Social-Emotional Learning in Action
A Conversation and Reflection Guide for School Leaders

This guide is intended to support principals, vice principals, and leadership teams to engage in school-wide discussions about social-emotional learning. It provides a school-reflection tool to support you as you begin this work with your school community.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a process for learning life skills, including how to manage emotions, develop healthy relationships and make wise decisions.

There is strong and consistent evidence to show that student participation in high-quality social-emotional learning at school is associated with good emotional health AND enhanced academic achievement.

Social and emotional skills help us to be successful at home, school, and work. They are the sorts of abilities that are needed to start and keep friendships, complete tasks, and stay positive in the face of stress or adversity. Social and emotional skills are also foundational to ensuring that we maintain respectful and inclusive schools and communities where everyone feels they belong.

Social and emotional skills can be learned, practised, and applied across the curriculum, throughout the school experience, inside and outside of class, at home and in the community. As with any new skill, SEL takes time and practise. Providing structured opportunities for explicit application of the practices as a school, and within classes builds comfort, confidence and reinforces new knowledge for students and educators.

Schools and classrooms provide natural opportunities for students to develop, practise and reinforce these skills. Educators are well positioned to model and consistently use social-emotional learning practices that are reflective of student identities, cultural assets and strengths in schools and classrooms. Practising your own social and emotional skills – self-awareness and cultural competencies – can strengthen relationships with students, staff and parents/families and influence a positive sense of self and belonging in the school, classroom and school community.
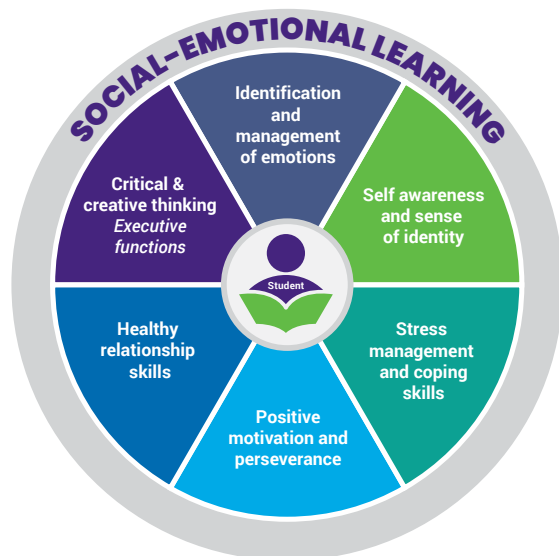
Key understandings

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), students gain vital skills through social-emotional learning, including the ability to:

* set and achieve goals
* recognize and manage emotions
* form and maintain relationships
* show concern and care for others
* make responsible decisions
* prepare for, handle and recover from challenging situations

> "The skills associated with social-emotional learning [are] both 'fundamental for life effectiveness' and 'a framework for school improvement.' The integration of individual development with organizational development offers a new pathway to progress.." (Darling-Hammond, L., 2015)

Equity considerations:

The following considerations are shared as part of the National Equity Project:

* Approach SEL work with the **explicitly stated purpose** of creating more equitable learning environments and outcomes (not as an afterthought or add-on).
* Support educators in developing their own sense of self-awareness and cultural competence while reflecting on personal bias.
* Model and embed learning about SEL skills in all curriculum through culturally responsive pedagogy and in interactions with students inside and outside the classroom that reflects a range of lived experiences.
* Promote SEL practices to facilitate healing from the effects of systemic oppression, and create welcoming inclusive learning environments (e.g. naming and identifying emotions).

> "Implemented thoughtfully and intentionally, SEL has tremendous potential to create the conditions for student affirmation, youth agency and civic engagement and, ultimately, social change." (2020 Ontario Math curriculum)

Research shows that social-emotional learning:

* is most effective when taught explicitly and early in a child's development
* enhances academic performance
* can help schools address important challenges by enhancing prosocial behaviour and a sense of belonging
* can build protective factors and enhance the mental health of all students

The CASEL website (www.casel.org) highlights current social-emotional learning research and offers an online library of related resources.

