measuringSEL™
Using Data to Inspire Practice

RAND CORPORATION

Choosing and Using SEL Competency Assessments:
What Schools and Districts Need to Know

AUTHORS

Jeremy J. Taylor
CASEL

Katie Buckley
TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

Laura S. Hamilton
RAND

Brian M. Stecher
RAND

Lindsay Read
CASEL

Jonathan Schweig
RAND

Contents

Acknowledgements

About this document

This document was jointly developed by the Assessment Work Group (AWG) and researchers from the RAND Corporation's Assessment Finder project. Its purpose is to provide school and district leaders and implementation teams with guidance on how to choose and use social and emotional learning (SEL) competency assessments. It discusses the benefits and challenges of measuring SEL competencies, what to consider when choosing an SEL competency assessment, and guidance for using SEL competency data in practice.

The information found here serves as a complement to two online resources:

- **The AWG's SEL Assessment Guide** offers guidance to educators on how to select and use assessments of students' SEL competencies, specifically interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindsets. The Guide focuses on measures currently used in practice and will expand over time as more are nominated.

- **The RAND Assessment Finder** lists more than 200 assessments of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and higher-order cognitive competencies. The Assessment Finder enables practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to explore what assessments are available and obtain key information about what they are designed to measure, how they operate, what demands they place on students and teachers, and what kinds of uses their scores support[1].

These resources respond to a need from educators for more information about assessing students' SEL competencies. A recent nationally representative survey of more than 800 school principals revealed[2] :
- Near unanimous commitment to SEL (95% of principals).
- Even stronger belief that SEL competencies are teachable (99% of principals).

However, these leaders were far less clear about how to approach the assessment of students' SEL competencies:
- Less than a quarter (17%) reported they were aware of which assessments of students' SEL competencies were available to use.
- Just as few (16%) believed their teachers knew how to use data from these measures.

In this document, we hope to provide information to help educators determine which available SEL competency assessments are right for them and how they can best use data from those assessments. With nearly 140 different SEL frameworks in existence, it is not feasible to offer customized guidance on each specific framework or its competencies.[3] Instead, this document offers recommendations and best practices that apply across SEL frameworks and competencies, rather than make judgments about particular frameworks. More work on the definitions of and relationships among competencies is underway by Stephanie Jones and the Harvard Taxonomy project. See also the series of useful briefs about SEL frameworks the AWG is producing.

---

[1] For ease of communication, we generally refer to SEL competencies throughout this document, though the guidance is equally applicable to the higher-order cognitive category included in the RAND tool.
[2] DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017
[3] Berg, Osher, Same, Nolan, Benson, & Jacobs, (2017). Identifying, Defining, and Measuring Social and Emotional Competencies.

What are SEL competencies?

SEL competencies are essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindsets that individuals need to succeed in life. SEL competencies are the product of social and emotional learning (SEL), which can be defined as the process through which schools and districts implement practices and policies that allow children and adults to acquire and effectively apply those competencies.

Specifically, SEL competencies and the ability to apply them to everyday life are developed through:

- A supportive learning environment.
- Positive interactions with adults and peers.
- Explicit SEL instruction.
- The integration of SEL into academic instruction.

SEL can take place in a number of settings. They include the home, schools, and after-school programs. When schools are committed to SEL, it shapes their partnerships with families and community members, highlighting engagement, trust, and collaboration.

SEL is developmental. Social and emotional learning occurs across various stages in an individual's life. At certain developmental stages, some competencies are more likely to develop than others. For example, self-management skills tend to develop in preschool and elementary school, while mindsets and values tend to develop during the middle school and high school years, respectively[4] (see *the Developmental aspect of SEL* in the "Considerations for SEL competency assessment" section).

SEL competencies are often organized according to those that are intrapersonal and those that are interpersonal.

- **Intrapersonal competencies** refer to ways of dealing with oneself, including ones' thoughts and emotions. These are the awareness, beliefs, and skills directed and applied inwardly.

- **Interpersonal competencies** refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes directed toward other people, institutions, or social structures.

In addition, these competencies can also be organized according to whether they refer to one's "awareness" or one's "skills." The matrix in Table 1 uses these two axes (Intrapersonal/interpersonal and awareness/skill) to represent the range of SEL competencies discussed in this guide.

Table 1. Categories and Examples of SEL competencies

	Intrapersonal: Knowledge, Skills, and attitudes directed toward oneself	**Interpersonal:** Knowledge, skills, and attitudes directed toward other people, institutions, or social structures
Awareness: Mindsets, knowledge, beliefs, or understandings	Intrapersonal Awareness (e.g., growth mindset, self-efficacy)	Interpersonal Awareness (e.g., empathy, social awareness)
Skills: Learned abilities to carry out a task with intended results or goals	Intrapersonal Skills (e.g., self-control, goal-setting, stress management)	Interpersonal Skills (e.g., social perspective taking; collaborative problem-solving)

---

[4] Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlich, & Heath, 2015

Why assess SEL competencies?

Assessment is a cornerstone of effective instruction and student learning[5]. This is true for SEL, just as it is in academic disciplines such as mathematics and science. In fact, a recent PDK poll indicated that the vast majority of Americans agree that measurement of SEL competencies is important, with 84% of a nationally representative sample saying they believe schools should assess students' interpersonal skills[6]. Student SEL competency assessment provides a range of benefits for educators at multiple levels. Specifically, these assessments can help schools and districts to:

- **Communicate SEL as a priority.** It's often said, "what gets assessed gets addressed." With time and resources typically limited, the decision to dedicate resources to assessing and reporting SEL sends a clear message that promoting students' SEL competencies is a top priority.

- **Establish a common language for SEL.** By choosing an assessment that aligns with the school's SEL framework, the school can establish and reinforce how SEL is described so the district, staff, students, and parents can better communicate about SEL.

- **Deepen understanding of how SEL competencies manifest in students over time.** Through training, use of assessments, review of score reports, and subsequent discussions about the assessment results, teachers and other school staff develop a more profound knowledge about how SEL competencies develop. This will allow schools and districts to set achievable goals for student growth across different competencies and developmental levels and highlight which competencies to emphasize in instruction and practice. Students and families will similarly deepen their understanding of the development of SEL competencies over time, a critical step for the buy-in to SEL.

- **Continuously improve SEL instruction and implementation.** Through formative uses of assessment, educators can measure how SEL implementation is impacting instruction and whether any adjustments need to be made. Formative assessment can be thought of as assessment *for* learning. It is done frequently, is usually embedded within and even considered part of instructional practice and is designed to provide information to guide instruction and practice. Formative assessment is discussed later in this document; see more on Formative Assessment.

- **Evaluate the effectiveness of SEL programming and approaches.** Through summative uses of assessment, districts can undertake a higher-level examination of the effectiveness of districtwide or schoolwide SEL implementation, as well as classroom-based programs. Summative assessment can be thought of as assessment *of* learning. These data are also valuable for reporting to stakeholders about progress with SEL initiatives. Summative assessment is discussed later in this document; see more on Summative Assessment.

- **Support equitable outcomes in education.** According to the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (NCSEAD), "when done well, an integrated approach to social, emotional, and academic development benefits each and every child and can be part of achieving a more equitable society."[7] Systemic SEL is a key lever for supporting equity in schools because of its emphasis on improving learning environments and its strength-based approach. SEL competency assessment is a critical part of this systemic approach. It can help to reveal disparities in the degree to which students' needs are being supported by schools and districts.

---

[5] Soland, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2013; National Research Council, 2013
[6] Phi Delta Kappa International, 2017
[7] The Aspen Institute, 2018

Considerations for SEL competency assessment

Although measuring students' SEL competencies can provide many benefits, there are several considerations to bear in mind:

SEL competency assessment is an emerging area. The field of SEL competency assessment is growing rapidly, and a lot of promising research and development is underway. However, there is less consistency across frameworks and less clarity about terminology and developmental progressions than in more established fields. Also, few SEL assessments have gone through the validation process typical of most large-scale academic assessments. Resources like the *RAND Assessment Finder* and the AWG *SEL Assessment Guide* can help to determine which available measures are backed by evidence of reliability and validity for particular purposes. See Appendix A for more information about validity and reliability. It is also important to consider that most SEL assessments were not specifically developed for the purpose of comparing schools, and little research exists to determine whether currently available assessments have the precision necessary to make such comparisons[8].

Strength-based approach vs. diagnostic approach. We strongly recommended that practitioners not take a *diagnostic approach* that uses assessments of students' SEL competencies to screen for deficits (e.g., behavioral or emotional problems). SEL competency assessments are not the appropriate tool for this critical function.

Instead, it is important to take a *strength-based approach*, which focuses on students' strengths and assets to promote positive development and prevent problems from emerging. This approach distinguishes SEL from related disciplines. Unlike the diagnostic approach used in the mental health field, SEL emphasizes promoting the development of all students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes (i.e., competencies).

A strength-based approach assumes that competencies equip students with the positive relationships and effective coping mechanisms that support healthy development and success. They also protect against problems emerging from stress and adversity and can help students thrive in their future pursuits. For practitioners looking to identify students in need of additional support based on emotional or behavioral problems, we recommend using tools developed specifically for this purpose.

Equity and cultural factors. Another important consideration when assessing students' SEL competencies is to ensure that issues of equity have been identified and attended to in both the selection of SEL competencies and the development, validation, and use of measures (see the Great Lakes Equity Center Guidance for more on SEL and equity).

