Social-emotional skills are critical for students’ learning, their readiness for college and careers and their future success. Both research and evidence-based practice clearly show the strong connection between social and emotional development, academic learning, and success in life (Domitrovich, Dusenbury & Hyson, 2013). For example, a meta-analysis of 213 rigorous research studies by Durlak and his colleagues (2011) found that students who received programming designed to promote social-emotional skills had academic test scores that were, on average, 11 points higher than their peers who did not receive such programming. Other recent research was able to connect early prosocial skills not only to future educational outcomes (but also to outcomes related to public assistance in adulthood, crime (substance abuse, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg, & Crawley, 2015). In part as a result of this type of research, there has been significant attention focused on the development of these skills by educators, families, and communities. The Office of Learning Supports and Early Learning (OLSEL), in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department), developed this statement (document) to provide districts, schools, and programs with a better understanding of social-emotional learning (SEL) and its various elements.

The process by which students develop social-emotional competencies is referred to as SEL. SEL includes the foundational skills, attitudes, and behaviors that help promote school engagement and academic success. There have been many frameworks developed by organizations such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), to articulate the components of SEL. The common competencies identified are as follows:

- **Self-awareness** - identifying and understanding one’s own feelings
- **Self-management** - regulating and managing one’s own behavior, and setting and achieving goals
- **Social awareness** – empathizing with, and showing concern for others, and respecting diversity
- **Relationship skills** - establishing and maintaining positive relationships with others
- **Responsible decision making** - making constructive and positive choices

SEL skills are learned through high quality experiences and can be supported in many different environments, including but not limited to: home, classroom, school, early childhood, after-school, and out-of-school time programs, and varied community settings. For schools and programs serving students, SEL can be supported and enhanced by high quality standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment, professional development, and family engagement.

**Standards**

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework\(^1\) lays out a set of standards that includes social-emotional development. Standards help to outline the expectations of students across the learning continuum. They also help to guide curriculum and instruction to ensure that students have high quality learning experiences that provide them with an opportunity to develop these critically important skills.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

There are many programs that have been developed to guide the teaching of social-emotional learning. The Department developed *Guidelines on Implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curricula*, for example. While social-emotional skills can be discreetly taught, most students learn them best when they are taught in the context of everyday lives.

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\(^1\) The Preschool and Kindergarten standards for Social and Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play and Learning contained in this framework will be available as a resource later this summer.
learning. Curricula that incorporate literacy, math, and science with social-emotional learning are effective in advancing the development of these skills.

Instructionally, there are many ways that educators can support the development of social-emotional skills and competencies. Cooperative learning and project-based learning are two examples of ways in which children can engage with content while also being provided the opportunity to build skills such as leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and social interactions. Students should be provided opportunities throughout the course of the day to learn these skills and most importantly, to practice them.

**Assessment**

In general, social-emotional skills are not most effectively assessed through traditional paper and pencil types of assessments. Adults must find more authentic ways to assess skills and competencies in these domains. The key to assessment of competencies in the social-emotional domains is to provide opportunities for students throughout the course of the day to demonstrate their abilities. More integrated approaches such as project-based learning and cooperative learning provide educators with an important chance to conduct performance based assessments where skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration can be observed and documented.

**Professional Development**

Professional development for administrators and educators on how SEL can be supported and developed through curriculum, instruction, and assessment is a key element in the success of programs to help students build these critical competencies. SEL should be incorporated into all educational practices school wide.

Professional development should connect SEL to effective teaching practices. SEL should be a meaningful, integral, and integrated part of all professional development. Ideally professional development provides a common language and understanding across grades and settings. Further, all adults should model SEL for students. To ensure there is consistency in the messages students receive and the practices they experience it is also important to coordinate classroom instruction in SEL with school, family, and community experiences.

**Family Engagement**

Engagement of families in their child’s learning is associated with increased achievement and academic performance, improved self-regulation, fewer discipline problems, stronger homework and study habits, improved work orientation, more positive attitudes toward school, and higher educational aspirations (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). In the context of supporting the development of SEL competencies, families play a critical role. They help children to develop and practice them in contexts that are culturally and linguistically sensitive and relevant for the child.

As students learn social-emotional skills, they need opportunities to practice and apply the skills in actual situations and be recognized for using these skills across a variety of settings, including home (Bond & Hauf, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2004; Nation et al., 2003; Weare & Nind, 2011). Two-way communication with families and community partners about the importance of SEL, including ways in which it can be supported at home and in the community is essential to encouraging SEL development in students.

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