



# Embedding Social and Emotional Learning in High School Classrooms

By Carol Miller Lieber and Michele Tissiere with Sarah Bialek



## Acknowledgements

Engaging Schools is deeply grateful to the NoVo Foundation for the funding that made this project possible. We would also like to thank the many people who reviewed drafts of this paper and offered insightful feedback. They are:

- Rob DiFlorio, Principal (former), Henninger High School, Syracuse, NY
- Ann Duffy, Senior Consultant; Danyell Lewis, Collaborator; and Kelly James, Partner: Education First
- Maurice Elias, Professor and Director, Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab, Rutgers University
- Jane Ellison, Executive Director (former), Thinking Collaborative
- Deidre Farmbry, Senior District Consultant, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
- Angela Hernandez-Marshall, Washington, DC
- Karin Jones, Principal, Chinook Middle School, Bellevue, WA
- Stephanie Jones, Gerald S. Lesser Professor in Early Childhood Development, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- Jenny Nagaoka, Deputy Director, Chicago Consortium on School Research, University of Chicago
- David Osher, Vice President, American Institutes for Research
- Meena Srinivasan, Program Manager (former), Office of Social and Emotional Learning, Oakland Unified School District

Special thanks to Engaging Schools Executive Director Larry Dieringer for his leadership on this project, and to Lucy Patton, Denise Wolk, Elaine Lamy, Sara Adelman, and Katie Lemke who made invaluable contributions to the development and production of this paper.

This paper was copy edited by Julie Clark and designed by Walter Zekanoski/WZ DESIGN. Cover photographs courtesy of the Syracuse City School District and Cally Robyn Wolk.

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## Executive Summary

Well-researched strategies exist for implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) in elementary grades in ways that reach and impact every child, but there is insufficient clarity and far less research on how to implement SEL in high school settings. Schools are wrestling with how to address SEL in a way that is integral, rather than added on, and reaches all students.

We believe that a foundational approach to implementing SEL in high schools is embedding SEL instruction and support into every classroom. This approach provides an opportunity for high school teachers to systematically integrate SEL skills into their teaching practice in order to develop students' cognitive, social, and emotional competencies. It also creates a more equitable, engaging, culturally responsive, and developmentally informed environment where meaningful learning and social experiences take place.

Because SEL competencies include skills directly linked to increased academic success and college and career readiness, we have defined a set of Learning and Life Competencies for School, College, and Career Success. They align with the developmental and cultural needs of secondary students and the academic expectations held by high school teachers.

This paper presents our framework for using students' mindsets as an entry point for teaching four broad student competencies — self-awareness, self-management, social efficacy, and academic efficacy — in ways that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and academically relevant to high school students in classroom settings. Specific skills flow from these competencies. Each skill (e.g., perseverance, organizing to learn and study) includes explicit target behaviors and understandings that can be modeled, taught, practiced, and assessed within any classroom learning experience.

Learning and Life Competencies are taught and practiced within five classroom learning domains: Positive Personal Relationships; Organizing the Learning Environment; Content Design, Learning Tasks, and Protocols; Academic Support; and Restorative and Accountable Discipline and Behavior Support. These domains incorporate evidence-based practices and strategies that attend to students' developmental and cultural needs while strengthening their social and emotional competencies and promoting academic behaviors associated with improved student performance.

Educational leaders have a critical opportunity to develop and support their own as well as teachers' capacities for this work. We offer recommendations for professional learning that align with the complex demands placed upon teachers in secondary schools. We also outline measures and structures for assessment of Learning and Life Competencies.

We acknowledge that more research is needed, as is the funding to support it. In order to reach every student, secondary school leaders will need to develop thoughtful and innovative alternatives to more traditional SEL approaches. In the search for more effective delivery of SEL in high schools, we call on districts to strongly consider implementing and evaluating classroom-focused SEL initiatives based on our Learning and Life Competencies framework.

## Introduction

*“If we have learned anything from Vygotsky, it is that ‘children grow into the intellectual life around them.’ That intellectual life is fundamentally social, and language has a special place in it. Because the intellectual life is social, it is also relational and emotional. To me, the most humbling part of observing accomplished teachers is seeing the subtle ways in which they build emotionally and relationally healthy learning communities – intellectual environments that produce not mere technical competence, but caring, secure, actively literate human beings.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Peter H. Johnston**, *Choice Words: How our Language Affects Children’s Learning*

**A**lthough well-researched strategies exist for implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) in elementary grades in ways that reach and impact every child,<sup>2</sup> there is little clarity and far less research on how to implement SEL in high school settings. This paper focuses on how to embed SEL instruction and support into every classroom, reaching every student, at the high school level. Districts and high schools throughout the country are wrestling productively with the following questions:

- How can we address SEL in high schools in a way that is integral, rather than an add-on, and reaches all students?
- How can we address SEL in high schools in a way that feels authentic to staff and students?
- What does comprehensive integration of social and emotional learning competencies in the high school classroom look like?
- In what ways do we alter the instructional process to infuse and integrate these competencies into classroom structures, systems, practices, strategies, and the curricular content?
- What is viable in an increasingly pressure-filled environment where meeting standards is urgent?

### What is SEL?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

**While high school implementation of SEL in the classroom is the focus of this paper, much of the approach we recommend applies to middle schools.**

This paper proposes to answer these questions for school, district, and state educational leaders and thought leaders in the field of social and emotional learning. In brief, the primary aims of this paper are to:

- make a case that integrating SEL instruction and support into the classroom setting should serve as the foundational approach to implementing SEL in high schools;
- broaden the concept of SEL competencies to include competencies and skills directly linked to increased academic success and college and career readiness;
- provide a framework for thinking about students' mindsets and the development of four key competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social efficacy, and academic efficacy) in ways that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and academically relevant to high school students in classroom settings;
- illustrate how our list of skills can be taught and practiced within five classroom learning domains (Positive Personal Relationships; Organizing the Learning Environment; Content Design, Learning Tasks, and Protocols; Academic Support; and Restorative and Accountable Discipline and Behavior Support); and
- provide ideas for successful implementation, professional learning, and assessment.

A broad consensus of educators, policy makers, and researchers agree that students' development and mastery of social and emotional competencies increases personal well-being, reduces problem behaviors, and supports academic achievement gains.<sup>3</sup> Specific skills such as interpersonal communication, cooperation, and social responsibility are highly prized by employers<sup>4</sup> and perceived as vital for success in today's economy.<sup>5</sup> In addition, positive social skills are known to foster good citizenship in and out of school.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, SEL is now at the center of numerous district and school conversations about how to improve student outcomes and healthy development. Many states have developed or are working on SEL standards, while some districts, notably in California, have made SEL a part of their accountability frameworks.<sup>7,8</sup> The Every Student Succeeds Act provides the potential for funding streams that may be used to support SEL.<sup>9</sup>

Integrating skills associated with self-awareness, self-management, social efficacy, and academic efficacy into the fabric of our high school classrooms may seem like an unconventional or even revolutionary idea. Our work over a 20-year span of supporting hundreds of high schools nationwide to integrate SEL in the classroom has convinced us that the classroom is the place where SEL competencies and skills can best be developed on a daily basis. When teachers, through their actions and classroom planning, systematically nurture the cognitive, social, and emotional skills of students, they grow young people who are happier, healthier, and academically engaged in their day-to-day schooling and life. The future of our students' success in school, work, and life depends on how district and school leaders and teachers think collectively about integrating SEL effectively in their high school classrooms.

A commitment to SEL also aligns with and supports a commitment to equity. Thousands of our high schools, particularly those in urban districts, are multilingual and racially, culturally, and economically diverse. Many students experience times during adolescence when they are at risk, and may not be leading lives that support healthy development and include saturated opportunities for success. Gender, maturity, learning readiness, and other developmental differences can profoundly impact students' experience of school. In the context of these facts, social and emotional learning supports three critical conditions for learning that enable every student to be successful.

- First, SEL supports each and every student to experience a safe, positive, and engaging learning environment.
- Second, and equally important, SEL directly engages teachers in practices that support developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive teaching.
- Third, SEL supports students to engage in target behaviors that are closely aligned with enhancing their capacity to succeed in “real time” school experiences, careers, and life.

Leaders and teachers who leverage SEL competencies engage, empower, and educate all students, especially those students who are underserved and left behind by the mainstream educational system.

### Examples of Engaging Schools' SEL work in high schools

In **Syracuse, NY** we are working with ninth grade teams who have identified problem behaviors that become barriers to academic success in the classroom. Team members then identify skills that counter problem behaviors. At the beginning of the school year, target behaviors are modeled, taught, practiced, and assessed in team members' classrooms.

As part of recalibrating discipline policies and practices, we worked with four high school climate and culture teams in **Chicago, IL** who aligned their schoolwide and classroom expectations to skills that focused on social efficacy. Target behaviors included “I respect the dignity of each person and their rights to be heard, to be valued, and to learn in a safe classroom,” and “I take turns, listen to and encourage others, and do my fair share.” Teachers and students discussed the benefits of these behaviors and identified ways for students to demonstrate them in their classrooms.

In **Austin, TX** we partnered with a comprehensive high school and worked with all departments to design engaging units that embedded highly interactive instructional strategies in which students had real-time opportunities to practice effective communication, assertion, self-advocacy, cooperation, and participation skills.

Serving a population of over 3,000 students, the faculty at **Lyons Township, IL** High School established a school improvement goal focused on “personalizing relationships and the learning environment.” We supported their work to reduce students' feelings of anonymity in a large school and to integrate community-building and participation practices in the classroom, fostering students' development of social and emotional competencies. Faculty continue to train new teachers in these practices during an induction institute every summer.

Classroom SEL instruction and support fit neatly into a multi-tiered system in which teachers hold a collective responsibility for implementing universal practices and strategies in Tier 1. As such, SEL promotes positive behavior and academic success for all students and can reduce the number of students who need Tier 2 interventions. (See Figure 1.1) SEL instruction and support are also embedded in Tier 2 interventions that teachers facilitate when their students experience persistent academic and behavioral challenges. Classroom teachers stand at the center of this approach.

### Learning and Life Competencies for High School, College, and Career Success

At the high school level, SEL skills are found among many other lists variously identified as college and career readiness skills, life skills, 21st century soft skills, noncognitive competencies, replacement behaviors, and habits of learning. While finding significant overlaps, we also found differences in the categorization, selection, and wording of skills that seem particularly relevant to students and teachers in high school. The challenges of making the instruction and support of SEL skills a viable practice in high school classrooms rest on a bold departure: a recommendation to widen the net of competencies beyond those that are most closely associated with SEL. Our cross-walk, combined with our extensive experience working in high school communities, inspired us to create a set of competencies, skills and target behaviors that align with the developmental and cultural needs of secondary students and the academic expectations held by high school teachers. We call these “Learning and Life Competencies for School, College, and Career Success,” referred to hereafter as Learning and Life Competencies (see pages 15–16).

