

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Non-Cognitive Assessments In Minnesota

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Issue

What, if any, are the Minnesota mandates for non-cognitive assessments and/or other standards regarding social and emotional competencies? How are they being measured?

Answer

See [Minn. Stat. § 121A.031, subd. 5](#): “Districts and schools **must establish strategies for creating a positive school climate and use evidence-based social-emotional learning** to prevent and reduce discrimination and other improper conduct.” (Emphasis added) Schools are already doing this, and as explained below, **new proposed legislation will make it clearly mandatory**.

Non-Cognitive Assessments

Data collected and stored on students’ SEL competencies are central to SEL.

[Minnesota Department of Education \(MDE\)](#) prepared a SEL document entitled [MDE Social and Emotional Learning Assessment Guidance \(PDF\)](#) (SEL Assessment) that **doesn’t state a mandate per se but seems to imply that SEL is already being implemented**.

Specifically, the SEL Assessment states on page 8 “SEL assessment can be administered using multiple methods, including questionnaires/surveys, observations, performance assessments, report cards and interviews or focus groups.” The way the assessments are conducted is detailed through page 11.

Page 16 of the SEL Assessment states “Choosing the SEL assessments to use – outcomes and processes – can be a difficult task and will depend on the purpose of the assessment, what you are trying to evaluate and if you are reporting at the student, classroom, school, or district level. In most cases, not all SEL competencies and benchmarks need to be assessed every year or for every student, teacher or school.”

It appears from the MDE documents that **assessments are being conducted on a more frequent basis, even daily in some instances**.

“Student social and emotional skills, which can be measured through 1) self-report, 2) teacher report, 3) family report or 4) performance of tasks. In addition, **SEL can be inferred or supplemented through existing data** such as attendance, GPA, behavior incidents, suspensions, and expulsions. Outcomes ... may include student, staff, and family perceptions of school climate.” [Emphasis added]

“For example, a teacher could assess a student’s communication skills during group discussions.”

The questions arise as to why such continual assessment, and what lens is being used to interpret these assessments. If the purpose is to address the behavior/misbehavior of a student through the lens of Critical Race Theory/Equity (oppressor/oppressed), as is the case with [Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning](#) (CASEL) and [The Great Lakes Equity Center](#), then SEL is a politicized tool, not

simply a tool for improving behavior. A neutral and objective system to evaluate better behavior, *the stated goal of SEL*, would be something like a checklist at the end of the day/week using the following:

Today (This week):

- I was kind ... yes/no
- I was respectful ... yes/no
- I was on task ... yes/no
- I was distracted when ...
- I was unkind with (name) because ...
- I am happy with myself today because I ...
- Tomorrow I want to do better at ...

Page 18 of the SEL Assessment provides “[T]hree additional considerations and decisions that districts and school leaders may take into account as they select an SEL assessment include[e] the rigor of the assessment, the practicalities in administering the instrument, and the burden and ethics of administering the assessment.” There is no definition or description of the “ethics of administering the assessment.”

There is much in the MDE SEL Assessment to consider.

SEL Competencies

Standards regarding social and emotional competencies can also be found in the [MDE SEL District Implementation and Professional Development Guidance \(PDF\)](#) document. There are five competencies (relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making) that are individually charted from K-12 with various learning goals for each. The charts are divided into columns entitled Grade Band, Benchmarks, Sample Activities, and Related Academic Standards. It is easier to examine each of the charts for the standards than to list them. Below is an example chart for Relationship Skills:

Grade Bands	Benchmarks	Sample Activities	Related Academic Standards
Grades 4–5	Recognize how groups behave differently than individuals and affect an individual’s emotions, attitudes and behaviors.	<p>Have students participate in a group challenge. After the challenge, discuss how they worked in a group. Discuss ways they could have improved their team effort.</p> <p>Routinely invite students to reflect on how they worked as a team in cooperative learning or project-based learning.</p>	<p>Science, 5.4.4.1.1, Give examples of beneficial and harmful human interaction with natural systems.</p> <p>Science, 5.3.4.1.3, Compare the impact of individual decisions on natural systems.</p> <p>Arts, 4.2.1, Create or make in a variety of contexts in the arts area using the artistic foundations.</p>

Minnesota Legislation

In light of legislation now in the [Minnesota Senate, 2023 SF-619 summary](#), we will expect to see changes mandated for SEL as set out in section 7 of that bill:

Section 7. State model policy. **Requires** the commissioner to develop and maintain resources to assist a district or school in implementing strategies for creating a positive school climate and use evidence-based, social-emotional learning to prevent and reduce discrimination. **Requires** the commissioner to develop and adopt state-level social-emotional learning standards. (Emphasis added)

[Amendments have been made](#) at a hearing on February 6, 2023. As of this writing, the amended bill is referred to the [Education Finance Committee](#).

