

Using Data to Inform MTSS Efforts to Promote Student Well-being

Why Collect Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health Data?

- **Identify individual students' SEL and mental health-related needs** so students can receive the MTSS supports that will best serve them.
- **Identify and prioritize SEL and mental health-related needs at the school- or classroom-level**, which can depict what SEL competencies students are strongest in and where they are struggling.
- **Track SEL and mental health growth** by reviewing data over time to track progress and ensure these efforts are moving in the right direction.
- **Evaluate effectiveness of SEL and mental health programming and strategies** to see if the supports put into place are leading to change.
- **Make the case for SEL and mental health supports** by showcasing your school or district's needs and progress. It's important to have data to build buy-in from the community.



What Data Do You Need?

When starting a data collection process, ask yourself:

What questions need to be answered in order for us to effectively support our students' SEL and mental health needs?

Below are examples of questions you might ask, along with potential responses and data sources:



Questions	Response	Data Sources Examples
What are our students' SEL strengths and challenges?	Strong interpersonal skills, need support with emotional management	SEL assessments (such as <i>Devereux Student Strengths Assessment</i>)
What mental health challenges do our students face?	Depression, anxiety	Mental health screeners (such as <i>Patient Health Questionnaire</i>)
What are the main stressors our students face?	Familial trauma, academic stress	Qualitative data (such as conversations with school counselors), data from community partners (such as local hospital records)
What type of negative behaviors are our students manifesting?	Substance misuse, absenteeism	Health surveys (such as <i>Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Survey</i>), school records

Where Do You Find Data?



It's often easiest to begin with data your school or district already has. For example, data regarding attendance records, discipline referrals, suspensions/expulsions, and referrals to mental health services will help paint a picture of some of the issues your students are experiencing.



Your community may also have helpful data that can be used, such as contacts with law enforcement or juvenile justice, hospitalizations for mental health reasons, and information about families experiencing homelessness in your area.



Finally, your school or district may collect school-based mental health data, such as information from mental health screening tools, SEL assessments, school climate or health surveys, and guidance counselor or social worker caseload reports.



In reviewing this data, look for patterns and concerns that emerge related to students' mental health and SEL needs.

Data Equity and Culturally Competent Assessment Practices

SEL and mental health data can be a powerful tool to help you identify equity issues in your school or district. Consider the following:¹

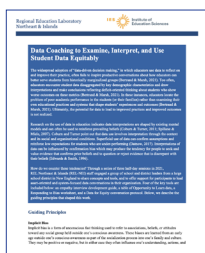
- **Ensure that surveys, screeners, and other data collection tools are culturally appropriate.** The tools you select should be tested not just for psychometric properties but also for cultural relevance to subgroups of students represented in your communities.
- **Provide professional translations and interpreter services when needed and be aware of issues of linguistic proficiency.** Make sure language is not a barrier for students completing assessments. For example, use SEL assessments that have been translated and whose translations have been tested for validity and reliability.
- **Ensure data collection protocols do not perpetuate inequities.** Schools and districts should make sure they are not evaluating students based on behavioral norms tied to dominant cultures. This deficit-focused approach to assessing social and emotional competencies can help promote implicit bias against certain groups of students. In contrast, a strength-based approach helps teachers see and build on the strengths that each student brings. Additionally, interpreting SEL competencies as individual traits rather than symptoms of systemic challenges can also perpetuate inequities. For example, if a particular group of students score low on sense of belonging or self-confidence, it is important to consider how such data might reflect the school environment, rather than individual students' mindsets.
- **Focus on cultural strengths, not just disparities.** Decisions about which skills or competencies to prioritize might be based on cultural assumptions. For example, some cultures encourage young people to speak up, particularly in the face of injustice, while in other cultures this may be interpreted as a sign of disrespect toward adults. It is important to understand what types of social and emotional competencies different cultures promote and see the benefits of such values rather than interpret them through a singular cultural lens.
- **When possible, disaggregate data to better understand the experiences and challenges of subgroups of students.** For example, say assessment results indicate that 20% of grade 5 students need Tier 2 and Tier 3 SEL supports. But once the data is broken down by race, the report shows that 75% of those students who need these supports are Latino(a) and Latinx. This tells you that this may be a school community issue, where Latino(a) and Latinx students may not feel that they belong or are supported by their school community.
- **Engage multiple voices and perspectives in data interpretation.** How to interpret data and making data-driven decisions can also be influenced by cultural biases. Having multiple cultural perspectives to develop guidelines for data interpretations can help ensure that the way data is interpreted reflects cultural values represented in your community.

“Data equity involves applying an equity lens and mindset to the ways in which districts collect, analyze, interpret, communicate, and make decisions based on data, with the goals of acknowledging and addressing historic and systemic bias and building more equitable policies, practices, and systems.”²

Key Data Equity Questions to Consider³

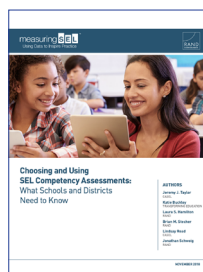
- Whose voices are we missing?
- What additional context should we consider?
- How can this data support our bigger “why”?
- What biases might students and staff have brought into the data collection experience?
- What biases might we be bringing into the data analysis?
- What more do we need to know to better understand the trend(s) we are seeing?
- Who do we need to listen to and collaborate with to fully understand and act on the data?

Additional Resources



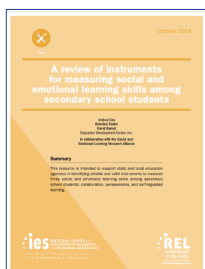
[Data Coaching to Examine, Interpret, and Use Student Data Equitably](#)

REL Northeast & Islands



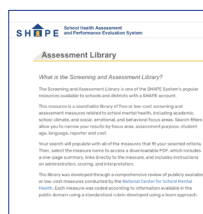
[The RAND Education Assessment Finder](#)

Rand Corporation



[A review of instruments for measuring social and emotional learning skills among secondary school students](#)

REL Northeast & Islands



[Screening and Assessment Library](#)

School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System (SHAPE)
(requires free registration)

References

- REL Northeast & Islands. (March 2022). *Data Coaching to Examine, Interpret, and Use Student Data Equitably*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/northeast/Resource/100720>
- Digital Promise. Data Ready Playbook. Retrieved from <https://digitalpromise.org/initiative/league-of-innovative-schools/data-ready-playbook>.
- EDC Social, Emotional & Behavior Academy. Recommendations and Resources for Equitable Data Use. Retrieved from <https://sebacademy.edc.org/>.

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