Learning and Life Competencies cover four competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social efficacy, and academic efficacy. Each competency includes associated skills and specific target behaviors that demonstrate students’ growing mastery of these competencies over time. Students’ capacity to strengthen and refine self-awareness, self-management, social efficacy, and academic efficacy is directly related to course grades, graduation rates, and college and career readiness and success.<sup>10</sup>

We chose our set of skills and target behaviors because of their natural fit in a high school classroom context. They directly support students’ capacity to learn, as well as their capacity to interact productively in classroom settings. Students’ engagement in their day-to-day activities requires them to tap into these foundational behaviors to ensure their capacity to be efficacious personally, interpersonally, and academically.

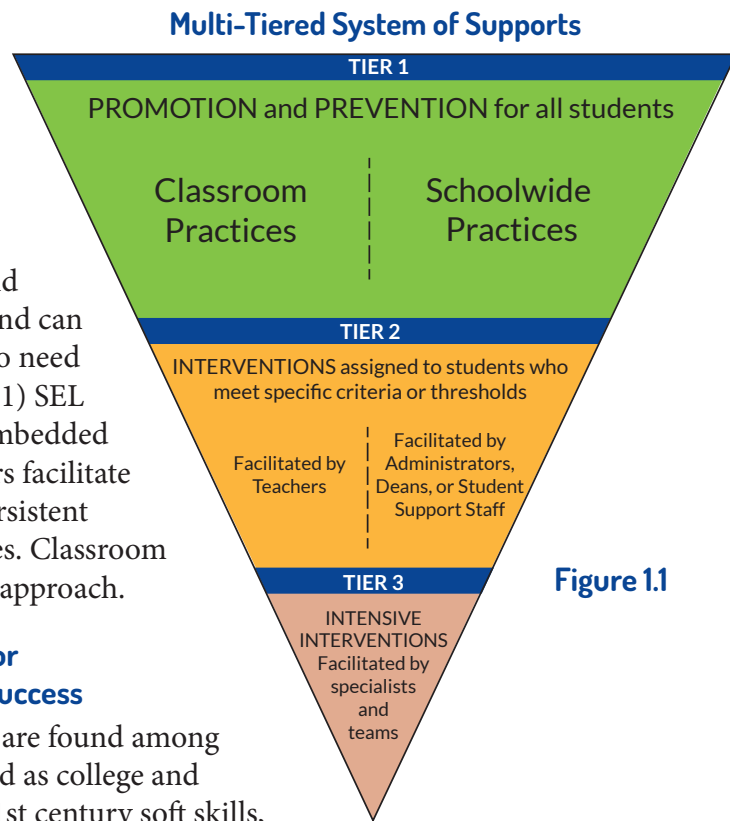


Figure 1.1



## Learning and Life Competencies Flourish in Equitable, Developmentally Appropriate, and Culturally Responsive Classrooms

If we are committed to ensuring that every adolescent has access to supports and opportunities that foster college and career readiness and life success, we must be mindful about creating truly safe, equitable, and inclusive classroom environments. This means that developmentally appropriate practices go hand-in-hand with culturally responsive practices. It further means that teachers are attuned to, attend to, and embrace the range of developmental and cultural differences among adolescents with equal passion. Learning and Life Competencies flourish in these classrooms.

Developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive teaching emphasizes relationships, relational trust, and caring communication; relevant content and student work; student voice and choice; diverse learning strategies; and scaffolded learning that meets students where they are and pushes them to excel. Thus, students' developmental and cultural needs will consistently inform what we teach, how we connect and communicate with young people, and how we support them to become self-directed, independent learners.

When teachers' interactions with students are respectful and caring, and consider how cultural background, race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, language, learning preferences, and ability/disability impact students' learning, students feel affirmed, their voices are heard and honored, and their needs are met. In such classrooms, the teacher signals, "I believe in you and your ability to be successful, and I will support you to navigate the complexities of rigorous and meaningful learning and social experiences."

In a climate where growth is a goal and mistakes and missteps are normalized, students are much more willing to practice academic and social behaviors that may at first feel awkward or even irrelevant. In short, developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive classroom communities invite students to develop Learning and Life Competencies authentically every day.

### Overview

In this paper, we explore the teacher's role in fostering students' development of Learning and Life Competencies in the classroom. It is divided into five sections, outlined below.

In **section I**, we offer a historical perspective on SEL at the secondary level.

In **section II**, we explore beliefs that foster a commitment to model and embed Learning and Life Competencies into daily academic instruction, classroom management, and student discipline. We also discuss beliefs about adolescent development that encourage teachers to hold a holistic and realistic view of young people to support their healthy social and emotional development in addition to ensuring their academic success in school.

In **section III**, we introduce the Learning and Life Competencies chart and offer a tool for embedding these competencies into five classroom learning domains. The learning

domains—Positive Personal Relationships; Organizing the Learning Environment; Content Design, Learning Tasks, and Protocols; Academic Support; and Restorative and Accountable Discipline and Behavior Support—are aligned with core practices and strategies that attend to students’ developmental and cultural needs and will help teachers naturally integrate and promote Learning and Life Competencies in the classroom. We also provide a snapshot that reveals how students’ practice of Learning and Life Competencies can be integrated naturally into an academic lesson in the high school classroom.

**Classroom management** involves the routines, procedures, protocols, and rituals that help create and establish safe, orderly, and respectful classrooms.

**Student discipline** focuses on the teacher’s responses and interventions when unskillful, inappropriate, and unacceptable behaviors occur with the aims of restoring safety and order and supporting students to engage in behaviors that help them self-correct, re-engage and make things right.

In **section IV**, we offer targeted ways to think about how to assess students’ practice and mastery of Learning and Life Competencies in the high school classroom.

In **section V**, we discuss the critical role of sophisticated, ongoing, and timely professional learning that supports teachers’ efficacy, craft, and commitment.

## I: History of Social Emotional Learning Implementation at the High School Level

Interest in social conduct, good character, and the management and tempering of emotions can be traced back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece. In the United States, character education was an explicit aim of schooling in the 19th century.<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, however, was the first American educator to shift away from a religion-based focus on character education to the development of a child-centered and civic-minded pedagogy that called on teachers to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of each individual learner in ways that prepared all students for adulthood and effective social membership. For Dewey, the school itself “becomes a form of social life, a miniature community” in which children learn and practice social skills and civic dispositions that foster responsible citizenship.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the 20th century, schools continued to value the role of social development in a child’s education, most commonly illustrated by assigning report card grades for conduct, deportment, or citizenship. However, attention to teaching and strengthening specific SEL competencies did not become an identifiable field of study until the early 1990s.<sup>13</sup> During the last 30 years, the vast majority of SEL programs have focused on K–5 education, providing stand-alone lessons that teachers in self-contained classrooms incorporated into their weekly instruction.<sup>14</sup> The history of SEL initiatives for high school adolescents reflects different but parallel pathways that all placed students’ development of social and emotional competencies at the center of their research and practice. These pathways included social skills training; conflict resolution education, and restorative practices; safe, supportive, and engaged classrooms; and developmental college and career readiness.

## **Social Skills Training and SEL Instruction**

Albert Bandura's research in the 1970s and 1980s on aggressive adolescents concluded that without providing young people with more effective skills, anti-social behaviors would not change.<sup>15</sup> Bandura is considered to be the father of social skills training, which involves a deliberate process to directly model, teach, practice, and assess social and emotional competencies with the aim of increasing students' capacity to self-regulate and function effectively as individuals and within a group.

From a risk and prevention perspective, Hawkins and Catalano identified the acquisition of pro-social skills as a primary protective factor that can buffer the negative influences of risk behaviors for adolescents.<sup>16</sup> Researchers like Arnold Goldstein and John Gibbs<sup>17</sup>, organizations like Comprehensive Health Education Foundation, and programs associated with the federal Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools further developed skills training programs and prevention curricula primarily directed to youth at risk.

Thanks to SEL pioneers like Peter Salovey, Roger Weissberg, and Maurice Elias, the big idea of teaching social and emotional competencies moved beyond the delivery of social skills training for some students to promoting SEL as an essential component of K–12 education for all students. High schools have tried embedding social skills instruction into advisory, health education courses, orientation, student leadership programs, and social studies courses with limited success and/or reach.<sup>18</sup> Scheduling restrictions, an overloaded set of course requirements, and questions about how to teach social skills most effectively to adolescents have made skills training for all high school students a challenging proposition. Despite these obstacles, agreement on the importance of supporting students' development of SEL competencies has gained considerable traction among high school faculty in the last five years.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, school districts across the country are committed to exploring how to make SEL instruction a part of every high school student's experience.

## **Conflict Resolution Education and Restorative Practices**

Morton Deutsch articulated the principles of conflict resolution in the 1960s and 1970s that continue to guide its practice today.<sup>20</sup> Conflict resolution education—understanding of dimensions of conflict, managing emotions appropriately, communicating effectively, and resolving conflicts constructively in ways that solve the problem and maintain or restore relationships—became a widely accepted K–12 school practice in the 1980s and 1990s through the use of classroom curricula and peer mediation programs. The social and emotional competencies required to negotiate, mediate, problem-solve, and manage conflict are remarkably similar to skills named within SEL frameworks.

Two notable trends continue within many high schools. The first is that some social studies teachers continue to infuse SEL skill development into the analysis of domestic and international conflicts, studies of genocide and the Holocaust, exploration of multiple perspectives that inform controversial issues, and mock trials and negotiation simulations.<sup>21</sup> Well-researched programs like Facing History and Ourselves have shown significant improvement in students' critical thinking and SEL competencies. Multiple studies have also shown that students trained in peer mediation, a structure and process for addressing interpersonal conflicts between students, increased their capacities to listen, empathize, and problem-solve.<sup>22</sup>

More recently, from the field of restorative justice, practices like restorative group conferencing have been embedded in school disciplinary practices as alternatives for preventing and reducing exclusionary punishments. Teachers who have been trained in restorative practices are implementing restorative circles in the classroom as a vehicle to build community and discuss issues and concerns. For adolescents, these processes respect student voice and empower students to practice key skills that are critical to personal and social efficacy. A restorative, problem-solving orientation within schoolwide discipline and in the classroom offers rich opportunities to develop social and emotional competencies in real time.

### **Safe, Supportive, and Engaging Classrooms**

Because students take their behavior cues from adult modeling (what adults actually say and do), a teacher’s pedagogy (how he/she teaches, supports, responds to, and connects with students) significantly influences the degree to which classrooms feel safe, supportive, and engaging for all students. The last two decades have witnessed a surge of interest and research focused on a teacher’s capacity to foster trust, respect, and belonging while creating conditions that increase student effort and motivation.

Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor at the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools have spent 30 years documenting how the practices that optimize conditions for learning reduce learning barriers and enable teachers to “meet learners where they are in terms of their capabilities, interests, attitudes, and other intrinsic motivational considerations.”<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, four out of five effective high school SEL programs cited in CASEL’s 2015 guide did not involve stand-alone lessons, but instead highlighted major shifts in teaching practice that emphasized caring relationships, high support, and meaningful dialogue between students and teachers.<sup>24</sup> Even more compelling, these programs and many similar professional development initiatives showed linkages between the use of personalized, student-centered classroom practices and improved academic performance.<sup>25</sup> In their book on the history of American school reform, perhaps David Tyack and Larry Cuban got it right: “Changing where it counts the most—in the daily interactions of teachers and students—is the hardest to achieve and the most important.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Developmental College and Career Readiness**

Unpacking the complexities of college and career readiness has proven to be an interesting inquiry. There is common agreement that preparing students academically to meet the challenges of college-level study is fundamental to college success. In addition, college access researchers like David Conley and Mandy Savitz-Romer and organizations such as ACT have made a dramatic push to affirm the critical role that metacognitive skills, habits, mindsets, and attitudes play in a student’s capacity and commitment to enroll in college, stay in college, and complete a degree or certificate program in a reasonable period of years.<sup>27</sup>

These developmental readiness competencies go beyond mastery of academic and career knowledge and skills related to classroom course work. They grow and strengthen throughout the early and middle stages of adolescence between the ages of 12 and 18, and, for many, are not fully developed until the late stage of adolescence between the ages of 18 and 21. Examples of developmental readiness competencies include:

- **Self-regulation** – “a set of internal processes that enable one to manage one’s behavior, emotions, attention, and cognition.”<sup>28</sup> This includes the tendency to persist when tasks are new, difficult, or ambiguous; the effective use of a range of learning and problem-solving strategies; and the capacity to regulate, evaluate, and direct one’s own thinking and learning toward an achievable goal.<sup>29</sup>
- **Mindsets** – the “psycho-social beliefs and attitudes about oneself, the external world, and the interaction between the two.”<sup>30</sup> Mindsets such as “I belong in this academic community” or “I can succeed at this” support self-efficacy, openness to learning, and a belief that one’s effort influences performance. Optimistic mindsets help young people actively engage in the process of getting to and through college.<sup>31</sup>
- **Social and Cultural Efficacy** – the skills that enable students to collaborate with others in school and the work place, “marshal the support of peers and family in the college-going process,” participate in the public life of the community, engage with others across diverse cultures and navigate across new cultural settings such as the institutional culture of college.<sup>32</sup>

Two recent reports from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research explored in depth how noncognitive skills shape academic performance and contribute to young adults’ success in college, career, and life.<sup>33</sup> Helping students to learn about and demonstrate college and career readiness skills is a very persuasive platform for integrating SEL skill development into the teaching-learning process. It is an effort that schools, families, and policy makers can all get behind.

Social skills training, conflict resolution, and restorative practices provide powerful entry points to embed SEL instruction into high schools. Presently, however, these initiatives reach a small percentage of high school students for a limited amount of time.

## II: Adult Mindsets and Competencies

Deeply held mindsets influence how teachers perceive their responsibilities to young people and ultimately drive what they do and say in the classroom. What teachers believe about students, teaching, and the goals of schooling impacts how they structure learning and provide support to their students.

When we have opportunities to engage teachers in multi-year or multi-day professional learning experiences, mindset-building is a critical thread woven into the work. We invite teachers to examine, question, and rethink their core mindsets with several questions in mind: “In what ways do my own schooling experiences as a student and teacher shape my teaching practices? How do different aspects of my identity influence my interactions with students? How conscious am I of the diversity of the students I am serving? What are the core mindsets that empower me to reach and engage every student and support students’ personal, social, and academic development?”

We have found that the following set of mindsets inspires teachers to integrate Learning and Life Competencies in the classroom.

- Students invest in school because of the presence of trusting and caring relationships with adults.
- All adolescents are capable of changing their behavior and growing their Learning and Life Competencies with guidance, instruction, and support.
- All students can improve their academic performance when we provide different groups of students with different kinds and amounts of time, attention, tasks, and supports to behave responsibly and succeed academically. Teaching each student with considerations of cultural and developmental differences in mind has a direct impact on creating conditions of equity in the classroom.
- Teachers have an obligation to help students develop mindsets and Learning and Life competencies that enable them to be good students, good citizens, and good human beings.

In addition, teachers' mindsets about — and deep understanding of — adolescence shape the learning environment and influence their capacity to reach and teach every student who shows up at the classroom door. For example, teachers who value the process of adolescent maturation and identity development (including racial identity development) may be more aware of the potential biases they may hold, how these biases can hinder relationships and student success, and the ways in which they can interrupt these biases. This awareness enables them to confer respect and dignity to each individual student, accept and appreciate developmental and cultural differences, and incorporate diverse voices and resources in the classroom.

High school teachers who strongly value principles of youth development are more likely to support every student's personal, social, and academic development.<sup>34</sup> Briefly, youth development principles promote pro-social bonding; transparent limit setting; social and emotional competencies; saturated opportunities to grow one's talents, interests, and a wider understanding of the world; optimism that promotes a positive sense of identity and hope in the future; and caring and personalized support.<sup>35</sup>

Highly effective high school teachers also hold mindsets about adolescent development that enable them to normalize typical adolescent behaviors. When teachers assume that most high school students will have moments when they express intense emotions, challenge adult authority, and exhibit immature or unskillful and inappropriate behaviors, they are ready to respond with calm, firm, and caring support. Most importantly, teachers who appreciate the enormous variations in maturation timetables among adolescents accept and even celebrate the idiosyncratic nature of teenagers and are better prepared to depersonalize conflictual situations. "Not taking it personally" enables adults to utilize their own social and emotional competencies to listen to and problem-solve with young people.

Integrating Learning and Life Competencies into high school classrooms requires all teachers and instructional leaders to be aware of their thoughts, feelings, points of view, and intentions, and the effects those have on their students. This awareness will ensure that a community of leaders and teachers holds a collective responsibility for creating classroom communities where students have an insatiable drive to perfect, improve, and reach their potential. It is no small task to rethink mindsets so they align with this vision.

### III: Integrating Learning and Life Competencies into the Domains of the Engaged Classroom

Providing universal SEL instruction to every student presents challenges and opportunities in high school classrooms. One challenge centers on the delivery of SEL instruction. Unlike elementary settings where a single teacher is the primary instructor for one group of students, multiple teachers within specific subjects and courses deliver instruction in the high school setting. In addition, high school teachers may be less likely to recognize the links between the development of students' SEL competencies and improved achievement in their classrooms. Third, at the high school level, a set of competencies defined as SEL competes for time and attention with other compelling lists of competencies that support students' developmental growth and college and career readiness.<sup>36</sup>

We appreciate that schoolwide programs such as peer education, student mediation, and pro-social campaigns emphasizing tolerance and anti-bias strategies have a powerful impact on a number of students in a school community. We also acknowledge that collective and intentional efforts to cultivate a culture that is caring, compassionate, and respectful has the power to create an environment where students observe and experience real-time adult modeling of the Learning and Life Competencies.

On the other hand, integrating Learning and Life Competencies into daily instruction presents a powerful opportunity to make standards-based instruction a richer experience for all students and a far more successful experience for many. At its heart, embedding Learning and Life Competencies into core teaching practices humanizes the learning experience and invites students to bring their real selves into the classroom community.

The what, where, and how of providing systemic Learning and Life Competencies instruction and support to every high school student stands at the center of this paper. Our approach is framed by three questions:

1. What Learning and Life Competencies are essential for high school students to learn and practice?
2. Where do we strategically integrate and teach these competencies?
3. How do we authentically teach these competencies?

#### What Learning and Life Competencies Are Essential for High School Students to Learn and Practice?

As noted in the introduction, we have constructed a set of adolescent mindsets, competencies, and appropriate skills for specific use in high school classrooms. Figure 2.1 illustrates how mindsets set the stage for developing and mastering the Learning and Life Competencies.

Figure 2.1 Developing Learning and Life Competencies

## Students develop positive MINDSETS that set the stage for...

A **mindset** is a set of deeply held assumptions and beliefs that drive behavior and create powerful incentives to sustain prior habits, choices, and preferred ways of doing things. Mindsets set the stage for academic engagement and developing Learning and Life Competencies. Self-identification with the values of schooling and the roles of a learner will influence the attitudes and perceptions a student holds in relation to his/her learning and academic performance. When students feel that school and school work have value, when they feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, and they approach learning tasks with positive expectations, they have a capacity to sustain their effort over time and express their curiosity, enthusiasm, and personal interest in what they are learning. This boosts students' confidence about their day-to-day experiences and fires up hope in their future. The examples cited provide a range of entry points for conversations with students.

### EXAMPLES:

- School and school work have value for me.
- I belong to an academic community.
- I approach tasks with positive expectations and an open mind.
- I accept challenges, take academic risks, and push myself to excel.
- My ability and competence grow with my effort.
- I express curiosity, enthusiasm, or personal interest in what I am learning.
- I cultivate personal talents, values, and positive qualities of character.
- I have hope in a positive future I can make for myself.

Learning and strengthening four key **COMPETENCIES**

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Management
3. Social Efficacy
4. Academic Efficacy

That incorporate specific **SKILLS**

Aligned to specific **TARGET BEHAVIORS** that strengthen positive **MINDSETS**

A **competency** is an ability an individual grows over time that can be used fluidly and flexibly in varied contexts, drawing from knowledge, practice, and experience. A **skill** is a specific ability an individual demonstrates within a competency. A **target behavior** is a discrete, observable behavior that an individual uses in school, work, and life.



Figure 2.2 presents the Learning and Life Competencies chart. You will notice that the column in orange identifies four broad competencies, followed by skills in blue, and then a column in green that identifies target behaviors aligned to specific skills. We appreciate that there are a number of target behaviors from which to choose. Schools with whom we work take a variety of approaches. Grade level teams, course-alike cohorts, and departments might choose a set of universal target behaviors that they will model, teach, practice, and assess. Additionally, individual teachers might select additional target behaviors unique to their classroom context and the needs of their students. Some high schools have identified two to three target behaviors that they want all students to work on and that line up with their academic and behavioral expectations.

### **A few words about COMPLIANCE**

When we consider how to support young people to engage in behaviors that help establish safe, orderly, and respectful schools and classrooms, we think it is critical to distinguish between the use of coercive and committed compliance. Coercive compliance uses force, fear, sanctions, rudimentary demands, and punitive threats to control the group. We believe schools should aim for committed or normative compliance, a system of control that rests on individual's self-identification with the shared values and purpose of the community. From students' perspectives, committed compliance emerges when students understand the interests behind rules, norms, and instructional tasks and procedures; self-identify as learners; value their experience at school; and feel a sense of belonging within the school and classroom communities. Committed compliance helps students move from "You're making me do this" to "I should do this because..."<sup>37 38 39</sup>

