

Social-Emotional Competencies in Context: Using Social-Emotional Learning Frameworks to Build Educators' Understanding

Given the large and growing number of SEL frameworks designed to meet different purposes and to work in different contexts, it is increasingly important to look both at specific frameworks in depth and to compare across frameworks. This is particularly so when choosing a framework to guide the selection of SEL strategies for implementation and/or assessment tools. In addition, once a framework is selected it should be aligned with other frameworks likely to be in use in a classroom, school, district, or broader context.

This series of three briefs examines three different efforts to compare frameworks. The first brief, about the Harvard Taxonomy Project, describes tools for comparing the words in different frameworks using a master thesaurus and interactive visualization tools. The second brief, by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), is based on AIR's study of 136 different frameworks from a variety of fields. The final brief, by CASEL, compares the existing state SEL standards as frameworks designed to help guide practice in each state.

Social-emotional development is critical to children's—and adults'—ability to navigate through life. Children develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally, and that development continues throughout the lifespan. Development happens not only in school but in all social settings. Social-emotional competencies include emotional processes such as regulating emotions and displaying empathy; interpersonal skills such as social competence and social perspective taking; and cognitive regulation, including cognitive or mental flexibility. Social-emotional competencies also include intercultural competence and understanding, connectedness to others, and social responsibility. These competencies are malleable, meaning they change depending on context and culture. Context and culture—and the social interactions young people have within them—can affect which competencies young people exhibit, how they exhibit them, and which competencies are reinforced. Therefore, researchers and practitioners should consider how social-emotional competencies relate to specific contexts.

Typically, practitioners and researchers use social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks to organize, define, and describe a combination of competencies.

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Frameworks draw on extensive evidence from more complex theories. The [introductory series of briefs](#) from the Assessment Work Group described in detail the importance and utility of SEL frameworks. SEL frameworks shed light on how to help individuals thrive by demonstrating how social-emotional competencies develop within particular developmental contexts such as school, home, and neighborhood. Frameworks can help shape how communities approach youth development. But how? Using frameworks, how can we identify which competencies are essential for some students in certain contexts at certain developmental periods and also for all students in all contexts?

STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (SEAS) HAVE BEEN USING EXISTING SEL FRAMEWORKS TO DEVELOP AND DEFINE SEL GOALS OR STANDARDS. CURRENTLY, 14 STATES HAVE USED SEL FRAMEWORKS TO CREATE K-12 LEARNING GOALS FOR SEL. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT STATE-LEVEL POLICY, VISIT CASEL'S [COLLABORATING STATES INITIATIVE](#) WEBPAGE AS WELL AS THE THIRD BRIEF IN THIS SERIES.

In this brief, we describe our comprehensive scan and analysis of 136 frameworks that address these questions and our findings. First, we describe the background and process used to examine frameworks and their competencies. Then, we discuss our findings regarding the importance of considering context in social-emotional competencies. Next, we explore what SEL frameworks tell us about how the development of competencies interacts with these contexts. Finally, we discuss implications for practice in implementing SEL.

Identifying, Defining, and Measuring Social-Emotional Competencies Through a Frameworks Search

Social-emotional competence is the capacity to integrate cognition, affect, and behaviors to realize positive developmental outcomes¹. Social-emotional competencies include **skills, knowledge, attitudes, perspectives, and values** that are adaptive to diverse contexts and develop over the lifespan. Numerous fields have attempted to quantify, qualify, and measure social-emotional competencies. Economists, developmental psychologists, behavioral specialists, and other scientists have studied social-emotional competencies for decades. Researchers may refer to these competencies as *noncognitive skills*, *employability skills*, and *emotional intelligence*. Although this important work can be aligned across fields^{2,3}, the lack of alignment of the various perspectives leads to a “jingle-jangle” effect: there are multiple terms and phrases that describe competencies, but they lack precision⁴. Misaligned and underaligned terminology can create difficulties both for implementing and assessing SEL.

