



Tip Sheets for Families

What is "SEL" Screening?



Understanding the types of assessments and screeners that measure your child's Social Emotional Learning Competencies

What is SEL? Why is it important?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. These competencies support students in learning and achieving in core academics. It is important to know that SEL is not the same as mental health. Gaps in social-emotional learning competencies can flag that students might need more support around skills or have a mental health concern. Schools are not primary providers for mental health treatments but they can connect families to clinicians.



What are the SEL competencies?

- **Self Awareness**
- **Self Management**
- **Social Awareness**
- **Relationship Skills**
- **Responsible Decision-Making**

How do schools assess Social Emotional Learning?

There are a number of diverse assessments that can be used to measure the presence of social emotional competencies in students. They fall into two distinct categories: observational and self perception. In observational screeners, there are key behaviors that adults who spend a lot of time with students look for. For example, teachers and caregivers might look for evidence of students being able to advocate for help when they are struggling on a task. Or, they might observe a student show empathy when a classmate or family member is sad. In self-assessments, students answer questions around their



perception of their own social emotional skills. Both types of screeners have benefits and limitations. They also help support a multi-level approach to supporting students. It helps to see who needs more instruction and coaching or who needs connection to more intensive behavioral health services. Check with your student's district to see what ways they are screening for social and emotional learning.



How to understand the results:

Because each screener is different, each parent can interpret SEL data differently. One thing to keep in mind is that this is just one snapshot of your child's abilities. Some questions you might consider are:

- What areas are coming up for strengths with your student?
- What areas are coming up as growth areas?
- How can you use their strengths to build up their growth areas?
- How can you help them with SEL skill building at home?

How does the school look at SEL data?

Schools should be looking at this data as one point of information across multiple data points to tell us how students are doing individually, as a school, and as a district system. Because there are benefits and limits to SEL screeners, schools should be asking:

- Consider the lived experience behind this data.
- What additional context would be helpful to the team in interpreting and acting on this data?
- What biases or blindspots might exist within our team as we interpret this data?

Knowing that schools are looking at SEL data with an equity lens, caregivers should feel empowered to ask for more support in helping their children build those skills in the classroom.

Elias, Maurice. (2010). Sustainability of Social-Emotional Learning and related programs: Lessons from a field study. *The International Journal of Emotional Education*, 2:1, 17-33.

Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in schools: From programs to strategies. *Social Policy Report*, 26:4

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