In a forthcoming brief in the SEL Framework Series titled "Equity and Social-Emotional Learning: A Cultural Analysis," Robert Jagers and colleagues explore how each of the CASEL 5 competencies should be reconsidered through the lens of equity.

If an assessment consists of items or tasks that are heavily influenced by values of a dominant culture, but may not be shared by other cultures, the results of the assessment may fail to capture strengths and perspectives of students from all cultures.

It is also important for schools and districts to guard against the presence of unconscious bias (a.k.a., implicit bias) in assessment, especially when using teacher or adult rating of students. Emerging research indicates that unconsciously held differences in expectations of students of differing races can lead to subsequent inaccuracies in teachers' evaluation of students' abilities or performance, as well as unintended differences in how instruction is delivered.

---

[8] Melnick, Cook-Harvey, & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Duckworth and Yeager, 2015

Research shows that these differences can ultimately contribute to disparities in student learning and achievement.[9] Schools and districts should provide training to teachers and school staff on how to recognize implicit bias, and guard against its influence on student learning.

In interpreting results, we also strongly encourage educators and policymakers to consider the context in which students live and learn (i.e., family background, school culture and climate), because context has considerable influence on their social-emotional development (see Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World, 2017). When planning in response to assessment data, it is essential to consider how available environmental supports might be leveraged and environmental sources of adversity addressed. Additional equity considerations are further discussed in the sections that follow.

Concerns with high-stakes use. We do not recommend that SEL competency measures be used for high-stakes decisions and/or high-stakes accountability systems, such as a state accountability system or a teacher evaluation system. Decades of research demonstrate how attaching high stakes to student achievement test results in an accountability system can increase the risk of score corruption.[10] There is particular risk of corruption with non-performance-based assessments, such as self-report surveys or teacher-reported ratings, since students and teachers can easily manipulate their responses. Furthermore, the field of SEL competency assessment is nascent compared to other types of educational assessments, and few measures have undergone the kind of rigorous validation research necessary to be used in high-stakes decision making.[11]

The developmental aspect of SEL. As with all learning processes, SEL is inherently developmental. Competency evolves over time from less to more sophisticated, it is often correlated with general maturity, and each person's sequence of learning can be different. From PreK to adulthood, people's brains are continually changing as their thought processes become increasingly complex and their cognitive abilities more sophisticated. Thus, children, adolescents, and adults vary over time in how they both learn and manifest SEL competencies.[12]

Practitioners can ensure that their approach to SEL is developmentally appropriate by implementing frameworks that are age-appropriate, clearly articulate how competencies develop over time (i.e., developmental sequence), and offer implementation supports that attend to development (e.g., SEL learning progressions, model learning standards, and aligned assessment tools).

Children's developmental levels have important implications for assessing their SEL competencies, informing both the mode of assessment (e.g., self-report, peer-rating, teacher/adult-rating) and the competencies that may be most important to assess. For example, the age and developmental level of a child can influence the precision and reliability of a self-report measure of SEL competence. Younger children have less ability to accurately self-evaluate compared to their older counterparts. Thus, many measures of early elementary-aged (e.g., PreK-3rd grade) children rely on ratings or observations conducted by adults (e.g., teacher, counselor, and/or parent).

Particular modes of SEL competency assessments (e.g., self-report, peer-rating, teacher/adult-rating) are also linked to certain developmental levels through the competencies that tend to emerge during a particular developmental period. For example, competencies such as having a "growth mindset" tend to emerge during adolescence.[13] Since mindsets are internal processes/characteristics, without clear behavioral (observable) indicators, their measurement tends to necessarily rely on self-report.

---

[9] Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby- Senghor, 2016
[10] Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2012
[11] Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Melnick, Cook-Harvey, & Darling-Hammond, 2017
[12] Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria, & Knox, 2009; Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlich, & Heath, 2015
[13] Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlich, & Heath, 2015

SEL Competency Development and Assessment in Elementary, Middle, and High School Students

Students' SEL competency develops over time, and the measures and methods used for assessing those competencies should reflect this.[14]

Elementary Grades (middle childhood)

Students experience...

- Growth in their abilities to self-reflect and self-regulate, including increased ability to plan and manage their emotions.
- Emergence of metacognition – the ability to reflect-on one's own thought processes.
- Feelings of empathy and perspective-taking abilities, which become the foundation for interpersonal skills and positive social relationships.

Competencies are assessed...

- Primarily through ratings and observations by teachers and adults, as students are not yet reliable reporters of their own abilities and might lack the necessary reading skills, especially in early grades (e.g., 3rd grade and younger). More accurate self-report by students may emerge in 4th or 5th grade.
- Some computer-based performance assessments (e.g., SELWeb and ZooU) offer opportunity to measure students' competencies in elementary grades, including assessment of perspective-taking, emotion recognition, social problems solving, emotional regulation, communication, and cooperation.

Middle School Grades (early adolescence)

Students experience...

- Continued growth in self-regulation, interpersonal knowledge and skills, and metacognition.
- Emerging sense of group identity fostered by development of stronger peer relationships.
- Emergence of various mindsets (e.g., growth mindset).

Competencies are assessed...

- Self-report often used, as students' capacity for self-reflection has typically developed at this stage.
- Interviews may become increasingly valuable during this time period, as students' thought processes become increasingly complex and sophisticated, leaving them equipped to provide more in-depth information in an interview.
- Assessment methods that allow students to demonstrate their ability to use their SEL competencies in an applied setting (e.g., observation and/or rubrics assessments of performance in group projects).

---

[14] Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlich, & Heath, 2015

High School Grades (middle adolescence)

Students experience...

- Continued development of mindsets and knowledge of self (differentiated from others).
- Emerging sense of values, which can manifest as skills like responsible decision-making.

Competencies are assessed...

- Self-report often used, students' capacity for self-reflection is well developed.
- Interviews may become increasingly valuable, as they allow students to demonstrate both their breadth and depth of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindsets.
- Assessment methods that allow students to demonstrate their ability to use their SEL competencies in an applied setting (e.g., observation and/or rubrics assessments of performance in group projects) may become increasingly valuable for determining whether their skills may be transferable to settings outside the classroom environment.

When the best mode of assessment does not align well with the developmental level of students and the competency being assessed, the resulting data may be less useful and potentially problematic. This is the case, for example, when trying to assess internal processes like "self-awareness" in young children. Although self-report tends to be better than external ratings for measuring intrapersonal competencies (e.g., self-awareness) that cannot be observed directly by others, young children may not be reliable reporters of their own abilities and may not have the reading skills needed to complete a self-report survey. Although challenges like this persist in the field today, ongoing research and development efforts offer promise for the future.

Taking a holistic view of competency development is essential. Student competency data should include intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that are being taught from PreK to 12. Competencies should also be examined alongside other related kinds of data, such as: adult SEL competencies (if available), school climate, implementation data, and other important student outcomes, such as attendance and academic achievement. Examining these data together is essential to understand how these factors may relate to each other, and ultimately to understand how, why, and when improvement occurs.

How to assess SEL competencies

Although schools and districts may take a variety of paths in determining which SEL competency assessments to use and how to use them, there are key steps that can provide guidance through the process. This section outlines a process for preparing, selecting, and using SEL competency assessments:

Prepare
- Step 1: Frame the overall SEL effort
- Step 2: Plan the role of assessment
- Step 3: Choose the SEL competencies to assess

Select
- Step 4: Review the assessment options
- Step 5: Select assessment tool(s)

Use
- Step 6: Implement assessment
- Step 7: Use data

Prepare

Step 1: Frame the overall SEL effort

Research shows that promoting the SEL competencies of all students requires a systematic approach that goes beyond the classroom and implements SEL schoolwide or districtwide.[15] Implementing systemic SEL requires a range of activities that build capacity and commitment for SEL; cultivate a positive, supportive, and equitable learning environment; and explicitly promote competencies in students. To support the success of this kind of multifaceted implementation, two foundational activities are important:

- **Adopt an SEL framework.**

- **Develop a theory of change (ToC).**

Adopt an SEL framework. SEL frameworks are important tools for organizing plans, communications, and actions related to SEL. They can be used to align SEL instruction to standards and assessments, develop a plan and system for professional learning, and ultimately, guide implementation. Read more about SEL Frameworks.

A high-quality SEL framework provides practitioners with:

- A set of competencies to consider or emphasize.

- Consistent language that ties to theories and empirical studies and helps communicate with stakeholders.

- Clarity about how its SEL competencies develop over time in children (i.e., developmental sequence).

- Guidance, tools, and resources to support implementation in practice (e.g., theories of action, implementation rubrics, other tools to foster implementation).

- Available curriculum/programming and assessment tools. See the AWG brief Ten Criteria for Describing and Selecting SEL Frameworks for more.

By choosing an SEL framework to adopt and implement, schools and districts can ensure that essential elements of SEL implementation (instructional programming, learning standards or guidelines, assessments) will align as part of a cohesive approach.

---

[15] Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015

The Challenge of Choosing an SEL Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) introduced one of the field's earliest set of SEL competencies in 1997, identifying a set of five core competencies that schools could promote in their students that are keys to academic and life success.

As the field of SEL has grown, additional SEL frameworks have emerged. This growing number of frameworks presents a challenge for educators trying to decide which framework to use with their students. A few ongoing efforts underway are seeking to help with this challenge.

Led by Stephanie Jones, Harvard University's _EASEL Lab_ is developing an online tool as part of its _Taxonomy Project_. The emerging online platform should be available in spring 2019. It will allow users to compare frameworks and competencies from different frameworks in a visual way that showcases the points of alignment and divergence—enabling users both to identify common ground and to see what is distinct within any particular framework.

