

Fostering social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies can improve life outcomes for students



What are SEL competencies?

- ◆ SEL competencies span a broad set of attributes, such as how well students persevere, manage their thoughts and emotions, and understand what others think and feel.
- ◆ SEL competencies are sometimes called non-cognitive skills, non-academic skills, or character.

Why are they important?

- ◆ SEL competencies are linked to short-term and long-term outcomes:
 - SEL competencies predict students' long-term outcomes, including educational attainment, health, earnings, and employment.¹
 - They are also related to short-term academic achievement.²
- ◆ Most importantly, these competencies can be improved through education.³

Why should I measure SEL competencies?

- ◆ If a school or district uses early warning systems to identify individual students that could be at risk for poor outcomes, exploring student SEL competencies could shed light on how best to target support for those students.⁴
- ◆ Similarly, SEL data can be useful to target and support groups of students:
 - For example, middle and early high school could be especially important times to support student SEL competencies. Studies have found these transitional grades to be particularly difficult for students,⁵ and recent research has confirmed that SEL competencies tend to be lower in these grades.⁶

- ◆ Finally, early evidence has shown variation at the school level in how SEL competencies change over time, much like academic measures (such as test scores) have been observed to vary over time at the school level. Districts that track SEL data over time can identify schools in which students' SEL competencies have improved, and districts can investigate the potential sources for these advancements, such as local SEL practices, to inform other schools.⁷



What should I measure?

- ◆ Consider exploring measures with the following characteristics:
 - They can be improved through education, such as social well-being (that is, students' relationships with others in school).⁸
 - [They relate to future outcomes, such as self-management](#) (that is, how students manage their own thoughts and emotions).⁹
 - They align with your school, district, and state's priorities.



Note: The terminology used in the SEL field is not always consistent. Harvard University's [Explore SEL](#) is a resource that provides summaries of different SEL frameworks and visual tools to help you compare the content and terminology these frameworks incorporate.

How do I get started measuring the SEL competencies of my students?

- ◆ Two examples of free high-quality surveys are those of [Panorama Education](#) and [CORE Districts](#).¹⁰
- ◆ In addition, the [CASEL SEL Assessment Guide](#) and the [RAND Assessment Finder](#) are two compendia of SEL tools.

How can I get started in developing the SEL competencies of my students?



Changes in SEL competencies vary across schools, much like academic measures have been observed to vary over time at the school level.

- ◆ A few resources you can explore include the following:
 - The [CASEL Program Guide](#) outlines existing evidence-based programs that aim to improve SEL competencies in school settings.
 - The [Character Lab](#) designs free resources for teachers to incorporate evidence-based SEL practices in their classrooms.
 - The [Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety](#) provides technical assistance, as well as free resources.
 - The report "[Navigating SEL from the inside out](#)"¹¹ highlights information about 25 SEL programs for elementary students.

Endnotes

¹ Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Almlund et al., 2011

² O'Conner et al., 2017

³ Elango et al., 2016; Kautz et al., 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2020

⁴ Kautz et al., 2021

⁵ Benner, 2011; Eccles, 2004; Rudolph et al., 2001

⁶ Kautz et al., 2021

⁷ Kautz et al., 2021

⁸ Jackson et al., 2020

⁹ Kautz et al., 2021

¹⁰ Research has found psychometric evidence for the reliability and validity of Panorama Education's (Panorama Education, 2020) and the CORE District's surveys (West et al., 2018; Gehlbach & Hough, 2018).

¹¹ Jones et al., 2017

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