FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WCSD SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT (WCSD-SECA)

Background

This document provides responses to frequently asked questions about the WCSD-SECA instruments that are designed to assess social and emotional competencies (SECs) in grades 5-12. All instruments are free and open-source.

If you have additional questions about this assessment and related research, please contact Laura Davidson, Washoe County School District Director of Research and Evaluation at 775-348-3850 or ldavidson@washoeschools.net.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is the WCSD Social and Emotional Competency Assessment?**

The WCSD SECA is a set of instruments developed through a collaboration between Washoe County School District, the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), and the University of Illinois at Chicago through an Institute of Education Sciences Research-Practitioner Partnership grant. The project resulted in the development of two instruments and a bank of items aligned to the CASEL 5 clusters and WCSD SEL standards:

- o **Long-Form Assessment**: 40-item instrument measuring eight domains of social and emotional competence: 1) self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, 2) self-awareness of emotions, 3) self-management of emotions, 4) self-management of goals, 5) self-management of school work, 6) relationship skills, 7) social awareness, and 8) responsible decision-making.
- o **Short-Form Assessment**: 17-item, short-form assessment of global social and emotional competence.
- o **Item Bank**: 138 items assessing eight domains. Useful for training and item replacement.

2. **Can my organization/district/school use these instruments?**

Yes! All three instruments are free and open-source. You and your organization can use and adapt the instruments any way you would like. You do not need to request permission to use these instruments, but we appreciate if you would cite the measure so we can track how organizations use the instruments and expand our knowledge base and connect users together. The measure can be cited as "items from or adapted from the WCSD Social and Emotional Competency Assessment (Davidson et al., 2017)."

3. How were these instruments developed?

The three instruments were developed through a 4-year, iterative process that included the following steps:

- o Mapping of items against developmental pacing guides and district SEL standards to ensure developmental-appropriateness.
- o Four years of survey administration to students in grades 5-9 and 11 in a large, urban school district.
- o Rasch modeling techniques to determine how well items assessed students across a range of social and emotional competencies.
- o Focus group testing of items with 75+ students in elementary, middle, and high school to improve item readability and comprehension, promote better survey engagement, and develop items that assessed high levels of social and emotional competencies.
- o Latent class analyses to better understand characteristics of the different "profiles" of students who rate themselves highly across all social and emotional competency items.
- o Multi-level regression modelling to assess relationship of assessments with academic and behavioral outcomes.

4. Are the SECA instruments valid and reliable?

Current Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing call for an approach to measure development that views reliability and validity as fluid properties that vary across populations, locations, and time, rather than as fixed traits of instruments (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014). In that vein, the Standards encourage test adopters to weigh reliability and validity evidence with the intended use of the measure in mind. For example, in WCSD, our primary intended use for the instruments was to assess a broad range of student social and emotional ability levels using a measure that aligned closely with our local SEL standards and the CASEL framework so that early instructional support could occur. With this end in mind, our reliability and validity analyses focused on iteratively improving the item bank, ensuring that items covered the full range of each construct, and allowed selection of item subsets to be used at particular grade levels and in repeated administrations using an Item Response Theory approach.

Key findings about the psychometric properties of these instruments to-date include:

- Items assess a broad range of student ability levels, with limited evidence of ceiling effect or floor effects on either the long- or short-form instruments.
- Across two survey years, items still primarily target students at low-to-average ability levels.
- Only a small number of items show differential item functioning by grade level and student gender/race-ethnicity (but not English language learner status).
- When statistically controlling for factors known to impact student outcomes, including demographics (grade level, gender, Free and Reduced Price Lunch status, participation in English Language Services and Special Education Services), and the previous year's standardized reading and math test scores, GPA, suspension rate, and attendance rate, multi-level regression models using the short-form measure indicate that students with higher SECs had, compared to students with lower SECs had:
  - o significantly higher reading and math standardized test scores (8 point difference)

- o weighted GPAs in high school
- o lower rates of suspension
- o lower absenteeism

5. How should I use these instruments?

Feel free to use these instruments in any way you see fit. To determine if the WCSD-SECA is an appropriate assessment for your needs, consider reading the American Institute of Research's article *Are You Ready to Assess Social and Emotional Development*. In WCSD, we have used the instruments primarily for mass administration to students for low-stakes decision-making, discussion, and trend monitoring. This includes providing schools with school-level reports to help them monitor data trends, debriefing the data with students, families, staff, and community members, and studying the relationship between the measures and students' academic and behavioral outcomes. These are the three instruments available for use:

- **Item bank**: The 138-item bank offers extensive examples of indicators aligned to the five CASEL SEC clusters and has been useful for training purposes and cross-walking to learning standards. These items can help educators understand what some social and emotional competencies might "look like" in a school setting.
- **Long-form instrument**: Currently in use as part of WCSD's annual student climate survey administered to roughly 24,000 students in grades 5-9 and 11. Assesses 8 subdomains of social and emotional competence (see instrument below) to allow for more detailed analyses of specific competencies. Aggregate data is reported back to schools and the community in various forms, including as part of school's annual data profile book, through professional development, and through data summits.
- **Short-form instrument**: Short-form assessment of global SEC for when districts needed fewer than 40 items due to concerns about time and burden.

