

USING CALSCHLS TO ASSESS SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND HEALTH

There is a strong and growing research base indicating that the social and emotional health of students improves their readiness to learn, classroom behavior, academic performance, and overall likelihood of success in school and life. Learning is a holistic, social process involving intellect, emotions, relationships, and spirit. Empirical evidence demonstrates that personal abilities or skills (e.g., self-awareness and behavioral regulation) are associated with better school and quality-of-life outcomes.¹ Thus schools will be more successful if they integrate social-emotional with academic learning.

The *California Healthy Kids Survey* (CHKS) and its companion *California School Staff Survey* (CSSS) — two components of the California Department of Education’s *California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey System* — are valuable resources for helping schools determine the social-emotional competencies and health of their students and the degree to which schools are providing the conditions and supports that help foster these competencies, generally referred to as social-emotional learning (SEL). It also enables them to compare their data to other schools and to statewide norms. Of particular value is the supplemental CHKS Social Emotional Health Module (SESM).

Described below are the specific questions in the CHKS and CSSS that can be used to assess student social-emotional health and learning and the level of school supports to promote it. Exhibit 1 lists the related CHKS questions. Exhibit 2 provides more details about the CHKS Social Emotional Health Module. Exhibit 3 provides the related staff survey questions.

¹ For example, Durlak et al. 2011; Zins et al 2004.

As defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process through which children and youth develop self-awareness and management of their emotions, set and achieve important personal and academic goals, use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and acquire the ability to make decisions and behave responsibly to achieve school and life success. These are the five competencies — self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making — that CASEL’s research has identified as essential to success. For users familiar with this framework, we have used it as general categories to help group the CHKS/CSSS questions.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

The CHKS was one of the first large-scale student surveys to emphasize the importance of moving beyond the assessment of risk behaviors typical of prevention and health surveys to the identification and building of the strengths or assets of youth and the factors that contribute to resilience, positive development, social-emotional health, and, as a result, school success. Using a three-item scale, the CHKS measures six internal assets or personal strengths that are consistently described in the literature as characteristics of resilient, successful youth and align with the CASEL SEL competencies: cooperation and communication, empathy, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and goals, problem solving, and aspirations. For schools that are using SEL and other curriculum designed to enhance these attributes, these internal asset scales have an intrinsic value in measuring change among students over time. Thus, these scales can be useful as part of evaluations of these programs.

The CHKS further assesses three external developmental supports in the school, home, community and peer group that the research has shown to be essential in fostering these personal strengths: caring adult relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation. In the secondary survey, these questions are included in a supplemental Resilience and Youth Development Module (RYDM), with the exception of the scales assessing developmental supports in the school, which were deemed so important for guiding school improvement efforts that they were moved into the Core Module of essential questions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing on the research on resilience, learning engagement, and academic achievement, the major theoretical framework of the CHKS — and the entire CalSCHLS system — is that schools that provide environments rich in these three developmental supports promote higher levels of social-emotional learning, school connectedness, and lower involvement in risk behaviors that are barriers to learning. Students who have access to more environmental supports tend to report having more internal strengths.² This leads to positive outcomes in school, career, and life. One way this occurs is in the modeling and mirroring of the social-emotional competencies and other internal strengths by the adults in the school. Adults must exhibit the desired behavior and attitude, intentionally discuss, and reflect back the desired behaviors and attitudes to young people. Many social and life skills programs that attempt to change individual behavior by direct teaching approaches without paying attention to the external assets (the quality of relationships, messages, and opportunities for participation), have difficulty finding positive long-term behavioral change outcomes. In contrast, environmental change approaches (supports) create opportunities to learn these skills and attitudes through direct and ongoing experience.