**Figure 2.2 Learning and Life Competencies for School, College, and Career Success**

Competency	Skill	Target Behaviors
Self-Awareness	I know myself.	<p>I am aware that my mindsets and emotions impact my capacity to learn and be skillful.</p> <p>I can accurately assess my feelings, behavior, interests, values, and strengths through my experiences.</p> <p>I know when I have done the right thing and when I make mistakes.</p> <p>I know when I bother others or upset them.</p>
	I am aware of skills, behaviors, and attitudes that help me.	<p>I can name and describe the benefits of skills, behaviors, and mindsets that help me be a good student and a good person.</p> <p>I know what motivates me.</p> <p>I know when it is important to follow the rules, procedures, and norms of acceptable behavior.</p>
Self-Management	I identify, express, and manage emotions.	<p>I name and assess emotions accurately.</p> <p>I express emotions skillfully even when I feel angry, frustrated, or disrespected.</p> <p>I manage my emotions by using strategies to cool down and regain my balance.</p>
	I exhibit self-regulation.	<p>I sustain my focus and pay attention throughout an activity or task.</p> <p>I work silently without bothering others.</p> <p>I accept help, feedback, correction, or consequences with goodwill.</p> <p>I follow instructions, procedures, and rules.</p>
	I demonstrate perseverance and resiliency.	<p>I persist in my effort until I “get it” and finish the task.</p> <p>I pursue and sustain efforts to complete long-term tasks and achieve long-term goals related to my future.</p> <p>I can right myself and bounce back even when I experience temporary setbacks, failure, or adversity.</p>
Social Efficacy	I communicate and problem-solve effectively.	<p>I focus my attention on people who are speaking to me.</p> <p>I listen respectfully and paraphrase/summarize or question before speaking.</p> <p>I use school-appropriate language and project appropriate body language.</p> <p>I use problem-solving strategies to work things out.</p> <p>I resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively.</p>
	I demonstrate empathy and respect.	<p>I make an effort to understand the emotions, words, and actions of others.</p> <p>I respect the dignity of each person and their rights to be heard, to be valued, and to learn in a safe classroom.</p> <p>I accept other viewpoints respectfully and appreciate individual and group similarities and differences.</p> <p>I stand up for people whose rights, identity, or dignity have been violated.</p> <p>I interrupt or call attention to incidents of bullying, harassment, prejudice, or teasing.</p>

Competency	Skill	Target Behaviors
Social Efficacy	I foster healthy relationships.	<p>I greet and talk to people in a friendly manner.</p> <p>I use words of common courtesy like please and thank you, excuse me, sorry about that.</p> <p>I am dependable and follow through on what I say I am going to do.</p> <p>I help and support others.</p>
	I am assertive and I self-advocate.	<p>I use neutral, non-aggressive language to express myself.</p> <p>I can verbalize and present my ideas, my values, and my needs to others.</p> <p>I take the initiative to seek help.</p> <p>I can navigate across different settings in order to present my best self to others.</p>
	I cooperate and participate.	<p>I work effectively with different students.</p> <p>I take on various roles and responsibilities to complete the learning task.</p> <p>I take turns, listen to and encourage others, and do my fair share.</p>
	I demonstrate civic responsibility.	<p>I volunteer to take on leadership roles or extended responsibilities in a group.</p> <p>I do positive things to make the class a good place to learn.</p> <p>I take responsibility for my words and actions and acknowledge the impact of my behavior on the community.</p> <p>I make responsible decisions.</p>
Academic Efficacy	I invest in quality work.	<p>I attempt each part of the question, task, assignment, or test.</p> <p>I revise, edit/proof, and correct for quality and accuracy.</p> <p>I push myself to take academic risks.</p> <p>I complete assigned tasks regularly.</p> <p>I engage in critical, reflective, and creative thinking.</p>
	I organize to learn and study.	<p>I attend class every day and arrive to class on time.</p> <p>I organize myself and manage my materials.</p> <p>I prioritize and manage my time and tasks.</p> <p>I figure out the instructions before I begin a task.</p> <p>I use a range of study strategies to remember and apply key knowledge, skills, and understandings.</p>
	I set goals and self-assess.	<p>I make sure that I know the criteria for high-quality work.</p> <p>I set specific learning goals and identify and adjust action steps to improve my grade.</p> <p>I monitor my academic progress through written and oral self-reflection and conferencing.</p> <p>I can identify the evidence that shows my effort to meet my goal.</p>

The selection of the Learning and Life Competencies and the configuration of the chart are designed with these considerations in mind:

- Our intention is to include competencies that are most closely aligned with the needs of high school students to support their learning and academic achievement in classroom settings.
- The selection includes competencies that are most closely linked to students' capacities to navigate school successfully and are strongly associated with good grades in high school, post-secondary degree completion, and career success.
- Competencies are named using I-statements with key vocabulary to support student ownership and to make them relatively easy to categorize and remember.
- Student-friendly descriptors of target behaviors associated with each competency are an essential component of the chart to aid students and teachers in identifying, monitoring, and assessing progress in mastering specific Learning and Life Competencies.
- Many of the target behaviors cited are considered “replacement” behaviors for problematic behaviors that create barriers to learning and high performance in the classroom. Thus, directly teaching and practicing these behaviors is likely to prevent and reduce many behavioral concerns that can potentially disrupt classroom learning.

### Where Do We Strategically Integrate and Teach These Competencies?

We are proposing the classroom—on any day, with any teacher, in any subject, with any group of students—as the primary setting for teaching Learning and Life Competencies in high school. Embedding Learning and Life Competencies instruction into day-to-day learning tasks is a viable strategy for reaching every student during every year of their high school experience. This is an achievable endeavor when teachers adopt a teaching pedagogy that places equal value on what is taught (the content aligned to learning standards) and how students learn it (the strategies and learning protocols students use to complete performance tasks).

Teachers need not introduce all of these competencies simultaneously. Within a school, grade level teams or department teams might prioritize specific competencies, skills, and target behaviors to emphasize. Individual teachers might choose some skills and target behaviors to teach to all students while identifying other competencies and target behaviors to focus on with individual students.

### How Do We Authentically Teach These Competencies?

We have outlined five domains through which teachers can meet students' academic, developmental, and cultural needs in ways that optimize learning and promote personal, social, and academic efficacy. The charts in this section identify each of the five domains, the daily classroom management, discipline and instructional practices and strategies (the how) that support each domain, and Learning and Life Competencies that are most closely aligned with practices and strategies in each domain.

**Domain:** a defined area of pedagogical knowledge

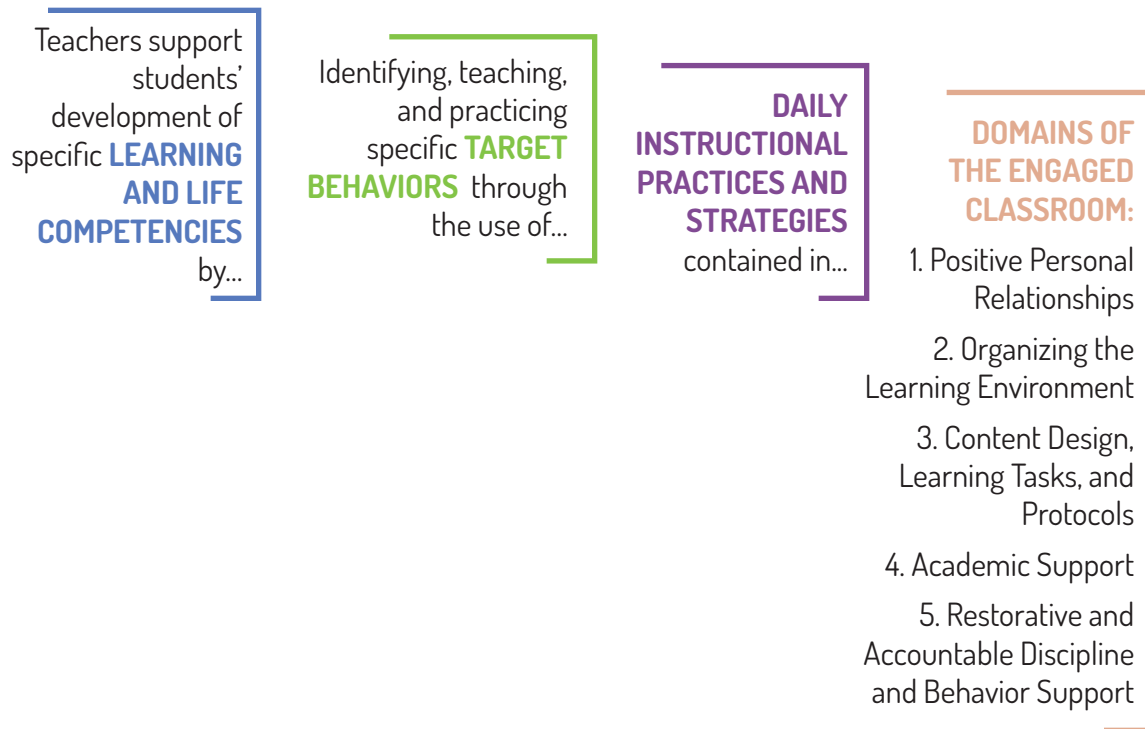
**Practice:** a method that has a high level of agreed upon effectiveness

**Strategy:** A specific action teachers take to support students in completing a learning task or meeting an outcome or goal

Figure 2.3 shows how the Learning and Life Competencies are linked to five domains.

**Figure 2.3**

**Linking Learning and Life Competencies to Domains of the Engaged Classroom**



**Example:**

A teacher supports development of the selected **skill** — e.g., “I identify, express, and manage emotions” within the Self-Management competency by engaging students in **target behaviors** that help them expand their emotional vocabulary, identify their own emotions, and recognize other’s emotions. The target behaviors are learned and practiced through the use of Circle, a daily instructional **strategy** contained within the **Domain** called **Positive Personal Relationships**.

## Teaching Learning and Life Competencies through the Domains of the Engaged Classroom

Domains	Daily Instructional Practices and Strategies	Aligned Learning and Life Competency Skills
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Positive Personal Relationships</b></p> <p><i>How do I foster and sustain strong and supportive personal relationships?</i></p>	<p><b>Knowing Students and Making them Feel Known</b> (Learning Students' Names; Meet &amp; Greet; Collecting Student Profile Data; Personal Check-ins)</p> <p><b>Creating group cohesion among students</b> (Gatherings &amp; Closings; Anchor Experiences; Circle; Student Feedback)</p>	<p>Know myself</p> <p>Identify, express, and manage emotions</p> <p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Demonstrate empathy and respect</p> <p>Foster healthy relationships</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Organizing the Learning Environment</b></p> <p><i>How do I purposefully organize my learning environment to support academic engagement?</i></p>	<p><b>Arranging the Learning Environment</b> (Visual Postings; Furniture Arrangement; Tools and Resources)</p> <p><b>Foundational Procedures</b> (Starting Class; Ending Class; Getting Attention; Maintaining Silence; Clear Instructions; Grouping Formats)</p>	<p>Know the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that help me</p> <p>Self-regulate</p> <p>Demonstrate civic responsibility</p> <p>Communicate and problem solve effectively</p> <p>Cooperate and participate</p> <p>Organize to learn and study</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Content Design, Learning Tasks, and Protocols</b></p> <p><i>How do I ramp up engagement and rigor in order to increase academic achievement?</i></p>	<p><b>Rigorous, Meaningful Learning Tasks</b> (Representing to Learn; Problematizing a Learning Task; Student Voice and Choice; End-of-Unit Assessments; Culturally Relevant Content)</p> <p><b>Learning Protocols</b> (Text Protocols; Activators; Turn and Talk; Cooperative Learning; Whole Group Discussion)</p>	<p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Be assertive and self-advocate</p> <p>Cooperate and participate</p> <p>Demonstrate civic responsibility</p> <p>Invest in quality work</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Academic Support</b></p> <p><i>How do I target my academic practices and strategies to meet the range of learners in my classroom?</i></p>	<p><b>Academic Press</b> (Setting and Monitoring Expectations; Academic Reflection, Goal Setting, and Progress Tracking; Anticipating and Planning for Learning Gaps; Study Strategies; Revise, Edit, Proof, and Correct; Guided Work Period)</p> <p><b>Formative Assessment</b> (Academic Check-ins; Walk-around Look-fors; Feedback for Self-correction; Five-minute Assessment Tools)</p> <p><b>Academic Interventions</b> (Academic Problem-Solving and Planning Conference; Academic Turnaround Plan; Progress Monitoring; Academic Coaching)</p>	<p>Know the skills, behaviors and attitudes that help me</p> <p>Invest in quality work</p> <p>Exhibit self-regulation</p> <p>Demonstrate perseverance and resiliency</p> <p>Set and assess goals</p> <p>Be assertive and self-advocate</p> <p>Invest in quality work</p> <p>Organize to learn and study</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Restorative and Accountable Discipline and Behavior Support</b></p> <p><i>How do I plan for, respond to, and manage behavior concerns and intervene in high impact situations?</i></p>	<p><b>Planning for Behavior Concerns</b> Classroom Behavior Plan; First Response to Behavior Concerns; Behavior Check-ins)</p> <p><b>Defusing Charged Situations</b> (Depersonalization; Responding to Disrespectful Behavior; Defusing Students who are Upset; Defusing Power Struggles; Re-set Protocols; Interrupting Physical Altercations; Responding to Oppositional Behavior)</p> <p><b>Behavioral Interventions</b> (Restorative Conversations; Behavioral Problem-Solving and Planning Conferences; Progress Monitoring; Behavioral Coaching)</p>	<p>Know the skills, behaviors and attitudes that help me</p> <p>Identify, express, and manage emotions</p> <p>Exhibit self-control / impulse control</p> <p>Set and assess goals</p> <p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Demonstrate empathy and respect</p> <p>Demonstrate civic responsibility</p>

