

Creating A Common Language for Social and Emotional Learning in Delaware

Rodel Teacher Council 2018

The State of SEL

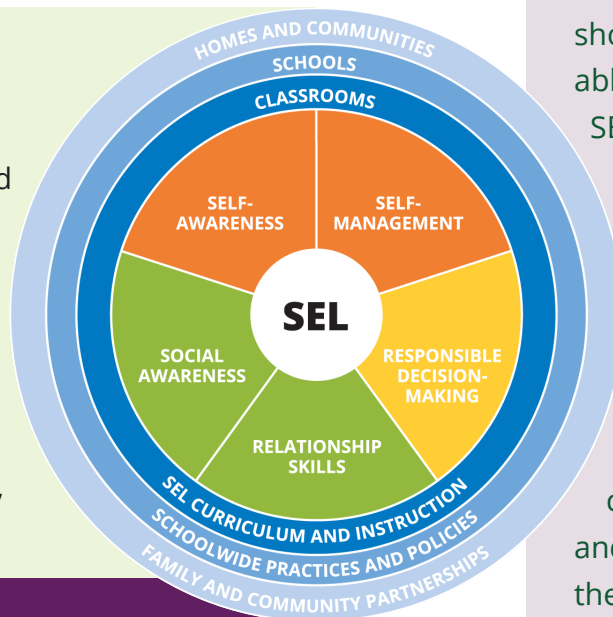
In 2017, the Rodel Teacher Council released *Educators Speak Up: Social and Emotional Learning in Delaware*, a brief report highlighting the results of a statewide survey of more than 200 K-12 teachers. Their message was loud and clear: social and emotional learning (SEL) is critically important to their classrooms and they want a toolkit to better support students' social and emotional needs. Nine out of 10 educators want a common set of expectations for what students should know and be able to do at different stages of social and emotional development, but only about nine percent reported the existence of such standards at their school (44 percent didn't know). This follow-up brief, based on our national and local research, is meant to serve as a resource for educators, districts and charters, and anyone interested in learning more about how to intentionally integrate social, emotional, and academic development.

– Rodel Teacher Council SEL Advocacy Group Members

Definition

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

In surveying educators, we used the CASEL definition for SEL.



Different states use different terms to describe the common language provided to schools and educators:

Social and Emotional...

