



# CENTERING EQUITY IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Created by:  
*M. Nickie Coomer*

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## About the Centers

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Great Lakes Equity Center (Center) is an educational research and service center located in Indiana University's School of Education at IUPUI. The Center engages in equity-focused technical assistance and related research with educational and community agencies focused on systemic improvements to serve all learners with particular focus on educational access, participation and outcomes for those who have been historically marginalized. Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center is a project of the Center and provides technical assistance related to educational equity based on student race, national origin, sex, and religion at no cost to public educational agencies throughout its 13-state region in the Midwest and Plains.



## Introduction

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Social Emotional Learning (SEL) developed out of a trend in progressive education that stressed students' character development as much, if not more, than academic advancement for the purpose of fostering a moral and just democratic citizenry (Cohen, 2006). Importantly, pedagogical progressions in both moral and character education have served as the basis for the evolution from character education into Social Emotional Learning. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the leading organization in developing research and policy around SEL, providing research and technical support to states as they develop and implement SEL in their schools. Most notably, the language of CASEL's Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning five core competencies is visible across SEL state standards, organized in five standardized domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

As curriculum developers and educational policy makers adopt the work of CASEL to inform education policy and the development of state standards for SEL, it is important to understand how these competencies have developed, and equity implications for those students who have been historically marginalized within and by schools. Importantly, contemporary trends in SEL have shifted the focus from the moral development of character traits for a more just democracy, to the internal emotional worlds of students, and externalizing behaviors as a reaction to an inferred internal experience. As with any standardization of behavioral norms, aberrations of that norm are concurrently defined. With the shift from the development of individuals for the good of a society to a focus on the emotional well-being of students also comes a mechanism by which school professionals infer the motivations of student behavior, which ultimately risks both policy around social emotional learning aimed at managing student behavior and emotion, as well as pathologizing emotional responses that do not adhere to the



## Introduction (Continued)

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norms of the school.

It is imperative for school leaders and policymakers to consider how standards and policies related to SEL continue to the center norms of emotional experiences and behavioral response that are rooted in the preferences of the White, middle class (Tobin, 1995), and that rather than control student behavior, SEL can be a responsive method by which school professionals promote and foster student engagement and agency.

## About This Tool

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The Centering Equity in Social Emotional Learning Tool enables users to determine the extent to which developed standards reflect an equity-focused approach to SEL. The Centering Equity in Social Emotional Learning Tool is adapted from CASEL's Framework for Systemic Social Emotional Learning five core competencies, the Great Lakes Equity Center's Policy Equity Analysis Tool (2015b), and the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center's Assessing Bias in Standards & Curricular Materials Tool (2017) to provide guidance in evaluating SEL standards using an equity-oriented reframing of CASEL's five core competencies. This tool reframes each competency toward more equitable educational experiences for students who are members of historically marginalized groups by guiding users to consider the degree to which each competency implicates the role of the school in determining social norms, the politics and power imbalances embedded in emotional interactions, and the degree to which the standard promotes student agency.

The rubric is sectioned into the following five domains (a reframe of the CASEL core competencies):

- I. **Self-Awareness:** Students are able to demonstrate an awareness of one's own cultural history, personal identities, and community practices
- II. **Self-Management:** Students are able to express one's emotions, desires, and opinions constructively. Empowered to make decisions toward self-determination (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995)
- III. **Social Awareness:** Students are able to recognize, respect, and appreciate difference. Able to demonstrate an appreciation of the lived experiences of multiple perspectives of others (GLEC, 2015a)
- IV. **Relationship Building:** Students are able to cultivate empowering relationships with diverse individuals and groups through acknowledging



## About This Tool (Continued)

individuals' assets, agency funds of knowledge and community practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzaléz, 2001; Paris & Alim, 2014)

- V. **Responsive Decision-Making:** Students are able to engage in social critique and make decisions that will lead to changes toward a socially just society (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Gay, 2010; Stovall, 2006)

### Preparing to Engage in Critical Reflection

To prepare for critical reflection on centering equity in SEL, consider the following key framing questions:

1. What purpose does teaching social behavior and emotional management serve in schools?
2. How will we avoid the risk of pathologizing the emotional experiences and behavioral actions of some students by establishing social emotional standards risk?
3. How are we critically examining the extent to which trending approaches to social emotional learning consider the historical and social contexts of which students are a part?

### Centering Equity in Social Emotional Learning Tool Instructions

Rate social emotional learning standards for each domain based on the associated indicators:

1. Provide recommendations or considerations to support your rating
2. Propose a modification, addition, or deletion to the addressed standard related to changing, improving, or enhancing it (GLEC, 2016, p. 2)
3. Indicate whether the proposed change is a recommendation or a revision (GLEC, 2016, p. 2)

# I. Self-Awareness

Students are able to demonstrate an awareness of one's own cultural history, personal identities, and community practices.

