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Making SEL Assessment Work: Ten Practitioner Beliefs

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Executive Summary

Making Assessment Work: Ten Practitioner Beliefs was developed by the National Practitioner Advisory Group on Using Data to Inspire SEL Practice (NPAG), a group of social and emotional learning (SEL) practice leaders convened to provide insights on SEL. Collectively, we believe that SEL assessment is a valuable investment. At the same time, we caution that assessment of social-emotional competencies and SEL practices, when not implemented with a strengths-based, growth-oriented focus, can be more harmful than helpful.

Educators, program leaders, and policymakers recognize the value of holistically supporting young people's social, emotional, and academic development.[1] Assessment of social and emotional competencies helps paint a fuller picture of youth's capabilities and needs. As widespread implementation of SEL practices gains traction, SEL data are increasingly available in multiple forms. Available data speak to culture and climate of settings, the implementation of SEL programs and practices, and growth in individuals' development of social and emotional competencies.

The SEL process is dynamic and lifelong, and the multidisciplinary SEL field has wrestled with how to capture various expressions of social and emotional competencies. The assessment of social and emotional competencies, as well as the assessment of SEL practices, require careful consideration. Key to the effective assessment of social and emotional competencies, we believe, is a continuous improvement lens: that is, the understanding that SEL data can be used in conjunction with other data to improve efforts, rather than evaluate or categorize youth and adults.

This consensus statement was developed from discussions and work of the National Practitioner Advisory Group. It is designed to facilitate a stronger practitioner voice in discussions and decisions concerning SEL assessment.

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Those who intend to measure and assess SEL must guard against bias, assess for sound reasons, protect individual privacy, and consider the strengths of youth and adults. Those assessing must be clear on why, what, and to what end they are assessing. Otherwise, schools, districts, programs, and service providers run the risk of assessing SEL through a deficit lens.

This consensus statement reflects NPAG's insights on how assessment of social and emotional competencies, as well as SEL practices, should be planned, implemented, and interpreted.[1] Throughout the statement, we *do not* advocate for a single type of assessment or suggest that every program, state, or district adopt SEL assessment. However, we recognize that many educators and program staff are *already* assessing SEL, formally and informally, and that many more are considering an assessment path. As practice leaders, we offer these insights based on our experience with SEL and assessment to date for consideration, conversation, and further exploration.

We view this document as the culmination of our efforts, as well as a basis for new conversations about exactly how, why, and to what end SEL assessment should occur. Our collective hope is that this position statement guides future actions about assessing SEL ethically and from a strengths-based perspective.

About the Statement

This statement is intended for use by practitioners who are working to support social and emotional development, from early childhood through adulthood. Additionally, the statement provides valuable practitioner insights to researchers, assessment developers, and others interested in the SEL field. Each of the ten belief statements is undergirded by a deeper explanation of the belief as well as a rationale based in research. For each belief, we outline actions to guide practice leaders in carrying out the belief statements. Each section ends with reflection questions to consider with your leadership team as you embark on the SEL assessment journey.

About the National Practitioner Advisory Group

NPAG is a group of 28 educators, youth development professionals, school administrators, state and district education staff, and nonprofit out-of-school time leaders from across the country with expertise in SEL. More than 200 individuals applied to the program, and the group of 28 was invited based on their leadership in local, state, and organizational efforts to advance SEL and their experience in assessing social and emotional competencies. NPAG offers a critical, yet untapped perspective in the

[1] This statement reflects the consensus of the group. The statement does not necessarily reflect the views of CASEL or AIR or any funders of the Assessment Work Group. The statement does not reflect the views of any organization to which individual NPAG members belong.

assessment conversation. NPAG was initially convened by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to engage a practitioner perspective in the tasks of the Assessment Work Group of the *Establishing Practical Social-Emotional Competence Assessments of Preschool to High School Students* project. Drs. Dale Blyth, CASEL consultant, and Deborah Moroney, AIR, serve as NPAG co-chairs. Elizabeth Nolan, AIR, serves as project manager.

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I. Effective assessment begins with a strong vision and intentionality.