  To learn more about how we report and use the data, check out our websites:
  - o For Climate Survey Reports and data debriefing toolkits, visit our Climate Survey Project website: https://www.washoeschools.net/Domain/231
  - o To see how we have shared this data with students, staff and the community, visit our WCSD Data Summit webpage: http://www.wcsddatasummit.net
  - o To learn more about how we make this data transparent to the community, visit our WCSD Data webpage: http://www.wcsddata.net

6. How do I score these instruments?
Because these instruments are open-source, you can score them any way you see fit. In Washoe County School District, we use a variety of scoring techniques depending on the audience and the intended use of the data. For example:

- For school climate reports using the long-form instrument, we typically report the overall % easy/very easy across each of the 8 domains as well as the % responding in each of the four response categories.
- As seen on our website http://www.wcsddata.net, we also report sub-domain means and the average item locations within a subdomain to help describe which items reflect higher levels of student social and emotional ability.
- For the short-form measure, we score across all 17 items to represent overall social and emotional competency (either an overall mean or overall % easy/very easy score).

7. Do students' scores on these measures change from year-to-year?

This is an area we are beginning to study in more depth. Student scores do change year-over-year. The extent to which scores change as a result of exposure to social and emotional learning is an area of ongoing study.

8. Can I use the WCSD-SECA as a pre-to-post measure?

WCSD does not currently use the SECA as a pre-to-post assessment to evaluate program impact, but please let us know if you use it for that purpose and what results you find!

9. Who else uses the WCSD-SECA?

Because the WCSD-SECA is free and open-source, we do not require users to request permission to use it. We therefore do not formally keep track of which organizations and school districts are currently using the instruments and how they use and report the data. However, we are happy to share reports from organizations who have shared their findings with us, and we encourage users of the WCSD-SECA to continue contributing to the knowledge base about the instruments and their use in practice by contact ldavidson@washoeschools.net.

Manuscripts Published and In Progress:

- To learn more about the process of developing the instruments, see:
    - Davidson, L. A., Crowder, M. K., Gordon, R. A., Domitrovich, C. E., Brown, R. D., & Hayes, B. I. (2017). A continuous improvement approach to social and emotional competency measurement. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2017.03.002.
    - Schamberg, R. S., Domitrovich, C. E., Davidson, L. A., Hayes, B. I., Shaffer, T., Gordon, R. A., Crowder, M. K., Brown, R. D., Bryson, A. M., LaMarca, P., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and Washoe County School District (WCSD) social and emotional learning assessment partnership. In J. W. Owen & A. M. Larson (Eds.), Research-policymaker collaboration: Strategies for launching and sustaining successful partnerships. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.
- To learn more about some of the other Rasch analyses applied to instruments, see: Crowder, M. K., Gordon, R. A., Brown, R. D., Davidson, L. A., & Domitrovich, C. E. (in press). Linking social and emotional learning standards to the Social-Emotional Competency Assessment: A Rasch approach. *School Psychology Quarterly*.
- Additional manuscripts in progress will include the following topic areas:
    - Examination of dimensionality of the 40-item version to determine whether items align with theoretical expectations of which constructs the items measure.
    - Examination of whether student social and emotional competence might buffer against students' academic risk for drop-out.

Appendix: WCSD-SECA (Long- and Short- Form; Version Oct. 2018)

Items highlighted (17-item) indicate items that comprise the briefer, composite SEC assessment.

Directions: *Please tell us how easy or difficult each of the following are for you.*
Response Options: *1 = Very Difficult; 2 = Difficult; 3 = Easy; 4 = Very Easy*

Self-Awareness: Strengths and Weaknesses

1. Knowing what my strengths are. (17-item)
2. Knowing how to get better at things that are hard for me to do at school.
3. Knowing when I am wrong about something.
4. Knowing when I can't control something.

Self-Awareness: Emotion Knowledge

5. Knowing when my feelings are making it hard for me to focus. (17-item)
6. Knowing the emotions I feel. (17-item)
7. Knowing ways to make myself feel better when I'm sad.
8. Noticing what my body does when I am nervous.
9. Knowing when my mood affects how I treat others.
10. Knowing ways I calm myself down. (17-item)

Social Awareness

11. Learning from people with different opinions than me. (17-item)
12. Knowing what people may be feeling by the look on their face. (17-item)
13. Knowing when someone needs help. (17-item)
14. Knowing how to get help when I'm having trouble with a classmate.
15. Knowing how my actions impact my classmates.

Self-Management: Emotion Regulation

16. Getting through something even when I feel frustrated. (17-item)
17. Being patient even when I am really excited. (17-item)
18. Staying calm when I feel stressed.
19. Working on things even when I don't like them.

Self-Management: Goal Management

20. Finishing tasks even if they are hard for me. (17-item)
21. Setting goals for myself. (17-item)
22. Reaching goals that I set for myself.
23. Thinking through the steps it will take to reach my goal.

Self-Management: School Work

24. Doing my schoolwork even when I do not feel like it. (17-item)
25. Being prepared for tests. (17-item)
26. Working on assignments even when they are hard.
27. Planning ahead so I can turn a project in on time.

28. Finishing my schoolwork without reminders.
29. Staying focused in class even when there are distractions.

Relationship Skills

30. Respecting a classmate's opinions during a disagreement. (17-item)
31. Getting along with my classmates. (17-item)
32. Sharing what I am feeling with others.
33. Talking to an adult when I have problems at school.
34. Being welcoming to someone I don't usually eat lunch with.
35. Getting along with my teachers.

Responsible Decision-Making

36. Thinking about what might happen before making a decision. (17-item)
37. Knowing what is right or wrong. (17-item)
38. Thinking of different ways to solve a problem.
39. Saying "no" to a friend who wants to break the rules.
40. Helping to make my school a better place.