

***State Learning Standards  
to Advance Social and Emotional Learning:  
The State Scan of Social and Emotional Learning Standards,  
Preschool through High School***

**Linda Dusenbury**

**Jessy Zadrazil**

**Amy Mart**

**Roger Weissberg**

**April 2011**

**With funding from the Buena Vista Foundation and NoVo Foundation**

Department of Psychology

**UIC** UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT CHICAGO

**Social and Emotional  
Learning Research Group**



## ***State Learning Standards to Advance Social and Emotional Learning:***

### *The State Scan of Social and Emotional Learning Standards, Preschool through High School*

CASEL's goal is for every child to receive evidence-based instruction in social and emotional learning. Learning standards are central to this goal because of their importance in current educational practice. With funding from the Buena Vista Foundation and NoVo Foundation, CASEL and the University of Illinois at Chicago Social Emotional Learning Research Group are conducting a review of educational standards related to social and emotional learning from preschool to high school in all 50 states and the six territories.

#### **Five Components of Comprehensive Social and Emotional Learning**

- Self-Awareness (identifying emotions, self-confidence, self-efficacy)
- Self-Management (impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, motivation, goal setting, organizational skills)
- Social-Awareness (perspective taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, respect for others)
- Relationship Skills (communication, social engagement, relationships, cooperation, resolving conflicts, seeking help or helping)
- Responsible Decision Making (problem solving skills, ethical responsibility)

Learning standards matter. The 2006 *State of the State Standards* report by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation presented several analyses linking high-quality standards in academic subject areas to student achievement measured on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Further, we know from the meta-analysis by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) that evidence-based instruction in social and emotional learning boosts academic achievement (by 11 points, on average, on standardized tests). And research by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted in Alaska suggests that learning standards may increase the likelihood that students will receive instruction in social and emotional learning, experience improved school connectedness, and become better learners.

The purpose of the State Scan is to understand whether and how states currently address social and emotional learning in their learning standards--an important step toward achieving the goal of every child receiving high-quality education in social and emotional learning. During our initial interviews with state leaders, many have expressed great enthusiasm about collaborating with us in this effort.

## *What are Learning Standards?*

State learning standards are statements about what students should know and be able to do as a result of educational instruction. Standards present the goals and benchmarks for student learning in each subject area, grade by grade.

States have the authority to develop their own learning standards, which is usually done with input from a large number of educational professionals and other stakeholders. School districts may have some flexibility when adopting state standards as long as they comply with the state's overall goals.

Although far from perfect, national model standards are an attempt to raise the educational bar by providing examples of high-quality standards in diverse areas of the curriculum. Although states usually do not adopt national standards outright, many states use national model standards from different subject areas to inform the process of developing their own standards.

Learning standards have been an important focus of educational reform since the 1980s. By 1998 almost all states had learning standards for Math and English Language Arts, although researchers and educational scholars have noted that the quality of standards across the country is variable. To improve the quality of learning standards for Math and English Language Arts nationwide, states came together to develop the Common Core, which are national model standards designed largely to replace a state's own standards in Math and English Language Arts. This effort was coordinated by the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center). The Obama administration later launched the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top Initiative, which required adoption of these rigorous, widely shared standards and assessments as one of six major selection criteria for participation. Forty-two states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have adopted these national model standards.

### **Why Are Learning Standards Important?**

Learning standards create uniformity and coherence in education by establishing and communicating priorities, and providing a common language and structure for instruction within subject areas. Standards are one element of a coordinated approach to effective education that includes:

- Clear and appropriate educational goals and benchmarks;
- Evidence-based curricula and instruction to achieve those goals;
- Professional development for teachers to support high-quality instruction; and
- Assessment that allows teachers to monitor student progress.

Standards tend to be taken more seriously when they are connected to assessment. In turn, this is likely to create demand and opportunities for professional development. Where standards are taken seriously, they become the plan or blueprint for instruction, shaping and influencing what happens in the classroom. When standards for social and emotional learning were introduced in Illinois, schools responded by developing plans, selecting evidence-based programs, and seeking out high-quality professional development in social and emotional learning for teachers.

## *Findings of the CASEL State Scan to Date*

The State Scan began in May 2010. Below we present early findings.

### **Key Findings**

1. Infant/toddler and prekindergarten learning standards for social and emotional learning are well-developed and widely disseminated nationwide. A total of 48 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico have learning standards for social and emotional learning at the pre-kindergarten level; 40 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico have a pre-kindergarten domain that includes the words “emotional” and “social” in their title, while six other states have the words “personal” and “social.” All states have fairly comprehensive standards relevant to social and emotional learning in that every state has at least one standard for “personal” development and one standard for “social” development.
2. There have been three different approaches to developing K-12 standards for social and emotional learning. Illinois is the one state that currently has free-standing, comprehensive standards at the K-12 level, but more states are moving in this direction.

