ALN
ASSESSMENT LEARNING NETWORK
LEARNING POINT

What is social and emotional learning (SEL)?

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an interrelated set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that underscore the capacity to learn, develop and maintain mutually supportive relationships, and be healthy—physically and psychologically. Although there are many ways to organize the skills encompassed by Social and Emotional Learning, the field tends to organize these skills into five larger domains or competencies:

- self-awareness
- self-management
- social awareness
- relationship skills
- responsible decision making

Mounting evidence from the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and education validate the role of SEL in high quality learning environments. Moreover, research suggests that high quality classrooms are in support of, rather than dismissive of, social and emotional learning.

In a study by the Center for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), researchers found that 93% of teachers want a greater focus on SEL in schools. SEL is the foundation for student's learning in the classroom. If we think of academic learning as a painting, SEL is the brush that paints the picture of what quality instruction and learning looks like.

SEL includes instruction in five interrelated competencies that underscore our abilities to identify, understand, interpret, and express our emotions. Social and emotional programming supports the development of these skills to enhance school performance

> **SEL** is the foundation for student's learning in the classroom. If we think of academic learning as a painting, SEL is the brush that paints the picture of what quality instruction and learning looks like.

and youth development through instruction and school and classroom climate. SEL programs can support the education of the whole student and move beyond student achievement to also support behavior and psychosocial functioning.

Five competencies of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Self-awareness is recognizing one's own feelings, thoughts, and values and knowing how those feelings, thoughts, and values influence behavior. Competencies that inform our self-awareness include: identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Self-awareness encompasses the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

A child who is not able to recognize that he is feeling anxious about school is distracted by his body, unable to focus, and likely to act out or withdraw during learning activities. These are not optimal conditions for learning.

Students develop self-awareness by thinking about their different feelings (happy, sad, angry, excited, surprised, jealous), how each feeling feels (heart racing? palms sweaty?)

and looks (smile? face scrunched? fists clenched?), and what events or situations make them feel different feelings (receiving a present, working on a hard math problem, having a fight with a friend). They build their vocabulary for describing and expressing their feelings, and develop an understanding for how different events cause them to feel. Understanding one's emotional life is key to learning how to manage emotions, the next competency.

Self-management is regulating one's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. This involves strategies for feeling more or less of an emotion, controlling impulses such as talking over others or physically acting out, and motivating oneself by setting goals and achieving. Dimensions of self-management include: impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal setting, and organizational skills.

A child who is unable to manage emotions is at their mercy, unable to set and achieve goals or act in a manner that is appropriate for a given situation (paying attention in class, listening to a teacher, staying on task during work time).

Students develop self-management when they practice strategies for reducing feelings of anxiety about a test such

> **SEL promotes a shift in school climate that improves outcomes for teachers, students, and classrooms and is supported by assessments that are meaningful, malleable, and measurable.**

as taking deep belly breaths; or lessening the intensity of anger at a friend by stopping before reacting to a mean utterance, turning away, and counting to 10. They practice strategies for increasing curiosity about a new topic by learning how to ask, "I wonder..." questions or motivating oneself to put in extra effort on a task by learning how to connect the work to another goal one has (If I use mental strategies, it will help me solve harder math tasks.) Seeing teachers model and talk about different strategies is a powerful way for students to learn that even adults need to manage their emotions, and they use many different strategies so their emotions don't take over.

Social awareness is being able to take another person's perspective and feel empathy. This is a competence critical for creating and maintaining supportive relationships. It requires understanding social norms (How do I act in this situation, in this place?), as well as understanding and appreciating that people have different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences that may differ from one's own. Dimensions that inform our social awareness include: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others.

A child who lacks social awareness may ostracize or be mean to others who look or act differently. The child may not notice or appreciate how his actions and words impact the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of others. The child may be disruptive or rude in the classroom, not be a good friend, or turn off others by his behavior.

Students learn social awareness when they talk about their own experiences, share their perspectives, and look for ways in which their perspectives are different from or similar to others'. They might read stories and discuss how different characters experience and act in the world, make comparisons with "What would you do?" or "What would you think?" and explore where differ-

ences and similarities emerge. Teachers model appreciation for differences when they ask open ended questions, free from judgment; share knowledge about many different cultures; and talk with respect about diversity.

Relationship skills include listening; communicating; cooperating; conflict management; and being kind, considerate, and respectful to others. These skills are key to creating and maintaining mutually healthy and supportive relationships. Competencies that inform our relationship skills include: communication, social engagement, relationship building, and teamwork. Students who lack these skills talk over others, do not contribute equally to team work (they may take over a group project, or check out of it), take advantage of others, and do not listen well.

Working in groups on projects while emulating positive relationship role models is one way students learn and practice relationship skills. Teachers model relationship skills when they actively listen to students; communicate clearly; and are kind, considerate, and respectful to students and their colleagues. They talk about what they are doing when modeling these behaviors, for example: "Did you notice how when Charlie was talking, I nodded my head and made eye contact so he would know I heard him and was paying attention? I asked him questions to learn more about what he was saying, and said, 'uh huh' and 'ok' to show him that I was understanding."

Responsible decision making refers to being able to make choices about one's behavior—toward the self and

toward others—that consider ethics, safety, and social norms. For example, students choose behaviors that help and do not hurt the self or others; that contribute to but do not disrupt from social interactions; and that support well-being, both of oneself, of others, and of a group. Competencies that inform responsible decision making include: analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, and ethical responsibility.

Students who are unable to make responsible decisions are disruptive in their relationships and in their classrooms. They fail to take the needs and feelings of others into account before they act. They choose actions that may harm their social standing, their academic performance, and their own well-being.

Teachers support the practice of responsible decision making when they talk aloud about how they make decisions in their lives and ask open-ended questions to students about their decision making processes, incorporating guiding questions that help students consider the ethics and consequences of different decisions. By guiding students in identifying problems, analyzing situations, evaluating different decision options, and reflecting on decisions, teachers support students in their capacity to make responsible decisions. Teachers create learning opportunities for responsible decision making when they read and explore as a class a novel that includes a character who made irresponsible decisions and the consequences that followed.

Everyone in the school community, including all our students and the teachers who educate them, benefit from SEL. SEL promotes a shift in school climate that improves outcomes for teachers, students, and classrooms and is supported by assessments that are meaningful, malleable, and measurable.

The Michigan Assessment Consortium's Assessment Learning Network (ALN) is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI's professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators.