

COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS & SUCCESS Center

at American Institutes for Research ■



Improving College and Career Readiness by Incorporating Social and Emotional Learning

This issue brief was written to assist state policymakers in better understanding how social and emotional learning (SEL) can help students to be college and career ready. The brief provides a short description of what SEL is, why it is needed, and what it looks like in practice. In addition, examples of standards that support SEL at the federal and state levels, current SEL initiatives and programs, and outcomes and measures that can be used to assess SEL programming are described. A list of resources is included at the end of this brief for policymakers who are interested in learning more.

The framework used in this brief aligns with the [College and Career Development Organizer](#),¹ developed by the National High School Center (National High School Center, 2012). In the following sections, we describe how SEL fits into each of the three strands focused on (1) goals and expectations for college and career readiness, (2) pathways and supports for college and career preparation, and (3) outcomes and measures for college and career success. In the first section of the brief, we describe what high school graduates should know and be able to do. In the second section, we discuss what policies, programs, and structures will help high school graduates meet expectations. And, in the third section, we describe how we know when high school graduates meet expectations.

What Should High School Graduates Know and Be Able to Do?

In this section, we provide a broad definition of what SEL is, describe each of the five SEL skills in detail, provide a rationale for why SEL is needed, and discuss research evidence of the benefits of SEL.

¹ The College and Career Development Organizer was created to synthesize and organize the field of college and career readiness initiatives. The organizer can be used to map the efforts of state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) as well as the many organizations that are researching and providing support for college and career readiness.

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WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

SEL involves the processes through which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Generally, SEL is defined as including five core competencies, which are presented in Table 1 (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.).

Table 1. The Five SEL Core Competencies

SEL Competency	Definition
Self-awareness	Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and limitations
Self-management	Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals
Social awareness	Showing understanding and empathy for others
Relationship skills	Forming positive relationships, working in teams, and dealing directly with conflict
Responsible decision making	Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior

These are the skills that allow students to regulate their emotions, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, avoid engaging in risky behaviors, and make ethical and safe choices.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is defined as accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence. One of the key components of self-awareness is the ability to identify, describe, and understand emotions as well as the causes of these emotions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). This skill is important for both emotion regulation and for recognizing when to seek help from others in situations of psychological distress (Ciarrochi, Wilson, Deane, & Rickwood, 2003).

Self-awareness also involves the ability to make accurate self-judgments, have a sense of internal motivation, and have a sense of satisfaction when goals are attained. This skill relates to an individual's perception of his or her own ability to accomplish a goal or execute a plan and has been shown to shape long-term aspirations and career trajectories (Bandura et al., 2001). Such self-perception may shift over time and influences one's willingness to engage in certain behaviors or activities as well as put forth the necessary amount of effort to succeed in academic settings (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007; Silverthorn, DuBois, & Crombie, 2005).



Self-Management

Self-management is defined as regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; and expressing emotions appropriately. A core aspect of this competency is emotion regulation, which involves learning to manage feeling overwhelmed and to adopt strategies that help reestablish a state of balance after feeling overwhelmed (Gullone, Hughes King, & Tonge, 2010). This aspect is particularly important as students experience more challenging coursework in high school and college settings and have to handle emotions such as test anxiety (Bradley et al., 2010). Students who can cope with stress have been found to transition to college more successfully and perform better academically (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004).

Social Awareness

Social awareness is defined as the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognize and appreciate individual and group similarities and differences; and recognize and use family, school, and community resources. One core aspect of social awareness is the ability to understand and respect others' perspectives in social interactions. This ability has direct implications both for the development of healthy interpersonal relationships and for moral and prosocial behavior (Decety, 2009). Another core aspect of this competency is the ability to identify situations in which social support can serve as a resource for managing problems. For example, parental and peer support during the transition to college is important in lowering anxiety levels and helping students to meet the academic demands of college classes (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills include establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed. These skills enable students to work well in groups and relate to others from different cultures and backgrounds. For example, students' worries about how to interact with others from diverse backgrounds and with faculty members may interfere with students' sense of belonging in college and impede the adjustment process during the first year of college (Hurtado et al., 2007). In addition, as first-year college students enter a new social environment, relationship skills help them to build new social networks. Connecting students to a network of supportive peers can reduce feelings of loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and increase college retention (Mattanah et al., 2010). Furthermore, knowing how to seek out help effectively helps students to access social capital in the form of high school counselors, college faculty members, and other support services.



