

ASSESSING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND HEALTH, 2016-17

A large and growing research base has demonstrated the importance of the social and emotional competence and health of students to school-related outcomes, including improved students' readiness to learn, school attendance, academic performance, classroom behavior, and overall likelihood of success in school, career, and life.¹ Schools stand to improve these positive outcomes if they take a strength-based approach and systematically foster these competencies, a process often referred to as social and emotional learning (SEL), and address the social-emotional issues that challenge some youth with targeted interventions.²

The first step in achieving these goals is conducting a valid assessment of social-emotional competencies and health, and the degree to which schools provide the conditions and supports that foster them. Such data are available to schools that administer the *California Healthy Kids Survey* (CHKS) and its companion *California School Staff Survey* (CSSS) — two components of the California Department of Education's *California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey System* (Cal-SCHLS).³

This Brief describes how questions from three of the CHKS secondary school modules — the Core Module, Social Emotional Health Module (SEHM), and School Climate Module (SCM) — provide a comprehensive profile of student social-emotional competency and health, and the related supports schools provide. *In addition, a SEHM is now available for adding to the elementary CHKS.* The companion staff survey provides data on the perception of adults in the school on social-emotional service needs and provision. Specific questions are listed in Appendix 1 and 2. Appendix 3 discusses the development of the secondary SEHM.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has developed a widely-used and respected framework for understanding SEL that emphasizes the importance of five competencies — self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. For the convenience of users familiar with this CASEL framework, we use it to categorize the relevant CHKS/CSSS questions in this Brief.

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

² Austin & O'Malley, 2012.

³ Cal-SCHLS was developed by WestEd for the California Department of Education. To learn more about the surveys, visit <http://cal-schls.wested.org>. This Brief focuses on the content of the secondary survey but the elementary survey Core combined with an elementary version of the SEHM provides similar data.

STUDENT SURVEY OVERVIEW

In 1998, the CHKS was one of the first large-scale student surveys in the nation to emphasize the importance of moving beyond the assessment of young people's risk behaviors to the identification of their social-emotional strengths and the conditions and supports adults provide that foster them and promote resilience, positive development, mental health, and school success. Over the years, the survey has been refined and expanded to improve it as a resource for school climate and student engagement data. Recognition of the interplay of school climate, social-emotional learning, and school success led to the creation of two supplementary CHKS modules for secondary students that expanded the survey's value for assessing these factors: the School Climate Module (SCM) and the Social and Emotional Health Module (SEHM). In a new round of improvements for 2016-17, we expanded and enhanced the value of the secondary SEHM and created a version for the elementary survey.

Core Module

Underlying the development of the Cal-SCHLS system is a theoretical framework that emphasizes the connection between a positive school climate and student acquisition of social-emotional assets, as discussed further below. Briefly, fostering a safe and supportive school climate is a key strategy or condition for effective SEL to occur. The CHKS Core Module provides data on all the key domains of school climate.⁴ Most relevant, it assesses the degree to which the school provides three fundamental developmental supports that have been directly linked by research to high levels of social-emotional competency: caring adult relationships, supportive high-expectations messages, and opportunities for meaningful participation.⁵ It also includes a scale assessing academic motivation/persistence and two indicators of mental health: chronic sadness and suicide contemplation.

Social Emotional Health Module

The CHKS Social Emotional Health Module (Appendix 1), developed and validated in collaboration with researchers at UC Santa Barbara, enables schools to assess directly the inter- and intra-personal strengths of their secondary students as well as overall mental health. The SEHM greatly enhances the value of the secondary-school CHKS as a strength-based assessment of positive emotions, engagement, ability to build and maintain relationships, and other social-emotional capacities linked to not only student mental health and well-being but also academic success and career and college readiness. It includes 46 items that capture the totality of core adolescent psychological assets.

⁴ For monitoring school climate (one of the LCAP requirements), schools can request a *School Climate Report Card* that provides summary data on eight domains and an overall School Climate Index score.

⁵ In the supplementary Resilience and Youth Development Module, these developmental supports are assessed in the family (home), community, and peer group.

Using multi-item scales, it assesses thirteen assets in four core-strength areas (belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence, and engagement in living):

- Empathy,
- Self-efficacy and self-awareness,
- Persistence,
- Emotional self-regulation,
- Behavioral self-control,
- Gratitude, zest, optimism,
- Collaboration, problem solving, goals and aspirations, and growth mindset.⁶

In addition, it assesses two areas of support: family coherence and peer support (school support is assessed on the Core Module).