Effective assessment of SEL practices and competencies must be driven by a clear vision and explicit goals for desired outcomes, including a vision for how settings, contexts, and culture should facilitate learning and development. The decision to assess SEL practices and social and emotional competencies must be intentional, deliberate, and collaborative. Leaders must engage key stakeholders in developing a common vision for the assessment of social and emotional competencies and the importance of thoughtful assessment. Assessment should be purposeful—measuring the practices and competencies that are most important, aligned to the overall vision, and reflective of the chosen SEL implementation strategies.

Rationale

Assessment of any kind should be tied to the goals and vision of the organization implementing the assessment.[2,3] Organizational goals, implementation of SEL practices or programs, and assessment of social and emotional outcomes should align. Further, assessments should measure the intended implementation goals and outcomes. Measuring many, or misaligned, SEL practices and social-emotional competencies can lead to disjointed efforts and inaccurate feedback on how well a strategy is working.[4] Intentionally selecting which social and emotional competencies to measure, using frameworks as a starting point, will help establish a baseline and provide feedback for continuous improvement.[5]

Actions to Achieve the Belief

What are Assessment and Data Use?
Assessment is the process of systematically collecting data. Data use is the practice of using data or information to inform practice – at the individual level, or at the program, site, or organizational level – to drive improvements in practice.

- Decide why and for what purposes your organization wishes to assess SEL. Assessment and subsequent data use should tie directly to the vision and goals that have been set and the efforts to reach them.
- Closely examine the ways your organization defines youth success, and consider whether success includes a holistic, or "whole child," approach.
- Before selecting or creating assessments, take stock of the scope of the social and emotional competencies and practices you wish to foster and ultimately assess. Select, align, and use SEL frameworks to connect to system, district, building, classroom, and program goals.
- Clearly articulate the purpose of SEL, SEL goals, and SEL assessment in local improvement plans, as well as in program, student, and parent handbooks.

Reflection Questions

As you set the vision for your SEL assessment journey, consider asking the following questions of yourself and your leadership team.

1. What is your "why" for assessing SEL? Who will it benefit?
2. How will you create a vision for SEL assessment, both with and for stakeholders?
3. Which stakeholders are important to engage in collaborative visioning?
4. How will you generate momentum and investment in implementing that vision?
5. Which SEL practices and competencies will you need to measure to gain insight into the progress you're making?

II. Assess social and emotional competencies on the basis of strengths, not deficits.

SEL assessment requires a strengths-based approach: that is, assessment requires the understanding that all individuals possess social and emotional strengths rather than weaknesses or risks. We believe it is important first to assess the strengths of social and emotional competencies in each child and then identify areas in which youth may struggle to further build youth assets in those areas. Likewise, we believe that the assessment of adult-driven SEL practices must consider the strengths of implementation first.

Rationale

Individuals present their unique SEL strengths in different ways across different settings.[6] Some settings may prove challenging for youth as well as adults to fully express the range of their social and emotional competencies.[7] Data from assessments should be framed in a way that highlights the strengths of individuals rather than areas in which they may be subjectively "lacking." SEL data should be used to inform and improve practices, *not to* diagnose, identify, or categorize individuals.

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Recognize that SEL as a field is growing, adapting, and changing. Developers and researchers continue to refine tools and assessments. Keep an open mind about SEL data and assessment, and don't be afraid to rethink as you (and the field!) learn more.
- Coach educators on how to use and communicate the results from a formal SEL assessment in a positive light with parents and families.
- Don't be afraid to use information outside of formal SEL assessments to inform reflection, interpret holistically, and elevate strengths.

- Carefully read assessment developers' descriptions, questions, and results to gauge how developers think about SEL.
- Do not make assumptions about behavior based on comparisons or perceived common norms. Youth have different lived experiences and individual developmental trajectories, even if they are the same age. Employ practices that foster positive relationships to ensure young people have the supports to buffer stressors in their environment and experience that may otherwise hinder their learning and development.