Rate standards related to self-awareness on the extent to which standards consider social emotional learning as a school's willingness to foster students' demonstrations of their awareness of their own cultural history, personal identities, and community practices.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<p><b>1.1</b> Standards move away from presuming a single model of emotional competency is valid across all cultural contexts, and toward adequately reflecting and engaging with cultural diversity (Hoffman, 2009, p. 538).</p>				
<p><b>1.2</b> Standards move away from considering emotions as "internal, individual states that require active managerial control" (Hoffman, 2009, p. 538), and toward considering authentic emotional engagement as a necessary cultural-relational component of socially just schooling (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons, &amp; Salazar, 2008).</p>				

**Recommendation or Consideration**

## II. Self-Management

Students are able to express one's emotions, desires, and opinions constructively. Empowered to make decisions toward self-determination (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Rate the standards related to self-management on the extent to which the standards consider social emotional learning as a school's willingness to foster student agency in expressing their emotions, desires, and opinions, empowering students to make decisions toward self-determination.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<p><b>2.1</b> Standards reflect the authority of teachers (Hargreaves, 2000), and consider how school leaders support the development of teachers' critical consciousness alongside students social-emotional competency.</p>				
<p><b>2.2</b> Standards consider what implicit values of the school are reflected in the approach to social emotional learning (Hoffman, 2009), and visibly consider who stands to benefit from mastery of the standards, and who may be further marginalized by them.</p>				

**Recommendation or Consideration**

### III. Social Awareness

Students are able to recognize, respect, and appreciate difference. Able to demonstrate an appreciation of the lived experiences of multiple perspectives of others.

Rate standards related to social awareness on the extent to which the standards consider social emotional learning as an ability of those who are members of dominant cultures to demonstrate an appreciation of the lived experiences of multiple perspectives of others, including those who are members of historically marginalized groups.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3.1 Standards are responsive to diverse cultural norms “regarding emotional expression, emotional experiences, and emotional regulation” (Hoffman, 2009, p. 540).				
3.2 Standards reflect the preferences of multiple cultures, beyond behaviors or interactions that “reflect the cultural preferences of the White, middle class” (Tobin, 1995).				
3.3 Standards avoid generic approaches to problem solving. Instead, standards consider that problems and solutions can be viewed from a myriad of perspectives, and reflect that problems and solutions are considerate of contexts, relationships, and community (Hoffman, 2009, p. 549).				

**Recommendation or Consideration**

## IV. Relationship Building

Students are able to cultivate empowering relationships with diverse individuals and groups through acknowledging individuals' assets, agency funds of knowledge and community practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Rate standards related to relationship building on the extent to which standards consider social emotional learning as an ability to cultivate empowering relationships with diverse individuals and groups, even when these relationships disrupts dominant ideologies that serve to marginalize non-dominant groups.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.1 Standards make visible how school leadership expects school professionals to engage emotion and relationship with their students (Hargreaves, 2000).				
4.2 Standards support school leadership in guiding school professionals to engage in authentically caring teacher-student interactions (Hargreaves, 2000).				

### Recommendation or Consideration

## V. Responsive Decision-Making

Students are able to engage in social critique and make decisions that will lead to changes toward a socially just society (Stovall, 2006; Gay, 2010; Aronson & Laughter, 2015)

Rate the standards related to responsive decision-making on the extent to which standards consider social emotional learning as an opportunity to engage students in social critique, and empowers students to make decisions that will lead to changes toward a socially just society.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<p><b>5.1</b> Standards consider how control, power, and choice are embedded in social emotional learning through the power imbalance between school officials and students, and the role of school personnel in discipline (Hoffman, 2009, p. 538).</p>				
<p><b>5.2</b> Standards consider the importance of meeting the social and experiential needs of students beyond improving assessment scores (Hoffman, 2009).</p>				

### Recommendation or Consideration



## Key Terms

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**ACCESS**—All members of the educational community should have entrance into, involvement with, and full participation of resources, conversations, initiatives, and choices which are attentive to heritage and community practices (Paris, 2012).

**CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**—The willingness and ability to see how power and privilege are at work to systematically advantage some while simultaneously disadvantaging others (Radd & Kramer, 2013).

**DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS**—Identities, histories, and narratives related to race, national origin, economic communities, dis/ability, gender and gender expressions, sexual orientations, and religion.

**EDUCATIONAL EQUITY**—When educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people such that each individual has access to, can participate, and make progress in high-quality learning experiences that empower them towards self-determination and reduces disparities in outcomes regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities (Great Lakes Equity Center, 2011).

**IMPLICIT BIAS**—The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. The biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individuals' awareness or intentional control (Blair, 2002; Rudman, 2004 as cited in Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Contractor, 2015).

**INTERSECTIONALITY**—The study of overlapping or intersectional social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

**MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION**—Agency and voice are afforded to all members of a community, by intentionally centering members who have been historically on the margins including, but not limited to people living in under-resourced communities, people with dis/abilities, as well as racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse individuals. Multiple perspectives are pursued and valued (Fraser, 2008).

**POSITIONALITY**—The multiple, unique experiences that situate each of us; namely that gender, gender expression, race, class, ability, religion, national original, language, and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities (Alcoff, 1998; Maher, 2003, Takacs, 2003).



## Key Terms (Continued)

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**POWER**—The legitimate control of, or access to, those institutions [resources and opportunities] sanctioned by state [authorities] (Major, 2002).

**PRIVILEGE**—Any advantage that is unearned, exclusion, and socially conferred (Johnson, 2006).

**REPRESENTATION**—Providing and having adequate presences of all when decision and choice making as to examine the patterns of underlying beliefs, practices, policies, structures and norms that may marginalize specific groups and limit opportunity (Chen et al., 2014; Mulligan & Kozleski, 2009).



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# IMPACT:

*Educate, Engage, Empower — For Equity*



**Great Lakes Equity Center**

902 West New York St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
317-278-3493 - [glec@iupui.edu](mailto:glec@iupui.edu)  
[glec.education.iupui.edu](http://glec.education.iupui.edu)



**INDIANA UNIVERSITY**  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
IUPUI

**IUPUI School of Education 902**

West New York St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
317-274-6801 - [llines@iupui.edu](mailto:llines@iupui.edu)  
[education.iupui.edu](http://education.iupui.edu)

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