¹ Elias, M. J., Weissberg, R. P., Hawkins, J. D., Perry, C. A., Zins, J. E., Dodge, K. C., ... & Wilson-Brewer, R. (1994). The school based promotion of social competence: Theory, practice and policy. *Stress, risk and resiliency in children and adolescents*, 268-316.

² Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*. doi:10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650

³ Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. *Applied Developmental Science*. doi:10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649

⁴ Jones, S., Bailey, R., Brush, K., Nelson, B., & Barnes, S. (2016). *What is the same and what is different? Making sense of the “non-cognitive” domain: Helping educators translate research into practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from https://easel.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-easel-lab/files/words_matter_paper.pdf

To address this concern, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), at the request of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, sought to delineate how social-emotional competencies are conceptualized, operationalized, and measured across diverse disciplines. In aligning multiple frameworks, AIR attempted to identify the competencies that researchers across multiple fields of study said were

THE TERM “FRAMEWORK” IS USED HERE TO REPRESENT ANY ORGANIZING STRATEGY THAT IDENTIFIES BEHAVIORS, ATTITUDES, PERSPECTIVES, AND VALUES THAT DEVELOP OVER THE LIFESPAN.

FRAMEWORKS ARE CREATED FOR MULTIPLE REASONS, INCLUDING TO IDENTIFY STANDARDS AND KEY COMPETENCIES, PROVIDE GUIDELINES FOR MEASUREMENT, DEVELOP THEORY OR RESEARCH, OR GUIDE APPLIED PRACTICE.

most critical to establishing a healthy developmental pathway.

Our search for frameworks involved a three-pronged approach. We sought advice from internal experts at AIR, conducted an extensive search of online databases and websites, and consulted with external experts. As a result of our search, we examined 136 frameworks from 14 substantive areas, including juvenile justice, foster care, trauma/resilience, economics, and disability/special education. To identify patterns across frameworks, we coded the frameworks using information such as the focal

age groups and whether the framework included developmental sequencing; the substantive area from which the framework was developed; whether or not the framework acknowledged children experiencing adversity, trauma, and difficulty; and whether the framework addressed the unique needs and experiences of racial, ethnic, or national groups.

To further analyze the frameworks and the competencies within those frameworks, we selected 50 of the 136 frameworks for deeper analysis, ensuring that there was a proportional representation of frameworks based on our codes. Within the 50-framework analysis sample, we identified 748 competencies, some of which were repeated in two or more frameworks. To further organize the competencies and facilitate comparison, we coded the competencies qualitatively using the taxonomy developed by the Taxonomy Project at Harvard University⁵.

These analyses permitted us to specify the connections between and among SEL frameworks and to deepen knowledge about the social-emotional competencies most critical to establishing a healthy developmental pathway. We also provided recommendations for developing measures for both in-school and out-of-school time settings⁶. Further details about the methods, similarities and differences between frameworks, information about each of the frameworks, competencies identified, and recommendations are described in the [full report](#).

Findings on Social-Emotional Development in Context

Casting such a wide net enabled us to identify three key issues about healthy social-emotional development in context:

⁵ See <https://easel.gse.harvard.edu/taxonomy-project> for more details about the coding system as well as the [first brief](#) in this series

⁶ To examine how competencies are measured, the AIR team conducted a measurement scan. The AIR team mapped the constructs of the measures onto the Harvard Taxonomy in order to determine which areas had measure coverage.

- **Competencies and context complement each other.** Situational demands may vary by context and one's position in a context. This contextual dependence applies to all youth, including youth with disabilities, youth who have experienced trauma, or youth who face societal marginalization or other stressors. Shifting our collective understanding of SEL would allow for a more strengths-based perspective in research and implementation.
- **Children express their competencies in different ways in different contexts. Researchers and practitioners must be mindful of this variability.** Some frameworks are explicit about context and sequencing. Such frameworks consider developmental periods, trauma, adversity, disability, and cultural diversity. Many frameworks, however, are not explicit. Frameworks should consider the complexities of young people's experiences within the different contexts in which they grow and learn.
- **Key social-emotional competencies include those that build awareness of privilege, bias, and cultural competence, help individuals adapt to diverse and challenging contexts, and allow individuals to connect with their communities.** These competencies should be considered when designing standards, measures, and assessments of SEL.

