Social-emotional learning (SEL) helps ensure students have the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic competence necessary for success in school and lifelong well-being. SEL is the process in which children and adults gain and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and express empathy for others, develop and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Research indicates SEL contributes to better health, improved school climate, increased academic achievement, improved behavior, success at work, stronger relationships, and has a strong return on investment. ¹

Developing the social-emotional health of children through effective SEL implementation requires a cultural and mindset shift as well as a collective approach. Educating the whole child cannot be reduced to a simple set of policies or proposals or viewed as a new initiative. Instead, it is a mindset that informs education and focuses on the needs of every student. Research suggests that when efforts to support social, emotional, and academic learning are shared and aligned across homes, schools and communities, learning environments that foster the comprehensive development of youth are created. In addition, students benefit with consistent opportunities to build and practice their skills. Furthermore, the collaboration can lead to an environment that respects all cultures and serves students equitably while also fostering meaningful relationships among and between young people and adults. ²

Why is Social-Emotional Learning Needed?
Social-emotional skills are critical for youth to be lifelong learners, productive workers, and engaged citizens. Young people who have stronger social-emotional and cognitive skills are more likely to enter and graduate college and succeed in their careers. In addition, they are more likely to have positive work and family relationships, better mental and physical health, reduced criminal behavior, and are more engaged as citizens. Students thrive in schools and environments where they are safe from violence, bullying, harassment and substance abuse. Many risky behaviors can be prevented or reduced when multiyear, integrated efforts are used to develop students’ social-emotional skills. Emotionally safe students feel free to express their emotions, have the confidence to take risks and tackle challenges, feel valued, and connected to their learning. ³
However, the data related to the social-emotional well-being of many Indiana students indicate concerning unmet needs. Hoosier students have unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety and depression which interfere with development and learning. For example, 1 in 3 high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless in 2017 and Indiana ranks 3rd out of 36 states in the percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide.\(^4\)

In addition, the compounding nature of childhood traumas, such as living in an environment exposed to substance use disorder or experiencing child abuse or maltreatment, has a negative impact and increases the need for social and emotional programs. The child abuse and neglect rate has nearly doubled in the past ten years and Indiana currently ranks 48th for child maltreatment. These stressors, along with others, are often compounded when low-income students and students of color attend schools with few resources, more disruptions, and less-engaging learning experiences.\(^5\)

### One in five Hoosier high school students seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months, Indiana: 2015

![Image](https://example.com/indiana-suicide-rate)

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey

### What is Social-Emotional Learning?

Social-emotional learning is more than a single program or lesson. Systemic SEL implementation is foundational for learning and occurs in multiple settings including classrooms, schools, districts, families and the wider community. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are needed to demonstrate social-emotional competence require integration across cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies.\(^6\)

The Indiana Department of Education’s (IDOE) new Indiana Social-Emotional Competencies address the social-emotional needs of students in grades Pre-K through grade 12. IDOE’s competencies start with The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning’s (CASEL) five core domains: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.\(^7\) Additionally, IDOE includes sensory integration and the mindset. All components of IDOE’s competencies are important to ensure students have the skills needed to cope with the stress of school, life, and outside factors that would impact their performance.\(^8\)

### Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Indiana Social-Emotional Competency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indiana Specific</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensory-Motor Integration: The ability to have body awareness and recognize sensations in the body. Gaining sensory-motor integration is an important skill for managing transitions, changing routines, increasing alertness for learning, and improving regulation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Awareness</strong></td>
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<td>Insight: The ability to know your emotions and how they affect your thoughts and actions. Gaining insight is an important skill for building self-confidence, self-esteem, and empathy for others. Insight helps students recognize their own strengths and areas of growth.</td>
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<td><strong>Self-Management</strong></td>
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<td>Regulation: The ability to recognize and manage one’s emotions. Regulation skills build positive self-control, positive self-discipline, and impulse control.</td>
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<td><strong>Relationship Skills</strong></td>
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<td>Collaboration: The ability to work well with others, including in the group and teamwork environment. Collaboration works to build positive communication and conflict management skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Awareness</strong></td>
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<td>Connection: The ability to have strong social awareness, giving students the ability to take the perspectives of others and empathize with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Responsible Decision Making</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking: The ability to make constructive choices and understand metacognitive strategies to enhance learning. Critical thinking skills build responsible decision-making, analytical, and critical inquiry skills which are necessary to approach learning from an innovative, creative, multicultural, and ethical lens.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indiana Specific</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindset: The ability to demonstrate cognitive flexibility and a willingness to learn. Developing mindset is a critical learning skill for building perseverance, adaptability, self-discovery, resilience, and the ability to receive and give constructive feedback.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Source:

- Source: Indiana Department of Education
How is Social-Emotional Learning Implemented?

