Preparing Youth to Thrive:
Promising Practices for
Social and Emotional Learning

Overview

The Preparing Youth to Thrive Field Guide describes promising practices for building skills in six domains: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem-solving. The guide presents 32 standards and 58 indicators of SEL practice in these six domains (defined below) as well as four curriculum features that were shown to be foundational for supporting SEL practices.

- **Emotion management:** Ability to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.
- **Empathy**: Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.
- **Teamwork**: Ability to collaborate and coordinate action with others.
- **Responsibility**: Disposition and ability to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.
- **Initiative**: Capacity to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.
- **Problem-solving**: Ability to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.

History of the Framework

The Preparing Youth to Thrive framework came from the SEL Challenge. After years of supporting out-of-school time (OST) programs in promoting quality practices that support positive youth development, the Forum for Youth Investment's Weikart Center undertook three years of research between several key partners, including the Susan Crown Exchange and consultants such as Dr. Reed Larson. The SEL Challenge aimed to distill best practices and

**Preparing Youth
to Thrive**

*The Forum for Youth Investment
and Susan Crown Exchange*

The SEL Challenge and guide have strengthened the bridge between research & practice, distilling brilliant ways to create readiness-rich environments that spark young people's social & emotional growth.

– Karen Pittman

The briefs in this 10-part series 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.

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aspects of curricula to discern which SEL skills are most important to children's success. The SEL Challenge also sought to identify promising practices for building skills in the six domains and has elevated the conversation on how to support learning beyond school hours and allowed learning communities to exchange information. These best practices and examples of them are available for any program to use through a guide, Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices in Social & Emotional Learning (Field Guide), which is the primary resource for those interested in using the framework.

To create the framework and Field Guide, developers focused on a participatory action approach – an approach to research in communities that emphasizes collaboration, participation, and action – drawing on 30 years of qualitative data from practitioners and youth. Additionally, from a pool of 250 providers of programs with SEL outcomes and experience in articulating theories of change, eight programs were featured in the Field Guide to provide rich examples. Finally, in recognition of developmental appropriateness, framework developers also investigated the relevance of the framework for children and produced findings in a complementary guide, Preparing Children to Thrive: Standards for Social and Emotional Learning in School-Age Settings.
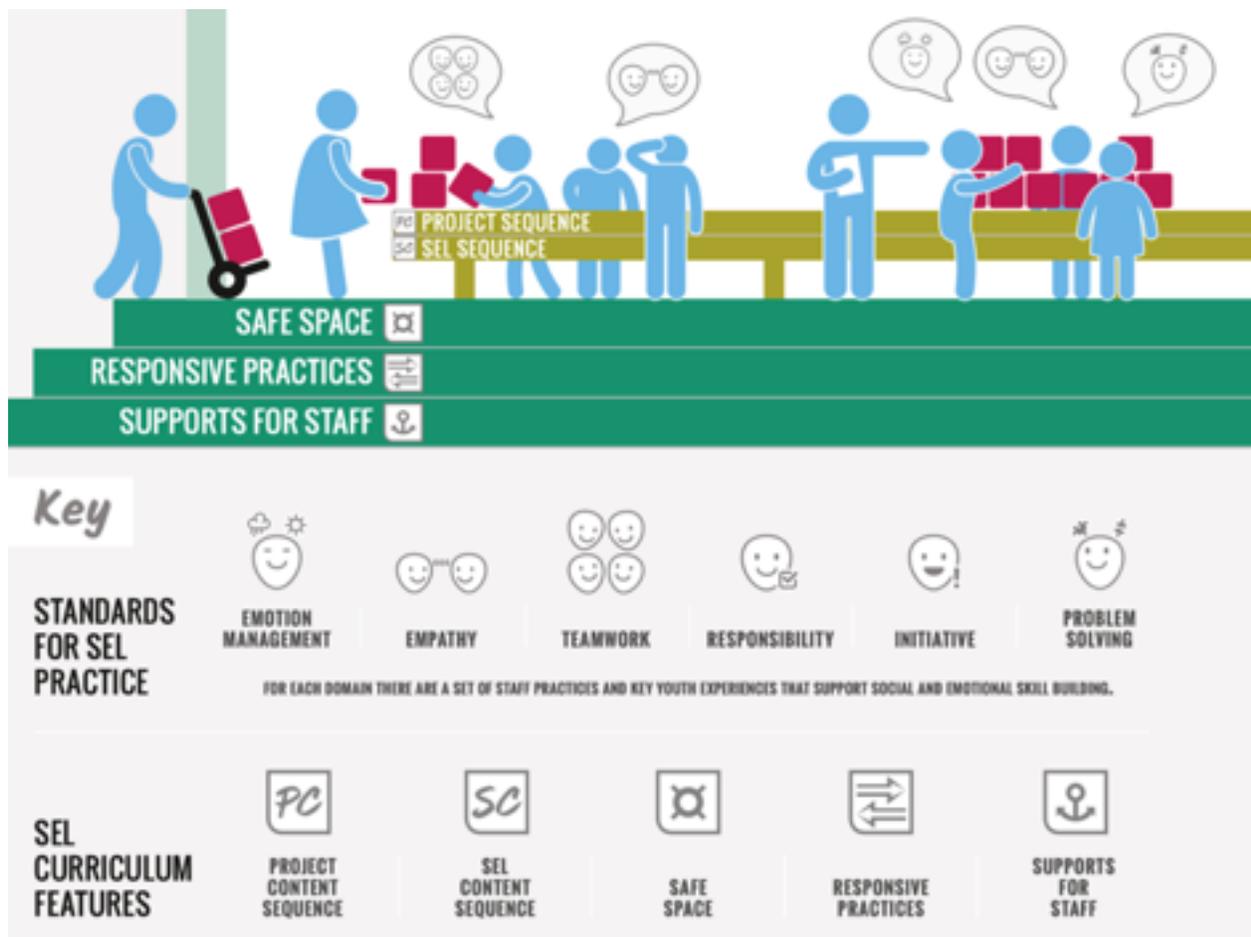
Purpose and Intended Audience