Members of the AWG, led by Roger Weissberg, Stephanie Jones, and Dale Blyth, are also seeking to help educators with this challenge. The group is publishing a series of briefs focused on helping educators learn how to select and effectively use SEL frameworks. Learn more about the AWG's Frameworks effort. These briefs will summarize what frameworks are and why they are useful, discuss key issues, describe commonly used frameworks, and define criteria for reviewing and selecting an SEL framework.
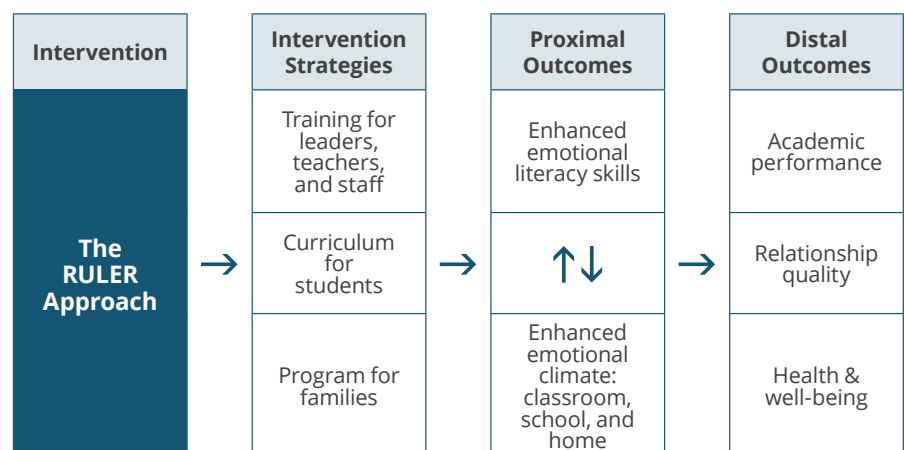
Develop a theory of change (ToC). A theory of change (ToC) articulates what improvements will occur as a result of implementation or intervention actions. Often created by teams at the system level (e.g., district-level SEL team), ToCs can be used as a blueprint for bringing stakeholders together, program and research planning, program implementation, assessment, and evaluation.

While creating a ToC, stakeholders are compelled to think through how their long-term goals will be achieved, starting with the specific implementation actions and following through the subsequent changes expected over time leading to long-term goals. A ToC should guide the choice of assessments to evaluate and foster practice improvement.

Using a ToC from a widely known SEL program called RULER as an example (see Figure 1), we see that several kinds of assessments are required to continuously improve implementation and monitor progress toward achieving outcomes.

Figure 1.
RULER Approach Theory of Change[16]

Intervention	Intervention Strategies	Proximal Outcomes	Distal Outcomes
The RULER Approach →	Training for leaders, teachers, and staff	Enhanced emotional literacy skills	Academic performance
	Curriculum for students →	↑↓	Relationship quality
	Program for families	Enhanced emotional climate: classroom, school, and home →	Health & well-being

---

[16] Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, & Brackett, 2016

First, implementation measures for the three intervention strategies shown are needed. Next, measures for two medium-term (proximal) outcomes are needed: (1) adult and student emotional literacy skills (SEL competencies) and (2) classroom, school, and home emotional climate. Finally, measures for three kinds of long-term (distal) outcomes are needed to determine if implementation achieves its ultimate goal: (1) academic performance, (2) relationship quality, and (3) health and well-being.

It is critical to assemble stakeholders to develop a ToC during planning to establish a shared understanding of actions to be taken, what subsequent improvements are expected, and what data are needed. Connecting data to be collected to a ToC is one way to ensure that these data have a clear purpose and role in understanding how improvement is occurring. This clarity of purpose is increasingly important in the face of concerns over "survey fatigue" and "overtesting."

Step 2: Plan the role of assessment

Before choosing an SEL competency assessment, it is important to identify the intended use of that assessment. Uses of data from SEL competency assessments can fall into two broad categories:

- **Formative assessments** are assessments *for* learning.
- **Summative assessments** are assessments *of* learning.

Rather than thinking about these categories as specific types of assessments, it is better to think about them as different ways of using assessments. It's worth noting that certain types of assessments, such as large-scale standardized tests, are likely to be more useful for summative purposes, while classroom observations or assessment rubrics are more likely to be useful for formative purposes. However, many assessments can serve both purposes to some degree.

Put simply, the differences between formative and summative assessment can be summarized as:

- **Formative assessment** is typically done frequently and is designed to provide information to guide instruction or practice.
- **Summative assessment** is done less frequently and focuses on determining what learning has already occurred, including whether a learning standard or expectation has been met or whether a program or curriculum has been effective.

Although these differences may at first seem distinct, they can be far less distinct in practice, especially because some measures can be employed for both formative and summative uses.

Below are examples of specific formative and summative uses of SEL competency assessments. Readers may notice that some of these examples could be described as either formative or summative, depending on the details of the example.

Formative uses of SEL competency assessment

- Monitor student progress toward SEL learning goals or standards.
- Promote effective SEL instruction and target instruction for students around specific competencies.
- Create an instructional plan based on a classroom profile of competencies.
- Elevate student voice and promote student engagement and agency.
- Improve school and district implementation strategies based on staff and students' needs.
- Foster equitable learning environments by revealing disparities in the degree to which students' needs are met.

Summative uses of SEL competency assessment

- Evaluate the impact on students' competencies of a particular SEL classroom program or practice.
- Report to stakeholders, including funders, families, and the community, about progress of SEL initiatives.

It is critical that stakeholders be clear from the start about their intended uses of assessment, as this has important implications for what kinds of measures are best to select and the sources of reliability and validity evidence that are relevant. With any assessment of SEL competencies (or student knowledge in general), there is some degree of uncertainty in the interpretation of scores.[17] Different intended uses have different tolerances for uncertainty. In general, the greater the consequences for individuals associated with score use, the less tolerance there is for uncertainty.

Summative uses tend to be associated with higher stakes, so assessments intended for these uses will require more rigorous evidence of reliability and validity. Ultimately, we recommend that practitioners make use of the AWG SEL Assessment Guide and the RAND Assessment Finder and work with vendors or developers to learn more about what sources of validity evidence are available to support their intended use.

To learn more about this, consult Appendix A, which details the technical aspects of validity and reliability to consider when choosing a measure.

Step 3: Choose the SEL competencies to assess

For schools and districts early in their SEL journey, determining the competencies on which to focus is an essential early decision. There are many SEL competencies, including both intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness and skills. Educators will have a good start with selecting competencies if they follow Step 1 of this section and select an SEL framework and develop a Theory of Change. Educators can further narrow their list of competencies on which to focus based on several other possible inputs, including but not limited to:

- Existing state or district SEL standards or learning goals.
- Stakeholder feedback/input, including from teachers, parents, and the community.
- The needs of the student body.

It is also important to consider whether potential target SEL competencies are:

- *Meaningful* (have an impact on long-term student outcomes).
- *Measurable* (can be assessed in a school setting).
- *Malleable* (can be developed in a school setting), based on existing literature from the fields of human development, education, psychology, economics.

These three considerations make up Transforming Education's 3Ms Framework for choosing SEL competencies.[18] See Transforming Education's 3Ms Framework Tool.

[District example: California CORE Districts]

In order to select the SEL competencies to measure, the CORE Districts used a six-step prioritization process in which district leaders and content experts voted on the competencies to include or exclude. The process they used is explained in more depth in a brief published by Transforming Education, Social-Emotional Competencies Selection Process.

---

17 The technical term for this level of uncertainty is called measurement error.
18 Krachman, Arnold, & LaRocca, 2016

Select

Step 4: Review the assessment options

A variety of resources have been developed to support SEL competency assessment. This document was written to complement two tools that can support practitioners in reviewing assessment options: The AWG *SEL Assessment Guide* and the RAND *Assessment Finder*.

SEL competency assessments take several forms. Each method has its advantages and limitations, and no single method is inherently preferable or superior. However, certain methods are preferable for different classifications of SEL competencies (e.g., awareness vs skills) and different developmental levels. These various methods are described below.

Self-report survey questionnaires and rating scales typically require students to rate their own abilities on an ordinal rating scale. This type of assessment is especially useful for collecting information about student awareness (i.e., beliefs or thought processes such as feeling empathy and social awareness), which is not easily assessed using other methods that rely on external observers.

- **Example:** a survey measuring self-awareness that asks students to report the extent to which they know when their feelings are making it hard for them to focus.

- **Advantages:**
    ° Cost-efficient.
    ° Can be administered at scale either using technology or paper and pencil.
    ° Unobtrusive and places minimal burden on the respondent.
    ° Can provide a way to capture student voice and assess knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are otherwise difficult to observe.

- **Limitations:**
    ° Can be susceptible to biases such as:
        – *Memory effects* (respondents may not accurately recall behaviors or actions).
        – *Social desirability biases* (e.g., respondents may provide answers they think are "correct," rather than answers that reflect their beliefs or actions).
        – *Reference biases* (e.g., students' self-ratings are influenced by the competencies of others with whom they interact; some research suggests that reference bias is a threat to validity of these measures, whereas other studies have failed to uncover substantial reference bias).
    ° Require respondents to be able to read and interpret the items, so most are not suitable for preschool or early elementary students.
    ° May not be accessible to portions of a school or district's student population unless they are translated into additional languages and additional accommodations are made for students with special needs related to reading and/or language comprehension.