Responsible Decision Making

Responsible decision making refers to making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one's school and community. These skills become increasingly important as adolescents navigate new settings (e.g., college, workplace) independent from their parents.

During adolescence, there is an increasing capacity for abstract reasoning, counterfactual reasoning, and systematic reasoning, which are all relevant to decision making (Steinberg, 2012). For example, an improved systematic reasoning ability provides adolescents with the ability to imagine future outcomes, allowing them to determine the consequences of their actions.

WHY SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

There are a great deal of data indicating that large numbers of students are contending with significant social, emotional, and mental health barriers that prevent them from succeeding in both school and life. Sometimes, the inability to surmount these barriers leads students to engage in risk-taking behaviors, and often this can contribute to poor academic performance. Educators can address some of the social, emotional, and mental health barriers by helping students develop better SEL skills and creating a safe, caring, and well-managed learning environment that fosters positive decision making and academic success.

Results from the [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012), the [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2011), and the [National College Health Assessment](#) (American College Health Association, 2012) indicate that many high school and college students are engaged in health-risk behaviors. Many of these, such as alcohol and drug use, violence and bullying, and risky sexual behavior, are major contributors to the leading causes of death among persons aged 10–24 years in the United States. The following exhibit presents some current statistics about students' engagement in a range of risky behaviors.

Current Statistics About Students' Engagement in Risky Behaviors

Alcohol and Drug Use. A major concern today is the prevalence of alcohol and drug use, and in particular binge drinking, among adolescents. During the 30 days before they were surveyed, 38.7 percent of high school students had drunk alcohol, 23.1 percent had used marijuana, 18.1 percent had smoked cigarettes, and 7.7 percent had used smokeless tobacco. Sixty-five percent of college students had drunk alcohol, 14.6 percent had smoked cigarettes, and 17.1 percent had used marijuana. Among young adults aged 18–25, the rate of binge drinking was 39.8 percent.

Violence and Bullying. Adolescents are also participating in and the victims of several types of violence and bullying, including physical, verbal, and domestic violence. During the 12 months before the survey, 32.8 percent of high school students had been in a physical fight, and 20.1 percent had been bullied on school property. About six percent (6.4 percent) of college students had been in a physical fight, 19.4 percent reported receiving a verbal threat, and 10.1 percent reported being in an emotionally abusive relationship.

Risky Sexual Behavior. Many high school and college students nationwide are engaged in sexual-risk behaviors associated with unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). More than 15 percent of high school students have had sexual intercourse with four or more people during their life, and, among currently sexually active students, only 60.2 percent had used a condom during their last sexual intercourse. More than 10 percent (10.1 percent) of college students have had sexual intercourse with four or more people during the past 12 months, and 20 percent of college students reported having unprotected sex during this time period.

The problems extend to students' disengagement with school, especially once they reach the high school setting, which influences attendance, graduation, college going, and college retention rates.

- In a 2007 survey, only 53 percent of the high school students in Philadelphia agreed with the statement, "In one or more of my classes, I usually look forward to going to class" (Jahi, 2008).
- According to the latest statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics, only 74.9 percent of public high school students graduate with a diploma in the United States. There were 3,030,000 public school students who dropped out of high school in 2011 (Education Week, Children Trends Database, 2012).
- Although the percentage of students enrolled in college directly after high school has increased during the past several decades (from 60 percent in 1990 to 68 percent in 2010), a staggeringly low percentage of these students receive a bachelor's degree within six years (58 percent). Only 29.9 percent of first-time, full-time associate degree- or certificate-seeking students in the nation's two-year colleges graduate within three years (Aud et al., 2012).

By providing students with comprehensive SEL programming characterized by safe, caring, and well-managed learning environments and instruction in SEL skills, many of these learning barriers and associated risk factors can be addressed.



RESEARCH EVIDENCE FOR SEL BENEFITS

The five core SEL competencies can help students develop other academic and lifelong learning skills, including higher-order thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking), academic success and employability skills (e.g., organization, teamwork), and civic/consumer/life skills (e.g., civic engagement, social media). For example, SEL competencies can help students become better communicators, cooperative members of a team, effective leaders and self-advocators, resilient individuals, and caring, concerned members of their communities (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 200; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004). These skills have been identified by today's employers and educators as important for success in the workplace and postsecondary settings.

