

## **Conceptualizing and Measuring Civic SEL**

Diana Owen

Professor

Director, Civic Education Research Lab

Georgetown University

Donna Paoletti Phillips, PhD

President & Chief Executive Officer

Center for Civic Education

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## Introduction

The imperative for quality civic education in American schools has never been more pressing. Recent events have prompted calls from across the political spectrum for unity to counter malevolent polarization, for respectful disagreement to replace incendiary discourse, and for renewed faith in government institutions to supersede apathy and suspicion (Klein, 2020; Forrest and Daymude, 2022). The myriad challenges posed to democracy, coupled with the deleterious impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on civic learning (Owen, 2024a), warrant increased emphasis on classroom teaching that promotes knowledge of government and politics, the acquisition of civic dispositions and skills, and the development of civic social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies (EAD, 2021). SEL builds students' capacity to achieve personal and collective goals, maintain positive relationships, and make meaningful social connections. Students' social-emotional development is integral to civic growth. Civic SEL is the integration of civic content and methods with SEL competencies that promote democratic engagement. It can instill proficiencies that support democracy by developing lasting skills of cooperation, collaboration, respectful engagement, and civil discourse (Hemmingway, 2022). It can improve civic skills, attitudes, and behaviors among marginalized and minoritized youth (Cipriano and McCarthy, 2023). SEL can address inequities in civic engagement by empowering young people to thrive and contribute to healthy communities.

We are in the early stages of development of a Civic SEL Framework (CSELF) for integrating social and emotion learning in civics, especially social studies, American government, and history classrooms. In this paper, we begin to formalize the conceptualization of Civic SEL and propose an approach to measurement that more directly incorporates civics into SEL assessments. Civic SEL encompasses core CASEL SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social and cultural awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making adapted specifically for the civics context at the K-12 and post-secondary levels. We proposed the CSELF which defines each of these competencies and designates domains that pertain to civic learning. We provide curricular and pedagogical examples of how civics and SEL can be integrated. Finally, we suggest the need for measures that better reflect students' experience of SEL in the civics classroom.

## Social and Emotional Learning Effects

SEL programs have the potential to provide significant benefits to elementary and secondary school students as well as adult learners. SEL is an integral element of educating the whole person, which includes “the capacity to develop healthy personal relationships, treat others with respect and dignity, develop the cognitive capacity to solve problems and think creatively, succeed in postsecondary education and the labor market,” and importantly, “to be a contributing citizen<sup>1</sup> in a democracy” (Greenberg, 2023: v). As educators continue to deal with the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' academic development, relationships, and mental health, SEL can support students' coping skills, resilience, and inter- and intra-personal competencies (Schwartz, et al., 2023). Hundreds of independent studies demonstrate that SEL leads to better academic performance, heightened social skills, improvements in critical thinking, and increased well-being (Cipriano, et al., 2024; Greenberg 2023; Jones et al. 2022). When SEL

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<sup>1</sup> We define citizen as a member of a political community with the ability to engage as opposed to a legal status.

is implemented effectively, student conduct problems, including misbehavior and aggression, and emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression, decline. Significant improvements in attitudes about the self, others, and school are realized. SEL has been associated with an increase in student achievement test scores (Hart, et al., 2020), although the outcomes are not consistent among different student populations (O'Connor, et al., 2017; Cipriano, et al., 2024).

Constructive developments in students' civic knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors have been attributed to SEL-infused programs. Students can consider foundational documents, such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, using critical inquiry and research skills. They can approach issues from a variety of perspectives, express their views, and engage in respectful discussions even when they disagree (McGuire, Stevahn, and Bronsther, 2019). Students can gain political agency as they explore their own civic identity and values while evaluating political power structures (Nachtigal, Zetlin, and Shen, 2024). SEL provides students with affordances for developing civic reasoning skills as they deal with issues of agency, identity, and communal orientation (Immordino-Yang, et al., 2024). Civics-relevant relationship skills are developed, as students work collaboratively with others, learn how to compromise, and engage in responsible decision-making to confront community problems (Quiammo, 2021).