Reflection Questions

1. How can you reframe your thinking and words to put young people's and adults' strengths first when discussing social and emotional competencies? What are some ways to promote opportunities for positive development of these competencies?
2. When examining measures of social and emotional competencies, ask how developers demonstrate that their measures are strengths-based. Are these measures ones that you would be comfortable administering to your own children?
3. When assessing SEL practice, how can you emphasize adult strengths?
4. Consider that social-emotional competencies include individual, as well as collective, assets. Both help youth thrive and promote a sense of belonging. How are you exploring both?

III. A positive organizational culture and climate is foundational to social and emotional assessment.

When our learning environments emphasize collaboration and inclusion, we establish conditions that accelerate progress and growth for all. Assessing SEL is one piece of a larger effort to foster healthy social and emotional development in context. By committing to improving the organizational culture and climate, organizations set a strong foundation for success.

Example from the field: The Iowa Department of Education, as part of its obligations under the Every Student Succeeds Act, requires that all third through 12th graders participate in a school climate survey, the Conditions for Learning. Optional teacher and parent surveys are in process. These surveys will allow triangulation of the data to illuminate gaps in perception so schools can identify key areas of need and better understand the context of the social-emotional landscape of their school.

Rationale

SEL is influenced by the settings, contexts, and cultures in which social and emotional competencies are learned, developed, and applied.[8] The environment—school, district, state, program, or organization—sets the stage for learning and development that happen in that environment.[9] Therefore, a commitment to

an inclusive, positive environment is a necessary precursor to successful assessment of SEL implementation and growth. Learning environments that are physically and emotionally unsafe are barriers to the positive development of social and emotional competencies.

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Conduct an analysis within your organization to identify strengths areas for improvement to the environment. This analysis can be formal, such as by using a climate and culture survey, or informal, such as by holding a focus group or a meeting with staff and stakeholders, including youth and their families.
- Learn about the contexts, cultures, and experiences youth bring to their schools and programs. Youth assets matter greatly for SEL implementation and assessment and enhance the learning environment.
- Commit to intentionally creating and supporting a positive culture and climate. Create deliberate processes by codifying the best practices of your stakeholders and staff.

Reflection Questions

1. How can your organization create positive institutional supports for adults and youth to support them in their SEL growth?
2. What types of resources will be required to support a positive climate and culture?
3. What areas of strength currently exist in your school or organization's culture? What are some areas for improvement?
4. Do adults feel emotionally safe in the learning environment? Do youth? How do you know?

IV. When implemented and assessed through an equity lens, SEL can mitigate bias and promote appreciation of diversity.

An understanding of educational equity is fundamental to ethically assessing SEL practices, measuring social and emotional competencies, and interpreting data. SEL must be conceptualized, implemented, and assessed in a way that reflects the cultural assets of youth, their identities, their lived experiences, and their inherent strengths. Importantly, leaders must actively guard against implicit bias when selecting and implementing assessments of SEL competencies.

Rationale

Educational equity refers to a state where youth have access to the resources, supports, and educational rigor they need to reach their potential by eliminating systemic barriers erected on the

basis of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income.[10] Some assessments of SEL may be biased toward a particular group; that is, assessments may privilege expressions of cultural norms that do not hold for all groups. SEL programming and assessment that promote equity allow young people to build an understanding of cultural identity and diversity, inequities in their environments, and an awareness of their potential to pursue equity within their community contexts and beyond.[11]

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Identify SEL frameworks, practices, and assessments that elevate equity, diversity, and inclusion as primary drivers. Look for frameworks and assessments that celebrate culture, identity, and context, rather than frameworks or assessments that squash difference or artificially normalize a perceived, dominant norm.
- Evaluate SEL assessments for bias by looking at reference samples. Determine whether the assessment was studied and tested with diverse learners, and whether the learners in the study were similar to the youth with whom you work. Examine the questions being asked related to SEL on assessments. Could the items be misinterpreted or be challenging to answer?
- Foster a brave space[12] to hold conversations about implicit and explicit bias for youth and adults. By having conversations in a nonconfrontational manner, concepts about bias, racism, and other "-isms" can more easily be addressed when issues arise.
- Pair SEL programming with culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy to accelerate the progress of all youth, guard against bias, and promote cultural competence.
- Assess the extent to which practices promote equity and are not used to discriminate—intentionally or unintentionally—against groups or individuals.

