Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Skills Survey

Spring 2016 District Report

What is the SEL Skills Survey?

In 2015–2016, in partnership with the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), and as part of Austin Independent School District's (AISD) participation in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), AISD students in middle and high schools as well as model elementary schools participating in online survey administration self-assessed their SEL skills. Items on the survey measured students' skill level across CASEL's five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. As part of the CDI, CASEL worked with Washoe County School District (WCSD) to refine an existing assessment of students' SEL skills. Because AISD is a member of the CDI, staff in AISD's Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) selected 20 items identified by CASEL and WCSD as having high reliability across school levels (grades 5 through 12), differentiating students based on their SEL skill level, and anchoring each of the five SEL competencies.

Who participated in the SEL Skills Survey?

Currently, AISD's 3rd- and 4th-grade students participate in AISD's Student Climate Survey, and their results yield moderate reliability estimates[1] across items. Although CASEL and WCSD did not administer the SEL skills survey to 3rd- or 4th-grade students, DRE piloted the 20 SEL Skills Survey items to a sample of AISD's 3rd- and 4th-grade students at four model SEL schools administering the survey online (Baldwin, Highland Park, Lee, and Pease). All middle and high school students in grades 6 through 11 were invited to participate in the survey. Campus reports can be found on the DRE's website. The numbers of students participating online or on paper are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
A total of 20,854 3rd- through 11th grade students participated in the SEL Skills Survey.
Twenty-nine percent of middle and high school students took the survey online.

	Paper	Online	Total	% online
Elementary	—	852	854	100%[†]
Middle	8,561	2,240	10,801	21%
High	6,301	2,988	9,199	32%

Source. 2016 SEL Skills Survey
[†]Only the four model SEL elementary schools who administered the survey online participated in the SEL Skills Survey; therefore, 100% of the invited participants took the survey online.
[1] Elementary school students' reliability estimates on the 2016 Student Climate Survey ranged from .60 to .85. Items are considered internally consistent when estimates are .75 or higher.

Response rates based on students' self-reported grade[2] are presented in Table 2. Most participants were in middle school. Numbers of responses based on student group (e.g., gender, ethnicity) are presented in the appendix.

Table 2
More middle school than elementary or high school students participated in the SEL Skills Survey.

Grade	Elementary (n = 853)				Middle (n = 10,113)			High (n = 8,291)		
	3	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	11
Number	214	317	249	73	3,394	3,462	3,257	2,998	2,762	2,531
Response rate (level)	25%	37%	29%	9%	34%	34%	32%	36%	33%	31%
Response rate (total)	1%	2%	1%	0%	18%	18%	17%	16%	14%	13%

Source. 2016 SEL Skills Survey
[2] Students self-selected their grade. In some cases, students did not select a grade, or selected a grade that did not match their school level; therefore, totals presented in this table may not match those presented in Table 1.

How did students respond?

The percentages of students who indicated the 20 skills were *very easy* or *easy* for them to do were compared based on school level and student group. A greater percentage of elementary school students than middle or high school students reported that SEL skills were easy for them to do. Interestingly, few differences were found between middle and high school students' responses. Across school levels, students reported that items related to self-awareness were easiest for them to do (Table 3), whereas items related to self-management were less easy for them to do (Table 4).

Examinations across student groups found a greater percentage of secondary male than of secondary female students reported most SEL competencies were easy for them to do (appendix). Across all school levels, a greater percentage of White than of Hispanic or African American students reported most SEL competencies were easy to do (appendix).

Future analyses and collaboration with CASEL will determine if the SEL Skills Survey is developmentally appropriate for students in 3rd and 4th grade, and if trends described in this report corroborate trends in other school districts. Future reports will analyze relationships between students' responses to the SEL Skills Survey and their responses to the Student Climate Survey, personal development skill ratings (elementary school only), teacher ratings of SEL skills (elementary school only), and other outcome measures of interest.

The remainder of this report displays students' responses grouped according to CASEL's five SEL competencies (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). The appendix displays students' responses based on student group (e.g., gender, ethnicity).

Psychometric Properties

Construct Validity

In a first step to determine if the 20 items were reliable measures of the five SEL competencies, a principal components factor analysis was conducted separately for each school level. Results from this analysis found support for three different factors, rather than five. These three factors can be characterized as follows: emotional awareness, self-management, and responsible decision making. The appendix lists each item with the corresponding factor. For the purposes of this report, each item is displayed with the SEL competency it was designed to measure.

Reliability

Reliability estimates were computed for each of CASEL's five SEL competencies separately for each school level. Estimates ranged from .55 to .89, with lowest estimates at the elementary school level. Because no other district has administered these items to students in 3rd or 4th grades, additional reliability estimates were computed for each grade. Estimates were lowest at 3rd grade for the social awareness (α= .49) and responsible decision making competencies (α = .49).

Future Analyses

Forthcoming analyses will examine how students' ratings relate to outcome measures of interest, or predictive validity. Additional analyses and ongoing collaboration with CASEL will help determine how best to measure students' SEL skills, particularly at the elementary school level.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is characterized by the ability to recognize one's emotions and values, as well as recognize one's own strengths and limitations. Table 3 displays students' responses to items designed to measure self-awareness.