Guiding Principles

Competencies

Framework

Guidance

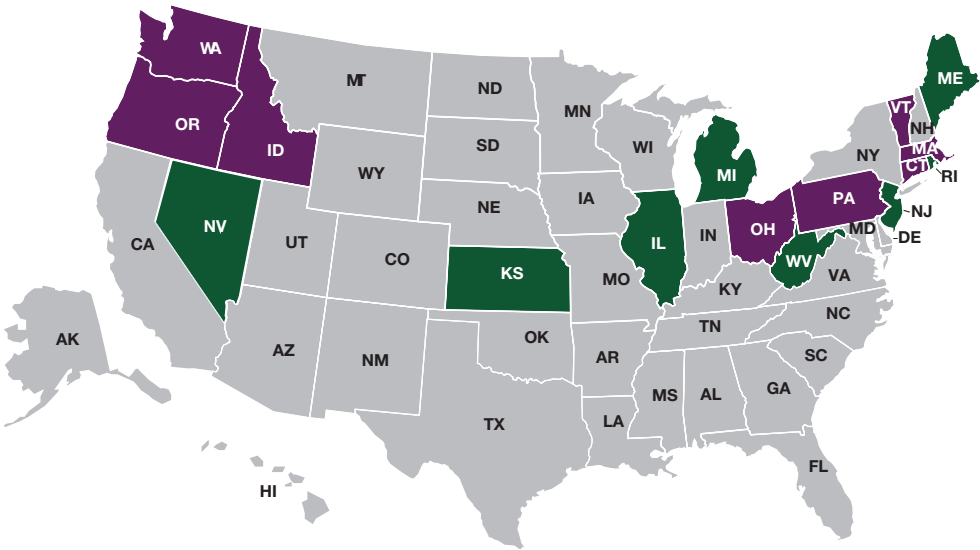
Benchmarks

STANDARDS

Across the country, there is growing momentum to develop a common language for social and emotional learning as states seek to incorporate SEL more explicitly into education practice. Such guidance, which can take the form of “standards,” “learning goals,” “benchmarks,” or “competencies” articulates common goals from pre-K through 12th grade for what students should know and be able to do regarding SEL. Such schoolwide roadmaps can support educators looking to embed SEL in academics, school climate, and culture. By articulating common goals and focusing on the progression of learning and development over time, schools will be better equipped to support students in gaining these critical skills, helping to motivate and inspire them both in school and in life.

National Momentum

While every state utilizes preschool competencies for SEL, more and more states are developing comprehensive, free-standing competencies for K-12 SEL. Based on their work with the Collaborating States Initiative, CASEL reports, as of February 2018 that eight states have also developed competencies for SEL **through early elementary grades**, and another eight **through high school**. By 2019, 16 states are projected to have developed competencies for SEL through high school.



■ K-12 ■ Early Elementary ■ Preschool (all 50 states)

Source: CASEL 2018 State Scorecard Scan. <https://casel.org/state-scan-scorecard-project/>

Examples from other states

Grade levels	Example performance descriptors for SEL competencies
Elementary school students are expected to be able to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and manage emotions and behavior• Recognize personal qualities and external supports• Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals• Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others
Middle and high school students are expected to be able to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify factors that cause stress as they manage their emotions and behavior• Select healthy defense mechanisms• Reduce stress by assessing a situation• Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions• Explain how a change in social policy would impact the behaviors of individuals and groups

What's Underway in Delaware?

Various standards in Delaware have components of social and emotional learning and are a foundation to build upon, but no set of comprehensive, free-standing K-12 competencies for SEL currently exists.

1. Delaware uses **pre-K standards**, like every other state, which contain elements of SEL, such as a student's ability to sustain positive interactions in a small group.
2. Delaware's **health education standards** provide a baseline for integrating SEL competencies. For example, the health standard "Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health," has embedded SEL competencies such as self-awareness and management skills.
3. The **Delaware academic content standards** have natural through-lines to SEL. For example, the English Language Arts standards include that students will "participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners" and "listen to others and take turns speaking." Educators and SEL experts are increasingly acknowledging that building students' SEL skills can help students succeed academically.

"For students to successfully meet (academic) standards, they must possess social-emotional skills. And unless students magically come to school with all these skills in place, deliberate teaching of these skills will be necessary."

—Vicki Zakrzewski, Ph.D., Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley

Why do we need a common language?

SEL is more likely to be effective when there are tools that support high-quality implementation and development.

More than nine out of 10 educators say explicitly adopting state competencies or standards for social and emotional skills—combined with training—would help to:

	% Agree (Overall)	% Strongly Agree
Provide guidance on how to create a positive learning environment and school climate essential to social and emotional development	97%	61%
Provide guidance on how adults can support students through teaching practices	97%	59%
Bring increased awareness of and legitimacy to social and emotional skill development	97%	58%
Provide guidance on how to integrate SEL with other subject areas	97%	50%
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	97%	46%

Quotes from Our Conversations with Delaware SEL Champions

Classroom teachers

"My classroom is not necessarily on the same page as others in the school, and we could all benefit from a **clearer SEL roadmap**. This would also **help me collaborate** better with specialists and parents."

"A schoolwide approach to SEL **supports** the work in my classroom. SEL competencies could be a **tool** to help educators change their practice and embed social and emotional skill development into academic lessons. It can be a foundation for me to make my decisions about my **instruction, classroom management, and professional development**."

District leaders

"Our next step is to **integrate SEL** into our multi-tiered system of supports. We do it in pockets, but we don't explicitly or consistently articulate across all schools what it looks like to **embed social and emotional language into academics and our multi-tier systems of support**. Once we have a common definition of the competencies students should demonstrate, we can then **align our professional development** and existing programs. Currently, this is what we are able to do in academic content areas."