To lend support to this theoretical rationale, a growing body of research has documented benefits for students who participate in SEL programs in a range of areas such as students' social-emotional skills; attitudes about self, school, and others; social interactions; emotional distress; alcohol and drug use; violence; truancy; bullying; conduct problems; and academic performance (Hawkins et al., 1997; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997; Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the benefits of SEL programs comes from a review of positive youth development, SEL, character education, and prevention interventions designed to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents aged 5–18 (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Dymnicki, Kendziora, & Osher, 2012). Participation in SEL programs was associated with positive impacts on six major student outcomes, including improved SEL skills, attitudes toward self and others, social behavior, and academic performance as well as reduced conduct problems and emotional distress. The impact on academic performance translated to an 11 percentile point gain in students' achievement test scores.

Existing Statewide and National Standards That Support SEL

States can help emphasize the important impact of SEL skills on student outcomes by adopting SEL standards or integrating SEL benchmarks into other content standards. In April 2011, CASEL completed the first nationwide scan of all PK–12 learning standards related to SEL (Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011). The review identified several states that have adopted K–12 free-standing SEL standards, including Illinois (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.), Kansas (Kansas State Board of Education, 2012), Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012), Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.), and New York (New York State Board of Education, 2011) (New York has adopted voluntary K–12 SEL goals). In addition, the review identified other statewide and national standards that focus on one or more components of SEL. It is important to note



that SEL standards and SEL-related language were more frequently included in standards for early childhood (prekindergarten) or elementary school students rather than for middle or high school students.

FREE-STANDING, COMPREHENSIVE SEL STANDARDS

In Table 2, we describe the SEL standards for two states, Illinois and Pennsylvania. Further information on the five states that have developed free-standing standards is presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Examples of States With Free-Standing SEL Standards

State	Name of Standards	Description and Focus of Standards
Illinois	SEL standards	Three goals related to students: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Developing self-awareness and self-management to achieve school and life success■ Using social-awareness and interpersonal skills to maintain positive relationships■ Demonstrating decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal and community contexts
Kansas	Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development Model Standards	One goal that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ “Students who are college and career ready must identify and demonstrate well-developed social-emotional skills and identify individual and community core principles that assure academic, vocational, and personal success.”■ Students who meet the standards:<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ “Demonstrate character in their actions by treating others as they wish to be treated.■ “Exhibit the skills to work independently and collaboratively.■ “Exhibit creativity and innovation, critical thinking, and effective problem solving.”
Pennsylvania	Standards for Student Interpersonal Skills	Three goals related to students: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Developing self-awareness and self-management■ Establishing and maintaining relationships■ Effective decision making and responsible behavior
Wisconsin	Standards of the Heart	Two goals that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ “Schools are places [where] children can learn and practice positive interpersonal, cross-cultural, and citizenship skills.■ “Families, with the support of schools, help children meet life’s challenges and become healthy, caring, and productive citizens.”
New York	Guidelines and Resources for Social and Emotional Development and Learning (SEDL)	These are voluntary guidelines and resources that provide school districts with information, examples, and evidence of SEDL in elementary and secondary school education programs.



Illinois was the first to adopt **SEL standards** in 2003 as part of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act (Gordon, Ji, Mulhall, Shaw, & Weissberg, 2011). In these standards, three goals are articulated. To meet these goals, students must:

- “Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.
- “Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.
- “Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts” (pp. 72–73).

Each goal includes 10 learning standards that describe the knowledge and skills students require to meet each goal, and each learning standard includes benchmarks. For example, “Recognize individual and group similarities and differences” is a learning standard included as part of the goal of social awareness. An early high school benchmark of meeting this standard is to “Demonstrate respect for individuals from different social and cultural groups.” A late high school benchmark is to “Evaluate how advocacy for the rights of others contributes to the common good.”

In April 2012, Pennsylvania finalized a set of standards, called the **Standards for Student Interpersonal Skills**, to address the skills students need to empower themselves and to successfully navigate the social world of family, school, college, and career connections in America and in the global marketplace. The three goals, similar to the Illinois SEL standards, focus on (1) developing self-awareness and self-management, (2) establishing and maintaining relationships, and (3) effective decision making and responsible behavior.