## Domain: Positive Personal Relationships

The aim of building positive personal relationships is to support students to increase their self- and social awareness and grow their efficacy to develop, manage, and maintain healthy relationships through personal connections. Strategies that help teachers know each student well and build group cohesion among students place positive relationships at the center of effective instruction, discipline, and support for students. Furthermore, most students need to feel a sense of belonging, trust, attachment, caring, respect, and acceptance from teachers and fellow students in order to engage and learn. Relationships that build trust and rapport reduce feelings of fear, anxiety, and isolation. Consequently, relationship building is an essential pillar of developmentally informed and culturally responsive teaching.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, positive relationships with students makes teaching more satisfying and heightens a teacher’s and a teaching team’s sense of efficacy, professional sustainability, and commitment to the craft of teaching. Researchers have concluded that students who form close and healthy relationships with teachers generally have stronger social skills, fewer externalizing behaviors, and overall higher academic performance.<sup>41</sup>

Strategies such as Meet & Greet by teachers at the beginning of the class and brief personal check-ins with individual students, for example, enable students to practice target behaviors linked to identifying, expressing, and managing emotions, interpersonal communication, and healthy relationships.

Strategies such as Gatherings and Circle enable students to practice target behaviors linked to interpersonal communication, empathy and respect, and healthy relationships. “The future is created one room at a time, one gathering at a time. To build community we seek conversations where people show up by invitation rather than mandate, and experience an intimate and authentic relatedness.”<sup>42</sup>

Domain	Daily Instructional Practices and Strategies	Aligned Learning and Life Competency Skills
<p><b>Positive Personal Relationships</b></p> <p><i>How do I foster and sustain strong and supportive personal relationships?</i></p>	<p><b>Knowing Students and Making them Feel Known</b> (Learning Students’ Names; Meet &amp; Greet; Collecting Student Profile Data; Personal Check-ins)</p> <p><b>Creating Group Cohesion among Students</b> (Gatherings &amp; Closings; Anchor Experiences; Circle; Student Feedback)</p>	<p>Know myself</p> <p>Identify, express, and manage emotions</p> <p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Demonstrate empathy and respect</p> <p>Foster healthy relationships</p>

## Domain: Organizing the Learning Environment

The learning environment must be envisioned as both a physical and cognitive space that has the potential to make students feel safe, welcome, and invested in their learning. Carefully designed visual postings aligned with the developmental and cultural needs and interests of students, strategic furniture arrangement, and organized and accessible resources inspire and support academic engagement and accountability and minimize classroom disruptions. In other words, students respond positively to places that are organized, attractive, and cared for, and thus are more likely to do the right thing to help maintain them.

In addition to intentionally arranging the learning environment to optimize learning, we are called to create classrooms that communicate to students what we expect of them when they enter and settle. Clearly articulated foundational procedures promote learning and social environments that are welcoming, predictable, and energizing. Modeling, teaching, practicing, and assessing foundational procedures influence high school students' readiness to participate, focus, commit, and put forth effort in each lesson. When students have a voice in creating the environment, and they understand the rationale behind the arrangement of the space and the foundational procedures, it empowers them to meet our expectations for learning and interacting.

Domain	Daily Instructional Practices and Strategies	Aligned Learning and Life Competency Skills
<p><b>Organizing the Learning Environment</b></p> <p><i>How do I purposefully organize my learning environment to support academic engagement?</i></p>	<p><b>Arranging the Learning Environment</b> (Visual Postings; Furniture Arrangement; Tools and Resources)</p> <p><b>Foundational Procedures</b> (Starting Class; Ending Class; Getting Attention; Maintaining Silence; Clear Instructions; Grouping Formats)</p>	<p>Know the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that help me.</p> <p>Self-regulate.</p> <p>Demonstrate civic responsibility</p> <p>Communicate and problem solve effectively</p> <p>Cooperate and participate</p> <p>Organize to learn and study</p>



## Domain: Content Design, Learning Tasks, and Protocols

Supporting our students to think critically, creatively, and reflectively and to question, problem-solve, and engage in rich academic conversations requires us to design rigorous and meaningful learning tasks. Rigorous and meaningful learning tasks foster a sense of agency. Key to success in school, work, and life is having a sense of agency, which encompasses “taking an active and intentional role in making choices and shaping and managing the course of one’s life rather than being at the mercy of external forces.”<sup>43</sup>

When we create tasks that harness students’ ownership, optimistic mindsets are activated. Optimistic students are more likely to approach tasks with positive expectations and an open mind, express their enthusiasm, take academic risks, and cultivate their personal talents. Moreover, learning protocols and more sophisticated end-of-unit assessments often require considerable cooperation, effective interpersonal communication, and self-advocacy to complete the task; students engage in saturated practice of target behaviors like doing their fair share of the work, working effectively with different students, verbalizing and presenting their ideas, values, and needs to others, and taking on various roles and responsibilities to complete the learning task.

Domain	Daily Instructional Practices and Strategies	Aligned Learning and Life Competency Skills
<p><b>Content Design, Learning Tasks, and Protocols</b></p> <p><i>How do I ramp up engagement and rigor in order to increase academic achievement?</i></p>	<p><b>Rigorous, Meaningful Learning Tasks</b> (Representing to Learn; Problematizing a Learning Task; Student Voice and Choice; End-of-Unit Assessments; Culturally Relevant Content)</p> <p><b>Learning Protocols</b> (Text Protocols; Activators; Turn and Talk; Cooperative Learning; Whole Group Discussion)</p>	<p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Be assertive and self-advocate</p> <p>Cooperate and participate</p> <p>Demonstrate civic responsibility</p> <p>Invest in quality work</p>

## Domain: Academic Support

Academic support refers to “a wide variety of instructional methods, services, or school resources provided to students in the effort to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in school.”<sup>44</sup> The core practices in this domain support all students to improve their academic performance but are particularly helpful to students who experience major learning gaps.

Academic press, a term coined by researchers Valerie Lee and Julia Smith, refers to the high-impact Tier 1 strategies that teachers use to push all students to meet universal expectations and complete high-quality work.<sup>45</sup> Formative assessment enables teachers to engage in real-time, reciprocal student-teacher feedback in order to assess students’ skill acquisition and understanding; adjust instruction according to learning needs; and provide feedback that supports students to close learning gaps and correct errors and misunderstandings.<sup>46</sup> Interventions when students are not learning involve teachers and students in Tier 2 strategies such as individual academic conferences, progress monitoring, and academic booster sessions that support academic course success and build students’ capacity to think and work independently.<sup>47</sup>

All of these practices help develop and strengthen target behaviors related to the following Learning and Life Competencies: perseverance and resiliency, goal setting and self-assessment, investing in quality work, and organizing to learn and study. Establishing a culture of conferencing in which students regularly engage in more personal dialogues with teachers cultivates the skills that align with this domain. “Few other activities communicate an adult’s belief and confidence in a student as powerfully as one-to-one conversations in which an adult listens responsively, asks thoughtful questions, and provides helpful feedback.”<sup>48</sup>

Domain	Daily Instructional Practices and Strategies	Aligned Learning and Life Competency Skills
<p><b>Academic Support</b></p> <p><i>How do I target my academic practices and strategies to meet the range of learners in my classroom?</i></p>	<p><b>Academic Press</b> (Setting and Monitoring Expectations; Academic Reflection, Goal Setting, and Progress Tracking; Anticipating and Planning for Learning Gaps; Study Strategies; Revise, Edit, Proof, and Correct; Guided Work Period)</p> <p><b>Formative Assessment</b> (Academic Check-ins; Walk-around Look-fors; Feedback for Self-correction; Five-minute Assessment Tools)</p> <p><b>Academic Interventions</b> (Academic Problem-Solving and Planning Conference; Academic Turnaround Plan; Progress Monitoring; Academic Coaching)</p>	<p>Know the skills, behaviors and attitudes that help me</p> <p>Invest in quality work</p> <p>Exhibit self-regulation</p> <p>Demonstrate perseverance and resiliency</p> <p>Set and assess goals</p> <p>Be assertive and self-advocate</p> <p>Invest in quality work</p> <p>Organize to learn and study</p>

**Domain: Restorative and Accountable Discipline and Behavior Support**

When teachers maintain a restorative and accountable approach to discipline and behavior support, they are more likely to see all students as resilient and capable of turning around adverse situations. Teachers are also more likely to recognize their critical role in preventing discipline problems and are more apt to use strategies that help students re-engage quickly and get back on track. A restorative approach places an emphasis on a teacher’s commitment to help students to restore relationships in the classroom community.<sup>49</sup> It places an equal commitment on the student to take responsibility for their actions and engage in some action that “makes things right.” For example, when one student behaves in a way that directly harms an individual or the group, or when two or more students are involved in an interpersonal conflict, Restorative Conversations can be implemented to repair relationships and mend the harm. Strategies within this Domain enable students to engage in target behaviors that strengthen these Learning and Life Competency skills: identifying, expressing, and managing emotions, self-regulation, effective communication, empathy and respect, and civic responsibility.

When students experience behavioral challenges, interventions focus on restoring self by regaining self-control, strengthening resiliency, and improving their capacity to manage emotions. Behavioral problem-solving and planning conferences between students and teachers serve as the starting point for all interventions and engage students in the direct practice of effective interpersonal communication. Conferences always involve goal-setting and self-assessment that invite students to replace problematic behaviors with target behaviors linked to improving their academic performance in the classroom.