Positive school environments where children are prepared for scholastic and future success can be fostered through SEL. Students can shape their learning experience by collaborating with educators and their peers to establish classroom norms and structures (Baines, et al., 2021). Implementing high-quality, effective SEL programs can have a beneficial impact on teachers and staff. It can help to improve school culture, creating more productive learning and work environments (Osher and Berg, 2018). SEL can increase retention when teachers are provided with quality professional development and ongoing support (Soutter, 2023).

## **Integrated SEL**

SEL can be implemented in schools and classrooms in a variety of ways. Universal school-based interventions (USB SEL) are delivered systemically to all students in a class, grade, school, or district. USB SEL typically focuses on fostering emotional intelligence, behavior regulation, identity formation, and positive skill building that leads to decision-making and policies that are in the best interest of the entire school or community (Cipriano and McCarthy, 2023; Durlak, Mahoney, and Boyle, 2022). The USB model typically provides SEL to students as a whole regardless of their identified needs or risk factors. Some evidence suggests that this one-size-fits-all approach may not sufficiently support the creation of equitable outcomes for at-risk and marginalized students (Greenberg, 2023; Cipriano and McCarthy), although further research is indicated. At the same time, USB SEL can be adapted successfully for diverse student populations, even within the same classroom (Lee, Shapiro, and Kim, 2023). SEL also can be employed as a stand-alone, separate program. However, without a solid school or subject-area infrastructure, SEL often occurs haphazardly or sporadically, which makes it difficult for students to build capacity and skills (Elias, et al, 2016). Students do not have robust opportunities to learn about and practice SEL competencies (Schwartz, 2023). Program effectiveness is compromised when SEL is not implemented in a high-quality fashion. Teachers should be prepared to deliver SEL programs effectively and in their entirety (Lawson, et al., 2019).

SEL's positive impact is mitigated when predetermined, generic content is not carefully aligned with subject-area curricula. Benefits are enhanced when SEL is explicitly taught through an integrated, systematic academic program (Taylor, et al, 2017). For SEL to be transformative, students need consistent opportunities to engage SEL competencies in tandem with content learning, collaborate with colleagues, set meaningful goals, and communicate effectively within a supportive and challenging classroom environment (Schwartz, 2023:8). Integrating academics and SEL through inquiry-based learning (IBL) can prioritize the needs of all students (Schwartz, et al., 2023). IBL is a student-centered approach to instruction that encourages critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement (Ramaila, 2024). Integrating SEL into the curriculum promotes process-oriented approaches to learning as opposed to rote memorization (Immordino-Yang, et al., 2024). Further, teachers and administrators may be more inclined to implement SEL if program components are directly relevant to their students' curriculum (Lawson, et al., 2019).

### The Civic SEL Framework

SEL has emerged as a core construct in education over the past quarter century. However, what exactly is encompassed under the rubric of SEL remains amorphous. The term has been applied broadly in the domains of non-cognitive development, character education, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, life skills, trauma-informed learning, and others (Jones, et al., 2022). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), an established leader in the field, 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, n.d.: online). SEL focuses on students developing life skills, emotional intelligence, and goal-setting capacities (Kaspar and Massey, 2022). Generic frameworks have been designed to create a foundation for more specific applications of SEL. CASEL's framework is based on fostering knowledge, skills, and attitudes across the five areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1**  
**The CASEL 5**

<b>CASEL 5</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>	<b>SELECTED COMPETENCIES</b>
Self-Awareness	The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets</li> <li>• Demonstrating honesty and integrity</li> <li>• Developing interests and a sense of purpose</li> </ul>
Self-Management	The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation</li> <li>• Setting personal and collective goals</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating personal and collective agency</li> </ul>
Social Awareness	The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking others' perspectives</li> <li>• Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones</li> <li>• Understanding the influences of organizations and systems on behavior</li> </ul>
Relationship Skills	The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating cultural competency</li> <li>• Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving</li> <li>• Resolving conflicts constructively</li> </ul>
Responsible Decision-Making	The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts</li> <li>• Identifying solutions for personal and social problems</li> <li>• Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions</li> <li>• Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts</li> </ul>

Sources: CASEL, 2020; Hamilton and Parsi, 2022: 11.