Interview protocols require an interviewer to ask questions or to make statements that prompt interviewees to discuss or explore a prescribed set of topics or issues. Like self-report questionnaires, interviews can be used to collect information about SEL competencies related to awareness (beliefs or thought processes).

- **Example:** The Berkeley Puppet Interview employs hand puppets to probe students' perceptions of their family environment and their teacher, school, and peer relationships.

- **Advantages:**
    - ° They allow for complex and in-depth responses.
    - ° They can surface issues and themes that may not be captured through questionnaires.
    - ° Do not rely on students reading abilities as self-report surveys do.

- **Limitations:**
    - ° They are difficult to administer at scale, requiring considerable time and resources for training, conducting interviews, and coding interview data.
    - ° They suffer from many of the same limitations as self-report questionnaires, such as memory effects, social desirability bias, reference bias, and the potential for faking.

Observation Protocols and Rating Scales. An external observer, such as a teacher, parent, or clinician, evaluates student behaviors using a rating scale or a structured observation protocol and observation rubric. Such instruments can be useful for assessing students' observable behavior and skills (e.g., self-management and relationship skills).

- **Example:** The Social Skills Improvement System SEL version is a rating scale that can be completed by teachers, who provide ratings of the social skills of their students.

- **Advantages:**
    - ° They do not rely on respondents to be accurate reporters of their own SEL competencies, which is beneficial with younger students, who may not yet have the required literacy skills, reading proficiency, or personal insight to accurately complete a survey questionnaire.

- **Limitations:**
    - ° They can be burdensome to administer when they rely on external observers. Resources need to be invested in training, and if a single classroom teacher is responsible for using a rating scale with every student in his/her class, administration and scoring can take a considerable amount of time.
    - ° External observers' ratings can also be subject to reporting biases, including reference bias and unconscious bias (aka implicit bias) in expectations and/or assessment of performance.
    - ° It is difficult to use these measures to capture information on students' awareness or beliefs.
    - ° Limited to reports in one setting (the classroom in which the teacher sees the student).
    - ° Potential for misinterpreting/misattributing source of behavior.

Performance-based assessments provide structured opportunities for students to engage in complex, real-world or simulated tasks that can be used as direct measures of students' SEL skills. These assessments can take many forms, including discipline-embedded projects and game-based simulations.

- **Example:** ZooU is a web-based game that provides students with a variety of scenarios, all set in a zoo, that can be used to measure students' communication, cooperation, and empathy skills.

- **Advantages:**
  - ° Designed to approximate real-world conditions.
  - ° Typically do not rely on subjective judgment, as questionnaires do.

- **Limitations:**
  - ° Can require substantial investments in training.
  - ° Significant investment in time for administration and scoring.

The table below shows which instrument types are best suited to the different classifications of competencies listed in Table 1.

Table 2. Suitability of assessments by competency classification

Type of assessment	Intrapersonal awareness	Intrapersonal skills	Interpersonal awareness	Interpersonal skills
Examples of competencies	Growth mindset, self-efficacy	Self-control, goal setting, stress management	Empathy, social awareness	Social perspective taking, collaborative problem solving
Self-report survey questionnaires	X		X	
Interview protocols	X		X	X
Observations and rating scales		X		X
Performance-based		X		X

Where does academic and behavioral data fit in?

Most schools collect a wide variety of data that are relevant to understanding students' SEL competencies. Data on factors such as students' grade point average (GPA), attendance, chronic absenteeism, disciplinary rates, and graduation rates capture aspects of student behavior that may provide relevant information about SEL—for example, information about chronic absenteeism can be useful for understanding students' school engagement. Data from these sources can be useful to examine alongside SEL assessment data, but they should not be interpreted by themselves as evidence of students' SEL competencies.

Step 5: Select assessment tool(s)

There are several practical factors that may drive the choice of assessment:

- **Cost.** Some assessments are free, whereas others require the purchase of a license, often on a per student per year basis. Frequently, costs reflect implementation supports offered by assessment developers. Alternatively, some assessment developers provide the assessment instruments for free but charge schools and districts for implementation support. Other developers make their instrument available only upon purchase of a more comprehensive system. Implementation supports typically offered for a fee include things like survey administration/data collection, scoring, data reporting and digital dashboarding, staff training on data collection and data use, and ongoing technical assistance.

- **Administrative and analytic capacity.** Depending on the district's or school's capacity for research and assessment, comprehensive, paid implementation support from the developer may or may not be needed. Although these supports can represent a significant investment, especially for large school districts with many schools and large student populations, they can be helpful to practitioners and supportive to the continuous improvement of SEL. These supports can provide easy-to-interpret data visualizations, the ability to disaggregate data to illuminate student strengths, and links to resources to guide instruction or implementation improvement within the data reports (ideally based on results).

- **Scalability.** It is important in some situations that assessments be administered to a large student population. Although cost is a factor in scalability, so are technology requirements and the length of time for assessment. For example, when California's CORE districts (eight of the state's largest districts) wanted to administer SEL assessments to nearly one million students in grades 1-12 across eight districts, they realized they would need assessments that were fairly inexpensive, did not have technological requirements, and minimized the impact on instructional time. The CORE districts chose student self-reports, which could be administered to students in grades 4-12, and teacher reports of student competencies, to be administered in grades K-3. The assessments could be administered online or via pencil and paper and take each student and teacher approximately 20-30 minutes per survey administration. See Expanding the Definition of Student Success: A Case Study of the CORE Districts for more information about CORE.

- **Reporting Needs.** Questions about the level at which scores are reported (student, classroom, grade, school, etc.), who will have access to the reports, and whether associated resources are included in the reports, such as recommended programs and practices based on the results of the assessment, can drive the choice of assessments. For example, some assessments provide scores only at the aggregate level, while others include scores at the individual and aggregate level but do not offer accompanying resources.

Look beyond terms to definitions

As Stephanie Jones and her team have found through the Taxonomy Project, many different terms can be used to describe the same SEL competency (see Dr. Jones' *What is the same and what is different* white paper). Thus, it is important when searching for measures to understand the inherent definitions, overlap, and distinctions among different references to specific competencies.

For example, many educators want their students to develop a growth mindset—defined as a belief that ability and skill are malleable and will increase in response to one's effort, rather than being fixed and outside of one's control. Measures to assess growth mindset do exist. However, growth mindset is closely related to other characteristics, including self-confidence, self-efficacy, and empowerment. If one only looked for assessments with "growth mindset" in the title, one might miss some measures that could be suitable.

Use

Step 6: Implement Assessment

Practitioners should consult their chosen assessment's manual, training materials, and/or developer for considerations and instructions that are specific to the measure, but some recommendations apply broadly. When implementing an assessment, be sure to:

- **Establish clear roles and responsibilities.** Assign specific people to collect data, compile data, and share findings with various stakeholders. Determine who will manage the overall process and who will "own" each of these subtasks.

- **Identify Stakeholders.** It is also important to consider the stakeholders with whom data will be shared. Who needs to see the results of assessment, when is the best time for them to learn of findings, and how can data be best reported to and discussed with each type of stakeholder (e.g., students, school administrators and staff, families, community, district, community)?

- **Determine the frequency and timeline for data collection and use.** Consider the following: Will the focus be on growth over time? Do you have the commitment and budget to collect multiple years of data? Who will be responsible for warehousing the data and analyzing for change? If data are used for continuous improvement, when are key decisions made? When must data be collected and shared in order to inform those decisions?

- **Communicate the purpose of assessing student SEL competence.** This will help set expectations with students and families about what is being assessed, when, why, and how to expect findings. Share how the assessment data will be valuable for students and how it fits into broader SEL continuous improvement activities. It is also beneficial to explain that all assessment tools are just estimates, but they are still useful if implemented well and communicated effectively.

- **Ensure that the assessment is accessible to all students and free of potential bias based on comprehension of questions or process.** Depending on the amount of cultural diversity in a school's student population, an assessment may need to be translated into multiple languages. Accommodations must also be in place to ensure that students with special needs (e.g., reading disabilities) can participate. It is also important that the reading level of an assessment be appropriate for the developmental level of the students to whom it will be administered.

- **Provide training to staff involved in conducting assessments and using the data.** Be clear about who needs what training at what stage in the process. Ask developers/vendors about any training resources. Training is often needed for:
  - Those involved in conducting the assessment (e.g., teacher doing ratings, staff proctoring survey, staff doing observations).
  - Staff responsible for compiling the data and reporting it back to stakeholders (e.g., research and evaluation department).
  - Staff responsible for using and communicating about findings (e.g., teachers responsible for using results to guide instruction, communicating findings to students/families).

Step 7: Use data

As noted in Step 2, uses of data from SEL competency assessments can fall into two broad categories:

- **Formative uses are *for* learning.**
- **Summative uses are *of* learning.**

This section takes a closer look at some examples of formative and summative uses of SEL assessments from districts across the country.

Formative uses of SEL competency assessment

Formative assessment is one of the most powerful tools classroom teachers can use to enhance student learning by providing insights into what students are learning and whether teachers should change their approach.[19] School and district leaders and teams can also use assessments formatively to determine if implementation strategies are effective or new ones need to be undertaken.