Social-emotional learning can be fostered through multiple approaches and interventions. As visualized in the CASEL Core SEL Competencies Wheel, systemic implementation of SEL occurs when it is promoted across multiple contexts and is prioritized across various settings. While the competencies remain consistent, SEL at each grade level includes unique aspects focused on what is typically and developmentally appropriate. Social-emotional competence can be nurtured through direct teaching, creating a positive learning environment, using teaching practices that promote SEL, integrating of SEL into academic curriculum, and implementing schoolwide initiatives. 9

For early learning, interpersonal skills are heavily emphasized with a secondary focus on emotional processes. For example, SEL may include exercises related to understanding and managing feelings, dealing with diversity, and building community. 10 Programs for elementary school-aged children may focus on regulating their emotions and collaborating in a group environment. Practicing both helpful and unhelpful nonverbal skills for effective communication and practicing mindfulness activities are examples emphasized in these programs. 11

In secondary education, middle and high school students may focus on critical thinking skills and mindset. Middle school SEL might focus on having strong social awareness and empathizing with people of diverse backgrounds. 12 Mentoring programs could also be provided to students at this age, as well as cooperative learning activities. High school SEL may include an emphasis on building critical thinking skills, responsible decision-making, and critical inquiry skills. 13 Role-playing scenarios, self-assessment activities, Socratic Circles, and career exploration activities could be emphasized to build skills such as perseverance, self-discovery, resilience and adaptability. 14

According to the Aspen Institute Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, three essential elements are common across various social-emotional programs that continue to drive positive student outcomes. When these elements are combined into a single framework, children and youth are more engaged, find a purpose in their learning, and have a sense of ownership. 15

![CASEL Core Competencies Wheel](image)

1. Children and youth must be intentionally taught social, emotional, and cognitive skills. SEL programming is supported in classrooms through instruction and robust practice. This includes inserting relevant examples of academic subjects, intersecting with social-emotional competencies in lessons and designing opportunities for students to engage their SEL skills. 16 For example, role-playing activities where students discuss playground scenarios where problem-solving skills are used to resolve a conflict that arises can be used by teachers to develop this skill. 17

2. Students must be asked to exercise these skills as they learn academic content and in their interaction with peers and adults throughout the day. An emphasis on these skills supports challenge and rigor in learning. For example, explicitly teaching “mathematical courage” shows students how to take positive risks. Asking questions, making mistakes, and receiving suggestions from others can then enhance their learning of mathematics. 18

3. Students must have equitable access to learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe and feature meaningful relationships among and between adults and students. A respectful learning environment models and reinforces a student’s development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills throughout the entire school day instead of a single program or lesson. For example, allowing students to help develop school and classroom norms that are followed by everyone in the building throughout the year can create respectful learning environments in schools and reinforce the connection of students to the classroom. 19

What is the Impact of SEL?

Research has shown that evidence-based SEL programs improve a student’s grades, problem-solving skills, reading comprehension, and attendance. According to Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning, a report from CASEL, a majority of both current and recent high school students said that going to a school that focused on developing SEL skills would: help improve student, teacher and peer relationships; reduce bullying; help them learn academic material and real-world skills; prepare them for college and jobs/careers; and prepare them to give back to their communities. 20

- 88% of current students and 78% of recent high school students from strong SEL schools felt motivated to work hard and do their best in school, compared to 39% of current and 24% of recent students in low SEL schools.

- 77% of current high school students and 75% of recent students from strong SEL schools say they would participate in full-time military, national, or public service for their community or country, compared to 62% of current students and 58% of recent students from weak SEL high schools. 21
Academic Outcomes. A meta-analysis covering three decades of research found that supporting students’ social-emotional development produces an 11-percentage point gain in grades and test scores. SEL programming has been proven to enhance students’ connection to school, classroom behavior, and overall academic achievement. Students become more self-aware, more confident about their learning capacities, and try harder when faced with a challenge. 22

Attitude and Behavior. Social-emotional competency decreases dropout rates, school and classroom behavior issues, drug use, teen pregnancy, mental health problems and criminal behavior. Emotional skills and competencies help students recognize and manage emotions, understand the emotions, behavior and perspectives of others and cope. 23

Stress and Trauma. Social-emotional and cognitive development offsets the effects of stress and trauma. External influencers can place bodies and minds in a constant state of stress and high alert which interferes with learning and growth. SEL and providing youth with supportive adult relationships can buffer against the negative effects of stress and provide youth with a set of essential tools. 24

Social-emotional and cognitive development offsets the effects of stress and trauma.