Much progress has been made in the articulation of and specification of general SEL concepts and indicators measuring students' acquisition of the CASEL 5 competencies. For example, the Framework for the Pedagogies of SEL identifies three types of SEL knowledge (declarative, procedural, conditional) that intersect with five related pedagogies of modeling, practice promotion, transfer promotion, elaboration, and validation (see Zieher, et al., 2024). However, Harvard's EASEL Lab makes the compelling argument that as the call for SEL to be integrated into K-12 classrooms has proliferated, the need for specification of the language, terminology, and meaning must be clear and carefully aligned with curricular domains and related skillsets (EASEL, 2022). Not one of the forty established SEL frameworks identified by EASEL's comprehensive inventory was developed for the civics domain (<http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/>).

The succinct tag line for iThrive Games aptly proclaims: "Civics is social and emotional." Competencies related to the CASEL 5 have obvious associations with civic learning. As such, we propose the Civic SEL Framework (CSELF). Most civic skills are transposable with CASEL competencies. Civic SEL makes the connection directly apparent by integrating students' development of civic competencies and social-emotional learning. The CSELF specifies how SEL is integral to capacities that are necessary for productive and effectual participation in democracy, including skills related to critical evaluation, communication, civil discussion, collaboration, teamwork, and active engagement.

The CSELF specifies how the five core CASEL competencies can be brought more directly in line with civic education. (See Appendix, Figure A1.) CASEL defines self-awareness as "the abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts." Self-awareness encompasses identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets, demonstrating honesty and integrity, and developing interests and a sense of purpose (Hamilton and Parsi, 2022). The CSELF stipulates civic identity integration as a domain of self-awareness where students explore their civic identity and can situate themselves in communities that support the next steps in their life-long civic growth.

Self-management is defined by CASEL as "the abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations." General referents of self-management include students exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation, setting personal and collective goals, and demonstrating personal and collective agency (Hamilton and Parsi, 2022). The CSELF articulates the domains of problem-solving, active and empathetic listening, and self-regulation as they pertain to self-management in the civic context. Students use tools of civics disciplines flexibly and fluently to define problems, organize and analyze information and context, find and apply solutions and evaluate impact. They cultivate curious and creative mindsets by listening and demonstrating openness to others' views and experiences and exploring increasingly complex questions. They demonstrate self-regulation by setting challenging goals for their civic learning and development, identifying resources, tracking and managing their progress, and navigating challenges.

CASEL's notion of social and cultural awareness encompasses "the abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts." These abilities include taking others' perspectives, identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones, and understanding the influences of organizations and systems on behavior (Hamilton and Parsi, 2022). The Civic SEL domains related to social and cultural awareness are advocacy and empathy. Students strategically advocate for themselves and others in local, national and global contexts, demonstrating perspective and empathy, and access relevant and timely data. The empathy domain encourages students to value and prioritize experiences and perspectives of others and account for the diversity of such in their decision-making and advocacy.

Relationship skills are characterized by CASEL as "the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups." Students should demonstrate cultural competency, practice teamwork and collaborative problem-solving, and resolve conflicts constructively (Hamilton and Parsi, 2022). The CSELF emphasizes teamwork and collective responsibility, where students lead and work in high-functioning teams where they seek, leverage, and contribute diverse perspectives and different types of expertise to achieve collective goals. Collaboration in the CSELF is realized when students exchange experiences and ideas as they join with others to address public issues in their communities, finding common ground while working together. In the domain of communication and civil discourse, students refine their civic expression skills by successfully building shared meaning with others from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints through strategic choices in language, medium of expression, and lens for interpretation.



Responsible decision-making is described by CASEL as “the abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.” Students learn how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts. They identify solutions for personal and social problems, anticipate and evaluate the consequences of their actions, and assess personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts (Hamilton and Parsi, 2022). The CSELF domains of evaluation and reflection requires students use critical thinking and reflection to connect knowledge, experiences, actions, and emotions to civic goals and values. Civic decision-making occurs when students develop multifaceted and dynamic understandings of the self as belonging to and responsible for a community with full consideration of democratic principles.