OTHER STANDARDS FOCUSING ON ONE OR MORE DIMENSIONS OF SEL

Several additional states and organizations that develop national curriculum standards have adopted standards that incorporate one or more SEL skills. Often, development of SEL skills is a crucial benchmark that must be reached to help improve other college and career readiness skills. For example, self-management and responsible decision making are essential to higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving. Social awareness and relationship skills are an important precursor to the development of employability skills, such as teamwork, collaboration, and effective communication. Although many states and organizations have integrated explicit SEL skills into their standards, others include higher-order thinking, employability, or academic skills that have more subtle links to SEL. Table 3 provides examples of standards that integrate SEL skills. The examples listed highlight diverse efforts in this area, but Table 3 is not a comprehensive list of organizations that include a focus on SEL in their standards.



Table 3. Examples of States and Organizations With a Focus on SEL Skills in Their Existing Standards

State/Organization That Developed Standards	Name of Standards	Description and Focus of Standards
Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards	National Health Education Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on relationship skills through Standard 4: “Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.” Focus on responsible decision making through Standard 5: “Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.” Focus on self-management through Standard 6: “Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.”
National Council for the Social Studies	Curriculum Standards for Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on social awareness through their emphasis on understanding “how experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.”
Washington	Communication Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on relationship skills through “developing communication skills and strategies that allow students to work effectively with others.”
Vermont	Vital Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on relationship skills through students’ ability to “demonstrate refusal and negotiation skills to enhance health, and to avoid potentially harmful situations” (Vermont Department of Education, 2003).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which have been adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia, are increasingly being recognized as an important set of college- and career-readiness standards. While SEL serves as a foundation for CCSS, the connections are implicit and not always immediately apparent. CCSS makes the assumption that students will have a broad range of skills that include the five SEL core competencies. However, a deep understanding of SEL is needed in order to see the SEL-CCSS integration. For example, in the CCSS English language arts questions, there is a focus on *demonstrating independence; adapting communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline; and coming to understand others’ perspectives and cultures*. Although the SEL skills of self-awareness, relationship skills, and social awareness are essential to meeting this standard, the important connection to SEL may not be readily apparent to a practitioner with limited experience. It is essential not only to students’ social and emotional well-being but also to the achievement of these rigorous academic standards that states continue to help practitioners make these connections as they implement CCSS.



What Policies, Programs, and Structures Can Be Put in Place to Help High School Graduates Meet Expectations?

Developing SEL standards is an important contribution that states can make to prepare students for postsecondary success. However, once standards are established, states must help districts and schools implement them by providing support for programs and initiatives that enable student acquisition of SEL skills. In this section, we describe key research-based elements of effective SEL programs, provide examples of current initiatives that incorporate these features, and examine school-level programs that illustrate the three “threads” of college and career readiness pathways and supports included in the National High School Center’s College and Career Development Organizer (personalized learning supports, rigorous programs of study, and aligned resources, supports, and structures).

RESEARCH-BASED ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE SEL PROGRAMS

There is great diversity in SEL programs designed to improve student outcomes, and research has indicated the effectiveness of this approach across a range of student populations and contexts. For example, effective programs can be implemented in both in-school and afterschool settings (Durlak et al., 2010) and for students with and without behavioral and emotional problems (Dymnicki et al., 2012). In addition, effective SEL programs can include students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds and from urban, rural, and suburban settings. Furthermore, effective SEL programs can be used for students across the developmental spectrum and more specifically for students in Grades K–12.

Research has also suggested that effective programs incorporate a set of core program elements referred to as Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit (SAFE) practices (see Table 4). These practices are echoed throughout the programs and initiatives highlighted below.

Table 4. Description of SAFE Programs

Definition of SAFE Programs	
S:	Use of a Sequenced set of activities to achieve skill objectives
A:	Use of Active forms of listening
F:	Includes at least one program component Focused on developing personal or social skills
E:	Explicitly targets a particular personal or social skill for development



EXAMPLES OF CURRENT INITIATIVES THAT SUPPORT SEL

In this section, we highlight three SEL initiatives that are focused on implementing SEL districtwide and schoolwide and are providing resources directly to school districts. We acknowledge that many other initiatives are taking place in the field of SEL and highlight these as examples of the range of work currently under way.