In the following sections, we use findings from our scan to elaborate on some of the implications of these three issues.

Considering Sociocultural Contexts Across Frameworks

Young people develop competencies through interactions with others in a variety of *sociocultural contexts*. Context encompasses multiple factors. For example, context includes the extent to which the school, community, or home are safe and supportive. Context also refers to the degree to which an environment is culturally responsive. Context interacts with young people's multiple social identities, which can include class, gender, race, age, sexual orientation, and ability status. These interactions change over time and across developmental stages.

The competencies that are considered necessary to be successful and the ways in which these competencies develop over time vary according to context and one's role and status in the context (e.g., student or teacher). Sociocultural contexts may encourage the acquisition of specific competencies. For example, some cultures prize children for speaking up in class, while other cultures consider deference a sign of respect. Both norms are acceptable, but the onus is on educators to recognize these differences as strengths when they implement SEL.

Successfully navigating different contexts is an important skill for youth who enter and exit diverse contexts that only sometimes correspond with their social identities⁷. One way youth successfully navigate different contexts is by what Cross and colleagues call *code-switching* in their developmental

⁷ Rogoff, B., Moore, L., Najafi, B., Dexter, A., Correa-Chávez, M., & Solís, J. (2007). Children's development of cultural repertoires through participation in everyday routines and practices. In J. E. Grusec & P. D. Hastings (Eds.), *Handbook of socialization*. (pp. 490-515). NY: Guilford.

model for African-American youth⁸. This refers to the ability to regulate behavior to suit the context and the comfort level of people from other, generally dominant, groups⁹.

Each context can either support or hinder young people's emerging competencies. Adaptation to context depends on young people's individual strengths and needs. In frameworks that focus on youth-serving systems and services, such as juvenile justice and foster care, this interaction of context and competencies is a defining feature. For example, youth who have encountered the juvenile justice system are often stigmatized when they reenter the classroom setting¹⁰. *Prosociality* and *integration within the community* are two competencies that were identified in the Positive Youth Justice Model. These competencies emphasize gaining or regaining connections with others following an encounter with the juvenile justice system¹¹.

Youth with disabilities also have a unique set of strengths and needs. The Progression Framework for young people on the autism spectrum focuses on commonly identified competencies such as social communication, social interaction, and social information processing but also on competencies such as *sensory processing* and *independence and community participation*, which help individuals with autism transition to adulthood¹².

Next, we discuss what we learned about key competencies in different sociocultural contexts and across developmental periods. Specifically, we focus on (1) culture, racial/ethnic diversity, and inequality, (2) adversity and trauma, and (3) age.

Culture, Racial/Ethnic Diversity, and Inequality

Development, including social and emotional development, is dependent on culture¹³. All students, and especially culturally and linguistically diverse youth, benefit from instruction that responds to their life experiences¹⁴. However, children's cultural assets, or strengths, and the challenges they face due

⁸ Cross, W. E., Jr., Strauss, L., & Fhagen-Smith, P. (1999). African American identity development across the life span: Educational implications. In R. H. Sheets & E. R. Hollins (Eds.), *Racial and ethnic identity in school practices: Aspects of human development* (pp. 29–47). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Morris, M. W. (2015). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in school*. New York, NY: The New Press.

¹¹ Butts, J. A., Bazemore, G., & Meroe, A. S. (2010). *Positive youth justice: Framing justice interventions using the concepts of positive youth development*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Juvenile Justice. Retrieved from <https://positiveyouthjustice.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/pyj2010.pdf>

¹² Autism Education Trust. (2015). *A progression framework for pupils on the autism spectrum: Notes, guidance, and instructions for use*. Retrieved from <http://www.aettraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/PROGRESSION-FRAMEWORK-NOTES-AND-GUIDANCE-170216.pdf>

¹³ Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence. (1994). The school-based promotion of social competence: Theory, practice, and policy. In R. J. Haggerty, L. R. Sherrod, N. Garnezy, & M. Rutter (Eds.), *Stress, risk, and resilience, in children and adolescents: Processes, mechanisms, and interventions* (pp. 268–316). New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ Simmons, D. (2017). Is social-emotional learning really going to work for students of color? *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2017/06/07/we-need-to-redefine-social-emotional-learning-for.html>

to structural inequality and bias, privilege, and prejudice, are often insufficiently addressed in SEL¹⁵. Researchers and practitioners are now gaining greater clarity about the importance of considering culture in SEL¹⁶.