### **Civic SEL and Project-Based Learning**

The ability of SEL to impart positive civic outcomes is enhanced when students engage in more participatory, student-led approaches to civic education. Project-based learning (PBL), where students design, develop, and construct hands-on solutions to a problem (Boston University Center for Teaching & Learning, 2025), is a ready-made context for SEL integration. As Baines, et al. assert, “PBL can be a powerful strategy for weaving social and emotional learning into core instruction and empowering students to learn through projects” (2021: 6). Combining PBL and SEL has been shown to enrich students’ experience with projects as they are empowered to take ownership of their work (Almulla, 2020). Students gain civic agency, efficacy, and empathy as they work cooperatively and collaboratively on a problem. They develop active listening, democratic deliberation, and public speaking skills (Nachtigal, Zetlin, and Shen, 2024). Students gain the capacity to make decisions and take an active role in their communities and government as they use their knowledge and skills to achieve concrete results. They can become motivated to engage beyond the classroom. PBL provides pathways to participation by connecting students to people who model civically engaged behavior and connect them to organizations that offer continued mentorship, structure, and resources (Weissberg, et al., 2015).

PBL allows students to develop civic competencies in their own way at their own speed. Different mechanisms for engagement will be relevant to different students. Experiential civic learning through student-led civics curricula allows students to take action on personally relevant issues in combination with reflection activities. Schools can empower students to view themselves as changemakers. SEL, especially when used in conjunction with PBL, is justice oriented and is suited to diverse learners. It has the potential to mitigate educational, social, and economic inequities that exist between diverse student groups (Baines, et al., 2021). The approach can be tailored for underserved populations, including students of color, English learners, low-income students, and students who struggle academically to achieve successful outcomes (Owen, 2024a, Owen, 2024c).

The CSELF specifies the connections of SEL to PBL in the civics context. (See Appendix, Figure A1.) Self-awareness is achieved through authenticity, where students engage in projects that connect to their personal interests, identities, and communities. Students can explore their civic roles, bridge the gap between school and home, and practice identity integration. The competency of self-management is realized as students address a challenging

problem or question through sustained inquiry. When students are able to determine a meaningful problem or question to investigate and solve, they can develop a problem-solving disposition through practicing sustained inquiry (defining and investigating complex issues, asking questions, finding and using resources, and developing solutions). This practice fosters critical thinking, analysis, and the development of solutions aligned with civic learning goals. Self-management is also achieved through student voice and choice. Students are engaged in active and empathetic listening when they have input over many aspects of the project and need to make collective decisions with consideration of others' viewpoints. Finally, students engage in critique and revision. They practice self-regulation in how they give and receive feedback to improve their project process and track and manage their progress towards meeting their civic learning and development goals. Social and cultural awareness is related to civic PBL through a public product. When students share their finished project, they practice advocacy and empathy through how they present and discuss their ideas in a public context and represent themselves and others. Relationship skills are developed through PBL by student voice and choice. Students effectively practice teamwork and collective responsibility and collaboration in how they leverage their individual strengths and welcome diverse perspectives on a team to collaborate and reach a shared goal through mutual respect and shared responsibility. When students share their work publicly, they demonstrate tools of civil discourse and communication to effectively connect with their audiences. Finally, students engage in responsible decision making and deepen their learning through PBL by evaluation and reflection of their project experience. They solidify what they have learned and connect it outside of the project context. They take ownership of their work and set new goals for continued learning. As students authentically engage in their projects and communities, they develop a deeper connection to and understanding of their role in community and civic life. They are able to engage in effective civic decision making during the project process and beyond.

### **Civic SEL and Project Citizen**

The Center's strategy is to incorporate SEL competencies into their curricular programs, such as Project Citizen and We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, and instructional practices rather than treating them as stand-alone curricular components (Owen and Phillips, 2023). For example, the simulated congressional hearings that are the capstone of the We the People curriculum provide opportunities for students to work as a unit to address questions by evaluating evidence, respectfully considering different perspectives, and expressing ideas and viewpoints in a civil environment. Research demonstrates that We the People students at the elementary and secondary school levels made significant gains in civic domains of SEL (Owen, 2024b; Owen, 2024c).

