State Standards to Advance Social and Emotional Learning

Findings from CASEL's State Scan of Social and Emotional Learning Standards, Preschool through High School, 2014

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Abstract

The purpose of the CASEL State Scan is to support the development of high-quality standards for social and emotional learning (SEL), preschool through high school, across the country (Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Weissberg & Mart, 2011). This brief summarizes recent findings from CASEL's State Scan (Dusenbury, Newman, Weissberg, Goren, Domitrovich & Mart, in press), which reviewed the research literature on learning standards generally to identify key components of high-quality standards and assessed the status of each state in developing well-articulated learning standards for SEL, preschool through high school. This brief also provides recommendations to support development of high-quality SEL standards, including examples from states identified as part of CASEL's State Scan. We conclude with a discussion of CASEL's plans for advancing high-quality standards for SEL nationwide.

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The key elements of high-quality SEL standards have been identified in research (Dusenbury et al., in press). They include:

- Free-standing standards that provide simple, clear, and concise statements and developmental benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do in terms of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (see definitions for these five core competencies at the CASEL website).
- Integration with standards from other subject areas.
- Guidance on how adults can support students through teaching practices.
- Guidance on how to create a positive learning environment and school climate essential to social and emotional development;
- Guidance on how to make instruction culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate.
- Tools to support high-quality implementation, including evidence-based programs, assessment, and professional development.

Preschool SEL Standards: Progress and Challenges

CASEL's scan of state learning standards over the past three years reveals that there is growing momentum across the country for the development of educational standards for SEL at the preschool level.

- Most states (49) have free-standing preschool standards for social-emotional development, and many of these states also support SEL standards with other guidelines and resources. For example, many states work to support implementation of preschool standards through assessment tools and professional development.
- Preschool standards often contain many of the features of high-quality standards identified above. Specifically, at the preschool level 90 percent of states provided student indicators or benchmarks for SEL, guidance on how teachers and caregivers could support development for SEL, and/or guidelines for creating a positive environment. We also found that, on average, nine out of ten states provided guidelines on how to make instruction culturally relevant, and eight out of ten states provided guidelines on how to make instruction linguistically relevant. Nevertheless, there is wide variability in how states do each of these things. Some provided guidelines in the introduction to the standards, others provided guidelines in the introduction to the section on social-emotional development, and others provided guidelines (for how teachers could support development of SEL, or how to create a positive learning environment) under each specific standard for SEL.
- There was also wide variability in the number and clarity of SEL standards each state provides, as well as in the range of age levels covered by preschool standards statements. For example, Alabama has a total of 16 statements in its social-emotional domain at the four-year-old age level, while Alaska has 77 for four-year-olds. Idaho has 113 for SEL that cover the age range from 36 to 60 months.

K to 12 SEL Standards: Progress and Challenges

In contrast to the situation at the preschool level, much work remains in achieving broad-scale adoption of SEL standards at the K-12 level.

- At the K-12 level only three states have adopted comprehensive SEL standards with developmental benchmarks. Illinois was the first state to do so in 2004. Kansas and Pennsylvania both adopted standards for SEL in 2012. At this point, Illinois and Kansas have at least some of the additional features to support SEL standards. Because preschool standards have many of the elements of high-quality standards, they serve as a model to states developing K-12 SEL standards.
- At the K-12 level SEL standards often are integrated into other sets of standards, including the Common Core State Standards. However, when SEL standards are integrated into other standards they are often scattered and lacking in comprehensiveness. Typically they are not systematically and developmentally sequenced across grade levels. We recommend that in order to establish SEL as a clear priority, there should be free-standing standards for SEL, along with developmental benchmarks for every grade level.

Integrating Preschool and K-12 SEL Standards

Some states have begun the process of developing SEL standards through the early elementary grades, as part of the process of aligning early childhood standards with K-12 standards. Idaho and Washington are examples of how two states have addressed SEL standards through third grade. Illinois and Pennsylvania have also aligned their preschool standards for SEL with their K-12 standards for SEL.

Recommendations for High-quality SEL Standards with Examples from States

CASEL recommends that every state develop and implement high-quality standards for SEL, preschool through

high school. To help states achieve this, we identified the following examples from states for each of the six elements of high-quality standards.

1. High-quality standards for SEL are free-standing and comprehensive across the five core competencies and provide developmental benchmarks for SEL, preschool through high school.

- See Illinois example of how preschool standards for SEL are organized beginning on page 93.
- See Illinois example of K-12 standards and performance indicators for SEL
- See Kansas example of K-12 standards for SEL and character development.
- See Pennsylvania example for preschool through high school standards for SEL.

For a deeper discussion of the process of developing SEL standards in Illinois and Pennsylvania, see Zinsser, Weissberg & Dusenbury, in press .

2. High-quality standards for SEL are integrated and reflected in standards from other subject areas.

- See example of how SEL is reflected in the Common Core State Standards.
- See example of how SEL is also reflected in National Health Education Standards.

3. High-quality standards for SEL provide guidance on how adults can support students through teaching practices.

- See Idaho example of "Caregiver Strategies" under Social and Emotional Development Goals.
- See Washington State example of "Ideas to Try with Children" on page 72.

4. High-quality standards for SEL provide guidance on how to create a positive learning environment and school climate essential to social and emotional development.

- See California discussion of well-designed environments (preschool) beginning on page 4.
- See Indiana discussion of positive environments (preschool) on page 11.
- See Illinois example for creating positive learning environments (K-12).

5. High-quality standards for SEL provide guidance on how to make instruction culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate.

- See Alaska discussion of "Supporting Individual Differences" on page 54
- See Idaho discussion of "Cultural Context" in Essential Practices.
- See Washington State discussion of "Children Can Learn More Than One Language" on page 8.

6. High-quality standards for SEL also provide tools to support implementation, including evidence-based programs, assessment, and professional development.

- Evidence-Based Programs. See CASEL example of evidence-based preschool and elementary programs.
- Assessment. See Indiana discussion of assessment on pages 7-8.
- Professional Development. See New Jersey discussion of professional development (and assessment) on pages 30-34.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The CASEL State Scan has found increasing momentum and opportunity for the development of high-quality, comprehensive standards for SEL from preschool to high school across the country. In the past year CASEL has been working with the National Governors Association (NGA) and The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to support states that have expressed an interest in developing learning standards for SEL. Based on our experiences working with states, CASEL has also developed the following plan for achieving our goal of promoting high-quality standards for SEL, preschool through high school, in all 50 states:

1. *Develop voluntary model standards for SEL.* In order to assist states that are interested in developing standards for SEL, CASEL will complete a draft of voluntary "model standards for SEL, preschool through high school. CASEL's will provide a variety of options for organizing and structuring standards.
2. *Disseminate model standards for SEL. When* the final set of model standards is complete, we will create a website and communications strategy designed to share the model standards with all 50 states.
3. *Support states developing standards for SEL on a broad scale.* We will continue to work with the NGA and the CCSSO and their state partners to support their efforts to develop high-quality standards for SEL. We will also develop strategies and tools for sharing information and supporting states embarking on the important work of developing high-quality standards for SEL (e.g., webinars and workshops on standards development).
4. *Assess the impact of model standards and support efforts.* We will systematically assess the impact of CASEL's efforts to promote adoption of SEL standards.

The development of high-quality standards for social and emotional learning is still in a relatively early stage. CASEL's State Scan project has found promising examples of such standards from preschool through high school and identified clear guidelines for the development of future standards. The work is well underway.

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