Here, we outline a variety of purposes that formative assessment of students SEL competencies can serve:

- Purpose #1: Promote students' competencies by fostering effective SEL instruction in classrooms
- Purpose #2: Create an instructional plan based on a classroom profile of competencies
- Purpose #3: Elevate student voice and promote student engagement and agency
- Purpose #4: Improve school and district implementation strategies
- Purpose #5: Foster equitable learning environments by revealing disparities

Purpose #1: Promote students' competencies by fostering effective SEL instruction in classrooms

According to Robert Marzano,[20] effective SEL formative assessment focuses on three essentials:

- Explicit learning goals regarding SEL skills.
- Progress toward those learning goals.
- Guidance in the steps needed to progress toward learning goals.

Marzano also outlines stages of learning from lowest to highest for any given SEL competency:

Figure 2. Learning stages for SEL competencies

Higher	
Making conscious decisions to use the skill in appropriate situations: • Understanding one's basic operating principles in terms of their influencing one's behavior • Making necessary changes in one's basic operating principles to increase the probability of using a specific SEL skill	
Being able to execute the steps or strategies associated with an SEL skill without error and with some fluency: • Becoming fluent in the execution of the skill • Shaping the steps or strategies through practice	↑ ↓
Understanding the declarative knowledge important to an SEL skill and being able to perform a rough approximation of the skill: • Knowing the steps or strategies that compose the skill • Knowing factual information important to the skill • Knowing important vocabulary relative to the skill	
Lower	

School and districts can use this kind of learning progression to develop SEL assessment rubrics that enable formative uses. For an example of this kind of rubric, see Appendix B and/or Appendix C. Data can then be gathered to complete the rubric using strategies such as probing discussions, student-generated assessments, and teacher observation of student behavior during routine instruction and learning.[21]

---

[19] Black & William, 1998; Kingston & Nash, 2011; Marzano, 2015
[20] Marzano, 2015
[21] Marzano, 2015

Getting teachers and students involved

When developing SEL competency rubrics, we recommend that schools and districts consider including teachers and students, to deepen understanding and build buy-in.

It can also be beneficial for schools to translate these learning progressions into "student-friendly" versions, which are easily understood by students of various developmental levels. Several of CASEL's partner districts have created such language, in some cases calling them **"I Can" statements**, framed as a series of statements that represent what a student "can" do if schools successfully implement SEL. See an example of "I can" statements from a CASEL district partner, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

In creating these versions, especially when students are involved, schools and districts empower students to be self-directed learners, which fosters a sense of agency. Moreover, student engagement with these learning progressions may foster the competencies they are meant to assess.

[District example: Naperville, Illinois]

DuPage District 203, Naperville Community Unit School District has made developing and using rubrics a key lever for fostering high-quality SEL instruction.

Naperville's rubrics articulate what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level, painting a picture of three degrees of development (e.g., "Beginning," "Approaching," and "Secure") for each competency. They are aligned with Illinois' SEL standards, as well as the districts' instructional curriculum for SEL. They articulate a grade-specific and developmentally appropriate learning progression that can be quickly observed by teachers throughout the course of daily instruction.

Teachers are provided training and resources on how to identify competencies at each grade level, and on what resources are available to help them foster their students' competencies. See Appendix C to learn more about Naperville's rubric and see examples of their work.

Other approaches to classroom formative use of assessment. Marzano's recommendations for developing formative assessment rubrics and the example provided by Naperville school district represent one approach to formative assessment use in classrooms, but there are others. Some SEL programs integrate ongoing assessment into their curriculum, so that teachers can check progress as they implement the program. In other cases, the line between instruction and assessment is indistinguishable, as is sometimes the case with computerized game-based programs that offer skill-building within simulated scenarios of decision-making and social interaction while also assessing students' abilities.

Purpose #2: Create an instructional plan based on a classroom profile of competencies

Results of survey measures and performance-based assessments can be helpful to provide teachers with an overview of their students' social and emotional strengths and opportunities for growth at the start of the year, which in turn can inform instructional planning for the year.

These assessments can also be retaken midyear to provide teachers an opportunity to check on their students' progress and adjust their instructional approach or strategies, if indicated by the data. To be useful, however, results must be provided in a timely fashion. If there's a long delay, findings may no longer accurately represent the students' actual progress.

Increasingly these assessment types are administered using computers (e.g., Panorama, DESSA, SELWeb; see the SEL Assessment Guide for more information), sometimes as an optional package from the developer. This can decrease the delay in getting results, but these options can include additional charges from developers or require additional equipment or the need for initial and ongoing technical support.

Purpose #3: Elevate student voice and promote student engagement and agency

School staff can empower students in their own social emotional development by involving them in the interpretation of assessment results and problem-solving. Involving students in the process gives them a sense of ownership of their own learning and increases their motivation, engagement, and sense of agency.

[District example: Washoe County, Nevada]

In Washoe County, Nevada, district leaders realized that fully understanding their data would require engaging their most important stakeholder group—their students. The district began conducting annual student-led data summits, during which students lead sessions focusing on understanding data and developing improvement plans based on what the data say. More information and resources are available about Washoe's work:

- See story about the project that led to these changes - "Students help design measures of social-emotional skills" in *Education Week.*
- See the district's dedicated "student voice" home page, which includes a downloadable student voice "tool kit." See also the district's video on student voice.
- Archives of materials from the district's previous data summits are available online (see district's Data Summits webpage).

[District example: Austin, Texas]

During the 2017-2018 year, Austin Independent School District in Austin, Texas, tested a process called a "student data dig" in a single high school. This was a two-session process done "to provide an opportunity to empower students' voices by gaining insight into their experiences at school, discuss students' needs, and brainstorm ways to improve students' experiences." Students were enthusiastic and helped generate specific ideas. In its report on the process, the district indicated it is likely to consider expanding to additional schools going forward.

Purpose #4: Improve school and district implementation strategies

Combined with implementation data, student assessment results can empower district and school leaders and teams to make decisions related to policies, practices, and programs. Examples include adding professional learning or programs to boost instruction. Keeping reliability and validity in mind, survey assessments can often be a good option because they can be administered quickly and at fairly low cost.

The specifics of how SEL competency data are used formatively for continuous improvement can vary based on whether decision-making is controlled by the central office or schools have more autonomy:

- **In centrally controlled districts,** district leaders may use the data to choose assessments and determine how to allocate supports, professional development, and programming adoption. Data may shed light on how students are responding to existing SEL programs or practices, or to identify schools where especially strong improvement is occurring so district leaders can explore what factors might have contributed to it.

- **When individual schools have more autonomy,** schools may use data similarly, but with school principals or SEL teams leading the way. There may be a focus on examining students' development across grade levels instead of across schools (although district-level leaders may also compare both across schools and across grades).

[District example: California's CORE districts]

As mentioned in Step 5, California's CORE network of eight large urban school districts has been working for many years to implement social and emotional learning at scale. Through their efforts, the CORE districts are pushing themselves and others to rethink how schools define success for their students. Along with academic and behavioral outcomes, the CORE districts utilize an annual survey that measures SEL competencies and areas of school culture and climate to foster continuous improvement in their schools.

Through strategic research partnerships with organizations like Transforming Education, Harvard University, and Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), the CORE districts have equipped their schools with the information needed to continuously improve while using techniques of improvement science to accelerate their learning and share ongoing insights across their schools.

Over the last few years, CORE's research partner PACE has disseminated numerous reports, briefs, and infographics on topics such as:

- The measurement properties of their surveys

- How students' competencies develop over time

- Learning from data and enacting support and improvement

- Enacting social-emotional learning practices and supports in core districts and schools

To learn more, see PACE's Publications page and the case study of the CORE districts.

Purpose #5: **Foster equitable learning environments by revealing disparities**

By disaggregating assessment results by student groups, school or district teams can identify opportunities for improving policies and practices, ensuring that SEL efforts benefit all students. To do this, districts and schools must identify disparities among student groups, systemic root causes, and strategies to improve systemic practices and policies that contribute to disparities.

Before diving in, it is important to consider whether assessments will allow for valid comparisons across student groups. We encourage schools and districts to ask assessment developers to share any research evidence that their instrument performs equivalently across groups of students for whom schools may look to disaggregate data.

It is also essential to deepen staff capacity for using data to explore differences among student groups. Doing this requires a shared understanding and agreement that:

- The school or district is looking for evidence of disparities, so they can determine and act on the root causes of those disparities.

- The system in which students live and learn is responsible for supporting all students' social, emotional, and academic development.

- Disparities among groups of students indicate a need for improvement in the practices and policies of the system, not deficiencies or failures of the students themselves.

Summative uses of SEL competency assessment

Compared to those used formatively, assessments intended for summative uses tend to be more formal, less frequent, and appropriate for system-level decision-making. Since they are often administered to all students in a school or district, issues of cost, time, and training are especially important considerations for implementing at scale. For this reason, surveys are frequently used because they tend to be comparatively low-cost, quick to administer, and require less training than other assessment methods.

Beyond those already outlined for student SEL competency assessment generally, there are some additional important considerations for using SEL competency assessments for summative purposes, which are sometimes associated with somewhat higher stakes decision-making:

- **Align instruction/program and assessment.** It is essential that the competencies targeted by an SEL program be the same as those being assessed. If a program focuses on empathy, then an assessment that explicitly measures empathy should be used. We recommend that school and district teams carefully read program and assessment documentation to learn how competencies are defined, as sometimes definitions differ even when labels or titles are the same. [22]

- **Ability to detect improvement.** Sensitivity of measurement is an important issue for both assessment selection and evaluation design. It is essential that assessments be able to detect improvement when it occurs, and that evaluations be designed to allow for analysis of data to occur on a schedule appropriate for the expected timeline for improvement (i.e., analyses that are designed to support inferences about change should not planned before research suggests improvement is likely to occur).