The Center for Civic Education's Project Citizen is a curricular program for upper elementary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary students and adult groups that promotes competent and responsible participation in local and state government. The program helps people learn how to monitor and influence public policy. In the process, they develop support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, and feelings of political efficacy. Project Citizen is designed to assist young people in understanding why they should participate and how to participate effectively. It is a valuable instructional tool, whose primary purpose is to



prepare a new generation of citizens to be competent, confident, and committed to civic participation.

Project Citizen introduces students to and educates them in effective means of participating at the grassroots level of the political process. The program adds to students' civic knowledge, enhances their skills, and deepens their understanding of how citizens and leaders can work together to improve our communities. Students become knowledgeable of the methods and procedures used in governmental processes. The goal of the program is to develop students' commitment to active citizenship and governance by 1) providing the knowledge and teaching the skills required for effective participation; 2) providing practical experience designed to foster a sense of competence and efficacy; and 3) developing an understanding of the importance of citizen participation.

Project Citizen focuses on the role of state and local governments in the U.S. federal system. The curriculum involves an entire class of students or members of youth or adult groups in a series of structured, cooperative-learning activities that are guided by teachers, organization leaders, and adult volunteers, and thus is conducive to USB SEL. Working in four cooperative teams, the students learn to interact with their government through a multi-step process. Participating teachers and organization leaders are encouraged to hold a showcase hearing as the culminating activity for Project Citizen. This hearing can be done in class and/or in front of the policy makers who have authority over the public policy problem the students have chosen. Each step in the process is aligned with Civic SEL target domains. (See Figure 2 and Figure A1.)

**Figure 2**  
**Project Citizen Process and Civic SEL Target Domains**

<b>Project Citizen Process Step</b>	<b>Civic SEL Target Domains</b>
Step 1: Identifying Problems to Be Dealt With by Public Policy	Identity Integration Civic Decision Making
Step 2: Selecting a Problem or Problems for Your Class to Study	Empathy
Step 3: Gathering Information on the Problem You Will Study	Problem-Solving Active & Empathetic Listening
Step 4: Developing a Portfolio to Present Your Research	Problem-Solving Self-Regulation Teamwork and Collective Responsibility Collaboration
Step 5: Presenting Your Portfolio in a Simulated Public Hearing	Identity Integration Advocacy Empathy Teamwork and Collective Responsibility Collaboration Communication and Civil Discourse
Step 6: Reflecting on Your Experience	Identity Integration Self-Regulation Evaluation and Reflection Civic Decision Making

## Measuring Civic SEL

An essential aspect of the Civic SEL project is developing measures that closely align with the conceptual framework. A substantial bank of SEL measures with known reliability and validity is available from a range of sources, including CASEL and RAND (Taylor and Hamilton, 2019). Some of these measures are readily adapted to the civics context. However, there is a need for new measures that reflect the novel attributes of Civic SEL. A pilot study conducted in conjunction with the James Madison Legacy Project Expansion (JMLPE)<sup>2</sup> which studied the effectiveness of the Center’s We the People curriculum intervention employed standard, generic SEL measures. While the study found gains in SEL competencies, the effect sizes were small (Owen and Sutherland, 2023). When presented with the findings, teacher experts suggested that the measures did not adequately capture the integration of SEL in civics instruction. They suggested that extant measures might be reworked to reflect civic outcomes. In some cases, the changes would be relatively minor. For example, a standard item measuring collaboration asks students how much they agree with the statement: I enjoy working with others on projects. Teachers remarked that students may not necessarily “enjoy” working on group projects, but they can see that there are benefits to the process. A better item would be: It is important to work with others to address problems and issues in my community.

Designing measures in conjunction with the CSELF requires taking stock of extant indicators of civic dispositions and skills. Most studies of students’ civic capacity focus on a fairly standard subset of civic competencies, even as the scope of these orientations has increased with the availability of digital avenues of engagement. This approach is important for tracking stability and change in civic orientations over time. However, there is a need for a more comprehensive catalogue of measures that examine the impact of the integration of SEL and civics that takes into account the range of civic competencies. We seek to develop an inclusive inventory of measures that will provide a resource for researchers and educators. In so doing, we draw upon existing measures from sources, including the American National Election Studies, the National Civic League Civic Index, the Active-Empathetic Listening Skills Index, among many others. While this process is in its infancy, Figure 3 provides some examples of extant measures widely used in SEL studies and sample measures that are directly connected to Civic SEL.