Domain	Daily Instructional Practices and Strategies	Aligned Learning and Life Competency Skills
<p><b>Restorative and Accountable Discipline and Behavior Support</b></p> <p><i>How do I plan for, respond to, and manage behavior concerns and intervene in high impact situations?</i></p>	<p><b>Planning for Behavior Concerns</b> Classroom Behavior Plan; First Response to Behavior Concerns; Behavior Check-ins)</p> <p><b>Defusing Charged Situations</b> (Depersonalization; Responding to Disrespectful Behavior; Defusing Students who are Upset; Defusing Power Struggles; Re-set Protocols; Interrupting Physical Altercations; Responding to Oppositional Behavior)</p> <p><b>Behavioral Interventions</b> (Restorative Conversations; Behavioral Problem-Solving and Planning Conferences; Progress Monitoring; Behavioral Coaching)</p>	<p>Know the skills, behaviors and attitudes that help me</p> <p>Identify, express, and manage emotions</p> <p>Exhibit self-control / impulse control</p> <p>Set and assess goals</p> <p>Communicate effectively</p> <p>Demonstrate empathy and respect</p> <p>Demonstrate civic responsibility</p>

## Supporting the Seamless Integration of Learning and Life Competencies

Teachers support the seamless integration of Learning and Life Competencies into daily instructional practices when they take the following steps:

1. Clearly identify the target behaviors that students practice during a learning task. To claim it, you need to name it.
2. Discuss the benefits of practicing the specific target behavior. “In what ways will it help me grow as a learner, be successful in school and in my life?”
3. Invite students to identify some things they would see and hear when successfully engaging in the target behavior. In this way, students are more likely to own the target behavior.
4. Model or have students demonstrate the target behavior.
5. After students complete the learning task, invite them to reflect on how they experienced the use of the target behavior or how it helped them engage and find success in the learning experience.
6. Provide feedback with examples of what the teacher saw and heard to leverage the group’s strength and effort to support future commitment.
7. Have students assess their individual or group use of the target behavior through written or oral reflection.
8. Analyze the data from the class’s reflections, the teacher’s feedback, and the students’ self-assessments and calibrate the next lesson.

## A Few Words about Teachers’ SEL Competencies

As highlighted in II: Adult Mindsets and Competencies, teachers are more likely to embed Learning and Life Competencies into daily classroom practice if they place high value on self-awareness, self-management, social efficacy, and academic efficacy, and can say to themselves and others why and how the regular use of these competencies can improve student behavior and academic performance in their classrooms. In addition, teachers who model these competencies in the classroom are more likely to generate students’ good will to try out and practice target behaviors. Adolescents do take their lead from what they see and hear. Teachers who see developing and mastering Learning and Life Competencies as a life-long endeavor are open to assessing their own strengths and “growing edges” as they seek to become fully competent. A teacher’s willingness to grow alongside their students is a powerful invitation to students. When teachers are committed to modeling, teaching, practicing, and assessing the Learning and Life Competencies, they are strengthening their own capacities to make these competencies live in their everyday experiences and a vital aspect of their teacher persona.

## A Snapshot of Learning and Life Competencies Integrated into a High School Classroom

So what does embedding Learning and Life Competencies into classroom practices really look and sound like? The snapshot that follows highlights how a teacher can intentionally integrate Learning and Life competencies into an academic lesson in real time in a high school classroom.

The chart in Figure 2.4 identifies the **competency**, **skill**, and **target behavior** in the right column. The left column reveals what the teacher is doing and what students are doing to learn and strengthen Learning and Life Competencies.

**Figure 2.4 Embedding Learning and Life Competencies in Real Time**

Actions/Activities	Competency	Skill
	Target Behavior	
<p><b>DURING THE</b> passing period Ms. Green is standing in her classroom doorway to Meet and Greet students as they arrive. She welcomes students by name and smiles warmly as students enter the classroom. “<i>Jake. Marcus. Janelle. Good morning. Hi, Ladonna.</i>” Students respond with friendly hellos and smiles. Ms. Green also does a quick personalized check-in with several students. “<i>Marisol, welcome back! Are you feeling better?</i>” and “<i>Gilberto! Tell me how the baseball team did last night.</i>”</p>	Social Efficacy	Healthy Relationships
	<i>I greet and talk to people in a friendly manner.</i>	
<p><b>STUDENTS WALK</b> into the classroom and see that instructions for the Reflect &amp; Connect linking the lesson to the real world are posted on the board with a reminder to get started the moment the bell rings. Students immediately find their seats and start pulling out their notebooks and reading the directions.</p>	Self-Management	Self-Regulation
	<i>I follow instructions, procedures and rules.</i>	
<p><b>WHEN THE BELL</b> rings, Ms. Green closes the door and says, “<i>Thank you for all arriving to class on time and getting started on the Reflect &amp; Connect. I’m going to take attendance quickly and stamp your homework. We will start in three minutes.</i>” She projects a visual timer that counts down from three minutes on the overhead.</p>	Academic Efficacy	Organizing to Learn
	<p><i>I attend class every day and I arrive to class on time.</i></p> <p><i>I organize myself and manage my materials.</i></p>	

<p><b>ONE STUDENT</b> quietly asks her neighbor to borrow a pencil. Another student realizes he forgot his notebook and asks to go to his locker. The teacher responds non-verbally by pointing to a sign on the wall that says, “<i>Forgot your note book? Use a piece of lined paper today and tape it into your notebook tonight.</i>” There is a stack of lined paper sitting in a basket below the sign.</p>	<p><b>Academic Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Organizing to Learn</b></p>
	<p><i>I organize myself and manage my materials.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Self-Management</b></p>	<p><b>Perseverance and Resiliency</b></p>
<p><i>I use problem-solving strategies to work things out.</i></p>		
<p><b>WHILE STUDENTS</b> work on the Reflect &amp; Connect, the teacher walks around and quickly stamps the homework that students automatically placed on the corner of their desk. Ms. Green also takes attendance on her laptop, jotting down the names of two students who did not do their homework assignment so she can check-in with them later.</p>	<p><b>Academic Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Organizing to Learn</b></p>
	<p><i>I attempt each part of the question, task, assignment, or test.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Self-Management</b></p>	<p><b>Self-Regulation</b></p>
	<p><i>I sustain my focus and pay attention throughout the activity or task.</i></p>	
<p><i>I work silently without bothering others.</i></p>		
<p><b>THE TIMER</b> goes off at 3 minutes, and the teacher announces to the group, “<i>Ok, time’s up, thank you for getting right to work today. The next step in our Reflect &amp; Connect is to do the Turn &amp; Talk Procedure with your Color Partners to share your thinking. If you need any help remembering the Turn &amp; Talk procedure, where can you look?</i>” Several students gesture to the TURN &amp; TALK TIPS sign on the wall. “<i>Great, I’ll be looking to see those in action. I’m going to set my timer for 90 seconds, please turn to your Color Partner and begin sharing how you responded to the Reflect &amp; Connect question.</i>” Students turn to face their partner and quickly decide who will begin sharing.</p>	<p><b>Social Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Cooperation and Participation</b></p>
	<p><i>I take turns, listen to and encourage others, and do my fair share of work.</i></p>	
	<p><i>I work effectively with different students.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Social Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Effective Communication</b></p>
<p><i>I focus my attention on people who are speaking to me.</i></p>		

<p><b>WHEN THE TIMER</b> goes off, Ms. Green moves to stand by the space on the whiteboard that features the Check-off Agenda and uses a hand signal to get the group's attention and silence. She checks off the Reflect &amp; Connect box and provides a quick verbal overview of the day's lesson, the learning outcomes, and how students will show what they know and are able to do by the end of class.</p>	<p><b>Self-Management</b></p>	<p><b>Self-Regulation</b></p>
	<p><i>I follow instructions, procedures, and rules.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Academic Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Goal-setting and Self-assessment</b></p>
	<p><i>I make sure that I know the criteria for high-quality work.</i></p>	
<p><b>BEFORE STARTING</b> the mini-lesson, Ms. Green projects a sample page of student notes from the previous day. The model is well organized and includes a coding system that makes key words stand out and highlights key points and summarizing statements. The teacher invites students to spend a minute silently comparing it to their own notes and reflecting on what they could do to make sure their notes are useful tools for learning and studying. The teacher then asks students to turn to their Number Partner and share one way they might improve the way they take notes so they have a good resource when it comes time to study for the unit test.</p>	<p><b>Academic Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Goal-setting and Self-assessment</b></p>
	<p><i>I monitor my academic progress through written and oral self-reflection and conferencing.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Academic Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Organizing to Learn and Study</b></p>
	<p><i>I use a range of study strategies to remember and apply key knowledge, skills, and understandings.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Social Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Cooperation and Participation</b></p>
	<p><i>I take turns, listen to and encourage others, and do my fair share of work.</i></p> <p><i>I work effectively with different students.</i></p>	

<p><b>DURING THE BRIEF</b> mini-lesson, one student moves up to a desk at the front of the room. This is a pre-arranged plan the student and the teacher designed together to support him to self-correct chronic blurting-out and engaging in side conversations that disrupted the class. There is a fidget object at the table and a Post-it note on the corner of the desk that the student marks every time he has the urge to blurt out but controls the impulse. The teacher also has a Post-it note discreetly placed on her clipboard that she is using to track every time the student blurts out. They will compare Post-it notes at the end of class so the student can reflect and monitor his progress with reducing behaviors that distract the group.</p>	<p><b>Self-Management</b></p>	<p><b>Self-Regulation</b></p>
	<p><i>I sustain my focus and pay attention throughout an activity or task.</i></p> <p><i>I work silently without bothering others.</i></p>	
	<p><b>Social Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Civic Responsibility</b></p>
	<p><i>I do positive things to make class a good place to learn.</i></p>	
<p><b>AFTER THE TEN-MINUTE</b> mini-lesson, students work in trios on a card sort to help them practice applying the concepts introduced in the mini-lesson. Students are taking turns reading the cards, analyzing the information, and sorting it into the appropriate category.</p>	<p><b>Social Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Cooperation and Participation</b></p>
	<p><i>I take turns, listen to and encourage others, and do my fair share of work.</i></p> <p><i>I work effectively with different students.</i></p>	



<p><b>THE TEACHER WALKS</b> around the room and notices one group is using aggressive speech and even a little name-calling as they disagree about the placement of a card. She stops by, gives the group some feedback, and asks an open-ended question to prompt the group to self-correct, “<i>The high energy at this table is really giving you a chance to engage with this task. Some of these are tricky and intended to spark a debate. How can you rephrase your differences of opinion in a way that keeps the dialogue professional?</i>” One student says, “<i>My bad</i>” and then attempts to restate his claim using one of the accountable talk stems from a poster on the wall titled “Student Resources.” “<i>I hear you saying... and I’d like to offer another perspective...</i>” Ms. Green listens in for a moment as the students continue their debate and then moves on to listen in on other groups.</p>	<b>Self-Management Efficacy</b>	<b>Self-Regulation</b>
	<i>I accept help, feedback, correction, or consequences with goodwill.</i>	
	<b>Social Efficacy</b>	<b>Effective Communication</b>
	<i>I resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively.</i>	
	<b>Social Efficacy</b>	<b>Cooperation and Participation</b>
	<i>I work effectively with different students.</i>	
	<b>Social Efficacy</b>	<b>Assertion</b>
<i>I use neutral, non-aggressive language to express myself.</i>		
<b>Social Efficacy</b>	<b>Civic Responsibility</b>	
<i>I do positive things to make class a good place to learn.</i>		
<p><b>TO WRAP UP</b> the lesson, Ms. Green brings the group back together and uses follow-up questions to clarify any misconceptions. Then she posts a question on the board and gives students five minutes to explain how they would respond based on what they learned that day. While students are writing, she is walking around the room looking for key words and phrases in the students’ responses. She makes a note if she notices a student’s response is off-point so she can check in with the student the next day and provide additional instruction and support.</p>	<b>Academic Efficacy</b>	<b>Organizing to Learn and Study</b>
	<i>I use a range of study strategies to remember and apply key knowledge, skills, and understandings.</i>	