The goal of the Preparing Youth to Thrive Field Guide is to produce a framework that integrated multiple aspects of SEL practice - including individual skills, curriculum, instruction, and management.

The primary audience for the Field Guide is practitioners in OST settings, because developers recognize that OST, particularly when connected and coordinated with the school day, is a great opportunity to build SEL and give youth voice. The Field Guide was an opportunity to engage in a larger communications campaign to provide SEL practices, hands-on tools, and activities for a range of audiences. The hope is for users of the Field Guide to create and pursue their own action plans for implementing SEL in their OST programs and networks. A secondary audience is OST practitioners and decision-makers in order to inform policy-making about how to best support and fund programs and the conditions that enable/facilitate SEL.

COMPETENCIES NAMED IN THIS FRAMEWORK

- Emotion management
- Empathy
- Teamwork
- Responsibility
- Initiative
- Problem-Solving

Settings

The Field Guide (an output of the SEL Challenge) was created in partnership with practitioners in OST programs, and so will speak readily to those who work in this setting. The learnings from the SEL Challenge, though, speak more generally to social, emotional, and cognitive development of young people, across multiple settings. The Field Guide recognizes that not much information exists on continuing SEL into the middle childhood and adolescent years and fills this gap. Another key focus of the Field Guide was to understand SEL in vulnerable youth. Each program articulated "vulnerable" differently, such as free/reduced lunch, low income, ethnic minority, or geographical neighborhood.

Criteria Ratings: Conceptual Clarity

FIVE CONCEPTUAL CLARITY CRITERIA			
CRITERIA	**LOW**	**MEDIUM**	**HIGH**
Specificity	For each domain, a definition, key youth experiences, and staff practices are provided, along with examples of how to develop these domains.		
Balance	The six domains, or constructs, in the framework include intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies. The framework recognizes the overlap within and between domains, and a goal is to further define them using input from practitioners. In general, the framework posits that context (e.g., SEL curriculum features) builds and helps develop SEL-related cognitive skills.		
Developmental	While acknowledging these skills build over time through an integrated Project Content and SEL content sequence and look differently over time, developmental sequencing within adolescence is not provided. The Thrive Guide takes a particular focus on older youth (ages 12 and up), as well as time periods of development, with the shortest time period as six weeks through the longest as nine months to a full year. Developers have investigated the appropriateness of the framework for children and found that the framework also applies for children, given two adaptations and a caveat. These findings are presented in a complementary guide Preparing Children to Thrive: Standards for Social and Emotional Learning Practices in School-Age Settings.		
Culturally Sensitive	The Field Guide encourages using the OST space with older youth to critically reflect, find empathy with each other, and work as a team to respond to systemic oppression and be able to think about the larger context in society. They also encourage developing a sense of agency to make choices that help address key challenges and problems that are potentially based on cultural, ethnic, or racial differences. Part of the Field Guide is about bringing those equity conversations into the program and engaging deeply with young people around questions of oppression. This is outlined in the Field Guide - specifically in the curriculum features and empathy stories sections. The Field Guide provides practices that can help staff think about how they're creating sensitive and responsive programs that provide a learning environment for young people to engage with these topics and that gives youth voice and the opportunity to respond.		
Empirically Grounded	The Field Guide drew on and used CASEL's definition of SEL as its foundation. The six domains were based on prior research supporting the importance of these competencies to student success, as well as on input from practitioners. A technical guide (available online) provides information on all the analyses and criteria that ground the framework.		
These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in this brief and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the introductory brief to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particualr context.			