This model emphasizes the importance of fostering a positive school climate to social-emotional learning. Similarly, CASEL researchers emphasize the importance of school and classroom contexts for positive social-emotional functioning and that some combination of improvements in student social-emotional competence, school environment, teacher practices and expectations, and relationships contribute to student behavior change. Reciprocally, “SEL programming fosters students’ social-emotional development through establishing safe, caring learning environments involving peer and family initiatives, improved classroom management and teaching practices, and whole-school community-building activities.”³ CASEL considers school climate one of six approaches to SEL.⁴

² Indicative of the linkages between environmental and internal assets, in 2007-2009, 94% of students who participated in the CHKS who were classified as high in total school supports were also high in total internal strengths.

³ Durlak et al. 2011, p. 407.

⁴ The others are curricula, infusion into academic curricula, instructional techniques to promote SE skills, experiential student engagement; and parent involvement (Zins et al. 2004).

SUPPLEMENTARY CHKS MODULES FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

Overtime, recognition of the interplay of school climate, student social-emotional learning, and school success led to the addition of questions to CalSCHLS to provide schools with better data to assess SEL-related conditions and competencies as part of two supplemental modules targeting secondary students.

- The supplementary CHKS *School Climate Module* (see Exhibit 1) provides student data on positive peer relationships and social awareness and on the social-emotional and behavioral supports in the school.
- The new CHKS *Social Emotional Health Module* (see Exhibit 2), developed by researchers at UC Santa Barbara, enables schools to assess directly the inter- and intra-personal strengths of their secondary students. (An elementary version is also under development).

STAFF SURVEY

The *California School Staff Survey* provides staff perceptions of the degree to which (1) students demonstrate these competencies and teachers model them, and (2) the school provides the conditions and supports that foster social-emotional health. A new supplementary Learning Conditions Module can now be added to the survey which provides staff data comparable to the CHKS Supplementary School Climate Module, including questions on social-emotional supports provided by the school (see Exhibit 3).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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The California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey System (CalSCHLS) is a suite of comparable student, school staff, and parent surveys developed by WestEd for the California Department of Education and now used as well by the states of Louisiana and West Virginia. To learn more about the surveys, guidebooks, and support materials, visit calschls.org.

EXHIBIT 1. CHKS SECONDARY STUDENT QUESTIONS RELATED TO SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND HEALTH

Key:

Core = Core

RYDM = Resilience and Youth Development Module

SCM = School Climate Module

SESM = Social Emotional Health Module

Self-Awareness (self-efficacy)

Self-Efficacy Scale (RYDM/SESM)

I can work out my problems.

I can do most things if I try.

There are many things that I do well.

Self-Awareness Scale (RYDM/SESM)

There is a purpose to my life.

I understand my moods and feelings.

I understand why I do what I do.

Self-Management (discipline, goal setting)

Persistence Scale (SESM)

When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher again and again until I understand.

I try to answer all the questions asked in class.

When I try to solve a math problem, I will not stop until I find a final solution.

Inventory of Student Motivation (CHKS Core)

I try hard to make sure that I am good at my schoolwork.

I try hard at school because I am interested in my work.

I work hard to try to understand new things at school.

I am always trying to do better in my schoolwork.

Emotional Regulation Scale (SESM)

I accept responsibility for my actions.

When I make a mistake I admit it.

I can deal with being told no.

Behavioral Self-Control Scale (SESM)

- I can wait for what I want.
- I don't bother others when they are busy.
- I think before I act.

Goals and Aspirations Scale (RYDM)

- I have goals and plans for the future.
- I plan to graduate from high school.
- I plan to go to college or some other school after high school.

Relationship Skills (social management, working cooperation, conflict resolution, help-seeking)

Positive Peer Relationships Scale (SCM)

- Students enjoy doing things with each other in school activities.
- Students enjoy working together on projects in class.
- Students care about each other.
- Students treat each other with respect.
- Students get along well with each other.

Cooperation and Communication Scale (RYDM)

- I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine.
- I enjoy working together with other students my age.
- I stand up for myself without putting others down.

