of ongoing parenting
workshops on the topic and actively supporting teachers and principals
in their efforts to build children's SEL skills during the school day. Thus,
the development of the formal SEL implementation support structure was
informed by and attempted to capitalize on prior organizational structures
and processes in Plainfield.

Systematically Assess Implementation and Outcome

A collaborative process between the Social Development Coordinating Com-
mittee and the consultation team was used to set goals and develop instru-
ments and reporting systems for feedback. Examples of this process are
described in Romasz, Kantor, and Elias (2004) and Bryan, Klein, and Elias
(2007). These included extensive checks on implementation through teacher
logging and documentation, periodic classroom observation, student and
teacher consumer satisfaction and feedback surveys, and Leadership Team
and Superintendent's Office walk-throughs. Outcome assessment involved
experimental and action-research designs. In one experimental-control group
study, Dilworth et al. (2002) found that students who received the inter-
vention experienced significant positive changes on teacher and self-report
measures of social competence, self-concept, and anger.

   In another study, high and low implementation groups were created to
take into account possible dosage effect in curriculum delivery. At preassess-
ment, students in the low implementation group scored higher on measures
of social skills and lower on measures of problem behaviors. Analyses of
covariance took into account these preexisting differences. When the initial
ratings of social competence by their teachers were taken into account, it
was determined that the students in the high implementation group were
rated as having higher levels of overall social skills, cooperation, self-control
and assertion, and academic competence than students in the low imple-
mentation group after the curriculum ended. Furthermore, students in the
high implementation group had lower levels of problem behaviors, includ-
ing internalizing behavior and hyperactivity, following the curriculum. The
degree and direction of change of social competence measures were greater
for children in the high implementation group (Mokrue, Elias, & Bry, 2005).

An ongoing tension is the dual nature of data analysis for peer-reviewed research purposes and the amount, format, level, and timing of data needed for district-based decisions related to program implementation support and resource allocation. Implementation feedback was important in securing school cooperation. In addition, report cards were modified to include more systematic indicators of SEL skills being taught in the curricula. After Year 6, all data systems were turned over to the school district for its subsequent use. Finally, school staff compiled records of behavior incidents and academic test scores and found significant outcomes with regard to increasing prosocial behaviors; reducing anger; creating strong home-school communication about social and emotional learning; and, ultimately, improving academic performance, especially in the area of literacy.

AN ENDNOTE: BROADER CONSULTATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The National Center for Innovation and Education (1999) set three guiding principles that must be attended to by those who are attempting to implement social and emotional learning programs. They are (a) caring relationships form the foundation for lasting learning, (b) emotions affect how learning takes place and what is learned, and (c) goal setting and problem solving provide direction and energy for learning. Reflections on the Plainfield experiences and involvement in other school reform innovations reinforce the significance of these principles. Standards-driven urban schools and classrooms can only enhance chances for students to succeed when these conditions are present. Consultants must ensure that any social and emotional learning must be implemented beyond even the most acclaimed evidence-based program format and must be integrated into the existing life of the school in a comprehensive, explicit, coordinated, and continuous manner. The research in Plainfield confirmed what others have said: especially in disadvantaged educational contexts, dosage matters (Rosenblatt & Elias, 2008).

If the aforementioned three principles may be thought of as universals, then there is also a set of particulars that apply to consultation in urban contexts. These have been highlighted through the examples and analysis provided earlier. They are also summarized in Table 2 as a set of guidelines for consultants seeking to implement evidence-based programs in disadvantaged urban contexts.

Clearly, a significant amount of time, energy, resources, and resilience is necessary to mount an effective consultative intervention in an urban setting, and Plainfield is not a large city. Ultimately, it is not feasible to imagine that school change in urban settings will come about in any large-scale way through external consultative intervention alone. It is essential that

TABLE 2 Specific Guidelines for Consulting With Urban Schools on SEL-Related Programs

1. Set up an infrastructure with distributed leadership but clear liaisons for accountability.
2. Begin with an evidence-based SEL curriculum but be prepared to adapt it for local culture and context.
3. Align any program with all operating district and school mandates and goals.
4. Plan for a curriculum to be used at all grade levels in a school.
5. Reinforce the SEL curriculum systematically in the everyday academic curriculum.
6. Build opportunities for students to use the skills and be recognized for them on a schoolwide basis.
7. Identify a unifying theme/mission/vision around which staff, students, parents, and the community can rally with pride.
8. Provide strong, consistent, readily available job-embedded implementation support while cultivating local capacity to assume this responsibility over time.
9. Engage in implementation monitoring, especially student and teacher consumer satisfaction surveys and walk-throughs, and share findings for constructive improvement.
10. Assist in monitoring behavioral and academic outcomes, recognizing that changes will not be immediate.

Note. SEL = social-emotional learning.

the training of school psychologists, professional school counselors, and other educational personnel emphasize the kind of skills needed to lead these efforts from within. At the early stages of intervention, when a critical mass of knowledgeable adherents is most important and a high degree of consultative support is needed for implementation, resources are often least available simply because consultants are not able to be everywhere they may be needed initially. If school professionals had an existing level of expertise in SEL interventions and consultative processes, outside experts would have more resources to mobilize and organize and the effort would therefore be more likely to get past the difficult initial years. Eventually, systematic approaches to social-emotional and character development will become part of the mainstream mission of schools and will be led by trained personnel on the school staff (Elias, 2008). That said, there is no doubt that urban schools will continue to benefit from expert outside consultation in these domains into the foreseeable future.

Ultimately, emphasizing the progress of students in standards-based academic instructional programs is a necessary but insufficient response to calls to promote the academic and social development of children and youth. As Adelman and Taylor (2000, 2006) made abundantly clear, schools must move beyond current school reform efforts that follow a two-component model (i.e., attend only to academic instruction and school management). Leaving no urban child behind, and in fact advancing them all forward, requires school leaders to embrace the responsibility to attend to students' social-emotional and character development in an integrated, ongoing way as an essential facet of building literacy and academic ability.

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