

# Social and Emotional Learning and Intensive Intervention



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National Center on  
**INTENSIVE INTERVENTION**

at American Institutes for Research ■



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The authors would like to thank Mara Schanfield for her helpful feedback on this brief.

This document was produced under U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Grant No. H326Q160001. Celia Rosenquist is the OSEP project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred. This product is public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. Although permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: Weingarten, Z., Brown, C., & Marx, T. (2020). *Social and emotional learning and intensive intervention*. Washington, DC: National Center on Intensive Intervention, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.

## Introduction

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Students who require intensive intervention often have social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that impact their ability to be successful in school as well as in their community. Getting along with others, paying attention, following directions, making responsible decisions, and managing emotions are challenges for many students who require intensive intervention, and may be linked to difficulties with executive functioning, communication, and academic learning. Schools are increasingly using social and emotional learning (SEL) to provide students with a well-rounded education; however, there is not often an explicit focus on students with intensive needs within these programs. This brief presents an overview of how SEL relates to intensive intervention and offers sample strategies for skill building among students in need of intensive learning, social, emotional, and behavioral supports.

## What Is SEL?

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The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as “...the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2020). According to CASEL, the core social and emotional competencies include:

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

There are a variety of approaches to teaching SEL in schools. Educators may adopt a published SEL curriculum or program, some of which are evidence-based. Effective SEL programs include activities that are sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (Durlak et al., 2011). Research demonstrates that implementing SEL programs with fidelity can result in improvements to students’ social competence, behavior, and academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

Beyond packaged programs, educators may take a systemic approach and embed SEL practices and policies into the school day and across settings (Osher & Berg, 2017). For example, educators may use



instructional strategies such as cooperative learning and classroom discussions to promote the development of students' social and emotional competencies (Yoder, 2014). A schoolwide approach to SEL also includes attention to policies, organizational structures, and relationships that create the conditions for learning that promote agency and belonging for all students and families (Dusenbury et al., 2015; Osher et al., forthcoming). Most important, SEL must not cause harm or be used as a tool to control student behavior, hunt for deficiencies, or shame students (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Simmons, 2017). No matter the approach, when educators consistently demonstrate strong self-awareness, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution skills, they model these competencies for students in addition to providing direct support and instruction to students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

## Building Social and Emotional Competencies Among Students With Intensive Needs



Successful implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) may help schools more effectively deliver SEL programs and practices to all students. MTSS is a framework designed to facilitate and sustain the use of evidence-based practices, such as evidence-based SEL programs and practices. MTSS systems and processes, including a focus on screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and a continuum of supports, can help schools enhance implementation of SEL programs and practices. More information about integrating MTSS and SEL can be found in this [guide](#) from the Center on PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports].

Within MTSS, SEL instructional practices are generally considered a universal or Tier 1 approach to support all students. Tier 1 SEL instruction may benefit students

with intensive needs by positively impacting the social dynamics of the classroom and school, thereby enhancing the social interactions and relationships that students with social and emotional difficulties have with teachers and peers (Trach et al., 2018). In addition, social and emotional skill building can happen through targeted (Tier 2) or intensive (Tier 3) interventions, or may be integrated into academic or behavioral Tier 2 or 3 interventions (Center on MTSS, 2020).

Schools and educators should consider the needs of students as they plan and implement SEL across the tiers. It is essential to implement more intensive and explicit SEL instruction and supports for students who require intensive intervention (Smith et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is a valuable practice to provide explicit SEL instruction and supports in each social and emotional competency in which the student demonstrates intensive needs. Table 1 presents a definition of each social and emotional competency along with relevant actions to support students with intensive needs across the tiers.

**Table 1. Strategies to Support the Social and Emotional Competencies of Students With Intensive Needs Within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports**

Social and Emotional Competency and CASEL Definition	Strategies to Support Students With Intensive Needs Within Tier 1	Strategies to Intensify Supports at Tiers 2 and 3
<p><b>Self-Awareness</b> The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Help students understand their strengths and areas of need, including their disability and associated terminology when appropriate.</li> <li>▪ If applicable, help students understand the accommodations that are in place, why they receive accommodations, and how to appropriately self-advocate.</li> <li>▪ Ensure that students are aware of learning and behavior goals, and include them in the process of developing goals as age appropriate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use a <a href="#">daily behavior report</a> card to encourage students to reflect on their behavior and choose what behavior to focus on each day.</li> <li>▪ Help students identify common behavioral triggers and potentially challenging situations in advance.</li> <li>▪ Use a menu of <a href="#">reinforcement</a> options, a survey, or an interview to help students identify what they find reinforcing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-Management</b> The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teach students strategies to regulate their emotions and solve problems (e.g., take a deep breath, count to 10).</li> <li>▪ Use predictable, proactive classroom routines and structures to support students’ ability to manage their emotions and behaviors.</li> <li>▪ Encourage students to identify and select stress management strategies (e.g., taking a break, using breathing exercises, turning off the camera during remote learning).</li> <li>▪ Use schedules and organizers to help students manage transitions or unexpected events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use a <a href="#">group contingency strategy</a> during academic instruction to help students successfully manage behaviors.</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities for students to <a href="#">self-monitor</a> their behavior and graph the data.</li> <li>▪ Provide additional explicit instruction in self-management strategies and more frequent opportunities to practice and receive feedback.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsible Decision Making</b> The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Help students reflect on their decisions and the consequences of their decisions.</li> <li>▪ Have students participate in developing classroom norms and appropriate consequences for rule violations.</li> <li>▪ Model the behaviors that are part of classroom norms (e.g., listening with respect, making comments using “I” statements, writing thoughts in their journals if they do not have time to share in class).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use a <a href="#">reflection sheet</a> to prompt students to evaluate their behavior following a conflict.</li> <li>▪ Use a <a href="#">choice menu</a> to help students practice responsible decision making.</li> <li>▪ Partner with families to promote responsible decision making (e.g., align behavior expectations and reinforcement strategies across home and school).</li> </ul>

Social and Emotional Competency and CASEL Definition	Strategies to Support Students With Intensive Needs Within Tier 1	Strategies to Intensify Supports at Tiers 2 and 3
<p><b>Relationship Skills</b> The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide coaching on conflict resolution and problem solving in preparation for when students encounter difficulties during collaborative work.</li> <li>▪ Model language to use when respectfully disagreeing with peers and how to verbally and nonverbally demonstrate respect for others' opinions during discussions.</li> <li>▪ Deliver explicit instruction on how to participate in group work and collaborate with others (e.g., model the social skills needed to engage in cooperative learning).</li> <li>▪ Develop structures to support collaborative work (e.g., assigned roles and responsibilities).</li> <li>▪ Set up check-ins with a caring adult daily for students who may need additional SEL support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use more prompting and structure (e.g., sentence stems) when supporting students with interacting with peers and/or when supporting students with resolving interpersonal conflicts (e.g., "I feel _____ when you _____").</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities for students to practice relationship skills in small groups (e.g., lunch buddies, social skills groups).</li> <li>▪ Establish peer mentoring relationships to provide additional opportunities to practice relationship skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Awareness</b> The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide opportunities for students to share about their home cultures and engage in discussions about cultures different from their own.</li> <li>▪ Integrate students' home cultures into instruction and classroom management strategies.</li> <li>▪ Use literature to help students identify the emotions of characters and make connections to their own life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use role play to help students empathize with and understand the perspectives of others.</li> <li>▪ Practice recognizing strengths in others and complimenting others.</li> <li>▪ Engage students in cross-age tutoring and mentoring to promote student understanding of how to interact with others in a variety of situations.</li> </ul>

CASEL = Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

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