Social Awareness (empathy, respect for others, appreciation for diversity)

Empathy Scale (RYDM/SESM)

- I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt.
- I try to understand what other people go through.
- I try to understand how other people feel and think.

Respect for Diversity (SCM)

- There is a lot of tension in this school between people of different cultures, races, or ethnicities.
- Students in this school respect each other's differences (for example, gender, race, culture, sexual orientation).

Responsible Decision Making (problem solving, situational evaluation, ethical responsibility)

Problem Solving Scale (RYDM)

When I need help, I find someone to talk with.

I know where to go for help with a problem.

I try to work out problems by talking or writing about them.

School Social and Emotional Behavioral Supports & Modeling Behavior (SCM)

Responsible Decision Making

This school encourages students to feel responsible for how they act (responsible decision making).

If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying me, the teacher will do something to help (SEL supports).

Self-Management

Students are often given rewards for being good (self-management).

Students are taught that they can control their own behavior (self-management).

Social Awareness

This school encourages students to understand how others think and feel (social awareness).

This school encourages students to care about how others feel (social awareness).

Teachers here make it clear to students that bullying is not tolerated (social awareness).

If another student was bullying me, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.

Students tell teachers when other students are being bullied (social awareness).

Relationship Skills

This school helps students solve conflicts with one another (relationship skills).

EXHIBIT 2. THE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH MODULE

The Social Emotional Health Module (SEHM) greatly enhances the value of the secondary-school CHKS as a strength-based assessment of positive emotions, engagement, ability to build and maintain relationships, and other social-emotional capacities linked to not only student mental health and well-being but also academic success and career and college readiness.

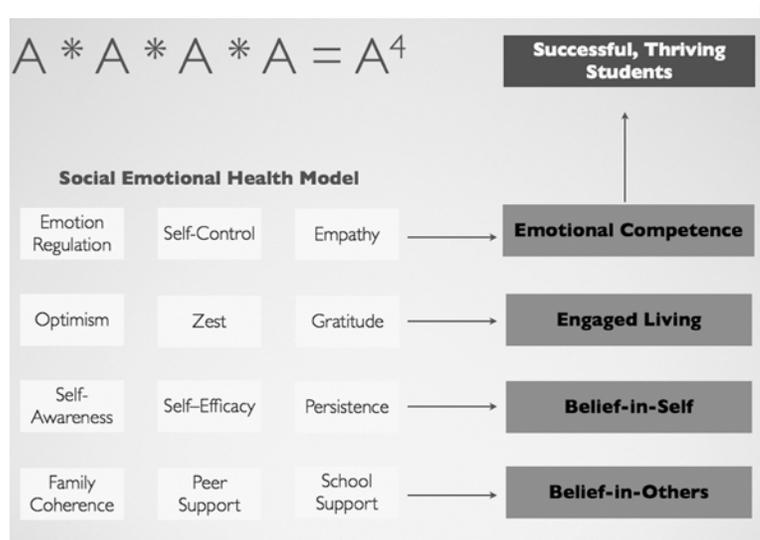
Developed and validated over two years by Dr. Michael Furlong and colleagues at UC Santa Barbara, it provides educators (and researchers) an efficient, 36-item measurement that captures the totality of core

adolescent psychological assets, focusing on four core psychological asset areas: confidence or positive *belief-in-self*, *belief-in-others* (core trust), a sense of *emotional competence*, and feeling *engaged in living* daily. These four core strengths are assessed by nine constructs, each measured by three-

item scales: empathy, self-efficacy, self-awareness, persistence, emotional self-regulation, behavioral self-control, gratitude, zest, optimism, family coherence, peer support, and school support, as shown in Figure 2.1.⁵

The SEHM is based on the premise that thriving and success is grounded, in part, in the conditions of a youth’s life that foster the development of internal psychological dispositions associated with these four core strengths.⁶ This approach is completely compatible for use as a measurement tool by those school districts that are using CASEL’s SEL model to guide their social emotional learning strategies.