<p><b>A FEW MINUTES</b> before the bell rings, Ms. Green reminds students that the end-of-unit test is scheduled for next week. She asks students to flip to the Unit Learning Outcomes Student Self-Assessment page in their notebooks. As an exit ticket, students are asked to reflect and jot down on a Post-it note which learning outcome(s) they are still challenged by and to articulate one thing they don't understand or are struggling with. As students exit, they post their notes on the TICKET OUT space by the door where the teacher is standing and saying goodbye to students as they exit.</p>	<p><b>Academic Efficacy</b></p>	<p><b>Goal Setting and Self-Assessment</b></p>
<p><i>I monitor my academic progress through written and oral self-reflection and conferencing.</i></p>		

#### IV: Assessing Learning and Life Competencies

When it comes to assessing Learning and Life Competencies, we urge policy-makers and district and school leaders to continue to think big and start small. We base this recommendation on lessons from the field of educational assessment. Educators in the United States have been on a quest for the past 150 years to develop accurate measures of educational achievement,<sup>50</sup> yet there is growing evidence that current standardized tests vary in rigor and do not give us direct and complete measures of what students actually know and can do.<sup>51</sup> Arguably, measurement of a student's self-awareness, self-management, social, and learning behaviors will be even harder to assess than academic outcomes. In the nascent field of social and emotional assessment, the research and development of valid, reliable, and fair measures of SEL are in their infancy.<sup>52</sup>

We recognize there is a national dialogue about whether we are ready to measure SEL as a part of accountability systems. There is a broad consensus that the most effective set of tools, systems, and protocols is not yet in place. At the same time, there is a growing body of research that shows a strong relationship between academic performance, career success, and interpersonal/intrapersonal competencies, so assessing Learning and Life Competencies in schools will likely be integrated into most school improvement plans in the future. Although purposes for assessing Learning and Life Competencies include accountability to SEL standards and communication about forward progress in the field of SEL, we recommend that schools begin with information-gathering about promising practices in the classroom.<sup>53</sup>

A **Likert** scale is used to gauge attitudes, values, and opinions by having a person complete a questionnaire that requires them to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements.

A **rubric** is an evaluation tool that communicates to a student, in writing, what is expected of them and delineates consistent criteria for grading. Rubrics help students make connections between what they will learn and what will be assessed.

Information-gathering at the classroom level encourages teachers' exploration of practices that support Learning and Life Competencies, increases capacity-building through the sharing of information, provides instructional guidance related to implementation, and engages both students and teachers in formative assessment around the demonstration of Learning and Life Competencies. Students benefit from the opportunity to reflect on the growth of their Learning and Life Competencies through student self-report measures and teacher feedback via Likert or rubric rating approaches. Teachers benefit as they collectively grow their practices in support of students' self-awareness, self-management, and social and learning behaviors. Schools benefit in their ability to observe what really works for high school students in classrooms and what it really takes to establish a universal set of practices that promote Learning and Life Competencies.

Recognizing the complexity of measuring Learning and Life Competencies at scale (even if this scale is a single school), we recommend schools enter into an appreciative inquiry cycle for the purpose of answering the question, "What are the most viable and inclusive ways we can assess Learning and Life Competencies?" By inviting schools to assess Learning and Life Competencies flexibly, pathways toward systemic measurement are broadened and significant learning will occur along the way. We offer four initial measures to support schools in wrestling with this question.

- 1. Data from climate surveys:** Review the school climate survey and select key questions that focus on the use of these competencies in schools and lift up key items that focus on the degree to which students' developmental needs feel supported by staff. If a school or district does not yet have a school climate survey, or the questions are lacking around SEL, The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments developed a compendium on school climate surveys<sup>54</sup> and the United States Department of Education offers a free school climate survey.<sup>55</sup>
- 2. Student outcome data:** Regularly collect and analyze student outcome data such as behavior (e.g., office disciplinary referrals, in- and out-of-school suspension), attendance (e.g., attendance and tardy rates), and grades (e.g., course completion, graduation rates, on-track-to-graduate indicators) to determine the impact of embedding Learning and Life Competencies practices in the classroom. While there will likely be many factors that impact these data points, they can support formative assessment and course correction with Learning and Life Competencies supports and a deepened understanding of the connection between Learning and Life Competencies and student outcomes.
- 3. Student self-reportage and teacher outcomes:** In classrooms where Learning and Life Competencies are at the core of classroom culture, teachers can work together to develop reliable and valid student self-report measures of key skills and discrete target behaviors. Through rituals, routines, processes, and structures, teachers design outcomes that align with the developmental and contextual needs of their students and models, teaches, practices, and assesses these skills and target behaviors. Teachers, with students, identify goals, measure progress, and make modifications along the way by having students engage in systematic self-assessment processes and embedding timely and structured teacher observations.

For example, Likert scales often include statements to which students respond, “Strongly agree.” Rubric ratings often use a 0–3 rating scale: “I use it regularly,” “I use it regularly without prompting,” etc.

- 4. Progress-monitoring:** We recommend that teachers work together to identify students who need additional support and interventions with specific Learning and Life Competencies. This is an opportunity for teachers to partner with students to identify specific target behaviors for which the student is developing competencies and awareness, and design direct behavior ratings, so the teacher and student have a plan for monitoring progress over time.

The development of Learning and Life Competencies in students depends greatly on the structures and assessment practices that are intentionally put in place to support students. Two critical classroom structures support teachers in both formative assessment and progress monitoring: Circle and individual conferencing. In classrooms where students are included in unpacking target behaviors and where a culture of conferencing and listening is developed, both formative assessment and progress monitoring become a part of the rhythm of the week. Schools or districts might partner and collaborate with a small subset of teachers in developing their capacity to facilitate the two classroom structures in order to support learning about what it might take to scale these structures across a grade(s), the school, or district.

- 1. Circle:** After identifying and unpacking with students key Learning and Life Competency target behaviors that are critical for success in their course, and providing opportunities for ongoing practice, teachers can ritualize the use of Circle as a forum for ongoing group assessment. To support a data-informed conversation within Circle, teachers collect formative assessment data and invite students to self-assess along the way. Students can fill out exit tickets and use Likert or rubric rating instruments to set goals, measure growth and identify individually and collectively what the group needs to focus on moving forward. When students reflect on teacher observation and self-assessment data patterns within the context of Circle, classroom cohesion and a strong sense of community are fostered
- 2. Individual conferencing:** The structure of an individual conference gives students the personal attention and care they need to engage in metacognitive reflection and problem-solving. This is an opportunity for teachers to listen in active, empathic, and nonjudgmental ways, enabling students to grapple with the Learning and Life Competencies that have become barriers to learning. Creating a culture of conferencing in the classroom helps teachers determine which students need ongoing support and results in those students setting realistic and specific goals, and an agreed upon plan to monitor their effort and progress. This structure requires scaffolded support for teachers to both acquire the nuanced skill set to facilitate highly effective conferences, along with their ability to first develop the capacity of the group to sustain focus individually or in small groups before meeting one-to-one with individual students.

These two structures allow for dialogue to transpire and deeper meaning of Learning and Life Competencies to be made by both teachers and students. Through the process of self-assessment, teacher feedback, and dialogue, high school teachers raise the expectation of students to value metacognitive practices to support the growth and development of Learning and Life Competencies. Empowering adolescents to be self-assessors of their Learning and Life Competencies requires them to set learning goals and take the necessary steps/work to meet the goal, to actively assess their work to see if in fact they have met the goal, and then, finally, to set new goals or revise ones that were not achieved. Self-assessment requires teachers to elevate the importance of this target behavior, providing students with multiple opportunities to practice the behavior, and meaningful opportunities to engage with their peers and the teacher in mediated conversations about their work/performance. The goal is for students to make accurate judgments on their own, over time, rather than to agree with their teacher. Ownership occurs when the student is thinking, “I am working on this target behavior and I am engaged in self-assessment and feedback because it will help me socially, emotionally, and academically.” By engaging in the steps of self-reflection and self-assessment, students begin to shift their mindsets about their own capacity as they become incrementally more successful in school.

We recognize that for many students and teachers, the absence of a grade may reduce their inclination to emphasize and integrate these competencies and skills into a course, unit, and lesson plan. The fact that in many schools, teachers already grade academic behaviors related to participation provides an opportunity for teachers and leaders to collectively identify and include key skills and target behaviors that will strengthen students’ self-awareness, self-management, social, and learning behaviors in service of student achievement and success. For many students, grades can be a compelling motivator, as long as the teacher is clear about the ways in which the Learning and Life Competencies will support their holistic growth and development. Offering teachers the opportunity to cultivate students’ competencies and assess them in meaningful and constructive ways increases teachers’ commitment to supporting Learning and Life Competencies through instruction, and in the long run supports schools and districts in better understanding what they are trying to measure.

## **V: Professional Learning and Leadership**

### **Leaders at the Helm**

If we expect teachers to be knowledgeable, skillful, and fluid in their classroom integration of social, behavioral, and academic competencies, it is essential for school leaders to reflect on their own social and emotional competencies and skills. It is important to note, “Self-awareness is foundational to our ability to manage our own behaviors and to develop productive relationships.<sup>56</sup>” School leaders’ capacity to cultivate their own self-awareness is at the core of their ability to model inclusive learning communities and productive social and emotional competencies every day, in every interaction, with students, staff, parents, and adolescent advocates. School leaders, including principals, deans, assistant

principals, teacher leaders, department heads, and student support team leaders, all have an opportunity to hone their social emotional competencies. This is a critical first step in shaping a safe and supportive high school culture and climate, which is at the heart of any school change effort.

A second critical step for leaders is to examine their mindsets and practices through a lens of equity. Effective leaders hold a vision that supports teachers to critically examine their own cultural competencies and mindsets regarding cultural background, race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, language, learning preferences, and ability/disability, and how they inform their teaching. Leaders must ask themselves, “How do my leadership beliefs shape the culture of my professional learning community? What critical norms do we adopt to ensure teacher teams grow their group identity, efficacy, and trust? What are the ways that I embed ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers with a culturally responsive orientation to teaching and the link with Learning and Life Competencies? How do I help teachers move equity to the center of their instructional practice?” It is through this self-examination that leaders can begin to create a systemic infrastructure to support staff in navigating the complexities of the varied needs of students, thereby ensuring that every student has access and opportunities to grow these Life and Learning Competencies to achieve academic excellence.