Note: The CASEL and The Great Lakes Equity Center have/had a heavy hand in MN SEL. It is easy to see the financial incentives that SEL generates in both MN government (DOE, U of MN, school administration, etc.) and private organizations. For instance. [ASCD: SEL activities across grade levels](#) (in Equity book), [MSBA Parent Engagement \(PDF\)](#), and [\(NASBE\) State Policy Database](#). It will be difficult if not impossible due to statutory mandates to sever SEL from K-12 education, and not just in MN. However, we are seeing some movement away from CRT recently such as in Florida.

Historical Background Information on SEL in Minnesota

- [Minn. Stat. § 121A.031, subd. 5](#) “School student bullying policy,” the **groundwork for SEL** is found in the first paragraph of subd. 5 (a):

Subd. 5: Safe and supportive schools programming.

- (a) Districts and schools are encouraged to provide developmentally appropriate programmatic instruction to help students identify, prevent, and reduce prohibited conduct; value diversity in

school and society; develop and improve students' knowledge and skills for solving problems, managing conflict, engaging in civil discourse, and recognizing, responding to, and reporting prohibited conduct; and make effective prevention and intervention programs available to students. Districts and schools must establish strategies for creating a positive school climate and use evidence-based **social-emotional learning** to prevent and reduce discrimination and other improper conduct. (Emphasis added)

Minn. Stat. § 121A.031, subd. 5 was passed in 2014, amended in 2015 (re charter schools) and 2022 (deleting technical assistance center mandate)

- A proposed amendment to Minn. Stat. § 121A.031, subd. 5 is found in [SF-619](#) relating to social-emotional learning:

Section 7. State model policy. Requires the commissioner to develop and maintain resources to assist a district or school in implementing strategies for creating a positive school climate and use evidence-based, social-emotional learning to prevent and reduce discrimination. Requires the commissioner to develop and adopt state-level social-emotional learning standards.

- [Minnesota SEL](#): MDE states the reasons for SEL; the definition; the research (“The law (§ 121A.031, subd. 5) that explicitly calls for schools to use evidence-based social emotional learning to prevent and reduce bullying.; MN Every Student Succeeds Act and implementing SEL. **“One way schools can promote a well-rounded education is to explicitly teach SEL.”**)

Note: [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) is the federal K-12 education law of the United States and was signed into law in 2015, replacing the previous education law called “No Child Left Behind”; “The School Safety Technical Assistance Center developed Social and Emotional Learning Implementation Guidance”. (Emphasis added)

- [MDE: SEL Implementation Guideline](#) recommended collaborating with experts. [Guidance Development Process and Contributors](#) modeled its SEL guidance after the framework for Minnesota’s academic standards and selected the CASEL framework of five SEL competencies; [ensuring effective implementation](#); SEL five competencies framework (relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making); professional development guidance; district focus; and assessing practices and outcomes.

Also, see the last link pg. 36 in the SEL Assessment document that is very detailed about SEL assessments.

- [MDE SELAbstract](#) noting the core components and implementation resources.
- [Great Lakes Equity Center Guidance](#), a technical assistance and research center located at Indiana University-Purdue University, submitted to this group for a culturally responsive review of SEL framework.

“Effective SEL instruction will not position behaviors that are more reflective of white, mainstream, middle class, male culture as the only "right," "correct," "healthy," or "legitimate" responses to social

situations;” “Members from nondominant groups (people of color, people with disabilities, people who identify as gender-nonconforming etc.) that have been historically marginalized in schools and in society live with systems of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, ableism, heteronormativity, etc.)”

- [Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) as referenced previously.
- [Measuring SEL, Frameworks and Competencies \(2019\)](#),
Many states have elected to create K-12 learning standards (often called “competencies,” “learning goals” or “benchmarks”).