The SEHM is based on the premise that thriving and success is grounded, in part, in the conditions of a youth's life that foster the development of internal psychological dispositions associated with these four core strengths.⁷ The SEHM reports provide district and school level summaries of the students' responses for each of the core internal asset subscales (self-efficacy, self-awareness, etc.) and for the four composite psychological dispositions (belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence, and engaged living). Also provided is a summary score (Covitality Index) that provides a single indicator of overall strengths.

School Climate Module

The supplementary School Climate Module for secondary students provides additional student data on positive peer relationships, the disciplinary and physical environment, and the social-emotional and behavioral supports provided by the school.

STAFF SURVEY OVERVIEW

The *California School Staff Survey* assesses staff perceptions of the degree to which (1) students demonstrate and teachers model social and emotional strengths, and (2) the school provides the conditions and supports that foster social-emotional health. The accompanying Learning Conditions Module assesses staff perceptions of how well their school supports learning through the creation of a safe and supportive environment. Items on the staff survey (see Appendix 2) are comparable to the CHKS Supplementary School Climate Module.

⁶ The Resilience and Youth Development Module assesses six of these assets: self-awareness, self-efficacy, social awareness (empathy), collaboration, problem solving, and the setting of goals and aspirations.

⁷ See Renshaw et al. (2014) for a detailed review of each of these scales and their associated constructs, and a description of the conceptual rationale underlying the SEHS, including a discussion of the empirical merit of the internal assets.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Students are socially and emotionally healthier when their schools are safe and supportive. The Cal-CHLS system is grounded in resilience theory and research, and this research empirically demonstrates that schools that provide caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation promote higher levels of student social-emotional competency, health-related behavior, and other assets and strengths.⁸ One way this occurs is in the modeling and mirroring of the social-emotional competencies and other internal strengths by the adults in the school. Adults must both exhibit the desired behaviors or attitudes, and also intentionally discuss them with young people. But because many social or life skills programs in the past have focused on changing individual student behavior through direct teaching approaches, without paying sufficient attention to fostering developmentally supportive environments (the quality of relationships, high-expectation messages, and opportunities for participation), they have experienced difficulty achieving positive long-term behavioral change outcomes. Environmental-change approaches create opportunities for students to learn these skills and attitudes through supports and modeling, as well as direct instruction, in an environment that nurtures social and emotional development.

SEL and school climate approaches work in concert. The Cal-SCHLS model emphasizes the importance of fostering a positive school climate to fostering social-emotional learning. Similarly, CASEL researchers emphasize the importance of school and classroom contexts for positive social-emotional functioning, considering school climate as one of six approaches to SEL.⁹ The road to student behavior change lies in the combination of improvements in student social-emotional competence, school environment, teacher practices and expectations, and relationships. Reciprocally, as one CASEL researcher observed, “SEL programming fosters students’ social-emotional development through establishing safe, caring learning environments involving peer and family initiatives, improved classroom management and teaching practices, and whole-school community-building activities.”¹⁰

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⁸ Indicative of the linkages between environmental and internal assets, in 2007-2009, 94% of students who participated in the CHKS who were high in total school supports were also high in total internal strengths.

⁹ The others are curricula, infusion into academic curricula, instructional techniques to promote SE skills, experiential student engagement; and parent involvement (Zins et al., 2004).

¹⁰ Durlak et al., 2011, p. 407.

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Appendix 1.

CHKS Secondary Student Questions Related to Social Emotional Learning and Health

Key:

Core = CHKS Core

RYDM = Resilience and Youth Development Module

SCM = School Climate Module

SEHM = Social Emotional Health Module

Self-Awareness (self-efficacy)

Self-Efficacy Scale (SEHM/RYDM)

I can work out my problems.

I can do most things if I try.

There are many things that I do well.

Self-Awareness Scale (SEHM/RYDM)

There is a purpose to my life.

I understand my moods and feelings.

I understand why I do what I do.

Self-Management (discipline, goal setting)

Persistence Scale (SEHM)

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

I try to answer all the questions asked in class.

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

Inventory of Student Motivation Scale (Core)

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

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

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

I am always trying to do better in my schoolwork.

Growth Mindset Scale (SEHM)

My intelligence is something I cannot change very much.

Challenging myself will not make me any smarter.

There are some things I am not capable of learning.

Emotional Regulation Scale (SEHM)

I accept responsibility for my actions.

When I make a mistake I admit it.

I can deal with being told no.

Behavioral Self-Control Scale (SEHM)

I can wait for what I want.

I don't bother others when they are busy.

I think before I act.

Goals and Aspirations Scale (SEHM/RYDM)

I have high goals and expectations for myself;

I plan to go to college or some other school after high school (*RYDM only*).

I do not expect very much of myself in the future.

I am looking forward to a successful career.

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

Positive Peer Relationships Scale (SCM)

Students enjoy doing things with each other in school activities.

Students enjoy working together on projects in class.