We recommend that schools and districts ask assessment developers for evidence that their instrument can detect change over time. When designing a plan to evaluate the impact of programming, evaluators should align their plan with research that indicates a feasible timeline for improvement. This will allow schools and districts to set realistic expectations among stakeholders and also to foster an efficient use of resources by planning assessment and analyses only when improvements are expected to occur.

- **Know what to expect when interpreting data.** For example, if your theory of change and/or implementation plan indicates that a year of implementation is likely to be needed before improvements in certain student outcomes can be expected, then failure to find improvements in schoolwide or districtwide student SEL scores sooner does not necessarily indicate a need to change course. Moreover, improvement does not always occur in a linear or incremental manner. Use previous research and past experience to estimate likely timelines for improvement for particular competencies and keep these timelines in mind when evaluating success, interpreting findings, and reporting to stakeholders.

- **Inquire about measurement equivalence.** Researchers and assessment developers should establish measurement equivalence (or invariance) across student groups. Measurement equivalence relates to evidence that an assessment is equivalent across student groups and provides statistical assurance that an assessment functions similarly across diverse communities so that score interpretation is meaningful and appropriate for all members of a community. We encourage educators to inquire about these statistical analyses from assessment developers.

---

[22] Jones, Bailey, Brush, Nelson, & Barnes, 2016

For example, if statistical analyses fail to establish measurement equivalence between groups of students based on their ELL status, differences in scores between students with and without ELL status cannot safely be assumed to represent real differences in whatever that survey is measuring. For more about analyzing measurement invariance, see this [analytic "how-to" resource](#) from the Claremont Evaluation Center and this [example analysis on survey instrument](#) from the University of Connecticut.

Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships

Some districts may not have existing capacity in place to conduct this type of research. In these cases, we encourage schools and districts to consider forming a researcher-practitioner partnership to obtain measurement equivalence evidence needed to confidently compare student groups. Such a partnership could allow data to be tested for measurement equivalence and provide important insights about the appropriateness of exploring differences in groups.

[District example: Washoe County, Nevada]

Supported by funding from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Washoe County School District (WCSD), CASEL, and assessment researchers from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) collaborated on this kind of research-practice partnership. This partnership produced both improved assessments and improved measurement practices for the district and sparked a greater focus on student voice and engagement.[23]

Findings from this research and the subsequent developments in WCSD have been covered by media outlets (see [Students help design measures of social-emotional skills](#) in *Education Week*)

There are fewer purposes for which we recommended that student SEL competency assessments be used summatively, but two are outlined here:

• Purpose #1: Evaluate the impact of an SEL classroom program

• Purpose #2: Report to stakeholders about the progress of SEL initiatives

NOTE: There are other purposes for which summative data are used in education, such as for state accountability systems and teacher evaluation. However, those are not discussed in detail here, since we do not generally recommend that student SEL competency assessments be used for those purposes.

Purpose #1: Evaluate the impact of an SEL classroom program

Assessments administered before, during, and after the use of an SEL classroom program can provide evidence of the degree to which its implementation might have led to improvements in students' SEL competencies. Teachers and leaders can use this information to decide whether to continue with the programs and practices, add additional supports for implementation, or change their approach. Findings from these assessments can also contribute to a building body of research on the impact of SEL on student development.

---

[23] Davidson, Crowder, Gordon, Domitrovich, Brown, & Hayes, 2018

Purpose #2: Report to stakeholders about the progress of SEL initiatives

When aggregated at the school or district level and reported to stakeholders, student assessment results can build and maintain support for SEL by showing how investments in SEL are positively impacting students. When using data for this purpose, it is important to clearly communicate timelines and expectations to stakeholders at the start, so they are not surprised if improvement is not realized early on. Regularly remind stakeholders of these expected timelines, especially when reporting out about initiative progress. Consider limiting reporting only to analyses that align with the expected timeline for change. If improvement in students' competencies is expected on a particular timeline of implementation, analyses of these student data may not occur until after that timeframe. This also efficiently uses valuable human resources only when indicated by your implementation and evaluation plan.

[District example: Austin Independent School District]

The Research and Evaluation Department in the Austin Independent School District has been an integral part of the district's SEL effort. Since starting with SEL in 2011, the department has consistently published research reports and briefs on a wide range of topics, including:

- Technical reports that share the evidence of reliability and validity of measures (see example of district's technical report).

- Research briefs on the impact of implementation efforts over time (see research brief on longitudinal impact).

- Reports that demonstrate what high-quality implementation looks like by focusing on SEL "Model Schools" (see model school report and the district's Research & Evaluation Publication Website for More).

Concluding Remarks

Recognizing there is much still to learn, a growing number of researchers and practitioners across the nation are forging ahead with innovative and ground-breaking work in the area of SEL competency assessment. Examples of this work are found throughout this document and are emerging in the field more broadly. A recent *special issue of the Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* (JADP) focused on SEL assessment and highlights even more examples of the kinds of the cutting-edge work happening across the nation in both research and practice.

When done thoughtfully and with clear purpose and goals in mind, SEL competence assessment is an essential part of teaching and learning.[24] The Assessment Work Group is committed to identifying examples from the field showing how SEL assessment is being used effectively in practice and shining a light on this good work so others can learn from it. In addition to examples offered here, the AWG plans to highlight additional success stories from the field through the *SEL Assessment in Action* series on the AWG website, as well as in the AWG's weekly blog. If you have a story to share about how SEL assessment has been used in practice in supportive and innovative ways, join the AWG collaborator network and tell us about it!

---

[24] National Research Council, 2013

References

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing.* Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

American Institutes for Research. (2015). Are you ready to assess social and emotional development? Retrieved from https://www.air.org/resource/are-you-ready-assess-social-and-emotional-development

The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2018). How learning happens: Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development. Retrieved from https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/01/2017_Aspen_InterimReport_Update2.pdf

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in education: principles, policy & practice,* 5(1), 7-74. Retrieved from http://wiki.biologyscholars.org/@api/deki/files/1278/%3Dblack_p_etal_1998b%5B1%5D.pdf

Davidson, L. A., Crowder, M. K., Gordon, R. A., Domitrovich, C. E., Brown, R. D., & Hayes, B. I. (2018). A continuous improvement approach to social and emotional competency measurement. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology,* 55, 93-106. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019339731630137X

Denham, S. A. (2006). Social-emotional competence as support for school readiness: What is it and how do we assess it? *Early education and development,* 17(1), 57-89. Retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15566935eed1701_4

Denham, S.A. (2015). Assessment. In J. Durlak, T. Gullotta, C. Domitrovich, P. Goren, & Weissberg, R.P. (Eds.). *Handbook of social and emotional learning.* (pp. 285-300). New York City, NY: Guilford Publications.

Denham, S. A., Wyatt, T., Bassett, H. H., Echeverria, D., & Knox, S. (2009). Assessing social-emotional development in children from a longitudinal perspective. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 63, 37-52.

Denham, S.A., Ji, P., & Hamre, B. (2010). *Compendium of Preschool Through Elementary School Social-Emotional Learning and Associated Assessment Measures.* Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and Social and Emotional Learning Research Group, University of Illinois at Chicago. Retrieved from https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/compendium-of-preschool-through-elementary-school-social-emotional-learning-and-associated-assessment-measures.pdf

DePaoli, J. L., Atwell, M. N., & Bridgeland, J. (2017). Ready to lead: *A national principal survey on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises with Hart Research Associates.

Duckworth, A. L., & Yeager, D. S. (2015). Measurement matters: Assessing personal qualities other than cognitive ability for educational purposes. *Educational Researcher,* 44(4), 237-251.10.3102/0013189X15584327 Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4849415/

Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., Weissberg, R. P., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice.* New York City, NY: Guilford Publications.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development,* 82(1), 405– 432. Retrieved from https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/meta-analysis-child-development-1.pdf

Dusenbury & Weissberg (2018). Emerging Insights from States' Efforts to Strengthen Social and Emotional Learning. Chicago: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Retrieved from: https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CSI-Insights.pdf

Farrington, C. A. (2015). The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance: A Critical Literature Review. Retrieved from https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Noncognitive%20Report.pdf

Haggerty, K., Elgin, J., & Woolley, A. (2011). Social-emotional learning assessment measures for middle school youth. Social Development Research Group. University of Washington: Raikes Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.search-institute.org/sites/default/files/a/DAP-Raikes-Foundation-Review.pdf

Hamilton, L.S., Stecher, B.M., & Yuan, K. (2012). Standards-based accountability in the United States: Lessons learned and future directions. *Education Inquiry*, 3(2), 149-170.

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 91-112.

Heritage, M. (2008). Learning progressions: Supporting instruction and formative assessment. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Jones, S., Bailey R, Brush, K, Nelson, B, and Barnes, S. (2016). What is the same and what is different? Making sense of the "non-cognitive" domain: Helping educators translate research into practice. Boston, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education EASEL Lab. Retrieved from https://easel.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-easel-lab/files/words_matter_paper.pdf

Jones, S. M., Barnes, S. P., Bailey, R., & Doolittle, E. J. (2017). Promoting social and emotional competencies in elementary school. *The Future of Children*, 49-72. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1144815.pdf

Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and Emotional Learning in Schools: From Programs to Strategies. *Social Policy Report.* Volume 26, Number 4. Society for Research in Child Development. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED540203.pdf

Kane, M.T. (2013). Validation as a pragmatic, scientific activity. *Journal of Educational Measurement* 50(1), 115–122.