To broaden the SEL conversation to include cultural assets, the AIR team targeted frameworks that would provide insights into the strengths of culturally and linguistically diverse youth of color. The team found 24 such frameworks that emphasized the strengths of African- American, Latino/a, Asian-American, and American Indian youth. Frameworks developed for culturally and linguistically diverse youth remind us that key competencies include those that help young people adapt to diverse and challenging contexts, connect with their communities, and enhance awareness of bias and privilege.

**SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
COMPETENCIES THAT HAVE
NOT BEEN CONSIDERED IN
UNIVERSAL SEL:**

- Biculturalism
- Coping with racism
- Communalism
- Fairness
- Respect for diversity

Many of the competencies identified in the cultural asset frameworks overlapped with those identified in other frameworks, such as *communication skills*, *self-awareness*, and *managing emotions*. However, other competencies are seen less often in frameworks that are commonly used in SEL and education. Some of these competencies help young people adapt to the multiple—sometimes misaligned and unequal—contexts in which they grow up. For example, *biculturalism* is defined by one framework as “adapting to the mainstream culture while maintaining ethnic identity” (p. 18)¹⁷. *Coping with racism* is defined by one framework as an outcome of adaptation to the dominant culture¹⁸.

Other competencies emphasize a sense of connection and community. Communalism includes “the importance of social bonds and social duties, reflects a fundamental sense of interdependence and primacy of collective well-being, and offers the drive for connection and promotion within and across diverse groups” (p. 18)¹⁹. *Respect for diversity*²⁰ is another example of a competency that emphasizes young people’s connection to others around them, as is *fairness*^{21,22,23}.

¹⁵ Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 117–136. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44219024>

¹⁶ Osher, D., Kidron, Y., Brackett, M., Dymnicki, A., Jones, S., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Advancing the science and practice of social and emotional learning: Looking back and moving forward. *Review of Research in Education*, 40, 644–681.

¹⁷ Coll, C. G., Lamberty, G., Jenkins, R., McAdoo, H. P., Crnic, K., Wasik, B. H., & Garcia, H. V. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child Development*, 67(5), 1891–1914.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ American Psychological Association, Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents. (2008). *Resilience in African American children and adolescents: A vision for optimal development*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/resiliencrpt.pdf>

²⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2015). 2013 Asia-Pacific Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net) regional study on transversal competencies in education policy and practice (phase 1). Paris, France: Author. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002319/231907E.pdf>

²¹ Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A classification and handbook*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; and Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

²² Guerra, N., Modecki, K., & Cunningham, W. (2014). *Developing social-emotional skills for the labor market: The PRACTICE model* (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper). Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

²³ Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2005). *What works in character education: A research-driven guide for educators*. Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership. Retrieved from http://www.character.org/uploads/PDFs/White_Papers/White_Paper_What_Works_Practitioner.pdf

Implications for Practice

Together, the frameworks and competencies that speak to culturally and linguistically diverse youth remind us that youth use their cultural assets to interact with others in a world where they face unique challenges and unequal opportunities. Competencies such as the ones described above receive less attention in universal frameworks.

All youth—not just those who experience marginalization—can benefit from explicit teaching of competencies that help them adapt to their contexts and connect with their communities. These competencies contribute to a more respectful, culturally competent, and thoughtful culture. Competencies that enable people to be aware of their own privileges and the mindsets that relate to them can contribute to inclusive schools and communities. Frameworks, standards, and interventions can and should address these competencies.