Table 3
Elementary school students reported more ease in navigating their emotions and adjusting their behavior based on how they feel than did their middle and high school peers.

	Elementary	Middle	High
Knowing the emotions I feel.	93%[a,b]	81%[a]	85%[b]
Knowing ways to calm myself down.	88%[a,b]	77%[a]	80%[b]
Knowing what my strengths are.	92%[a,b]	84%[a]	83%[b]
Knowing when my feelings are making it hard for me to focus.	83%[a]	79%[a]	82%

Self-Management

Self-management is defined by one's ability to manage emotions and behaviors in order to achieve goals. Table 4 displays students' responses to items identified to measure students' self-management.

Table 4
High school students reported being more patient when they were really excited than did elementary school students.
Elementary students found it easier than did middle or high school students to finish difficult tasks, set goals, and do schoolwork even when they did not feel like it.

	Elementary	Middle	High
Being patient even when I am really excited.	74%[a]	77%	79%[a]
Finishing tasks even if they are hard for me.	78%[a,b]	68%[a]	67%[b]
Setting goals for myself.	86%[a,b]	81%[a]	82%[b]
Doing my schoolwork even if I do not feel like it.	81%[a,b]	66%[a]	59%[b]

Social Awareness

Social awareness is characterized by one's ability to show others that one understands their needs and can empathize with them. Table 5 displays students' responses to items selected to measure social awareness.

Table 5
Elementary school students found most skills related to social awareness easier to do than did middle or high school students.

	Elementary	Middle	High
Learning from people with different opinions than me.	83%[a]	78%[a]	81%
Knowing what people may be feeling by the look on their face.	90%[a,b]	83%[a]	84%[b]
Knowing when someone needs help.	95%[a,b]	86%[a]	85%[b]
Knowing how to get help when I'm having trouble with a classmate.	88%[a,b]	77%[a]	78%[b]

Source. 2016 SEL Skills Survey
Note. Response options ranged from 1 = *very difficult* to 4 = *very easy*. Percentages reflect students who selected 3 = *easy* or 4 = *very easy*. Percentages sharing the same superscript (a or b) across level and within item are significantly different (p <.05) using the z-test for proportions, blue indicates the higher percentage. Percentages in tables are rounded; calculations were computed using unrounded percentages.

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills are characterized by the ability to form positive relationships, work in teams, and deal effectively with conflict. Table 6 displays items designed to measure students' relationship skills.

Table 6
Although elementary school students' level of agreement was higher than that of their middle and high school peers, all students reported difficulty with talking to an adult when they had problems at school.

	Elementary	Middle	High
Respecting a classmate's opinions during a disagreement.	85%[a]	80%[a]	84%
Getting along with my classmates.	91%[a]	85%[a]	90%
Talking to an adult when I have problems at school.	75%[a,b]	62%[a]	63%[b]

Responsible Decision Making

Responsible decision making is defined by one's ability to make ethical and constructive choices regarding personal and social behavior. Table 7 displays items developed to assess students' responsible decision making.

Table 7
Ninety percent of all students felt they knew the difference between right and wrong, and could say no to a friend who wanted them to break the rules.

	Elementary	Middle	High
Thinking about what might happen before making a decision.	81%[a]	75%[a]	81%
Knowing what is right or wrong.	94%[a,b]	90%[a]	93%[b]
Saying "no" to a friend who wants me to break the rules.	93%[a,b]	82%[a]	85%[b]

Source. 2016 SEL Skills Survey
Note. Response options ranged from 1 = *very difficult* to 4 = *very easy*. Percentages reflect students who selected 3 = *easy* or 4 = *very easy*. Percentages sharing the same superscript (a or b) across level and within item are significantly different ($p < .05$) using the z-test for proportions, blue indicates the higher percentage. Percentages in tables are rounded; calculations were computed using unrounded percentages.

Appendix: Students' Responses to the SEL Skills Survey Based on Student Group

Table A1
Number of Responses by Student Group

	Hispanic	White	African American	Male	Female
Elementary	174	520	32	452	402
Middle	5,747	2,645	636	5,247	5,230
High	4,155	2,334	579	4,257	4,415

Note. Students' gender was self-identified on the survey. Students' race/ethnicity was matched to their district race/ethnicity records based on their self-reported student identification numbers. Eighty-four percent of students had correct student identification numbers.