Figure 2.1. SEHM Components and Measurement Model



⁵ Three of these scales — empathy, self-efficacy, and self-awareness — are also part of the CHKS Resilience and Youth Development Module (RYDM). If a school desires to administer both modules, there is a short version of the SEHM that eliminates this duplication.

⁶ See Renshaw et al. (2014) for a detailed review of each of these scales and their associated constructs, and a description of the conceptual rationale underlying the SEHS, including a discussion of the empirical merit of each of the twelve positive-psychological dispositions.

The SEHM reports provide district and school level summaries of the students' responses for each of the core internal asset subscales (self-efficacy, self-awareness, etc.) and for the four composite psychological dispositions (belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence, and engaged living). Also provided is a summary score for each student (Covitality Index) that provides a single indicator of each student's overall strengths.

DEVELOPMENT AND PSYCHOMETRIC QUALITIES

The SEHM has been under development since 2011. Prior to including it as a CHKS module, it was pilot tested in more than 40 California schools and subjected to a series of studies involving more than 20,000 students with several reports now published in peer-reviewed journals. This careful development process was undertaken to scaffold evidence of its reliability and validity and document its actual use by schools within a schoolwide complete social-emotional health screening process (see Dowdy, Furlong et al., in press; Furlong, You et al., 2013; Renshaw, Furlong et al., 2014; You, Furlong et al., 2013).

Studies carried out thus far have provided strong evidence supporting the SEHM's construct validity (it measures what it purports to measure) and that it has measurement equivalence for younger and older adolescents and for males and females. This means that the SEHM can be used and interpreted in a similar way for all adolescents. Thus far, students' SEHM responses have been found to be strongly positively associated with high levels of student subjective well-being, a central indicator of thriving mental health, and negatively associated with students' report of psychological distress (Furlong, You et al., 2013; You, Furlong et al., 2013). In addition, the SEHM measurement model is appropriate for use for Latino/a, Black, Asian, and White students.

The SEHM provides a psychometrically documented total score (called the Covitality Index), which has returned reliability coefficients of 0.92, 0.93, and 0.95 in three independent samples of California secondary students. Students in the highest 15% of the SEHM total score (Covitality Index) range report the highest levels of positive social-emotional health (e.g., 91% report that their life is going well compared to only 13% of students in the lower 15% of the SEHM distribution).

HOW IT CAN BE USED

The SEHM has been used in an anonymous administration format to track district and school level trends and for program evaluation. In addition, given its strong psychometric properties, when following appropriate informed consent procedures, the SEHM has been used in the schoolwide screening of students' complete social-emotional wellbeing. The results of these surveys have been used to better plan and target SEL interventions where they are most needed and where they will optimally enhance school climate.

ELEMENTARY STUDENT ASSESSMENT: POSITIVE EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL SCALE

The core psychological dispositions and internal assets that youth bring to their interpersonal transactions are not fully developed until adolescence, although they clearly emerge from early and life-long developmental influences and processes. Recognizing the potential prevention value of a social-emotional health survey for elementary school children, a briefer instrument— Positive Experiences at School Scale (PEASS)—was developed to assess the core social-emotional health constructs of gratitude, optimism, zest, and persistence. The PEASS also includes a brief prosocial behavior subscale. This 20-item scale has been pilot tested by school districts carrying out strength-focused schoolwide screenings with students in Grades 4-7 as part of their efforts to implement comprehensive comprehensive SEL services. Furlong et al. (2013) describes the development reliability and validity of the PEASS.

Drawing on the PEASS, WestEd is now working with a school district to develop a customized survey for elementary and middle schools to assess at the individual student level SEL and other non-cognitive domains that research has linked to school success and resilience. A major focus is items that have value for identifying and intervening with students at high-risk of school failure. The intent is to provide the schools with reports on individual student competencies that they can use in case management.