Educators can engage in a number of practices to ensure they support students in developing and applying competencies in the school context, including:

- (1) reflecting on one's own cultural biases;
- (2) identifying the multiple ways in which children can express their competencies across contexts and cultures;
- (3) engaging in crucial conversations with colleagues;
- (4) celebrating each child's unique and collective identities.

See also [Equity & Social and Emotional Learning: A Cultural Analysis](#) in the Special Issue Series of Framework Briefs.

Adversity and Trauma

Although most youth have experienced some degree of adversity, some youth develop in contexts that are systematically more challenging or traumatic than other contexts. Acute trauma, as well as chronic adversity, can negatively affect children's development²⁴. Having social-emotional competencies can buffer, or lessen, these negative effects. For example, some youth may experience the loss of a loved one, which can be considered an acute trauma. With guidance and support, children can use a variety of competencies—such as *self-care*, *perspective taking*, and *relationship building*—to help mitigate some of the effects of the trauma. Children can use their competencies more effectively when they have support from caring, supportive people and contexts.

We examined whether frameworks were sensitive to the development of individuals who have experienced trauma and adversity. The team identified 21 such frameworks. Although fewer than 10% of these frameworks directly addressed how these interact with the development of competencies. The 21 frameworks provided insight into how resilience-building competencies can address the impacts of trauma and other difficulties.

These frameworks included competencies that can assist children in overcoming traumatic experiences.

²⁴ Masten, A. S., & Obradović, J. (2006). Competence and resilience in development. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1094, 13–24. doi:10.1196/annals.1376.003

For example, the Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide to Education and Therapy (TARGET) framework focuses on children who have experienced trauma. The framework includes competencies such as *recognizing current triggers for “alarm” reactions, evaluating thoughts, and defining behavioral options*, which can help a child calm down when he or she is in an upsetting situation²⁵. These competencies resemble those identified in commonly used frameworks, such as *identifying emotions* and *recognizing strengths*. Yet these competencies are distinct because they address how an individual who has experienced trauma might react to a stressful environment.

Implications for Practice

Frameworks that address trauma and adversity identify the competencies that help young people face chronic or acute trauma and adversity, which may include race-based and other discriminatory stressors. Competencies that speak to resilience and the ability to adapt to challenging contexts may specifically help those children who have experienced trauma, but they may also benefit all youth. By exposing youth to resilience-building competencies, adults can help them navigate a variety of daily stresses and long-term challenges, as well as encourage them to be better partners, colleagues, and citizens; avoid self-serving and victim-blaming thinking; be humbler; and be less judgmental of others.

Educators can engage in a number of practices to encourage the development of social-emotional competencies to support students who have experienced potentially traumatic experiences, including:

- (1) getting to know their students;
- (2) identifying one’s own triggers in the classroom;
- (3) developing their own competencies;
- (4) creating safe places in the classroom;
- (5) providing student choice and responsibility in the classroom.

Age and Developmental Sequencing

As children develop, their abilities and the demands of the situations they encounter shift. Toddlers learn to control their behavior; children become experts at cooperation and peer interaction as they progress through elementary school; and adolescents craft individual identities as they gain more independence from their parents^{26,27,28}. However, many SEL programs lack sufficient nuance and depth to describe how

²⁵ Ford, J. D., & Russo, E. (2006). Trauma-focused, present-centered, emotional self-regulation approach to integrated treatment for post traumatic stress and addiction: Trauma adaptive recovery group education and therapy (TARGET). *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 60(4), 335–355.

²⁶ Raver, C. (2003). *Young children’s emotional development and school readiness*. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED477641.pdf>

²⁷ Ladd, G. W. (1999). Peer relationships and social competence during early and middle childhood. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 333–359. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.333

²⁸ Blakemore, S. J., & Choudhury, S. (2006). Development of the adolescent brain: Implications for executive function and social cognition. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 47(3-4), 296–312. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2006.01611.x

expressions of social-emotional competencies shift and change as children mature²⁹.

Age differentiation and related developmental sequencing of competencies add clarity about the competencies that develop as students age and transition from spending a great deal of time at home and in childcare to spending more time in school, with peers, and in community activities. For example, identity concerns and feelings of self-efficacy may be especially important and useful during the transition to adulthood.