School leaders and their teams must learn in a safe ecology—one that encourages transparency, experiential learning, collegial inquiry, and self-directed learning.<sup>57</sup> We ask high school leaders, “In what ways might you build in structures and processes to informally and formally model Life and Learning Competencies?” Some ways that have been successful in schools with which we work are: principals systematically engaging in early morning and late afternoon walk-throughs to meet and greet teachers in their rooms; assistant principals and deans meeting and greeting students as they enter and exit the school and transition between classrooms; and embedding rituals and routines into faculty and small group meetings that support a culture that is safe, challenging, and inspiring intellectually, emotionally, and socially, such as Home Groups.

Learning is affected by the contexts in which it takes place.<sup>58</sup> Professional learning occurs best when leadership creates an environment where staff respond positively when asking themselves, “Do I feel a sense of belonging in this learning context? Do I feel cared for and supported? Am I inspired and engaged? In what ways will school leaders partner with us to build learning communities that are continuous and sustainable?”

**Home Groups** are made up of a diverse cohort of five to eight staff members who meet throughout the year and engage in professional learning experiences that are relevant to every staff member in the community. A primary purpose of Home Groups is forming a more intimate community of learners who engage in deep reflection about themselves and their work at school.

## **Communities of Professional Learning**

At the center of professional learning is community, and it is well known that building professional communities of learning in high schools is by no means easy. In secondary schools, some have viewed school culture as more of an agglomeration of several subcultures.<sup>59</sup> Subcultures are likely to include course-alike cohorts, and departmental, academic, and grade-level communities. Often these subcultures work in isolation from each other, which makes it difficult to share a holistic vision of embedding universal Learning and Life Competencies into the classroom. “Additionally, the high school landscape is marked by organizational challenges: school size, class size, peer context, teacher-student relationships,”<sup>60</sup> and greater academic demands to meet a complex array of performance standards.

Given this reality, systemically integrating self-management, social, and academic behaviors becomes an exercise in humility, creativity, and imagination. Leaders may ask, “In my school context, in my district, what are the possibilities for this essential work? How does supporting integration of Learning and Life Competencies align with our School Improvement Plan? What critical work needs to be done around creating fair and impartial classrooms that are culturally relevant and inclusive? What are some initial first steps we must take that are viable? How do we hold a meaningful vision for this work, and start small and strategically? What are the ways we garner teacher voice and expertise to support a planning process for integration of practices and strategies that support Learning and Life Competencies?” These questions are a starting place to begin a critical conversation in high schools.

The demands on high school leaders and teachers from various constituencies are ever-present. We offer strategic options for school leaders to consider and/or deepen to create communities of professional learning like those that have been successful in schools across the country: professional learning configurations that support teachers to lean in, listen, experience, question, and embrace this critical work.

## **Time to Engage in this Work Using Viable Cohort Configurations**

It is evident throughout the country that leaders and teachers are asked to do more with less time. How do we capitalize on the time allocated to shape teacher beliefs and grow their knowledge and fluid implementation of the integration of Learning and Life Competencies into daily practice? There are myriad ways to gather full staff in order to share a collective and universal vision about the interests in supporting students’ self-awareness, self-management, social, and academic behaviors. Some districts have early release or late start professional learning sessions. Some high schools are fortunate to have all-call days throughout the year and dedicate a percentage of this time to this effort. Still other schools have a dedicated number of faculty meetings throughout the year. These venues vary widely as do the number of hours for faculty to gather.

To further the dialogue and begin to deepen the knowledge and skill implementation of teachers, other grouping structures can support continuous understanding of Learning and Life Competencies and implementation efforts. There are ninth grade teams, course-alike cohorts, departmental or cross-departmental humanities teams, and math-science

teams to collaborate on this effort. Also, in some school contexts, professional learning dialogue can be as powerful with a pair as with a group of ten, and it is a starting place. Other schools are using a common planning period shared by a subset of the staff that form a cohort for that semester. Schools that have found their “sweet spot” to maximize the capacity in their staff hold a realistic vision of what is possible given the competing needs within their strategic planning process. It is through this collective effort and shared vision that teachers begin to grow and deepen their own social-emotional skills, which can have a deep and sustaining impact on their efficacy and craftsmanship as teachers. It is nice to think big, but in reality, small wins and baby steps provide the essential foundation on which later, larger, and enduring successes can rest.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to identifying and forming the right cohorts to engage and commit to the work at hand, leaders have an opportunity to use these venues to grow their group emotional intelligence to support true collaboration and cooperation to ensure that the group is performing optimally. “Three conditions are essential to a group’s effectiveness: trust among members, a sense of group identity, and a sense of group efficacy.”<sup>62</sup> It has been our experience that highly effective teams create together and implement emotionally intelligent norms (attitudes and behaviors) that become ways that the team behaves and interacts with each other. Sophisticated norms enable these teams to have a “can-do attitude,” proactively solve problems, acknowledge and affirm the emotions and moods of individuals and the group, confront difficult behaviors and constructively manage conflict, and actively work to understand the varied perspectives that live in the work of teams. Now, more than ever, schools are dependent on teachers working together collectively to support the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. We understand that creating an organizational culture where teams are running optimally requires leaders at the helm to recognize, nurture, and care for the emotions and efforts of their teachers and their collaborations.

### **The Role of Coaches in Sustaining the Work**

In many high schools across the country, there are dedicated instructional leaders who carry the torch for this work. In collaboration with school administrators and with intentional planning, these instructional leaders collaborate with teachers to carry out the expectations of a well-designed professional learning plan, where Learning and Life Competencies are seamlessly embedded into meaningful trainings and professional learning cohorts. In these coaching contexts teachers have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives about their students, deepen their expertise, and develop increased consciousness about their beliefs and practices. This enables them to identify strategic ways to influence the learning environment for all of their students. With coaching support, teachers work together to identify key skills and target behaviors, create a plan for implementation, and participate in a cycle of observation where data are collected, synthesized, reviewed, and discussed. This collaborative structure, which differs depending on the school context, is where beliefs are explored, practices are refined and the cycle of learning continues. Effective coaches have an in-depth knowledge of students’ cultural, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic contexts, and sensitivity to their teachers’ experiences.



Ongoing coaching and strategic support raise the accountability bar and expectations for all teachers involved. In districts where instructional coaches are not part of the high school culture, principals and their administrative teams have re-imagined their staffing structures and leadership models to take on this critical work. It has been our experience that when teachers contribute to the plan, when leadership is clear about the vision, and when time is allocated to collaboratively work towards a goal that supports the developmental needs of students and the academic expectations of teachers, mindsets begin to shift and commitment becomes visible through actions.

## Conclusion

Creating secondary classrooms that offer rigorous and meaningful learning and social experiences and empower students to be agents of change will ensure that they engage in day-to-day complexities with increasing sophistication and success. It takes more than the good talent and habits of teachers to enable students to absorb and acquire these Learning and Life Competencies. It takes the collective effort of school leaders to champion an approach aligned with the Learning and Life Competencies framework and support teachers to be in tune with their students' contexts, to create classroom conditions, experiences, universal practices and strategies, and systematic rituals and routines where students feel known and safe, challenged and creative, cared for and encouraged.

Limited research on SEL in high school settings compels educational leaders to seek out innovative and sophisticated initiatives that support all students to develop and strengthen personal, social and academic efficacy and prepare for college and career success. The work of the next decade will require school leaders, teachers, school counselors, support staff, researchers, and SEL practitioners to take part in systematic efforts to develop and evaluate programs that ensure every student within a high school classroom is supported to develop and strengthen SEL competencies. Districts and states that are already developing SEL standards and guidelines have an opportunity to recognize how high schools (and even middle schools) are different from elementary schools and to develop approaches for these levels that embrace the ideas embedded in our Life and Learning Competencies framework.

Since it is too early in the work to make hard and fast policy recommendations for embedding SEL in high school classrooms, it is our hope that district and school leaders are inspired to convey two critical messages to policy makers at the state and national level: 1) that attributes and conditions in high school classrooms provide a platform for implementing SEL that is distinctively different from elementary school classrooms and thus, require innovative alternatives to traditional SEL approaches; 2) there is a need for funding to implement and evaluate classroom-based SEL initiatives in high schools where leaders are ready to tackle this important work.

Finally, we invite state, district, and local school leaders and other thought leaders to engage in dialogue about this paper and, together, forge opportunities to integrate Learning and Life Competencies into high school classrooms. As more high schools take on this work through comprehensive SEL classroom initiatives, we will be able to gather a rich collection of data that will advance the field of SEL and inform future advocacy.

## Authors' Note

In creating the Learning and Life Competencies, we studied, reviewed, analyzed, and considered mindsets, skill sets, and competencies developed by our colleagues across the country who hold students, teachers, and families at the heart of their work. We thank them for informing our thinking daily and for their relentless efforts to create high-performing, high-achieving learning cultures for every student.

1. The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research list of noncognitive factors that shape student performance and the developmental framework for young adult success
2. Developmental readiness skills linked to college and career access and success identified by David Conley<sup>63</sup> and Mandy Savitz-Romer<sup>64</sup>
3. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)'s five core SEL competencies
4. Competency lists designed specifically for use with adolescents from American Institutes of Research's College and Career Readiness and Success Organizer, and Arnold Goldstein's *Skillstreaming the Adolescent*

## About Engaging Schools

Engaging Schools is a non-profit organization that collaborates with educators to create school communities where each and every student develops the skills and mindsets needed to succeed and make positive contributions in school, work, and life. We specialize in work with middle and high schools to integrate academic, social, and emotional learning and development, and create a positive climate and learning-focused culture. We offer professional development and resources with practical strategies for instructional practice, classroom management, discipline and student support, and advisory programs – all grounded in the values of equity, community, and democracy. Engaging Schools was founded in 1982 as Educators for Social Responsibility and changed its name in 2014.

## About the Authors



**Carol Miller Lieber** got the call to teach as a teenager and never stopped. Exploration of the art, craft, and science of teaching and learning has been her driving passion for over forty-five years as an urban educator in the roles of middle and high school teacher, school founder, principal, curriculum writer, and clinical professor in teacher education. She is a national leader in integrating principles of personalization, schoolwide and classroom discipline, and youth development into everyday practices and structures for middle and high schools. Carol is the author or co-author of many books and publications including the upcoming book *Engaged Classrooms: Supporting Academic Success for Every Adolescent*, *Shifting Gears: Recalibrating Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support*, *Making Learning REAL: Reaching and Engaging All Learners* and *Getting Classroom Management Right*. She is also a longtime professional development consultant and program designer for Engaging Schools.



**Michele Tisiere** has extensive experience as a classroom teacher and senior administrator in secondary schools. As Director of Programs for Engaging Schools, she oversees the implementation of the Engaged Classrooms, Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support, and Advisory Plus programs. Michele has deep experience partnering with district leaders, school leaders, and teachers to support professional learning opportunities that maximize adults' capacity to carry out the complex work of school change, helping to shape healthy faculty, peer, school, and classroom cultures. Michele is author or co-author of several publications including the upcoming book *Engaged Classrooms: Supporting Academic Success for Every Adolescent*, *Shifting Gears: Recalibrating Schoolwide Discipline and Student Support*, and *Getting Advisory Right: Tools for Supporting Effective Advisories*.

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