Considerations for beginning:

* As a staff, watch and discuss the SEL in Action Video.
* Identify how familiar you and your staff are with SEL and the six skill categories.
* Identify what you and staff consider to be the most effective ways to learn about and discuss SEL?
* Discuss and identify how school staff can create a common language for talking about and teaching social-emotional skills.
* Use the reflection guide that follows to establish where to begin and talk about why is this important.
* Explore and identify what opportunities there are for explicitly teaching social-emotional skills in your school and classrooms?
* Identify and talk about any untapped opportunities throughout the school day that could be used to promote social-emotional learning.
* Explicitly explore what school-wide approaches are currently being implemented and that could be leveraged to better support social-emotional learning.

As you begin this work with your school community, the overview and reflection process provided below can be used to guide you in your next steps.

Taking the pulse

The following reflection tool provides guidance for collecting information about school readiness, and planning for implementation, in a school wide approach to social-emotional learning.

Assessing readiness

* How will the information you collect be used to help inform school planning at the school and classroom level?

* What expertise and resources are available to you and your staff to support implementation of SEL? How will you gain or use the expertise to enhance SEL?

* How will you support professional development related to SEL? Who can provide support?

School-wide SEL

As the school leader I:	Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Fully
am learning about SEL				
communicate SEL as a priority				
have identified a structure to build capacity and support the planning and implementation of SEL related school goals				
encourage collaborative partnerships to support school-wide SEL				
seek and incorporate students' perspectives about safety and well-being to promote positive learning outcomes				
support staff in reflecting on their own social and emotional competencies, identities, and biases				
engage in practices that affirm and cultivate students' cultures, values, and identities				
provide opportunities to practise, model, and enhance SEL				
embed the SEL competencies into staff meetings				
use the SEL competencies to guide my interactions with staff, students, families, and community members				

School-wide SEL

As a staff we:	Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Fully
invest time in building a foundational awareness of SEL				
take the time to learn about the six SEL categories				
collaborate with the school community to develop a shared vision of SEL				
identify connections and integrate SEL within our school improvement plan				
provide opportunities for student engagement and authentically capturing student voice				
have a clear understanding of the Everyday Mental Health (EMH) or Faith and Wellness resource				
have had the opportunity to practise and gain comfort in the use of everyday practices that can support the development of SEL in students				

School-wide SEL

In the classroom educators:	Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Fully
co-create a comfortable space for sharing feelings and opinions				
ensure classroom materials and resources reflect and reinforce SEL skills and practices (Example: SEL posters, use of practices from the EMH resource)				
integrate SEL practices into everyday routines of the classroom in ways that are developmentally appropriate				
integrate SEL practices into everyday routines of the classroom in ways that are culturally responsive				
know their learners and ensure learning objectives and resources reflect various identities of students				
integrate SEL across curriculum and explicitly teach and model using appropriate instructional materials				
engage students in and provide opportunities for leadership through SEL practices (example: opportunities to lead an activity)				
honour student voice in the use of SEL practices (Example: students have the opportunity to share what practices they find to be effective)				
provide regular opportunities for peer collaboration				
provide opportunities for students to engage in reflection and introspection relating to their identity and the identity of others				
coach and model healthy coping strategies in guiding students to develop resilience and manage feelings				
explicitly teach and model effective communication and conflict resolution skills (e.g., perspective taking, listening, respect, empathy development).				

School-wide SEL

Parents and families are provided with:	Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Fully
information about SEL and the benefits for student learning and development				
examples of practices used in the classroom that can be used at home to reinforce learning				
information about the school's approach to SEL to support alignment in messaging, common language and strategies				
opportunities for meaningful dialogue and feedback and updates on SEL implementation				

Ideas for school-wide implementation

* Engage a current or new leadership team to support building capacity and implementation of SEL.

* Build staff awareness, understanding, and confidence in the developmental of SEL skills for students by having a board mental health professional present at a staff meeting.

* Highlight one <u>everyday practice</u> at the start of each staff meeting to build comfort and confidence for staff in modelling and facilitating practices in their classrooms.

* Consider how you might use the material in module 3 of the <u>*MH LIT: Mental Health In Action*</u> course to build capacity and confidence amongst school staff.

* Consider hosting a SEL family night to share resources and practices with families and caregivers. Engage community partners and have partners host a room. Each room could model a different practice and provide an opportunity for the student and caregiver to try out the practice together. Recommended books and resources that promoted and support the development of SEL in children could be shared.

* Consider providing supplementary materials for parents and families to support the extension of SEL skill development at home (Example: a parent lending library of books with SEL related themes, electronic access etc.)

* <u>Visit the social-emotional learning page</u> of our website for more information about social-emotional learning and links to related resources.