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE), funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students, provides training and support to a variety of stakeholders, including state agency staff, school and district administrators, higher education administrators, school personnel, and families and students. NCSSLE seeks to improve schools' (K–16) conditions for learning through measurement and program implementation so that all students have the opportunity to realize academic success in safe and supportive environments.

Services include webinars and face-to-face trainings on a variety of topics, such as developing positive school discipline policies, developing effective planning strategies for program implementation, choosing evidence-based programs based on school needs, and improving school climate through enhancing peer-to-peer relationships. NCSSLE also develops toolkits on specific topic areas ranging from fostering safe and respectful classroom environments to addressing teen dating violence. In addition, NCSSLE specifically addresses related, emerging issues that negatively impact learning environments, such as bullying, violence, and substance abuse.

The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and the RULER Approach

Officially opening on October 1, 2013, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence will focus on applying the science of emotion to create increased well-being in children, families, and communities. Researchers at the center will conduct rigorous research on emotional intelligence (related to the core competencies of self-awareness and self-management), develop evidence-based approaches for teaching social and emotional skills, and disseminate these approaches to transform education systems and individuals' lives.

One of these evidence-based approaches that will be housed at the center is the RULER approach to social and emotional learning (Brackett et al., 2009; Rivers & Brackett, 2011), which involves a series of evidence-based SEL programs focused on emotional literacy at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012). This model posits that teaching children and adults how to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate (RULER) emotions leads to enhanced personal, social, and academic outcomes for students and the adults involved in their education (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010). In the RULER approach, both adults and



children learn specific “anchor tools” that help to develop the RULER skills, create a positive school climate, and promote school success. This curriculum provides opportunities for students to regularly and consistently write, read, speak, listen, and think about emotions in the context of learning.

The RULER curriculum is only one part of the overarching districtwide approach, being used in many districts, that involves a long-term implementation process, including training for school leaders, teachers, support staff, and families (Brackett et al., 2009). Key to the RULER approach is capacity building via a train-the-trainer approach, which enables school personnel to gain advanced knowledge of the RULER approach and become proficient at delivering professional development offerings in their schools. This comprehensive model ensures that students, teachers, special service providers, support staff, school leaders, and families receive the long-term benefits of the RULER approach.

Collaborating Districts Initiative

With funding from the NoVo foundation, CASEL is supporting districts in developing the capacity to incorporate high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential component of school improvement. As part of the [Collaborating Districts Initiative](#) (CDI), CASEL is engaging with eight large school districts to plan, implement, and monitor systemic changes that will impact schools and classrooms in ways that influence students’ social-emotional development and academic performance. CASEL fosters collaboration between partner districts, documenting and sharing lessons learned in an effort to generate knowledge that can inform similar initiatives in other districts across the country.

Aligned with CASEL’s theory of action for the CDI, participating districts receive a range of supports that are presented in the following exhibit. These are examples of supports that states could provide for school districts or could hire collaborating partners to help them provide.



Supports That States Could Offer School Districts

- **District systems development consultation**—provide senior advisors with experience in educational leadership and SEL content.
- **Staff development consultation**—provide assistance developing coherent, sustainable professional development plans.
- **Action research framework**—provide guidance to help districts continually gather information; reflect on the impact of policies, programs, and practices; and make decisions based on available data.
- **Connections to evidence-based SEL program providers and other external partners**—foster collaborations to help districts implement coordinated, sustainable SEL programming.
- **Planning and implementation tools**—provides resources to help district leaders and staff organize their SEL efforts.



In return, districts commit to engaging in a series of activities, including:

- Assessing the district’s SEL-related needs and resources
- Developing a clear SEL vision and detailed long-term plans for SEL
- Developing and adopting SEL learning standards and assessments
- Adopting evidence-based SEL programs
- Designing professional development programs to build internal capacity
- Integrating SEL with existing district initiatives
- Aligning budgets and staffing to support SEL
- Monitoring SEL implementation processes and outcomes
- Establishing a plan for communicating with stakeholders about SEL
- Participating in cross-district evaluation and learning communities with other districts

CASEL provides collaborating districts with needed support for key districts’ activities that are expected to achieve important district-level outcomes. These outcomes include positive student academic and behavioral outcomes and are articulated in the section *Outcomes and Measures Used to Assess SEL Programming*.