Reflection Questions

1. Who is in the room making decisions about SEL assessments? Are these decisionmakers reflective of the youth—in terms of race, lived experience, socioeconomic status, gender identity, context, and culture?
2. When interpreting data, what strengths do you bring to the table? What biases might you bring with you? How can you check those biases?
3. How might youth interpret and respond to items on assessments? Is there potential for offense, confusion, or misinterpretation? If so, are there ways to clarify the questions or the instructions?
4. Are there any glaring discrepancies when we disaggregate data by demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender)? What practices, biases, or structural barriers might be causing these discrepancies? What practices can we put in place to mitigate these barriers and biases?

V. Recognizing and promoting adult social and emotional competence is essential to thoughtful, sustainable assessment.

Adults play a critical role in the development of social and emotional competencies in youth and each other. Adults can serve as positive role models for young people, by demonstrating the attitudes, skills, mindsets, and competencies they hope to foster in youth to support their overall success. Adult awareness of their own social and emotional competencies is a precursor to supporting social, emotional, and academic development in others.

Rationale

Every person has a unique set of social and emotional competencies. Adults who are knowledgeable about supportive SEL practices, and are attuned to their own social and emotional competencies, will be better equipped to implement practices that support SEL. Social and emotional development is a lifelong process[13]; across developmental periods, and even as adults, we must be aware of our strengths, be open to reflection, and realize that we can always learn strategies to develop our social and emotional competencies. SEL is reciprocal: adults' ability to engage in mutually respectful and authentic relationships is key to young people's engagement in learning and developing social and emotional competencies.[14] When adults commit to understanding, developing, and reflecting on their own social-emotional competencies, they are better able to create supportive learning environments and collaborate to foster young people's social and emotional learning and development.

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Offer training for all staff that gives adults the chance to experience SEL practices and assessments before having youth engage with those practices and assessments. This training serves a dual purpose of demonstrating a commitment to SEL and increasing adult social and emotional competence.
- Provide adults with strategies and guidance for how to create intentional interactions with youth that foster relationships and social and emotional competencies. Adult-to-adult, adult-to-youth, and youth-to-youth interactions should provide positive examples of SEL.
- Offer tips for explicit learning strategies and discussion of competencies, as well as ways to embed SEL into everyday interactions with youth.
- Be knowledgeable about integrating SEL into school or organizational leader practices and decision-making processes. Strive to model SEL at all levels of your organization.
- Include information and language about your organization's culture and values in job descriptions and postings. Use interviews to describe your culture and values; ask applicants to

demonstrate specific skills, attitudes, mind-sets, and competencies important to your organization's culture and ongoing learning style.

- Create norms that promote ongoing peer discussion of social and emotional competencies. Encourage open discussion to allow adults to reflect on the meaning of SEL data, and how well specific SEL strategies are working.
- Create and build in natural opportunities for adults to identify and reflect on their own social and emotional competencies—during preservice professional development, ongoing professional development and coaching, and in-school collaboration with colleagues.

Reflection Questions

1. How and when will adults assess, reflect on, and foster their own social and emotional competencies? Do adults in your organization have sufficient space and mentorship to reflect on their own social and emotional learning and development?
2. What opportunities and structures already exist in which you can integrate adult social and emotional development?
3. What are the risks of not prioritizing adult social and emotional competencies?

A number of adult self-assessment tools exist. School climate and program quality assessment tools often measure components of adult practice. Consider how to include these in your professional development efforts and practice. See the accompanying resource list for more ideas.

VI. Social and emotional competencies evolve over time. Therefore, assess for growth, rather than finite outcomes.

Assessments should be sensitive to continuity and change in social and emotional competencies, influenced by an individual's developmental period, experiences, and external factors. An adolescent and a kindergartener do not express social and emotional competencies in the same way. Individual youth competencies should be measured for growth over time, rather than norming social and emotional competencies to limited samples. When selecting or considering assessments of social and emotional competencies, practitioners should look for the differentiation of competencies by developmental milestone in consideration of their lived experience.