**Figure 3**  
**Extant and Sample Measures of Civic SEL Constructs**

<b>CASEL COMPETENCY/ CIVIC SEL CONSTRUCT</b>	<b>EXTANT MEASURES</b>	<b>SAMPLE MEASURES</b>
<b>Self-Awareness</b> Civic Identity Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is important to understand American history and the events that shaped the United States</li><li>• It is important to know how American government works</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I have a clear vision of myself as a citizen/member of a community</li><li>• I am aware of my rights and duties as a citizen/member of a community</li></ul>

<sup>2</sup> The JMLPE is funded by a generous grant from the Education and Innovation Research program of the U.S. Department of Education.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I realize my own responsibility to engage in society<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Self-Management</b> Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am good at solving problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am aware of issues facing my community</li> <li>• I can work well with others to solve problems in my community</li> <li>• I know how to connect with community leaders to work on issues facing my community</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Management</b> Active and Empathetic Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I care about other people's point of view</li> <li>• I get along well with people who are different from me</li> <li>• When people disagree with me, I respect their views</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I listen carefully when I hear about issues and problems in my community</li> <li>• I try to find out the facts about issues and problems that impact my community</li> <li>• I am aware of what others imply but do not say</li> <li>• I ask questions to show my understanding of others' positions on issues</li> <li>• I keep track of the points other people make when discussing issues facing the community<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Self-Management</b> Self-Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I usually come to class prepared</li> <li>• I am eager to participate in this class</li> <li>• I put a lot of effort into getting involved in class discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I share my thoughts, feelings, and opinions about issues with others rather than keep them to myself</li> <li>• I trust myself to work hard on a project with others in my class<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Social &amp; Cultural Awareness</b> Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I care about other people's points of view</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can identify a problem in my community</li> <li>• I can create a plan to address a problem in my community</li> <li>• I can get others to care about the problem</li> <li>• I can contact public officials/community leaders about a problem</li> <li>• I can use social media to inform people in my community about a problem</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I attended a meeting to speak out about a problem</li> </ul>
<b>Social &amp; Cultural Awareness</b> Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I take time to learn about other races and cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I am aware of how society treats different racial and ethnic groups</li> <li>•I try to place myself in the place of others and try to assess their current situation</li> <li>•It is difficult for me to put myself in the shoes of someone who is different from me<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Relationship Skills</b> Teamwork and Collective Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•It is important to arrive at an agreement or consensus when working with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I am committed to serve in my community</li> <li>•I believe that all people have a responsibility to their community</li> <li>•I help people understand issues that are important to the community</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship Skills</b> Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like to work with other students on projects</li> <li>•I like to share my ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•It is important to work with others to address problems and issues in my community</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship Skills</b> Communication and Civil Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am comfortable speaking in front of a group</li> <li>• I am willing to share my views with others</li> <li>• I put a lot of effort into getting involved in class discussions</li> <li>• When people disagree with me, I respect their views</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I can explain my positions on issues to others</li> <li>•I can help others understand the reasons behind a public policy</li> <li>•I can express myself about policy issues in a way that others can clearly understand</li> </ul>
<b>Responsible Decision-Making</b> Evaluation and Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can take time for self-reflection and group reflection on progress toward goals and the process used</li> <li>• I can consider how my personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others</li> <li>• I can help to make my community a better place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I understand that I won't always be successful when I work on issues in my community</li> </ul>
<b>Responsible Decision-Making</b> Civic Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I care about political issues facing the country</li> <li>• I pay attention to issues affecting my community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•When I am considering a problem in my community, I like to gather as much information as I possibly can.</li> </ul>

	• I feel prepared to participate in my community	•It is important to consider all likely alternatives when making a decision about policy
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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from National Civic League Index (2019)

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from the Active-Empathetic Listening Index (Keaton, 2017)

<sup>3</sup>Adapted from Ecological Self-Regulation Measure (Walker and Walker, 2024)

<sup>4</sup>Adapted from the Civic Empathy Scale (Schmutz, et al., 2025)

## Summary

A strong connection exists between social and emotional learning and civic education. Despite the considerable alignment between students' development of SEL competencies and civic dispositions and skills, classroom instruction and research studies generally have treated them as separate enterprises. We propose a Civic SEL Framework that emphasizes the seamless integration of SEL into the civics curriculum. This paper presents the initial phase of our work on conceptualizing and measuring Civic SEL. We are embarking on an initiative to put integrated Civic SEL into practice through Project Citizen and to test our measurement strategy. We welcome your input.