Students care about each other.

Students treat each other with respect.

Students get along well with each other.

Cooperation and Communication Scale (RYDM)

I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine.

I enjoy working together with other students my age.

I stand up for myself without putting others down.

Collaboration (SEHM/RYDM)

I enjoy working together with other students on class activities.
When I work in school groups, I do my fair share.
I like to listen to other students' ideas in class.

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

Empathy Scale (SEHM/RYDM)

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

Respect for Diversity (SCM)

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

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

Problem Solving Scale (SEHM/RYDM)

When I need help, I find someone to talk with.
I try to work out problems by talking or writing about them.
I trust my ability to solve difficult problems.

Engaged Living (SEHM)

Gratitude

Since yesterday, how much have you felt grateful?...thankful?...appreciative?

Zest

How much do you feel energetic right now? ...active right now?...lively right now?

Optimism

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

Belief-in-Others (Support Systems)

School Support (Core)

At my school there is a teacher or some other adult who always wants me to do my best.
...listens to me when I have something to say. ...believes that I will be a success.

Family Coherence (SEHM)

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

Peer Support (SEHM)

I have a friend my age who really cares about me. ...talks with me about my problems.
...helps me when I'm having a hard time.

School Social and Emotional Behavioral Supports & Modeling Behavior

Responsible Decision Making (SCM)

This school encourages students to feel responsible for how they act.

Self-Management (SCM)

Students are often given rewards for being good.
Students are taught that they can control their own behavior.

Social Awareness (SCM)

This school encourages students to understand how others think and feel.
This school encourages students to care about how others feel.
Teachers here make it clear to students that bullying is not tolerated.
If another student was bullying me, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.
Students tell teachers when other students are being bullied.

Relationship Skills (SCM)

This school helps students solve conflicts with one another.

Mental Well-Being

Past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost everyday for two weeks or more that you stopped doing some usual activities? ...ever seriously contemplate suicide?

Appendix 2.

California School Staff Survey Questions

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

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

Student Competencies

Social Awareness

Students care about one another.

Students treat each other with respect.

Students here try to stop bullying when they see it happening.

There is a lot of tension in this school between people of different cultures, races, or ethnicities .

Students in this school respect each other's differences.

Relationship Skills

Students get along well with one another.

School Supports for SEL

Social Awareness

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

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

This school encourages students to understand how others think and feel.

This school encourages students to care about how others feel.

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

Self-Management

This school clearly communicates to students the consequences of breaking school rules.

This school teaches conflict resolution and behavioral management.

Students are often given rewards for being good.

Students are taught that they can control their own behavior.

This school helps students solve conflicts with one another.

Responsible Decision-Making

This school encourages students to feel responsible for how they act.

General SEL Supports

This school emphasizes helping students with social, emotional, and behavioral problems.

This school fosters youth development, resilience, or asset promotion. ...character education.

Staff Modeling Behavior

Social Awareness

Staff treat every student with respect.

Staff support and treat each other with respect.

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

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

Teachers show that they think it is important for students of different races and cultures at this school to get

along with each other.

Appendix 3.

Development of the CHKS Social Emotional Health Module

The Social Emotional Health Module has been under development since 2011 by researchers at UC Santa Barbara. Prior to including it as a CHKS module, it was pilot tested in more than 40 California schools and subjected to a series of studies involving more than 20,000 students. The psychometric properties of the SEHM have been reported in several articles published in peer-reviewed journals. This careful development process was undertaken to scaffold evidence of its reliability and validity and document its actual use by schools as a schoolwide social-emotional health screening process (see Dowdy, Furlong et al., 2015; Furlong, You et al., 2013a, 2013b; Renshaw, Furlong et al., 2014; You, Furlong et al., 2014, 2015).

Studies carried out thus far have provided strong evidence supporting the SEHM's construct validity (it measures what it purports to measure) and that it has measurement equivalence for younger and older adolescents and for males and females. This means that the SEHM can be used and interpreted in a similar way for all adolescents. Thus far, students' SEHM responses have been found to be strongly positively associated with high levels of student subjective well-being, a central indicator of thriving mental health, and negatively associated with students' reports of psychological distress (Furlong, You et al., 2013a, 2013b; You, Furlong et al., 2014, 2015). In addition the SEHM measurement model is appropriate for use for Latino/a, Black, Asian, and White students.

The SEHM provides a psychometrically valid total score (called the Covitality Index), with estimated reliability coefficients of .92, .93, and .95 in three independent samples of California secondary students. Students in the highest 15% of the SEHM total score (Covitality Index) report the highest levels of positive social emotional health (e.g., 91% report that their life is going well compared to only 13% of students in the lower 15% of the SEHM distribution).

HOW IT CAN BE USED

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