Rationale

Social and emotional competencies change and grow as children mature. Youth have different social and emotional capabilities, as well as needs, throughout school and into adulthood.[15] Take care to ensure that developmentally appropriate assessments and benchmarks are used.[16] Further, individuals' social and emotional competencies cannot be summatively assessed with rigor, because there is no "stopping point" to social and emotional development. As assessment developers continue to refine instruments to address such differences, much work remains. Practitioners should approach the assessment of social and emotional competencies with this caveat in mind.

Actions to Achieve This Belief

- Work with curriculum or program implementation teams across grade levels and ages to determine which social and emotional competencies can be reliably assessed in your organization's or program's context.
- Consult child development research to differentiate what youth can do socially and emotionally as they grow up. When considering assessment practices, determine both the *suitability* of the assessment practice for your organization, as well as the developmental period and experiences of the youth you serve.
- Adapt assessments and their administration as needed to meet developmental levels and provide greater access for youth. If you're not sure about the best ways to adapt assessments, ask! Inquire about the "fit" of assessments for the ages and developmental periods of the youth in your school, program, or organization.

Reflection Questions

1. How does your organization differentiate social and emotional competencies across the developmental spectrum?
2. Are the assessments you are considering developmentally appropriate for the youth you serve? (e.g., should prompts be read aloud, should fewer answer choices be offered on surveys)?
3. How will practitioners in your organization be able to recognize and assess the development of social and emotional competencies?

VII. Fostering adult capacity to assess social and emotional competencies and interpret data can improve SEL practice.

A lifelong learning approach is imperative when building adult capacity to effectively use SEL data to inform practice. To effectively build and retain adult capacity, efforts on the part of organizations as well as individuals are required.

Fostering Adult Capacity: How It's Done

"This year, our organizational evaluation team debriefed with our implementation team on how to talk to partners about assessment results. It was very useful! We were able to make sure we all had a common understanding of the assessment and what it measures—but also, the imperfect nature of the assessment itself. The team raised a great suggestion of reorganizing the assessment information into categories that align perfectly with the SEL competencies we emphasize in our training. This process did really support continuous improvement." —Brenda McLaughlin, BellXcel

Rationale

Effectively building adult capacity to assess SEL and use SEL data for improvement requires that organizations commit to fostering adult knowledge, skills, and competencies to understand SEL frameworks, programs, and practices as well as using data and information to improve SEL practices.[17,18] Applying a strengths-based lens to adult SEL will allow adults to continue a lifelong process of developing their own social and emotional competencies.

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Offer standard as well as differentiated workshops on SEL for all adults in the organization. Standard workshops will allow new and veteran employees to learn or apply their organization's SEL strategies. Differentiated workshops will allow all individuals to see how SEL and SEL data apply in their role in the organization.
- Review, with staff, their familiarity and preparedness to understand the data they are asked to collect and use. Ask whether staff need more support for interpreting SEL data.
- Provide resources to staff to use and communicate the results of data collection efforts with key stakeholders, including youth.
- Identify organizational champions for adult SEL. These champions should be equipped with the skills and resources to mentor adults in their analysis of SEL data.
- Encourage staff to question current practices in the spirit of continuous improvement, as SEL research and knowledge are rapidly evolving.

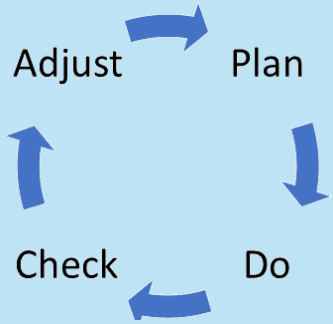
Reflection Questions

1. How can your organization promote adult capacity to use and interpret data for SEL? What are the opportunities to learn and grow?
2. How can your organization support capacity-building in SEL interpretation across levels and sectors of the organization?
3. How can you promote ongoing discussions of social and emotional competencies among adults?