Kingston, N., & Nash, B. (2011). Formative assessment: A meta-analysis and a call for research. Retrieved from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1745-3992.2011.00220.x

Krachman, S. B., Arnold, R., & LaRocca, R. (2016). Expanding our definition of student success: A case study of the CORE districts. Boston, MA: Transforming Education. Retrieved from https://www.transformingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/TransformingEducationCaseStudyFINAL1.pdf

Marzano, R. J. (2015). Using formative assessment with SEL skills. In The handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice. In J. Durlak, T. Gullotta, C. Domitrovich, P. Goren, & Weissberg, R.P. (Eds.). *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning* (pp. 336-347). New York City, NY: Guilford Publications.

Melnick, H., Cook-Harvey, C. M., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Encouraging social and emotional learning in the context of new accountability. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Social_Emotional_Learning_New_Accountability_REPORT.pdf

Minnesota Department of Education (2018). Social and Emotional Learning Assessment Guidance. Retrieved from http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE073521&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

Moroney, D., & McGarrah, M. (2016). Are you ready to assess social and emotional development? American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.air.org/resource/are-you-ready-assess-social-and-emotional-development

Nagaoka, J., Farrington, C. A., Ehrlich, S. B., & Heath, R. D. (2015). *Foundations for young adult success: A developmental framework.* Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Foundations for Young Adult-Jun2015-Consortium.pdf

Nathanson, L., Rivers, S. E., Flynn, L. M., & Brackett, M. A. (2016). Creating emotionally intelligent schools with RULER. *Emotion Review,* 8(4), 305-310.

National Research Council. (2013). Education for life and work: Developing transferable knowledge and skills in the 21st century. National Academies Press. Retrieved from https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Education_for_Life_and_Work.pdf

Phi Delta Kappa International. (2017). The 49th annual PDK poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(1). http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf

Soland, J., Hamilton, L.S., & Stecher, B.M. (2013). Measuring 21st-century competencies: Guidance for educators. New York: Asia Society. Retrieved from https://asiasociety.org/files/gcen-measuring21cskills.pdf

Warikoo, Natasha, Stacey Sinclair, Jessica Fei, and Drew Jacoby- Senghor. 2016. Examining Racial Bias in Education: A New Approach. Educational Researcher 45(9). Retrieved from https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/34785397/Examining_Racial_Bias_in_Education-sept.17nw.pdf?sequence=4

Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (Eds.). (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice (pp. 3-19). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.

West, M. R. (2016). Should non-cognitive skills be included in school accountability systems? Preliminary evidence from California's CORE districts. *Evidence Speaks Reports,* 1(13). Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/EvidenceSpeaksWest031716.pdf

Appendix A: Understanding validity and reliability

Thoughtful practitioners want use assessments that are accurate, fair, and appropriate for a given set of students, and that actually measure the competencies they say they measure. However, it can be difficult to know whether a new measure has these good qualities.

Psychometricians—scientists who specialize in measuring human abilities—have identified two key dimensions of quality—validity and reliability. Most measures that are available publicly should have some information about their validity and reliability, and users should review this evidence before adopting a particular assessment for a particular purpose. Below we lay out the different types of reliability and validity evidence that are important to consider when choosing an SEL measure. We encourage schools and districts to ask assessment developers for this evidence if it is not presented in the AWG and Rand tools.

Reliability

The reliability, or precision, of scores on an assessment refers to the extent to which an assessment produces scores that are consistent and free of error. There are different ways of estimating reliability which reflect different types of consistency and different sources of measurement error.

For instance, if a measure of persistence or self-control relies on teachers to rate students' behaviors, error could result if different teachers apply the rating scale differently (e.g., one teacher might always assign higher scores than another). To see whether this type of error occurs, one could compute an estimate of reliability based on having different teachers rate the same students; this would tell us about the consistency of scores across raters. Alternatively, you could have a teacher rate students on Monday and then again on Tuesday—if all other conditions were equal this would give information about consistency of scores over time.

Common indicators of score reliability for SEL assessments include:

   • Measures of rater agreement (often reported as a kappa statistic).

   • Test-retest reliability (correlations between scores obtained over two administrations of an assessment).

   • Measures of internal consistency (which measures the extent to which a student responds similarly across items and typically takes the form of coefficient alpha).

Typically, these indicators of reliability will take a value between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 indicating higher reliability and lower measurement error. An assessment that produces scores with low reliability is not particularly informative, and it is certainly not useful for decision-making.

Reliability isn't the whole story. While high levels of reliability are important for ensuring that scores are reasonably precise and consistent, reliability does not tell us whether an assessment measures what it is supposed to measure nor whether it is appropriate to use that assessment to make a specific inference or decision. Validity addresses these questions.

Validity

The term "validity" refers to evidence about what a score really means (technically, how users "interpret" the score) and whether it can be safely used for a specific purpose. Although some people refer to validity as if it were a feature of the measure itself, validity actually is a feature of how people interpret scores and use them. Thus, a measure can have high validity in one context and low validity in another.

For example, if a measure of self-management is being used to monitor student performance in response to a self-help curriculum, validity evidence could include information that the content of the measure is aligned with the curriculum (e.g., judgment from some experts) and that scores reflects a student's ability to engage in self-management (e.g., correlation between scores and a separate measure of self-management). If the same measure is used to compare two decide which of two self-help programs to implement districtwide, validity evidence might focus more on whether the measure has been shown reflect group-level changes over time.

Many sources of validity evidence might be relevant across a range of purposes, while specific evidence might be most applicable to a particular purpose. A key factor for users to keep in mind is that a single measure is never demonstrated to be valid independent of purpose; instead, users should look for evidence that supports a measure's use for a specific purpose.[25]

Evidence for determining validity of an assessment

A wide range of validity evidence can be used to support a decision to adopt a particular assessment for a particular purpose. The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing[26] specify four broad categories of evidence:

- **Evidence based on content:** Content refers to the wording and format of items, tasks, and scoring rubrics. Validity evidence based on content can include any information that suggests that the content is appropriate to support the desired interpretations and uses of the measure, such as expert ratings of the alignment of the items with the constructs being measured.

  For example, experts in research on emotion regulation might be asked to judge the items that are part of an emotion regulation scale. They would indicate the extent to which each item aligns with their definition of emotion regulation, point out items that appear to measure something different, and identify important aspects of emotion regulation are not addressed by the proposed scale.

- **Evidence based on response processes:** This category looks at how respondents are completing the assessment. The purpose is to find out whether respondents answer the items using the processes and behaviors the developer intended and not some unrelated solution strategy. This information can be collected, for example, through interviews with respondents as they complete the items (e.g., "I noticed that the right answer was always one of the two options that were almost the same, so I only looked at those two") or feedback from raters about the factors they considered when assigning their ratings (e.g., "Her handwriting is so sloppy that she cannot have much self-control").

- **Evidence based on internal structure:** The internal structure of a measure refers to the relationships among its items, scales, or domains. For example, in an assessment that claims to measure three competencies, we would expect to see higher correlation among items that measure the same competency than among items measuring different competencies.

---

[25] American Educational Research Association et al. 2014; Kane 2013
[26] AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014

This category of validity evidence also includes information about whether the items and scales have equivalent meanings across groups based on race/ethnicity, language background, sex, or other characteristics. Users would not want to compare the scores of subgroups without evidence that differences in the measured competencies or proficiencies are real, and not merely the result of item interpretations or responses associated with culture, gender, or other irrelevant factors.

For example, a male student and a female student with the same abilities to engage in self-management should be expected to perform similarly on a self-management assessment. However, if all of the items are multiple choice items, it is possible that the male student will score higher, as prior research suggests that males, on average, outperform females on multiple choice items, even though they have the same ability to engage in self-management. If this multiple-choice format effect holds, then score differences can no longer be used to make trustworthy determinations about whether one student has more developed self-management competencies than another.

This category also includes evidence that items and scales have equivalent meanings across time. Detecting change in student competencies over time is a critical goal of developmental programs or interventions. Just as it is important to find evidence that items and scales have equivalent meanings across groups (as discussed above), it is important to find evidence that scales have equivalent meanings across time in order to make claims about growth.

For example, a student's score on a self-reported measure of collaborative problem solving might improve from one year to the next due to changes unrelated to their abilities—the student's reading ability might improve so she interprets and responds to items differently or the student's peer group might change so she makes judgments about her own collaborative problem solving abilities relative to others.

It is harder to find evidence related to the validity of inferences about change or growth because studying growth over time takes longer, costs more, and involves more complicated analyses, so developers and researchers are less likely to conduct such analyses. The lack of such evidence does not mean that a measure should never be used for a purpose such as tracking growth in scores, but it does mean that users should be cautious about making growth inferences based on scores without supporting evidence.

• **Evidence based on relations to other variables:** Other variables may include a different measure of the same competency, as well as measures of other competencies that we would expect to be related. Simply put, measures of similar constructs should yield similar results, and measures of different constructs should yield different results.

Assessment developers sometimes refer to these as "convergent" and "discriminant" evidence. Convergent evidence comes from correlations with other measures of similar or related domains; e.g., we might examine how a self-report measure of self-management correlates with a measure of self-management that relies on teacher ratings. Discriminant evidence refers to correlations with other variables that should not show strong relationships; e.g., we would not want scores on a self-report self-management survey to be too highly correlated with students' reading achievement test scores because a high correlation might suggest that our self-management survey is actually measuring reading ability.