Frameworks that include one or more developmental periods or age spans identify competencies that are specific to the transitions that youth are going through during those ages. For example, the Positive Youth Development framework identifies competencies that become especially salient in adolescence, such as *social confidence* and *conflict resolution*³⁰.

Although most framework developers have not conceptualized the acquisition or development of competencies along a trajectory based on developmental age or period, but 11 of 136 frameworks provided such a developmental sequencing of competencies. The Building Blocks for Learning framework offers an example of a developmentally sequenced framework³¹. Foundational skills such as *stress management* and *self-regulation* contribute to school readiness skills like self-awareness and social awareness, which contribute to mindsets such as *self-efficacy*, which are associated with higher-order competencies such as *resilience* and *civic identity*.

²⁹ Denham, S. (2018). *Keeping SEL developmental: The importance of a developmental lens for fostering and assessing SEL competencies*. Chicago, IL: CASEL.

³⁰ Hair, E. C., Jager, J., & Garrett, S. B. (2002). *Helping teens develop healthy social skills and relationships: What the research shows about navigating adolescence*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2002/07/Child_Trends-2002_07_01_RB_TeenSocialSkills.pdf

³¹ Stafford-Brizard, K. B. (2016). *Building blocks for learning: A framework for comprehensive student development*. Retrieved from <http://www.turnaroundusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Turnaround-for-Children-Building-Blocks-for-Learningx-2.pdf>

Implications for Practice

The competencies that are most adaptive to specific contexts shift as young people get older and their contexts change. Age differentiation and developmental sequencing are important for understanding healthy development as young people's needs and contexts change.

Frameworks which only talk about a very broad age range may not fully meet the needs of all ages and are likely to contain less usable information. When examining frameworks, researchers and practitioners should analyze the extent to which frameworks provide age differentiation or developmental sequencing to determine the appropriateness of the framework for their purposes.

Educators can engage in a number of practices to ensure they support the developmental progression of social-emotional competencies in the school context, including:

- (1) defining what the competency looks like in different age bands and in different contexts;
- (2) reinforcing competencies that children may have developed earlier;
- (3) collaborating with colleagues to ensure they are using a common frame when talking about developmental progressions of social-emotional competencies;
- (4) understanding the complexity of the competencies.

See also [*Keeping SEL Developmental: The Importance of a Developmental Lens for Fostering and Assessing SEL Competencies in the Special Issue Series of Framework Briefs*](#)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Although it may not be feasible to examine 100-plus frameworks, those who are considering adopting one or more frameworks can ask key questions to determine whether the frameworks address children's contexts. No single framework will fit every context, or the needs of every child. The questions below may help practitioners evaluate frameworks in order to more fully address the needs of the specific population in their school, program, district, or state.

Does the framework...

1. Consider competencies from the perspective of other cultures, races, or ethnicities?
2. Align competencies to specific ages, grades, or developmental periods?
3. Provide clear definitions of competencies and not just single words or phrases?
4. Offer approaches to support student development in a culturally responsive manner?
5. Clearly articulate what behavioral expressions of social and emotional competencies look like in practice?
6. Address the skills youth will need to successfully navigate interactions inside and outside of school, including the skills they will need as they enter adulthood?
7. Address the skills youth need to interact with peers and adults who are different from themselves and to contribute to a more positive society?

The AIR report that is the foundation of this brief can be useful in exploring these questions, along with the third brief in the Introductory Series of Measuring SEL Framework Briefs -- [Ten Criteria for Describing and Selecting SEL Frameworks](#).

Conclusions

As SEL gains momentum and is implemented at scale, educators can best serve their students if they understand competencies with greater specificity. Greater precision, depth, and nuance in what we mean when we say *self-awareness* or *responsible decision-making* are necessary for understanding how educators and families can support and encourage youth development, as well as measure young people's capacities. Although the field of SEL has made great strides, there is still more to learn about how young people develop competencies, use competencies to navigate different contexts, and express competencies differently across contexts and over time.