VIII. Use SEL data to continuously improve practice.

Data are most powerful when used to improve efforts continuously. In our view, the integration of SEL with academic content instruction is imperative. We believe that SEL assessment data can and should be used in conjunction with other data and measures, qualitative and quantitative, to inform practice and continuously improve. Data should not be used to judge organizations or individuals; rather, data should be used to support change and improvement.

Be intentional about what you want to assess and why. Select or develop measures that provide feedback on the key practices and competencies that are important to you. Enact your assessment plan and analyze how well your assessment strategies worked. Adjust as needed to continuously improve.



Rationale

SEL is a large and interdisciplinary field, with an innumerable number of practices and competencies that can be enacted and developed in adults and youth. Practitioners who seek to assess SEL should consider what they wish to learn as an outcome of any new assessment and what they wish to improve based on the data from the assessment.[19] What gets measured is what gets improved. Many different types of data, which relate to SEL, are already available. Data on attendance and behavior, for example, can be informative about how youth are progressing socially and emotionally.[20] Assessment data can play a constructive role in the effective planning, design, implementation, and, ultimately, adjustment of how to support youth in developing the social and emotional competencies needed to succeed in school, work, and life.

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Ensure that the data you collect can be aggregated, disaggregated, and reported easily. Require vendors to demonstrate how SEL data can be disaggregated to examine subgroup trends and ask how reports will be made accessible for multiple audiences.

- Review academic, SEL, and behavioral data together at regular intervals throughout the year to get a fuller picture of the "whole" child. Make sure that instructional decisions are aimed at improving the overall classroom culture, rather than soliciting specific results on an assessment.
- Recognize that each child is on his or her own educational journey and will manifest social and emotional competencies in a variety of ways, which may be measured or observed by both quantitative and qualitative methods of assessment.
- Consider how you will assess and gather data for both outcome measures and process measures.
  - Outcome measures look at the intended goals of an effort. For your SEL efforts, outcome data might include individual social and emotional competencies, which can be measured through self-report, teacher report, family report, or the performance of tasks.
  - Process measures look at the practices that were implemented during the effort. Collecting these types of data help you understand what is happening in schools and other educational settings and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Assess the clarity and shared understanding of your vision and goals in this area by those who lead, shape, support, and implement practices in your systems, organizations, and settings.
- Assess how well the social and emotional needs and learning of adults in your systems, organizations, and settings are supported and grown to enable them to successfully play their critical roles.
- Assess whether youth are learning and using the social and emotional competencies we believe are critically important for their development. Use this informal lens to explore ways to improve practices and strategies to support SEL.

Reflection Questions

1. How can SEL data be used for improvement?
2. Youth already are assessed in many ways, both formally and informally. Do some of your existing measures address social and emotional competencies? What's missing?
3. How can you encourage the use of multiple types of data (qualitative and quantitative), gathered in diverse ways and at various times?

IX. Authentically engage and collaborate with stakeholders about assessment.

Engaging stakeholders—including support staff, teachers, administrators, youth, families, other community members—in the continuous improvement cycle of SEL is critical. SEL assessment provides natural opportunities to elevate youth voice in data collection and interpretation and hear from our most important audiences: youth and families. Assessment can provide the information needed to guide a direct feedback loop between educators, young people, and families about the culture and quality of their learning environments, adult actions, relationships with adults and youth, and resource investment.

Rationale

Sustaining SEL practices and improving competencies requires buy-in from families and youth, as well as other stakeholders.[21] Rather than conceptualizing SEL as something that must be imparted to youth and adults, educators and leaders should consider SEL a generative process, where youth can take an active role to foster their own competencies through developmentally appropriate youth engagement.[22,23] Practitioners can work together to ensure that data are collected and used collaboratively as a critical tool to strengthen and transform how practitioners continuously improve practices and results across levels.

Ensure that data are used only to help and empower youth, never harm them or violate their privacy. Consider the equity implications of interpreting and sharing data. When transparent and accessible, data can empower youth and families to drive positive changes in their schools and programs.