Page 4 Chart

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF 14 STATES THAT HAVE DEVELOPED K-12 SEL STANDARDS/COMPETENCIES

	Utilize CASEL 5 SEL Framework	Developed State Specific SEL	Provides developmental benchmarks	Academic Integration	SEL framework also connects to/aligns with:								State provides support for implementation:			
					Addresses Equity/ Diversity	Addresses Mental Health/ Trauma	Whole Child	Workforce, College/ Career 21C Learning	School climate/culture	Character	MTSS	PBIS	Guidance for Implementing SEL	Instructional Practices	Professional Learning	Assessment/Measurement
IL (2004)	✓**		✓*	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
KS (2012/2018)		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ME (2012)		✓	✓					✓								
MI (2017)	✓		✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			
MN (2018)	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
NV (2017)	✓							✓								
NJ (2017)	✓							✓	✓	✓				✓		
NY (2018)	✓**		✓	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
ND (2018)	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓		✓					✓
RI (2017)	✓			✓					✓					✓	✓	
TN (2017)	✓		✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
WA (2016)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	
WV (2012)	✓**		✓	✓				✓	✓				✓			
WI (2018)		✓	✓*	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Page 7: All 50 states have now articulated preschool standards for SEL (and have since 2015); ... An equity lens is important when developing SEL standards, particularly to ensure that the standards do not unintentionally reinforce implicit power and privilege inequities. ... equity-informed work as transformative SEL — “a process whereby students and teachers build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation of similarities and differences, learn to critically examine root causes of inequity, and develop collaborative solutions to community and societal problems.”

Page 8: An increasing number of states now emphasize equity in SEL to ensure that educational experiences are culturally and linguistically appropriate and engaging to all. ... Minnesota submitted its SEL framework to the Great Lakes Equity Center for a culturally responsive review. The review led to the creation of the Great Lakes Equity Center Guidance for supporting equity in teaching practices. The guidance provides multiple recommendations to support SEL through a culturally responsive lens, such as basing curriculum on the cultural-linguistic realities of students and viewing those realities as assets, among others.

Page 9: We were also interested in exploring the extent to which states connected their state SEL standards/framework to other strategic priorities and approaches. In their review, Berg and her colleagues identified character, mental health (including trauma), and workforce (career readiness) development as key approaches often connected to SEL.

Academic Integration. We found that 11 out of 14 states (including Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, **Minnesota**, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) integrated their SEL standards with academics through multiple means--for example, crosswalks with academic standards, proposed legislation to align SEL standards with academic and health and fitness standards, instructional approaches, and making the case for why SEL competencies are critical for academic learning.

School climate and culture. Twelve out of the 14 states (Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, **Minnesota**, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) explicitly connected their SEL standards to school climate and culture.

Page 11: “In many cases they [state websites] have also developed their own state-specific tools and resources, such as those found in Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, **Minnesota**, New York, Tennessee, Washington, and Wisconsin. ...

Across the areas of implementation, we found that half of the states (seven of 14) had developed general guidance or tools to support implementation of SEL, including Kansas, Michigan, **Minnesota**, New York, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Nine of the 14 states (64.29%) provided guidance on teaching practices to support SEL including Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, **Minnesota**, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. ...

Nine of the 14 states (64.29%), including Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, **Minnesota**, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington and Wisconsin, provided guidance or other supports for professional learning. ...

We found that seven states (50%), including Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, **Minnesota**, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin, provide some level of guidance on assessment or measurement of student/school progress in social and emotional development or school or classroom SEL practices ...). **Minnesota** provides detailed and thoughtful guidance for developing approaches to assessment.”

Page 15: APPENDIX A: In 2016, CASEL launched the [Collaborating States Initiative](#) (CSI) to help state education agencies create statewide conditions that will encourage and equip educators to promote integrated, equity-focused, academic, social, and emotional learning (SEL).

Page 20: APPENDIX B: **Minnesota**

MINNESOTA	
GENERAL	<p>The Minnesota framework, entitled SEL Framework: 5 Competencies (2018), aligns directly with the CASEL 5 core competencies (i.e., relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making). The competencies were developed in Minnesota to support the anti-bullying Safe and Supportive Schools Act, which was signed into law in Minnesota in 2014. SEL is viewed as an important strategy for supporting positive school climate and for preventing bullying, and a working group was organized in 2015.</p> <p>Minnesota SEL Framework: 5 Competencies (2018) can be found in the links, below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship Skills Competency • Self-Awareness Competency • Self-Management Competency • Social Awareness Competency • Responsible Decision-Making Competency
DEVELOPMENTAL BENCHMARKS	The Minnesota competencies provide developmental benchmarks for grade bands: K-3, 4-5, 6-8, 9-12. They are not directly aligned with Minnesota preschool standards.
EQUITY	On the state website where the SEL competencies are posted, a statement on “Ensuring Effective SEL implementation” explains that the “Great Lakes Equity Center (GLEC) was asked to review the SEL guidance and competencies.” In addition, the state webpage links to guidance designed to support culturally responsive implementation of SEL from the Great Lakes Equity Center SEL Implementation Guidance .
ALIGNMENT TO OTHER PRIORITIES	The Minnesota Competencies explicitly connect to academic standards (through crosswalk between SEL and academic standards), school climate/culture, and fall under the school climate work of the state. They also connect to bullying, and there is a strong emphasis on equity and culture. The Minnesota SEL framework was submitted for cultural review by the Great Lakes Equity Center.
GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION	To support successful implementation of the competencies, the working group also developed an extensive array of state specific implementation guidance (including for implementation and professional development), guidance for use in special education, and assessment guidance. The implementation guidance emphasizes systemic school and district SEL informed by the CASEL District Theory of Action that includes activities for developing a vision, needs and resource assessment, professional learning, evidence-based programming, integrating SEL across other programs and school priorities, and continuous improvement. Assessment guidance discusses purpose and types of SEL assessment, including assessment of outcomes versus process. The implementation guidance also includes resources to support teaching practices, self-assessment, district implementation, communication, etc.

