Measuring Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): A Brief Guide

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1 **Clarify the purpose for measuring**   **2** **Decide which SEL constructs to measure**   **3** **Select the appropriate SEL measurement tool**

STEP 1: CLARIFY THE PURPOSE FOR MEASURING

MEASUREMENT PURPOSE	DESCRIPTION	CONSIDERATIONS
Identifying student need		
Trauma-informed approach	Determining the specific needs of students who would likely benefit from extra support (front-end approach—intervene early before problems arise)	SEL measures can provide valid and reliable information about participants in aggregate but may not be sufficiently reliable for individual diagnosis.
Early warning systems	Identifying students at risk for negative outcomes and in need of additional support (back-end approach—intervene once problems have been detected)	Requires SEL measures that have been validated specifically for this purpose. Currently, few (if any) have been.
Program improvement		
Priority setting	Determining program improvement priorities based on students' current status (front-end approach—where should we focus our efforts?)	Is the burden of a survey outweighed by its potential benefits? In some cases existing data (e.g., chronic absenteeism rates, climate surveys) can serve as a proxy.
Assessing change	Determining whether program improvement efforts were successful (back-end approach—were our efforts effective?)	When used to assess whether improvement efforts were successful, SEL measures must be focused on constructs that are specifically tied to improvement efforts and sensitive to short-term changes.
Accountability	Identifying schools, districts, or programs in need of additional support	When used to compare settings/programs, SEL measures must be reliable at the setting level (i.e., not show evidence of reference bias); when tied to high-stakes decisions, there is the potential for "gaming" the measures.

STEP 2: DECIDE WHICH SEL CONSTRUCTS TO MEASURE

CONSIDERATIONS	
Does it matter?	Measure constructs that have the potential to impact long-term outcomes.
What do we care about?	Measure constructs that align with local priorities and goals.
What is within our power to change?	Measure constructs that are actually malleable.
What are we equipped to change?	Measure constructs that are aligned with existing capacities (i.e., structures/resources are currently in place to support students and/or inform instruction and programming).

STEP 3: SELECT THE APPROPRIATE SEL MEASUREMENT TOOL

CONSIDERATIONS	
Should we survey students or adults?	Ask the right questions of the right people. Students may be the best judge of their own internal beliefs and mindsets (e.g., sense of belonging, beliefs about effort and growth mindset), but the adults that work with them might be a better judge of their outward behavior (e.g., conscientiousness, social skills).
Does the tool provide actionable data?	Measurement tools must give practitioners the accurate and timely information they need to take explicit action.
Is this tool rigorous enough?	The required level of rigor is determined by the intended use of the data. For example, data used for high-stakes decision making require higher rigor than data used for internal information gathering. Rigor is defined as the extent to which a measure is established as reliable and valid for the intended setting.
Is this tool practical?	How much does the tool cost? Will additional training be required to administer the survey and/or analyze the data? How quickly can the data be accessed? Will additional technology be required to administer the tool? How burdensome will it be for respondents?

Resources

American Institutes for Research, SEL Solutions. (2015). *Are you ready to assess social and emotional development?* Retrieved from http://www.air.org/resource/are-you-ready-assess-social-and-emotional-development

Blyth, D., & Flaten, K. (2016). *Assessing social & emotional skills in out-of-school time settings: Considerations for practitioners* [Issue brief]. Retrieved from University of Minnesota Extension website: http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/research/sel/docs/issue-brief-assessing-sel-in-out-of-school-time-settings.pdf

Melnick, H., Cook-Harvey, C. M., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Encouraging social and emotional learning in the context of new accountability.* Retrieved from Learning Policy Institute website: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/encouraging-social-emotional-learning-new-accountability-report

Yeager, D., Bryk, A., Muhich, J., Hausman, H., & Morales, L. (2013). *Practical measurement.* Retrieved from Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching website: https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/resources/publications/practical-measurement/