PROGRAMMING THAT SUPPORTS SEL

In this section, we briefly describe programs that support personalized learning supports; rigorous programs of study; and aligned resources, structures, and supports to provide policymakers with concrete examples of what SEL programs look like. These programs were chosen because findings from research studies suggest positive program impacts, and a number of agencies have designated each as an “effective” or “model” program.² There are many other programs that demonstrate promising approaches to each of these threads. It is not our intention in this brief to promote a specific SEL program or approach, nor do we advocate that one program would be appropriate for every context. Instead, we recommend using the [2013 CASEL Guide](#) (for prekindergarten and elementary school students; the middle and high school version is currently under development) and other similar guides as resources to help practitioners choose an appropriate program based on district or school needs (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2013).

Personalized Learning Supports

[Check & Connect](#) is an SEL program designed to provide personalized learning supports by identifying students who are at risk of disengaging from school and pairing each student with a caring, trained mentor. The number of students enrolled in the program at each

² These include [Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#), the [Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy](#), the [National Dropout Prevention Center](#), the [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention \(OJJDP\)](#), [SAMHSA](#), and the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).



school varies, but usually ranges from five to 15. This program builds on the importance of developing long-term trusting relationships, increasing students' problem solving and capacity building, and reinforcing the importance of persistence. Each mentor is responsible for the Check component, in which they systematically track student engagement by monitoring absences, tardies, behavioral referrals, and grades, and the Connect component, in which they provide individualized learning supports in partnership with school personnel, family, and community health providers. Check & Connect can be implemented in K–12 settings and is frequently implemented at the high school level to promote student engagement and reduce high school dropout rates. Check & Connect was identified as an effective program by the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, the National Dropout Prevention Center, and the What Works Clearinghouse.

Rigorous Programs of Study

Lions Quest Skills for Action is an SEL program designed to provide essential components of rigorous programs of study by integrating core curriculum with SEL and employability skills and providing work experience to increase students' postsecondary preparedness. Lions Quest includes a classroom-based curriculum and has a large service learning component that focuses on teaching students to communicate effectively, analyze and solve problems, set and achieve goals, and work successfully as part of a team. The content of Skills for Action, the high school curriculum, can be integrated into academic areas such as language arts, health and personal development, social studies, and career preparation or can be taught as a semester-long stand-alone course. To best service a broad range of school settings, Skills for Action can be implemented as a one-semester, one-year, or multiyear course. The high school curriculum of Lions Quest consists of 33 sessions on leadership and service learning in the curriculum manual, 166 social and emotional skills in the Skills Bank, and 15 sessions in the drug prevention supplement. There is also a 15-session minicurriculum designed to help students gain the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to be healthy and drug-free individuals. Students research the issues and carry out service projects in their schools and communities, sharing with others what they have learned. Lions Quest Skills for Action was identified as an effective program by OJJDP, a "Model" designation from SAMHSA, and an SEL SElect program by CASEL.

Aligned Resources, Structures, and Supports

Alignment of resources, structures, and supports is an important issue that school leaders must consider when implementing any program. The **Olweus Bullying Prevention Program** (OBPP) integrates this crucial alignment process as a part of its implementation. OBPP involves a systemwide approach for change, and, while it does not include explicit classroom-based skills instruction, it has individual-level, school-level, and community-level components. Individual-level components include holding meetings with students and



parents of students involved in bullying and developing individual intervention plans. School-level components include establishing a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee, introducing school rules against bullying, posting and enforcing schoolwide rules in each classroom, as well as holding classroom-level meetings to discuss students' behavior as the need arises. Community-level components include developing partnerships with community members and involving them on the Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee. OBPP has been classified as a model program by the Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, SAMHSA, and OJJDP.

How Do We Know When High School Graduates Meet Expectations?

In this section, we describe some of the outcomes, including both program outcome measures (i.e., measures focused on assessing the impacts of programs on students, adults, and schools) and program implementation measures (i.e., measures focused on understanding how well and which part of the program is being implemented) that are used to assess SEL programming.

OUTCOMES AND MEASURES USED TO ASSESS SEL PROGRAMMING

Here we present an overview of important considerations for evaluating SEL programs and of the field of SEL assessment in general. It is essential to evaluate (1) a range of outcomes, including school, teacher, student, and family outcomes, to indicate a program's impact; (2) more specifically, growth in students' SEL skills to indicate a program's impact; and (3) the quality of program implementation. There are many measures that assess program implementation and a growing number of measures that can be used to measure students' SEL skills.

Program Outcome Measures

It is important to measure the outcomes that each program is designed to influence, such as school climate, adult attitudes and behaviors, and student behavior and academic performance. Historically, when evaluating SEL programming, schools use extant data measures of student behavior (e.g., attendance, suspensions/expulsions) and academic performance (e.g., standardized test scores), and researchers focus on assessing students' SEL skills and engagement in risky behaviors (e.g., conduct problems, drug use). There has been a more recent push to collect other types of student, adult, and school-level or system-level outcomes associated with SEL programming.



The CDI evaluation (described earlier) includes SEL program outcome measures at multiple levels. In Table 5, we present some of the key research questions, outcomes assessed, and ways each outcome is measured at the district, school, and student levels. To answer each research question, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) team is analyzing three sources of data: qualitative interview data from stakeholder interviews, documents related to SEL implementation and SEL programs, and survey data from a staff survey completed online.

Table 5. Example of How CDI Research Questions Relate to Outcomes and Measures Used

Sample Research Questions Related to Program Impacts	Outcomes	Measures Used to Measure Each Outcome
<p>District Level</p> <p>What are the outcomes of SEL districtwide implementation in different districts and different district contexts? To what extent do districts realize the outcomes specified in the CASEL theory of action?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SEL school program implementation ■ Integration of SEL with academic content and pedagogy ■ Quality SEL-related professional development ■ Systems for accountability and continuous improvement ■ Stakeholders' commitment to SEL as a priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stakeholder interviews ■ Document review ■ Rubric/benchmarks (scores assigned based on analysis of interviews and documents) ■ Staff SEL survey: items measuring district staff attitudes
<p>School Level</p> <p>To what extent and in what respects are intended school-level outcomes of district SEL reform initiatives realized at the school level?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Awareness and commitment ■ School vision ■ School needs and resources ■ Professional development ■ Classroom-based programs ■ Integrating SEL with other initiatives ■ Continuous improvement ■ Climate and culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stakeholder interviews ■ Document review ■ Staff SEL survey to measure school implementation and positive climate, collected by AIR
<p>Student Level</p> <p>To what extent and in what respects are intended student-level outcomes of SEL programming realized?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Achievement, attendance, discipline, dropout, and graduation ■ Social and emotional competence: teacher report for Grade 3, student self-report for Grades 7 and 10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Extant data already collected by districts ■ Student and teacher surveys, collected by AIR

Table 6 provides additional district, school, teacher, student, and parent outcomes that could be used to assess the impacts of an SEL program at the district level. Often, an aggregate of student outcomes is an important dimension of district and school SEL program outcomes.



Table 6. Sample District, School, Teacher, Student, and Parent Outcomes to Assess in a SEL Program

Possible Outcomes to Evaluate in a Districtwide SEL Program at Each Level

District

- SEL school program implementation
- Integration of SEL with academic content and pedagogy
- Quality SEL-related professional development
- Systems for accountability and continuous improvement
- Stakeholders' commitment to SEL as a priority

School

- School climate/conditions for learning
- The quality of teacher-principal, teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and student-student relationships

Teacher

- Retention and morale
- Teacher SEL skills and competencies
- Quality of classroom instruction and behavioral management

Student

- Student SEL skills and competencies
- Students' positive social behavior, attendance, and suspensions
- Achievement test scores and grade point averages

Parent

- Knowledge of students' school performance
- Knowledge of school practices

Outcome Measures Used to Assess Students' SEL Skills

In the field, progress has been made in developing valid and reliable SEL assessments for younger students (preschool, elementary school, and middle school), but assessments for high school students lag behind. Perhaps the most useful K–12 resources are the compendium of [preschool and elementary school measures](#) used to assess SEL and a similar compendium developed for [middle school students](#) (Haggerty, Elgin, & Woolley, 2011). The core competencies look relatively similar across the developmental span; however, there is more of a focus on developing leadership skills, long-term career and life plans, and taking responsibility for one's own life trajectory as a student gets older (Kress & Elias, 2006).