Economic. Evidence-based SEL programs have shown a return on investment benefit of $11 for every dollar spent. The return on investment includes savings related to a reduction in suspension rates, juvenile crime rates, higher lifetime earnings, and over all better health outcomes. 25 In addition, research indicates the development of early prosocial skills reduces the likelihood of living in or being on a waiting list for public housing and receiving public assistance. 26

College and Career. Social-emotional competency increases high school graduation rates, postsecondary completion, employment rates, and average wages. SEL provides children with a broad array of skills, attitudes, and character traits to succeed in college and career. These skills are increasingly in demand in the workplace, which includes the ability to work in diverse teams, handle difficult problems, and adjust to rapid change. 27

School Climate and Safety. Students thrive in schools and organizations where they are safe and secure. School safety includes an absence of threats and describes an environment where students feel safe both physically and emotionally. Emotionally safe students feel free to express their emotions, have the confidence to take risks and tackle challenges, and feel valued, respected, and connected to learning. When schools work to build strong relationships, offer mental health supports, and teach students social-emotional skills, students become safer. 28

What solutions are possible?

Families, community partners, youth development organizations, local businesses, universities, and professional associations can partner and support schools in effective SEL implementation. The meaningful and effective cultivation of social, emotional, and cognitive development does not come from purchasing a program or mandating a new policy. It comes from communities working together to create and implement a vision for students’ comprehensive development. This may include building respectful learning communities that value all students and staff and foster positive relationships; teaching social, emotional, and cognitive skills explicitly and embedding them into all academic instruction; prioritizing and building adult capacity to model and teach these skills; and working across schools and community organizations to align and collaborate for the good of all children. 29

Individuals

✓ Reinforce the SEL skills outside of the school to provide additional opportunities to practice.
✓ Communicate, through many avenues and on an ongoing basis, the value and importance of developing the whole child.
✓ Foster positive relationships among staff, students, and adults.

Organizations and Communities

✓ Take a city-wide approach to educating the whole child including the mayor’s office, youth-serving organizations and schools.
✓ Include parents and provide learning opportunities on the key SEL terminology so that there is a shared understanding when discussing SEL.
✓ Align visions, missions, values, strategic plans, and budget priorities to a shared vision of comprehensive development.

Leaders and Policy Makers

✓ Assist in establishing a clear and shared understanding of what social-emotional development in K-12 education looks like and why it is important.
✓ Enable the flexible use of resources including dollars and allocations of staff, time, and facilities to support the whole child.
✓ Set the foundation for a community-driven movement that acknowledges the central role of local communities in SEL work.
What Resources are Available?

The Indiana Department of Education’s (IDOE) Indiana Social–Emotional Competencies and Toolkits address the social and emotional needs of students in grades Pre-K through 12 as well as provide essential resources for implementation and additional research. https://www.doe.in.gov/sebw

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a trusted source for knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning. CASEL supports educators and policy leaders and enhances the experiences and outcomes for all PreK through 12 students. www.casel.org

The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development was created to engage and energize communities in the re-envisioning of learning to support the whole child. The Commission explores how schools can fully integrate social, emotional, and academic development to support the whole student. www.aspeninstitute.org

Child Trends is the nation’s leading nonprofit research organization focused exclusively on improving the lives and prospects of children, youth, and their families. Child Trends provides rigorous research, unbiased analyses, and communications on topics including social-emotional development. www.childtrends.org

IYI RESOURCES

The Indiana KIDS COUNT Data Book is the premier data resource on Hoosier youth. Developed with you in mind, it provides an in-depth profile on child well-being across the four key areas of Family and Community, Health, Economic Well-Being and Education.

Attend a Youth Worker Café. Grounded in the latest research and innovative practices, our professional education experiences are designed to equip and empower the people, organizations and communities of Indiana that are focused on kids and youth. Topics will vary, but the goal is always the same. Practical and solution focused learnings that you can take back to your team to meet the unique needs of the children and communities you serve.

Submit a Custom Data Request. Curious about a youth issue? Do you need data for a grant application, report or presentation? We are here to help! We work with you to get the data and research you need.
Sources