Table A2
Self-Awareness

	Elementary					Middle					High				
	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F
Knowing the emotions I feel.	88%[a]	95%[a]	87%	94%	93%	81%	80%	83%	87%[*]	76%	83%	86%	89%	88%[*]	81%
Knowing ways to calm myself down.	85%	91%[a]	71%[a]	87%	90%	74%	84%[a]	73%[a]	80%[*]	74%	80%	82%	80%	84%[*]	77%
Knowing what my strengths are.	90%	92%	81%	93%	90%	81%[a,b]	89%[a]	87%[b]	88%[*]	80%	82%[a,b]	87%[a]	87%[b]	87%[*]	80%
Knowing when my feelings are making it hard for me to focus.	81%	84%	72%	82%	84%	76%[a]	86%[a,b]	78%[b]	81%[*]	77%	80%[a,b]	87%[a]	85%[b]	83%	82%

Table A3
Self-Management

	Elementary					Middle					High				
	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F
Being patient when I am really excited.	74%	74%	78%	73%	76%	75%	80%[a]	73%[a]	80%[*]	74%	80%	77%	78%	83%[*]	75%
Finishing tasks even if they are hard for me.	75%	81%	68%	78%	78%	64%[a]	75%[a,b]	67%[b]	70%[*]	65%	64%[a,b]	69%[a]	71%[b]	70%[*]	64%
Setting goals for myself.	81%[a]	88%[a]	83%	86%	86%	81%[a]	82%	85%[a]	82%[*]	80%	83%[a]	80%[a]	89%[a]	83%	82%
Doing my schoolwork even when I do not feel like it.	79%	82%	71%	80%	82%	64%[a]	68%[a]	66%	66%	65%	60%[a]	55%[a]	68%[a]	61%	57%
Getting prepared for tests.	77%[a]	87%[a,b]	65%[b]	85%	81%	64%[a]	75%[a,b]	67%[b]	70%[*]	64%	59%[a,b]	65%[a]	65%[b]	67%[*]	58%
Getting through something even when I feel frustrated.	70%	74%	69%	85%	81%	60%[a]	69%[a,b]	59%[b]	68%[*]	58%	59%	61%	62%	67%[*]	58%

Source. 2016 SEL Skills Survey
Note. Response options ranged from 1 = *very difficult* to 4 = *very easy*. Percentages reflect students who selected 3 = *easy* or 4 = *very easy*. Percentages sharing the same superscript (a or b) within item and school level are significantly different across student group ($p < .05$) using the z-test for proportions. * indicates a significant difference by gender within item and school level. The z-test for proportions uses the number of students in each student group in the computation making significant differences were more difficult to detect with smaller sample sizes. Percentages in tables are rounded and calculations were computed using unrounded percentages.
H = Hispanic, W = White, AA = African American, M = Male, F = Female

Appendix, continued

Table A4
Social awareness

	Elementary					Middle					High				
	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F
Learning from people with different opinions from me.	80%	86%	71%	81%	85%	77%[a]	81%[a,b]	74%[b]	79%[*]	77%	81%[a]	73%[a,b]	79%[b]	82%[*]	80%
Knowing what people may be feeling by the look on their face.	90%	89%	81%	87%	93%[*]	82%[a]	87%[a,b]	83%[b]	81%	85%[*]	83%[a]	87%[a]	86%	83%	86%[*]
Knowing when someone needs help.	92%	95%	87%	94%	95%	85%[a]	90%[a,b]	85%[b]	86%	87%[*]	85%[a]	88%[a]	86%	84%	87%[*]
Knowing how to get help when I'm having trouble with a classmate.	86%	88%	87%	89%	86%	75%[a]	81%[a,b]	74%[b]	78%[*]	75%	78%	80%	79%	80%[*]	77%

Table A5
Relationship skills

	Elementary					Middle					High				
	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F
Respecting a classmates opinions during a disagreement.	86%	86%	74%	88%	87%	79%[a]	84%[a]	72%[a]	79%	80%	85%	85%	83%	84%	85%
Getting along with my classmates.	89%	93%	84%	94%[*]	89%	84%[a]	90%[a]	77%[a]	86%[*]	84%	90%[a]	93%[a,b]	90%[b]	90%	90%
Talking to an adult when I have problems at school.	72%	75%	69%	77%	72%	59%[a]	66%[a]	64%	66%[*]	58%	61%[a]	62%[b]	69%[a,b]	66%[*]	59%

Table A6
Responsible decision making

	Elementary					Middle					High				
	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F	H	W	AA	M	F
Thinking about what might happen before making a decision.	75%	82%	77%	80%	82%	72%[a]	80%[a]	76%[a]	74%	75%	79%[a,b]	84%[a]	84%[b]	81%	81%
Knowing what is right or wrong.	89%[a]	95%[a]	97%	89%	86%	88%[a]	94%[a,b]	90%[b]	81%	85%[*]	93%[a]	95%	95%[a]	80%[*]	77%
Saying "no" to a friend who wants me to break the rules.	87%[a]	94%[a]	84%	95%	91%	80%[a]	89%[a,b]	80%[b]	82%	83%	85%[a]	87%	89%[a]	84%	86%[*]

Source. 2016 SEL Skills Survey
Note. Response options ranged from 1 = *very difficult* to 4 = *very easy*. Percentages reflect students who selected 3 = *easy* or 4 = *very easy*. 2016 elementary, middle, and high school percentages sharing the same superscript (a or b) within item and school level are significantly different across student group (p <.05) using the z-test for proportions. * indicates a significant difference by gender within item and school level. The z-test for proportions uses the number of students in each student group in the computation making significant differences were more difficult to detect with smaller sample sizes. Percentages in tables are rounded and calculations were computed using unrounded percentages.
H = Hispanic, W = White, AA = African American, M = Male, F = Female