GREATER PRECISION, DEPTH, AND NUANCE IN WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY *SELF-AWARENESS* OR *RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING* IS NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING HOW EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES CAN SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, AS WELL AS MEASURE YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAPACITIES.

frameworks across diverse disciplines underscored the necessity of emphasizing competencies in all young people that build awareness of privilege, bias, and cultural competence. These competencies help build supportive and equitable environments by allowing young people to navigate diverse settings and expectations in culturally competent ways.

Although SEL has most often been understood as a universal intervention, individual children have distinct needs and strengths, driven by their individual developmental trajectories, contexts, and cultures. Further, youth interact with diverse individuals in school, in their neighborhoods, and eventually, in the workplace. They enter the classroom at different starting points, depending on the opportunities they have been afforded in their young lives. They also use and apply competencies depending on their community and societal context.

SEL frameworks that are explicit about context and consider age, adversity, trauma, and cultural diversity highlight the ways in which young people express their social-emotional competencies in different ways and the need to be mindful of this variability. At the same time, such frameworks remind us how important social-emotional competencies are for adaptation, coping, connection, independence, and social responsibility.

Researchers, educators, families, and communities should view each child's current social-emotional capacities and different expressions of strengths as assets, rather than as deficits. They should be mindful of the complexity of social-emotional development and the factors—such as potentially traumatic experiences, societal marginalization, and other stressors—that contribute to variability, recognizing that there is not one singular approach but multiple approaches to meet the needs of all students. Finally, they

CONSIDERING SEL ASSESSMENT?

[*Are you ready to assess social and emotional development?*](#)
Washington, DC: Author.

Our [report](#) highlights the many frameworks that identify and organize social-emotional and related competencies. These frameworks have developed in different disciplines and fields, with different goals, purposes, and foci—each of which matter in children's learning and development. Our search has taught us that there is a potential for alignment of competencies across many frameworks. At the same time, some competencies, including those that deal with cultural competence and social responsibility, are underrepresented or not well defined in dominant frameworks. A scan of

should remember that social-emotional competencies can benefit all young people by helping to contribute to more positive contexts for everyone.

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Amy Mart is a Researcher at American Institutes for Research. She has over a decade of experience working at the intersection of research, policy, and practice to promote positive outcomes for young people. Her work focuses on applying empirical and practical evidence to continuously improve conditions in K-12 education systems that support students' social, emotional, and academic development. She currently leads research, evaluation, and consultation projects that focus on social and emotional learning and supportive learning environments.

The Measuring SEL Series of Frameworks Briefs

The *Establishing Practical Social-Emotional Competence Assessments of Preschool to High School Students* project as guided by the Assessment Work Group (AWG) is dedicated to helping advance the effective use of data to inspire practice in SEL. In deciding how the AWG could best contribute to advancing the field and complement rather than compete with other efforts underway to address the challenges of multiple frameworks and inconsistent use of language, the AWG Frameworks Subgroup, led by Stephanie Jones and Roger Weissberg, developed four series of briefs designed for practitioners. Each series and each brief in the series is designed to help advance how people think about the issues and make reasonable choices that work best for them and their context. We hope they provide a set of “building blocks” that systems and practitioners can use to advance and improve their SEL efforts. Learn more at <https://measuringssel.casel.org>

Introductory Series

These briefs are about what frameworks are, how they are useful, the challenges and opportunities they present in practice, and defining criteria that are helpful when considering what frameworks to use.

Comparative Series

These briefs explore efforts underway to categorize and align ways of thinking about comparing unique frameworks. The briefs also describe tools available to aid systems and practitioners in their selection and use of a framework.

Special Issues Series

These briefs identify critical issues that frameworks must address or that influence how they are used that are important to consider when selecting and using frameworks, such as equity and SEL, and developmental considerations.

Descriptive Series

These briefs each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. *(The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.)*

The Assessment Work Group is committed to advancing dialogue on key issues in the field and stating a perspective when appropriate. The views and opinions expressed in these briefs reflect the general position of the Assessment Work Group. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CASEL or any of the individual organizations involved with the work group.