### **Early Childhood Guidelines**

Our review of early childhood guidelines found that 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico have learning standards for prekindergarten, 34 states have learning standards for infants and toddlers, and almost all (at both levels) include guidelines related to social and emotional learning.

<b>Examples of How States Conceptualize Social and Emotional Learning Standards at the Early Childhood Level</b>	
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>Washington</b>
<p><b>Social and Emotional Development:</b>  <b>Learning about Myself and Others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>self-concept</b></li> <li>- <b>self-regulation</b></li> <li>- <b>pro-social relationships with adults</b></li> <li>- <b>pro-social relationships with peers</b></li> </ul>	<p>Social Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interactions with adults</li> <li>- interactions with peers</li> <li>- adaptive social behavior</li> <li>- appreciating diversity</li> </ul> <p>Emotional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- self-concept</li> <li>- self-efficacy</li> <li>- self-control</li> <li>- emotional expression</li> </ul>

State leaders and educators increasingly recognize the importance of aligning preschool to high school education, and two states (Idaho and Pennsylvania) have already aligned their early childhood guidelines for social and emotional learning with early elementary standards. A handful of other states are in the process of aligning social emotional learning standards at the early elementary level as well.

Two States Align Social and Emotional Development with Early Elementary Education	
Idaho (first grade)	Pennsylvania (first grade)
<p><b>Domain 3: Social and Emotional Development</b></p> <p><b>Social Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children trust, interact with, and seek assistance from adults.</li> <li>- Children develop friendships with peers.</li> <li>- Children demonstrate positive negotiation skills.</li> <li>- Children demonstrate awareness of behavior and its effects on others.</li> <li>- Children participate positively in group activities.</li> <li>- Children demonstrate sympathy and empathy.</li> <li>- Children develop a sense of humor.</li> <li>- Children adapt to diverse settings.</li> <li>- Children recognize, appreciate, and respect similarities and differences in people.</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotional Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children perceive themselves as unique individuals.</li> <li>- Children demonstrate belief in their abilities.</li> <li>- Children regulate their feelings and impulses.</li> </ul>	<p>Key Learning Area: Personal Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop Self-Concept</li> <li>- Develop Self-Regulation</li> <li>- Develop Social Interactions</li> <li>- Develop Care and Self Reliance</li> </ul>

Most early education standards across the country were developed by educators and stakeholders who were informed by national model standards, including the Head Start Outcomes Framework and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8. Our scan of state prekindergarten guidelines indicates that approximately 48% of states consulted the Head Start Frameworks when developing their standards, and 60% of states relied on the NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practices.

The Head Start Framework organizes social and emotional development in terms of “social relationships,” “self-concept and self-efficacy,” “self-regulation,” and “emotional and behavioral health.” The Head Start Framework also contains important social and emotional content in other learning domains, particularly “Approaches to Learning,” which covers “initiative and curiosity,” “persistence and attentiveness,” and “cooperation.”

According to the NAEYC Position Statement, early childhood education should be informed by an understanding of child development, as well as of the individual child, and the culture and context in which the child lives. Effective teachers are intentional, and they set goals and provide experiences for children that are challenging and achievable.

## K-12 Standards

In contrast to the early childhood guidelines, it is less common at the K-12 level to find free-standing standards related to social and emotional learning.

### Three Approaches States Have Taken in Developing K-12 Standards for Social and Emotional Learning

1. Free-standing, comprehensive social and emotional learning standards
2. Free-standing standards focusing on one or more dimensions of social and emotional learning
3. Integration of goals and benchmarks related to social and emotional learning in other sets of learning standards (e.g., English Language Arts, Health, Social Studies)

**Free-Standing, Comprehensive Standards.** Only one state, Illinois, currently has comprehensive, free-standing learning goals and benchmarks for “Social and Emotional Learning.” Pennsylvania is currently considering adoption of the same goals for K-12 social and emotional learning, although Pennsylvania calls them “Interpersonal Skill Standards.” A number of additional states (e.g., New York, Washington, and Kansas) are considering or adopting state policies that would have the effect of moving those states toward development of comprehensive, free-standing social and emotional learning standards.