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Promote youth ownership of identifying their strengths and interpreting and reporting their SEL growth to peers, teachers, and parents.
- Host data workshops for parents and families and include SEL data. Empower parents and families to learn about the data generated for and by youth.
- Consider hosting an annual discussion of how SEL assessment is working (or not working) and invite families, community members, and youth.
- Carve out time to reflect on aggregate results with youth, maintaining confidentiality by identifying trends in specific classrooms and holding open discussions about progress and areas for growth. In these reflections and discussions, be sure to do the following:
  - Co-create norms for looking at feedback and display the norms in a visible place (e.g., focus on potential solutions rather than any problems).
  - Focus on only one or two topics with youth, specifically an area of strength and an area for growth.

- Ask youth to share lessons learned.
- Generate, together with youth, individual and collective next steps.

Reflection Questions

1. How can we ensure stakeholder engagement in the continuous improvement cycle of SEL assessment?
2. How can families, youth, and educators learn from and take ownership of the data that are collected?
3. How can you collaborate with families and youth when selecting SEL frameworks and assessment tools?
4. How have you applied a continuous improvement lens to your academic data? How can you apply these lessons to SEL data?

X. Practical SEL requires both universal and differentiated approaches informed by data.

All youth deserve support for learning and developing their social and emotional competencies, no matter their individual starting points. Assessment and data—when used constructively and with a strengths-based lens—can clarify opportunities for learning and development and identify where more targeted support can be offered.

Rationale

SEL is widely considered a universal intervention. However, youth may need additional supports beyond the universal level to successfully navigate social relationships, confidently express their emotions, and manage their behavior proactively. Assessment and data—including observational, project-based, and self-report measures—can help paint a fuller picture of each child's individual needs and competencies in context.[24] With such data in hand, educators and leaders can reshape their practices to deliver more effective supports with a strengths-based lens.

Actions to Achieve the Belief

- Investigate ways to assess social and emotional development beyond standardized tests and surveys. Project-based learning and performance assessments offer opportunities for youth to demonstrate their growth across multiple social and emotional domains.
- Consider how building-level SEL teams from multiple areas of the school, including special education, can work together to create tiered supports for SEL, based on data. Consider SEL

data from multiple areas of the child's life because different competencies may present in multiple ways in different settings.

- Explore how universal SEL assessments of all youth and resulting improvements in practice can positively influence the need for and delivery of more specialized services.
- Don't use the results from general SEL assessments as the only reason to inform the need for additional services (e.g., special education). Look at attendance rates, behavioral referrals, and surveys of school climate when making universal intervention or program decisions.
- Use a variety of measures when considering youth who may need Tier 2 or Tier 3 SEL interventions. These measures may include behavior referrals, absence/tardy rates, homework incompletion, health office visits, or other methods of seeking out extra help/attention (e.g., frequent visits to the guidance office). Schools also may wish to consider any data that are gathered to screen for exposure to trauma.

Reflection Questions

1. How can you diversify your data about the youth you serve to get a better understanding of their needs and strengths?
2. How do you know when youth need more intensive support in SEL; what are the indicators? How can you ensure young people receive the support they need without emphasizing deficits?
3. How can general and special educators, behavioral health teams, and others come together to identify organization-wide SEL needs, as well as needs for individual youth.

Conclusion

We hope that these 10 beliefs, summarized here, can serve as a springboard for additional discussion, collaboration, and advancement of the work by researchers and practitioners alike. As the field continues to grow and additional learnings are captured, we expect these beliefs will be further honed and evolved by stakeholders across the educational landscape.

1. Begin intentionally and with a strong vision.
2. Assess strengths, not deficits.
3. Create a positive culture and climate.
4. Implement and assess with an equity lens.
5. Recognize the importance of adult social-emotional competence.
6. Measure for growth, not an endpoint.
7. Foster adult capacity continuously.
8. Authentically engage and collaborate with youth and families.
9. Use data to continuously improve SEL practice.
10. Implement universal and differentiated approaches to SEL development.

For momentum to be sustained in the SEL movement, and to assess ethically, we must be clear about what we believe and apply those beliefs in practice. To be sure, there is much work left to do, and we believe practitioners can lead the way. Sufficient time and resources should be devoted to collaboration to collectively understand and foster social and emotional development. Assessment and the wise use of data are a critical part of this process.

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