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# APPENDIX

**Figure A1**  
**The Civic SEL Framework**

CASEL Competencies	Self- Awareness	Self-Management	Social & Cultural Awareness	Relationship Skills	Responsible Decision-Making
<b>Civic SEL Aims</b>	<p><b>Civic Identity integration:</b> Students have explored their civic identity and can situate themselves in communities that support the next steps in their life-long civic growth.</p>	<p><b>Problem-Solving:</b> Students use tools of civics disciplines flexibly and fluently to define problems, organize and analyze information and context, find and apply solutions and evaluate impact.</p> <p><b>Active &amp; Empathetic Listening:</b> Students cultivate curious and creative mindsets by listening and demonstrating openness to others' views and experiences and exploring increasingly complex questions.</p> <p><b>Self-Regulation:</b> Students set challenging goals for their civic learning and development, identify resources, track and manage progress, and navigate challenges.</p>	<p><b>Advocacy:</b> Students strategically advocate for themselves and others in local, national and global contexts demonstrating perspective and empathy, and access relevant and timely data.</p> <p><b>Empathy:</b> Students successfully value and prioritize experiences and perspectives of others and account for the diversity of such in their decision-making and advocacy.</p>	<p><b>Teamwork and Collective Responsibility:</b> Students lead and work in high-functioning teams, and seek, leverage, and contribute diverse perspectives and different types of expertise to achieve collective goals.</p> <p><b>Collaboration:</b> Students exchange experiences and ideas as they join with others to address public issues in their communities, finding common ground while working together.</p> <p><b>Communication and Civil Discourse:</b> Students refine their civic expression skills by successfully building shared meaning with others from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints through strategic choices in language, medium of expression, and lens for interpretation.</p>	<p><b>Evaluation and Reflection:</b> Students use critical thinking and reflection to connect knowledge, experiences, actions, and emotions to civic goals and values.</p> <p><b>Civic Decision Making:</b> Students develop multifaceted and dynamic understanding of the self as belonging to and responsible for a community with full consideration of democratic principles.</p>

<b>Curricular Integration examples</b>	Students sharpen their <b>identity integration</b> by working collaboratively to create their Community Map to identify assets and challenges to be addressed in their project.	Students improve their <b>active and empathetic listening</b> skills when they take turns reading through problems in society and listening to one another with curiosity and open minds as they determine in small groups if the problem at hand should be handled by the private sphere, civil society, or the government.	Students practice their <b>advocacy and communication</b> civic SEL competencies by working in teams to decide who will reach out to community members through email/calls/letters to gather more information about their selected issue, and how to do so strategically and empathetically.	Students refine their <b>communication and civil discourse</b> skills by practicing their public hearing speeches and giving and receiving peer feedback	Students will expand their <b>civic decision-making</b> competency by applying media literacy skills to the “ESCAPE Misinformation” activity, where they evaluate a chosen media source using the ESCAPE strategy (verifying factual accuracy, assessing source credibility, confirming information with other trusted sources, identifying intended audience, understanding the purpose of creation, and examining how and when information is presented) to assess its reliability in presenting information.
<b>PBL Connections<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Authenticity:</b> Engaging in projects that connect to students' personal interests, identities, and communities allows them to explore their civic roles, bridge the gap between school and home, and practice <b>identity integration</b> .	<b>Challenging Problem or Question and Sustained Inquiry:</b> When students are able to determine a meaningful problem or question to investigate and solve, they are able to develop a <b>problem-solving</b> disposition through practicing sustained inquiry (defining and investigating complex issues, asking questions,	<b>Public Product:</b> When students share their finished project, they will practice <b>advocacy</b> and <b>empathy</b> through how they present and discuss their ideas in a public context and represent themselves and others.	<b>Student Voice and Choice:</b> When students are leading the project work with their voice and choice, they are able to effectively practice <b>teamwork and collective responsibility</b> and <b>collaboration</b> in how they leverage their individual strengths and welcome diverse perspectives on a team to collaborate and reach a	<b>Reflection:</b> When students deepen their learning through the <b>evaluation and reflection</b> of their project experience, they are solidifying what they have learned, are able to connect it outside of the project context, and allow them to take ownership of their learning and set new goals for continued