Additional considerations in judging the reliability and validity of SEL competency assessments

It is unlikely that a specific measure will have validity evidence from all four categories, so users shouldn't expect to find every type of evidence.

More importantly, depending on the purpose of the measure, evidence from some categories is likely to be more relevant. Users need to consider this evidence in light of their specific uses for assessment. In general, higher-stakes decisions—for example, summative uses—require more solid evidence than do lower-stakes decisions, such as formative uses.

For example, an assessment of collaboration skills that is used primarily to help teachers identify student strengths and weaknesses at the classroom level to inform decisions about instruction requires less solid validity and reliability evidence than an assessment that is used to determine whether a curriculum is effective and should be retained.

Users of the RAND Assessment Finder will discover that although many assessments have some evidence of reliability and validity, this evidence is often limited, and some assessments have no validity or reliability information available.

Furthermore, the evidence reported by developers may come from a different group of students under different conditions. Evidence based on using an assessment with urban high school students at the end of the year may not provide much basis to support the use of the measure with rural middle school students at the beginning of the year.

The extent to which the existing evidence translates to a new context with a new sample depends on the extent to which those samples and contexts are similar. For example, if the developer of a self-management assessment collected evidence of validity and reliability from college freshmen who volunteered to participate in a pilot test of the assessment, and a school or district plans to administer the assessment to all elementary school students in conjunction with state standardized testing, the existing reliability and validity evidence is unlikely to be meaningful for their context and students. Users of SEL competency assessments should weigh all of the available evidence, as well as the conditions under which the evidence was collected when determining whether a given measure meets their needs.

Ultimately, we recommend that practitioners work with the vendors to learn more about what sources of validity evidence are available to support their intended use.

Appendix B: Developing SEL Formative Assessments to Guide Instruction in Classrooms

A long history of research shows that formative use of assessment is one of the most powerful tools available to classroom teachers for enhancing student learning (e.g., Black & Williams, 1998). In recent years, assessment experts continued to reiterate the value of formative uses of assessment (e.g., Kingston & Nash, 2011) and also highlighted the importance of formative uses in SEL, while also offering guidance on how to do it effectively (Marzano, 2015). Formative uses of SEL assessment data can provide teachers insights into what their students are learning and whether they should focus their efforts or change their approach.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (2018) defines formative assessment as:

Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners.

Effective use of the formative assessment process requires students and teachers to integrate and embed the following practices in a collaborative and respectful classroom environment:

1. *Clarifying learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;*

2. *Eliciting and analyzing evidence of student thinking;*

3. *Engaging in self-assessment and peer feedback;*

4. *Providing actionable feedback; and*

5. *Using evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, or next instructional steps.*

— Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2018

The characteristics of measures that are well-equipped to promote effective SEL instruction and foster students' competencies within everyday classroom instruction (i.e., within a formative assessment process as described and defined by CCSSO) are similar to their counterparts in academic disciplines. These characteristics stem from the deep research base on formative assessment, which identifies learning progressions and effective feedback to students that focuses on learning goals as essential elements of an effective formative assessment process[27].

In his 2015 chapter on formative assessment in the Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning, Dr. Robert Marzano identified learning progressions as a central element of effective SEL formative assessment that are focused on three essential things[28]:

1. Explicit learning goals regarding SEL skills,

2. Progress toward those learning goals

3. Guidance in the steps needed to progress toward learning goals.

---

[27] Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Heritage, 2008
[28] Marzano, 2015

Example SEL Competence Assessment Rubric

Score	Generic Form of SEL Proficiency Scales	Specific Example for an SEL Skill
4.0	Making conscious decisions to use the skill in appropriate situations: • Understanding one's basic operating principles in terms of their influencing one's behavior • Making necessary changes in one's basic operating principles to increase the probability of using a specific SEL skill	Making conscious decisions to use the skill of expressing understanding of those who hold different opinions: • Understanding the beliefs the student might have that stops him or her from expressing understanding of those who hold different opinions • Making revisions in beliefs that hinder the student from expressing understanding of those who hold different opinions
3.5	In addition to score 3.0 performance, partial success at score 4.0	In addition to score 3.0 performance, partial success at score 4.0
3.0	Being able to execute the steps or strategies associated with an SEL skills without error and with some fluency: • Becoming fluent in the execution of the skill • Shaping the steps or strategies through practice	Expressing understanding of those who hold different opinions in real-life situations without significant error and with some fluency using strategies like the following: • Acknowledging that there is a difference of opinions • Making a conscious decision to assume that the individual with whom you disagree is operating in good faith • Actively listen to what the other person is saying and try to understand his or her reasons for having that opinion • When making a point that is counter to the opinion of the other person, focusing on the logic of your point • Making sure that during your discussion you do not say anything that is negative about the person
2.5	No major errors regarding score 2.0 content, and partial success at score 3.0 content	No Major errors regarding core 2.0 content, and partial success at score 3.0 content

2.0	Understanding the declarative knowledge important to an SE skill and being able to perform a rough approximation of the skill:
	• Knowing the steps or strategies that comprise the skill
	• Knowing factual information important to the skill
	• Knowing important vocabulary relative to the skill
		Being able to perform a rough approximation of the skill of expressing understanding of those who hold different opinions, and being able to explain or describe:
		• The fact that the SE skill commonly involves steps such as the following:
		  º Acknowledging that there is a difference of opinion
		  º Making a conscious decision to assume the individual with whom you disagree is operating in good faith
		  º Actively listening to what the other person is saying and trying to understand his or her reasons for having that opinion
		  º When making a point that is counter to the opinion of the other person, focusing on the logic of your point
		  º Making sure that during your discussion you do not say anything negative about the person
		• Factual information about the skill, such as the following:
		  º The characteristics of an opinion
		  º The student's own opinion on specific topics
		  º Behaviors that indicate a difference of opinion between two people
		  º The student's typical emotional response when someone disagrees with him or her
		  º The ways strong emotion can influence one's thinking
		• The meaning of basic terms such as opinion, disagreement, conflict, confrontation, and respect

1.5	Patial success at score 2.0 content, but major errors or omissions regarding score 3.0 content	Patial success at score 2.0 content, but major errors or omissions regarding score 3.0 content
1.0	With help partial success at score 2.0 content, and score 3.0 content	With help partial success at score 2.0 content, and score 3.0 content
0.5	With help partial success at score 2.0 content but not at score 3.0 content	With help partial success at score 2.0 content but not at score 3.0 content
0.0	Even with help, no success	Even with help, no success

Appendix C: Naperville Community School District 203 (D203) Formative Assessment Rubric

Naperville Community School District 203 (D203), located in the western suburbs of Chicago, serves nearly 17,000 EC-12 students.

In the 2013-2014 school year, the district spearheaded a community engagement series to gather feedback and input for developing Focus 2020, the district five-year strategic plan. The community, families, and staff expressed the need to educate the whole child to ensure students learn not only academic content but also gain the social-emotional skills necessary for success in life. As a result, social-emotional learning became a key initiative within the district five-year strategic plan.

Building a comprehensive EC-12 curriculum was at the heart of bringing the district's vision to life. At the core of their curriculum was the idea that social-emotional skills can and should be taught to all students. Therefore, it was imperative that their assessments measure skill attainment similarly to core content areas such as literacy or math (See SEL Standards and Benchmarks Map).

Read the story about creating SEL Formative Assessments

Example Formative Assessment Rubric for Grade 3

NCUSD203 SEL Performance Rubrics

Reporting Standards Performance Rubrics

Reporting Standard	Describes socially acceptable behaviors (1A.2b)			
Possible evidence • Role Playing Scenarios • Reading responses about characters and their actions • Classroom/Class Meeting discussions • Self-Evaluation				
Trimester	**Beginning – 1**	**Approaching – 2**	**Secure – 3**	**Exemplary – 4**
1	With support, describes socially acceptable behaviors in one context/setting.	With support, describes socially acceptable behaviors.	Describes socially acceptable behaviors and explains that socially acceptable behaviors may vary depending on the context/setting.	Not available for SEL reporting
2				
3				

Additional Resources

Are You Ready to Assess Social and Emotional Development?[29] – American Institutes for Research, December 2015 (An updated version is due out in 2019)

Including a brief, decision-tree, and an index of available SEL assessment, this suite of tools was published in December of 2015 and was intended to help education leaders, practitioners, and policymakers decide whether and how to assess social and emotional development.

Compendium of Preschool Through Elementary School Social-Emotional Learning and Associated Assessment Measures[30] – CASEL, October 2010

Compendium that describes the tools to assess the social and emotional learning of preschool and elementary school students (i.e., five-to ten-year-olds), along with aspects of the contexts in which they learn and their learning behaviors.

Emerging Insights from States' Efforts to Strengthen Social and Emotional Learning[31] – CASEL, June 2018

Shares eight key insights from CASEL Collaborating States Initiative (CSI). Includes several valuable resources throughout, including linked resources for the 12 states that have established K-12 SEL competencies standards and the 17 states that have posted K-12 resources online.

Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Measures for Middle School Youth[32] – Social Development Research Group, University of Washington: Raikes Foundation, January 2011

Review to identify useable school-wide assessments that yield reliable scores with evidence of interpretations and uses for social and emotional well-being of youth and to help schools and districts identify tools that could be useful in determining the success of the programs created to improve student social and emotional well-being.

---

[29] Moroney, & McGarrah, 2016
[30] Denham, Ji, & Hamre, 2010
[31] Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018
[32] Haggerty, Elgin, & Woolley, 2011