- Free Standing Competencies/Standards: Minnesota’s [Early Learning Standards](#) (2017) include SEL competencies/standards for children birth through kindergarten (pages 57-62). The Minnesota Department of Education has developed [K-12 SEL Competencies](#).
- Guidance/Resources: The Minnesota Department of Education provides resources on SEL, including their [SEL Modules](#), [Great Lakes Center Equity Guidance](#), and [District Implementation and Professional Development Guidance](#). More information can be found on [MN’s SEL webpage](#).
- [R]eleased in 2022 by The Education Trust and CASEL, reviews policies in all 50 states to highlight how states are supporting student needs by prioritizing social, educational, and academic development

(SEAD) and where state policies threaten equity and diversity, including state efforts to limit the accurate teaching of history and current events.

This Scan looks at five policy areas to determine if state social, emotional, and academic development policies are aligned with evidence-based best practices. It covers: Discipline; Professional Development; Rigorous & Culturally Sustainable Curriculum; Student, Family, & Community Engagement; Teacher Diversity; and Wraparound Services.

- MDE competencies are aligned with [CASEL Frameworks, Competencies, Standards, and Guidelines](#), that include indicators with developmental benchmarks by grade band, and connect to a school climate framework created when the antibullying Safe and Supportive Schools Act was signed into law. The competencies are unique because they include strategies and sample activities educators can use to support student development of the competencies.

16 page chart for all MN K-12 students covering [Relationship Skills Competency \(PDF\)](#) with three Learning Skills.. Additional competency charts for K-12 can be found in the [MDE Implementation Guide](#) for:

- Relationship Skills Competency
 - Self-Awareness Competency
 - Self-Management Competency
 - Social Awareness Competency
 - Responsible Decision-Making Competency
- [University of Minnesota SEL Toolkit](#) The toolkit is mainly for those working with youth in middle school, but with small changes, activities can be used with other age groups too. Includes videos for each section: Equipping staff; creating the learning environment; designing impactful learning experiences (Ways I Am, Ways of Feeling, Ways of Relating, Ways of Doing); and Using data for improvement (“This section includes creating a data dashboard by using reflective activities to measure change over time, having youth assess and provide feedback to the adults that support them in learning social and emotional skills, several creative data collection strategies, a SEL SMART goals tracker and a checklist to help select SEL outcome measurement tools”).
 - The Federal Department of Education in regard to MN produced a recent compilation of [Compilation of School Discipline Laws and Regulations \(PDF\)](#) in June 2022 using a framework designed by National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE). SEL is specifically mentioned on pp. 58-59 regarding the statutory requirement of character development education in MN Statute 120B.232.

Additional References Concerning SEL

- Moms for Liberty (National) issued a useful [SEL Guide for Parents](#)

- [Parents Defending Education](#), crafted a 20-point questionnaire for parents [Questions to ask your school about Social Emotional Learning \(PDF\)](#).
- James Lindsey produced a podcast, [WTF is SEL](#) (3 hrs. 12/19/22); another is [The Dialectic of SEL](#) (3 hrs. 1/23/23)
- American Enterprise Institute testimony before Congress, [House Committee on Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies](#), April 6, 2022
- Critical discourse analysis reported by Sage Journals: [\(Un\)Standardizing Emotions: An Ethical Critique of Social and Emotional Learning Standards](#), July 8, 2022
- The Hechinger Report: [SEL is the latest flashpoint in the education wars](#) , February 21, 2022
- Time Magazine: [SEL in the classroom](#), April 27, 2022
- Business Wire: [SEL market report](#), November 23, 2022
- Harvard Political Review: [SEL, both facts and feelings](#)