### Examples of How States Conceptualize Social and Emotional Learning in Free-Standing, Comprehensive Standards at the K-12 Level

#### Illinois Standards for Social and Emotional Learning (Adopted 2004)

- Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success
- Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships
- Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts

#### Pennsylvania Interpersonal Skills Standards (Draft – Not Yet Adopted)

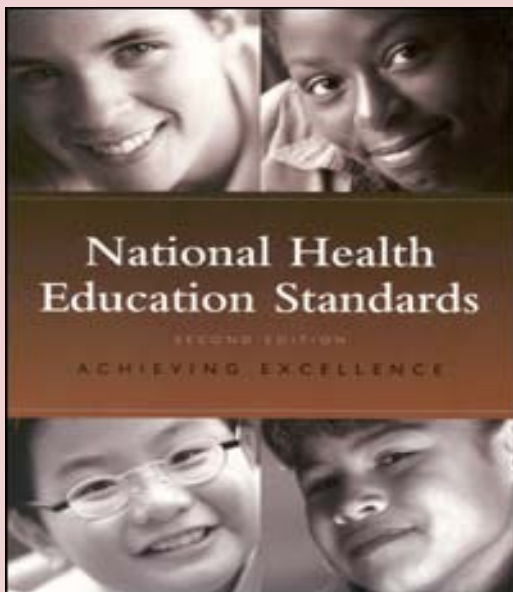
- Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life successes
- Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships and respect for cultural diversity
- Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behavior in individual, family, school, and community contexts

Also, as noted above in the discussion of early childhood guidelines, Pennsylvania and Idaho have both developed comprehensive, free-standing standards for social and emotional learning at the early elementary grades (K-3 for Idaho and K-2 for Pennsylvania) as part of aligning their early childhood guidelines with K-12 standards.

**Free-Standing, Focused Standards.** Several additional states address one or more elements (but not the full range) of social and emotional learning in free-standing standards. For example, Washington and Kansas have free-standing standards for Communication, which emphasize speaking and listening skills as well as cooperation. Vermont has free-standing standards called *Vital Results* that address communication, reasoning and problem solving, personal development, and responsibility. And Tennessee has free-standing standards in Service-Learning for grades 9-12, which include decision making and problem solving, goal setting, developing a plan of action, demonstrating a sense of purpose, and communication.

**Integration of Social and Emotional Learning into Other Sets of Learning Standards.** Most states have social and emotional learning content infused to one degree or another in other sets of learning standards. To illustrate this approach, we use examples from national model standards, which, as noted above, many states use to develop their own standards. National model standards often contain elements of social and emotional learning. For example, 42 states and two territories are in the process of adopting the Common Core Standards in Math and English Language Arts, which contain standards on communication (especially speaking and listening), cooperation skills, and problem solving. National model standards in Social Studies (used by most states to develop state standards) help students recognize the influence of groups and emphasize responsible decision making and good citizenship. National model standards in Science, used by 42 states, address problem solving. National model standards in Health, used by 42 states, help students develop communication skills, decision making skills, and goal-setting skills. Finally, although only seven states (Alabama, Kansas, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, and Wisconsin) have adopted the National Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Standards for students, these are quite comprehensive in terms of social and emotional learning. Although integration into other sets of standards is important, this approach may not place sufficient emphasis on social and emotional learning, which is why CASEL recommends free-standing standards for social and emotional learning, as well as integration of social and emotional learning into other sets of learning standards.

**Example of How Social and Emotional Learning is Integrated into National Model Standards for Health**



- Standard 2: Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors
- Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks
- Standard 5: Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health
- Standard 6: Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health
- Standard 7: Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks
- Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health

## **Conclusions**

This is a time of great opportunity for the development of high-quality, comprehensive standards for social and emotional learning from preschool to high school, and CASEL is committed to developing well-articulated standards that can provide guidance for each state.

Although almost every state already has early learning standards that address social and emotional learning, there is work to be done in aligning those standards with K-12 education. Except for Illinois, most states are only beginning the journey toward comprehensive, free-standing standards in social and emotional learning for K-12, but more and more states are moving in this direction. Most states include social and emotional learning standards to one degree or another in standards for other subject areas.

Although integration of social and emotional learning standards across learning areas is beneficial, we also believe it is important to develop free-standing, comprehensive standards in order to make social and emotional learning a clear priority. Because states rely heavily on national models to develop their own standards, we recommend that national model standards for social and emotional learning be developed.

In the next year, CASEL and the University of Illinois at Chicago Social Emotional Learning Research Group will communicate about the findings of the State Scan with departments of education in all 50 states and six territories as well as with other strategic audiences. We will also convene a working group to design model preschool to high school social and emotional learning standards. And we will look at the Common Core Standards and national model standards in other areas to highlight where social and emotional learning can be emphasized and elaborated.

We will identify a small group of states that express interest in collaborating to develop and implement social and emotional learning standards as part of their student learning standards. Our five-year goal is to establish comprehensive developmental standards for social and emotional learning, from preschool through high school, in 20 states by 2015.