In the compendium of SEL assessment tools for the preschool and elementary school settings, measures are arranged according to context (e.g., effective classroom management, instructional support), core SEL competencies (e.g., self-awareness, responsible decision making), and academic-related SEL competencies (i.e., feelings about school, school climate, and academic competencies). While these assessments are primarily for preschool- and elementary-aged students, many of the assessments included are appropriate for middle and high school students as well (see the following exhibit for examples of several measures included in this report, such as BERS, CRS/TRS/PRS, and DESSA). In addition,



several measures have child, teacher, and parent versions to develop a more holistic picture of the child (BERS, SSIS, and SSRS). Samples of other outcome measures can also be found on the [CASEL Assessment webpage](#) under *School Practices, Needs and Outcome*, and *School Climate*.



Sample Surveys Used to Assess SEL Skills for Middle and High School Students

Student Self-Report Surveys

- Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS)-Second Edition: Youth Rating Scale (YRS)
- Child Rating Scale (CRS)
- Communities That Care Youth Survey
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
- Youth Self-Report (YSR)

Teacher Ratings

- Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)
- Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) Teacher Rating Form (TRF)
- Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)
- Behavior Assessment System for Children/Second Edition (BASC-2)

Parent Ratings

- Bryant Empathy Scale for Children
- Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)

Student Ratings of Their Peers

- Sociometric Ratings and Nominations

Program Implementation Measures

There is a growing field of implementation science that emphasizes how critical it is to monitor the quality of program implementation before trying to establish program impacts. This means documenting what the program actually looks like in the school setting (i.e., which parts are being implemented, which parts are being implemented with fidelity), and what adaptations are being made (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012). For example, program implementation could be monitored by having school staff complete weekly or monthly implementation checklists that describe what was covered in each lesson or having trained observers complete observations of program lessons. There are many other approaches for how programs could be monitored, some of which are mentioned in the following exhibit.



Possible Ways to Measure Program Implementation

- Classroom observations by trained observers
- Videos of lessons being taught
- Teacher checklists
- Teacher journals
- Student and teacher focus groups
- Teacher and principal interviews

Conclusion

We conclude by providing several recommendations for how states can support schools and districts to implement SEL based on the three strands of college and career readiness around which this brief is organized.

WHAT SHOULD HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO?

- Establish statewide standards for SEL to emphasize that these skills are equally as important for postsecondary preparedness as mathematics and English language arts.
- Provide support to help teachers, district-level, and school-level practitioners create explicit links between content standards and SEL skills.

WHAT POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND STRUCTURES WILL HELP HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES MEET EXPECTATIONS?

- Provide guidance to districts and schools on how to develop comprehensive SEL supports and programs.
- Foster collaborations to ensure that students receive aligned SEL supports both in school and out of school and as they transition through the PK–20 spectrum.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES MEET EXPECTATIONS?

- Provide planning time and professional development to help teachers gather data on program implementation and program impacts, and use these data to inform their classroom practices.
- Share promising practices and program evaluation results from schools across the state to develop a body of evidence in support of this type of work.

We believe that these strategies will help advance the field of SEL and develop students' college and career readiness skills, which will promote positive outcomes for students, their families, and their schools.



Resources

Following is a list of resources related to SEL. We do not intend this list to be exhaustive by any means and do not list program-specific websites, of which they are many.

- [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) (CASEL) provides an explanation of what SEL is, important publications and research findings, policy and advocacy updates, and information on current SEL initiatives and assessment practices.
- [Character Education Partnership](#) (CEP) includes information related to character education, including publications; grants and funding; assessment tools for individuals, teachers, and schools; and strategies to engage families and communities.
- [National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk](#) (NDTAC) serves as a national resource center to provide direct assistance to states, schools, communities, and parents seeking information on the education of children and youth who are considered neglected, delinquent, or at risk.
- [National School Climate Center](#) (NSCC) provides resources to measure school climate; briefs about the importance of school climate; professional development offerings related to promoting school climate; and strategies to build safe, supportive, and civil schools.
- [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#) (NCSSE) provides information and technical assistance to states, districts, schools, institutions of higher education, communities, and other federal grantees programs on how to improve conditions for learning by teaching students SEL skills and addressing issues such as bullying, violence, and substance abuse. The center provides guidance in measuring school climate and conditions for learning and in implementing appropriate SEL programming.
- [National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices](#) (NREPP) on the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA) website is a searchable online registry of more than 280 interventions supporting mental health promotion, substance abuse prevention, and mental health and substance abuse treatment.

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