TABLE 2.1: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH MODULE ITEMS AND ASSOCIATED SCALES

Belief-in-Self

Self-Efficacy^a

- I can work out my problems.
- I can do most things if I try.
- There are many things that I do well.

Self-Awareness^a

- There is a purpose to my life.
- I understand my moods and feelings.
- I understand why I do what I do.

Persistence^a

- When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher again and again until I understand.
- I try to answer all the questions asked in class.
- When I try to solve a math problem, I will not stop until I find a final solution.

Belief-in-Others

School Support^a (At my school there is a teacher or some other adult who)

- ...always wants me to do my best.
- ...listens to me when I have something to say.
- ...believes that I will be a success.

Family Coherence^a

- My family members really help and support one another.
- There is a feeling of togetherness in my family.
- My family really gets along well with each other.

Peer Support^a (I have a friend my age who)

- ...really cares about me.
 - ...talks with me about my problems.
 - ...helps me when I'm having a hard time.
-

Emotional Competence

Emotional Regulation^a

I accept responsibility for my actions.
When I make a mistake I admit it.
I can deal with being told no.

Empathy^a

I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt.
I try to understand what other people go through.
I try to understand how other people feel and think.

Behavioral Self-Control^a

I can wait for what I want.
I don't bother others when they are busy.
I think before I act.

Engaged Living

Gratitude^b

Grateful
Thankful
Appreciative

Zest^b

Energetic
Active
Lively

Optimism^a

Each day I look forward to having a lot of fun.
I usually expect to have a good day.
Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad things.

Note. All values were statistically significant at $p < .05$. $n = 1,120$.

^a Response options: 1 = *not at all true of me*, 2 = *a little true*, 3 = *pretty much true*, 4 = *very much true*

^b Response options: 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *very little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *quite a lot*, 5 = *extremely*

EXHIBIT 3. STAFF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL STAFF SURVEY QUESTIONS

Data from the CSSS provide school staff perceptions on the degree to which:

- Students exhibit social-emotional competencies;
- The school supports social-emotional learning; and
- Staff model social-emotional competencies to help students learn from their example.

Some of the questions listed below are from the new Learning Conditions supplement (indicated by an *), which can be added to the CSSS on request.

Student Competencies

Social Awareness

Students care about one another (social awareness).

Students treat each other with respect (social awareness).

Students here try to stop bullying when they see it happening (social awareness).

There is a lot of tension in this school between people of different cultures, races, or ethnicities (relationship skills, social awareness).

Students in this school respect each other's differences (social awareness).

Relationship Skills

Students get along well with one another (relationship skills).

School Supports for SEL

Social Awareness

This school emphasizes showing respect for all students' cultural beliefs and practices.

To what extent does this school provide harassment or bullying prevention?

This school encourages students to understand how others think and feel (social awareness).*

This school encourages students to care about how others feel.

Teachers here make it clear to students that bullying is not tolerated.*

Self-Management

This school clearly communicates to students the consequences of breaking school rules (self-management)

To what extent does this school provide students conflict resolution and behavioral management (relationship skills & self-management)?

Students are often given rewards for being good (self-management).*

Students are taught that they can control their own behavior (self-management).*

This school helps students solve conflicts with one another (self-management).*

Responsible Decision-Making

This school encourages students to feel responsible for how they act (responsible decision making).

General

This school emphasizes helping students with social, emotional, and behavioral problems (SEL supports).

To what extent does this school foster youth development, resilience, or asset proportion? ...character education (SEL supports)

Staff Modeling Behavior

Social Awareness

Staff treat every student with respect.

Staff support and treat each other with respect.

If a student tells a teacher that someone is bullying her or him, the teacher will do something to help.

(supplement)

Adults in this school respect differences in students (for example, gender, race, culture, sexual orientation).

(supplement)

Teachers show that they think it is important for students of different races and cultures at this school to get along with each other. (supplement)

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