<sup>3</sup> The PBL Connections alignment relates to project-based learning (PBL) elements identified by [PBL Works](#).

		<p>finding and using resources, and developing solutions), which fosters critical thinking, analysis, and the development of solutions aligned with civic learning goals.</p> <p><b>Student Voice and Choice:</b> Students are engaged in <b>active &amp; empathetic listening</b> when they have input over many aspects of the project and need to make collective decisions with consideration of others' viewpoints.</p> <p><b>Critique and Revision:</b> Students are able to practice <b>self-regulation</b> in how they give and receive feedback to improve their project process and track and manage their progress towards meeting their civic learning and development goals.</p>		<p>shared goal through mutual respect and shared responsibility.</p> <p><b>Public Product:</b> Students will share their work publicly, in which they will have to demonstrate tools of <b>civil discourse and communication</b> to effectively communicate with their audiences.</p>	<p>learning.</p> <p><b>Authenticity:</b> As students authentically engage in their projects and communities, they develop a deeper connection to and understanding of their role in community and civic life, and are able to engage in effective <b>civic decision making</b> during the project process and beyond.</p>
<b>Project Citizen Process Steps<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Step 1: Identifying Problems to Be Dealt with by Public Policy</b>	Step 1: Identifying Problems to Be Dealt with by Public Policy	<b>Step 1: Identifying Problems to Be Dealt with by Public Policy</b>	Step 1: Identifying Problems to Be Dealt with by Public Policy	Step 1: Identifying Problems to Be Dealt with by Public Policy

<sup>4</sup> While each of the Civic SEL aims can be activated in all steps of the Project Citizen process, bolded in each box are the three key steps that are particularly important to the Civic SEL aims identified above.



	<p>Step 2: Selecting a Problem or Problems for Your Class to Study</p> <p>Step 3: Gathering Information on the Problem You Will Study</p> <p>Step 4: Developing a Portfolio to Present Your Research</p> <p><b>Step 5: Presenting Your Portfolio in a Simulated Public Hearing</b></p> <p><b>Step 6: Reflecting on Your Experience</b></p>	<p>Step 2: Selecting a Problem or Problems for Your Class to Study</p> <p><b>Step 3: Gathering Information on the Problem You Will Study</b></p> <p><b>Step 4: Developing a Portfolio to Present Your Research</b></p> <p>Step 5: Presenting Your Portfolio in a Simulated Public Hearing</p> <p><b>Step 6: Reflecting on Your Experience</b></p>	<p><b>Step 2: Selecting a Problem or Problems for Your Class to Study</b></p> <p>Step 3: Gathering Information on the Problem You Will Study</p> <p>Step 4: Developing a Portfolio to Present Your Research</p> <p><b>Step 5: Presenting Your Portfolio in a Simulated Public Hearing</b></p> <p>Step 6: Reflecting on Your Experience</p>	<p>Step 2: Selecting a Problem or Problems for Your Class to Study</p> <p><b>Step 3: Gathering Information on the Problem You Will Study</b></p> <p><b>Step 4: Developing a Portfolio to Present Your Research</b></p> <p><b>Step 5: Presenting Your Portfolio in a Simulated Public Hearing</b></p> <p>Step 6: Reflecting on Your Experience</p>	<p><b>Step 2: Selecting a Problem or Problems for Your Class to Study</b></p> <p>Step 3: Gathering Information on the Problem You Will Study</p> <p>Step 4: Developing a Portfolio to Present Your Research</p> <p><b>Step 5: Presenting Your Portfolio in a Simulated Public Hearing</b></p> <p><b>Step 6: Reflecting on Your Experience</b></p>
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