"We know that social and emotional learning is already **interwoven with academic learning and school climate**. So this is not meant to be just one more thing. It's about elevating the importance of SEL being a **shared responsibility of all adults**."

Community Partners

"The biggest need is to develop a common language to help people understand how the many **in- and out-of-school** efforts and initiatives can all support the same goal. Afterschool programs and other expanded learning providers are natural allies for districts and schools doing SEL work. But too often the **opportunities to better coordinate** efforts are missed because they all use different language and operate within separate frameworks. Let's **break down the silos**."

"While schools can certainly help to improve a student's social and emotional skills, the great work of the schools can be elevated with **family support and alignment of community resources**. Other states have offered guidance and support for how families and the communities can use SEL competencies."



What Are the Possible Characteristics of SEL Competencies and Next Steps for Delaware to Consider?

We recommend, based on best practice, that SEL competencies:

Provide a framework for integrating social, emotional, and academic development

- Be comprehensive, meaning they apply to all students through 12th grade and build upon existing pre-K standards
- Be free-standing, meaning they are defined separately from academic goals
- Be integrated and aligned with academic content standards and competencies
- Be informed by and meaningful to educators, students, parents, and the community

Meet the needs of students

- Be culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Be inclusive of developmentally-appropriate combination of knowledge and skills
- Be built on previously acquired skills or goals

Meet the needs of educators

- Be written so that they are clear and can easily inform practice
- Be specific enough to convey what skills students should learn, but broad enough to allow for a variety of approaches to teaching and aligning curriculum
- Be specific enough to allow for classroom assessments to measure student progress

Support classrooms and schools

- NOT be used in any accountability system
- Be supported with guidelines on how to create a positive and inclusive school-wide learning environment
- Be accompanied by other strategies to support high-quality implementation, including:
 - evidence-based programs
 - formative assessments that allow teachers to monitor student progress and inform continued instruction
 - high-quality professional development

Next steps to be determined by educators

How competencies are developed

- What range of social and emotional competencies would be included?
- What developmental benchmarks fall within each competency?
- How should developmental benchmarks be structured? Per grade? Or for grade bands? What grade bands?
- How can we obtain feedback from stakeholders and experts?

How competencies are supported

- Should guidance documents be created or should existing policies be revised to integrate SEL?
- How can we build on work underway in Delaware, such as grading on non-academic skills, effort, and habits?
- What implementation supports are needed?

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Linda Dusenbury at CASEL; SEL leaders in Washington and Illinois; state, district, and charter leaders in Delaware for their resources, insights, and conversations.

Resource links

- **State Guidance Documents:** CASEL and partner states developed resources to help educators integrate SEL into general teaching practice. <https://casel.org/csi-reports-tools-and-resources/>
- **2018 State Scorecard Scan:** CASEL's national review of state policies supporting SEL includes links to existing state guidelines and resources. <https://casel.org/state-scan-scorecard-project/>
- **Social and Emotional Learning in Delaware:** The Rodel Teacher Council and Rodel Foundation of Delaware have cultivated local, state, and national SEL resources. <http://www.rodelfoundationde.org/resources/issues-and-resources/selinde/>

Who is the RTC?

The first Rodel Teacher Council was convened by the Rodel Foundation of Delaware in 2013 to elevate the voices of public school teachers, represent the diversity of the teaching force in Delaware schools, provide a venue for teachers to weigh in on important issues affecting their work, and help set the course for the next generation of teaching and learning in Delaware. The council is a group of teacher leaders dedicated to finding solutions, improving their craft, and leveraging their voices for the benefit of their students. Members represent all three counties, a variety of grade levels and subject areas, and bring a broad cross-section of leadership perspectives. In all, council members boast over 369 years of combined teaching experience. To access other resources published by the Rodel Teacher Council, including their Blueprint for Personalized Learning and accompanying policy briefs, visit bit.ly/RTCInfo.

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