Criteria Ratings: Implementation Support

FIVE IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT CRITERIA			
CRITERIA	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Intended for Practice	Practical knowledge and expertise were driving factors and a key focus in the development of the Field Guide, which is meant for a wide audience and available to everyone. Recognizing that work around SEL typically includes a range of OST networks, schools, and other partners, the Field Guide equips practitioners to have conversations about where work under different SEL frameworks intersect. The Field Guide builds out a suite of SEL methods and practices to complement the frameworks practitioners are already working within. In addition, the Field Guide promotes practitioner self-awareness and understanding of what they can do to think about their own SEL to model and scaffold into their work with youth.		
Resources for Practitioners	The main resource for practitioners is the Field Guide – available for download or as a printed copy. Additional resources and tools are provided on the selpractices.org webpage. Live trainings which align with the Field Guide and are focused on the domains and curriculum features are also available. These resources are meant to support staff to develop their own practices in adult/staff teams to implement SEL.		
Resources for Use with Children and Youth	The Guide is mostly geared toward practitioners (both in-school and OST), and such resources are not part of their offerings. However, both guides present a framework for practitioners along with case studies which provide examples of staff practices and specific activities that can be used with children and youth directly to develop their SEL skills. The accompanying website also provides up-to-date research and resources in the six domains, examples of activities that can be used with children and youth directly, and tips and tools from exemplary SEL programs.		
Resources for Measurement and Data Use	The Weikart Center has two standard measures related to the framework: SEL Program Quality Assessment (PQA), a validated instrument based on observation of learning contexts, and Staff Rating of Youth Behavior. These are available at http://www.cypq.org/content/selpqa. Additionally, framework developers wanted to augment these by translating the research on qualitative and granular experiences into these measures. Developers are in the process of validating instruments with additional items such as creating safe spaces, emotion coaching, scaffolding learning, fostering growth mindset, fostering teamwork, promoting responsibility and leadership, and cultivating empathy. Other measures such as a self-perception youth survey and youth skills measure were also developed in partnerships. The technical report on the SEL challenge is also available and provides information about the suite of performance measures, and the benchmarks from the performance studies.		
Empirically Tested	The work drew deeply from Dr. Larson's work and the youth program quality pyramid (a research-based framework of what goes into high-quality developmental learning experiences, such as a safe and supportive environment, opportunities to build higher-order skills). Additionally, an implementation study that measured SEL in OST and discusses lessons learned, as well as the Technical Report, is available on the website.		
These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in this brief and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the introductory brief to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particualr context.			

Summary of the Framework

The Preparing Youth to Thrive Guide came from the SEL Challenge - a partnership between Susan Crown Exchange, the Forum for Youth Investment's David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, staff teams from exemplary OST programs, and technical consultants. The partnership was created as a learning community to gather collective expertise into an integrated set of statements and stories about how to do SEL work with adolescents from underserved populations to share with OST practitioners. The resulting Guide identifies promising practices for building adolescents' skills in six areas: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem-solving.

About the Developer

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality is a unit of the Forum for Youth Investment that is focused on strengthening the quality of practice in expanded learning programs and the systems that support them. The Weikart Center works in the areas of positive youth development, adult learning, measurement, knowledge management, technical assistance, and lower stakes accountability policy.

Susan Crown Exchange (SCE) is a Chicago-based foundation that leverages up-to-date research, best practices, grant-making, and innovative programming to design, evaluate, and promote high-quality learning experiences for young people beyond the classroom, particularly youth from underserved communities.

About the Author

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Teresa Borowski is a graduate student in the Community and Prevention Research PhD program in Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where her research focuses on social-emotional competence development, particularly through dance and other arts. She works as a research specialist with CASEL's research team and the Frameworks subgroup of the Assessment Work Group. She is also the co-editor of Measuring SEL's blog. Prior to UIC, Teresa worked as a research assistant in the Infant Cognition Lab and the Cultural Studio at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and for the Learning and Memory Lab at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology.

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Smith, C., McGovern, G., Larson, R., Hillaker, B., & Peck, S. C. (2016). Preparing youth to thrive: Promising Practices for Social Emotional Learning. Forum for Youth Investment: Washington, D. C. Retrieved from: https://www.selpractices.org/

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Useful Links to Explore

- Preparing Youth to Thrive website: https://www.selpractices.org/

- Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SELPQA) Introduction and Overview: http://www.cypq.org/content/selpqa

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://measuringsel.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.