

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR EQUITY & JUSTICE



Throughout 2020, the National Urban League (NUL) hosted a series of listening sessions with more than 50 parents, educators, community leaders, researchers, and others to gather feedback on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Social-Emotional and Academic Development (SEAD), Science of Learning and Development (SoLD), Whole Child Equity (WCE), and other related approaches wherever people learn, grow, and develop “both in classrooms and across the community.” A clear threat to historically and currently marginalized communities is how intimate spaces of teaching, learning, and development have been and are weaponized as spaces of subjugation and harm through the reliance on frameworks and practices that fail to recognize culture, intersectionality, history, and existing social hierarchies. Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has called the effort to impose one sole, dominant way of thinking “the danger of a single story.” We are seeing that very effort today across our nation, with anti-equity laws being passed under the guise of fighting against Critical Race Theory. We aim to replace that simplistic, unexamined, and oppressive narrative with one that values a range of ways of being, understanding, and operating in a shared world, thus giving all learners access to an equitable learning environment.

Participants of the listening sessions identified such harms and the potential for additional negative impacts and consequences in flawed designs that promote, fail to upend, or allow anti-LGBTQ+, male-domination, racial capitalism, and other false hierarchies to fester. However, they also highlighted the many ways that their communities and the institutions they work in promote and utilize frameworks and practices that support children and youth to thrive. Hence, the purpose of this rubric is to shed light on the sources of inequity that can infect SEL initiatives and to provide a tool that can be used to support efforts to create and sustain the thriving of youth.

By using this rubric, parents and youth can ask the key questions of approaches being considered for or already implemented in a child’s after-school program, summer camp, or a classroom during the school day. Educators and youth development staff looking to choose or implement new, transformative SEL initiatives can also use these questions and examples to shape, evaluate, and modify their approaches. The elements of the rubric align with NUL’s SEL Design Principles. A crosswalk between the two is included that can help a site director or a small staff committee to zero in on a few dimensions for stakeholder reflection and program growth during the year. Differently situated stakeholder groups will most likely deem some dimensions more relevant than others. For example, stakeholders could be asked to describe an experience that ‘needs improvement’, brainstorm ways to move their practice to ‘pro-development’ and customize their own column of emerging excellence practices between the two. Youth-serving leaders may choose to assign point values to the respective columns and use these rankings as a departure point for discussions between raters, or to narrow the focus of a large group of practitioners. Overall, users may choose to zero in on the references for the dimension which they want to improve and work backwards from pro-development practice to adopt or create new activities for youth, staff trainings, study groups, or professional learning communities. We look forward to witnessing and supporting NUL’s innovative and diverse partners as they test drive our suggestions, devise other ways to use these tools, and create new instruments in the service of equitable SEL implementation for Black, Brown, and other diverse learners. We humbly hope that practitioners and communities will continue to develop and expand the initial thinking on this rubric and the SEL principles document using these tools that we have produced.

1. ASSET-BASED APPROACH

Does the SEL program imply or communicate a mission of helping young people and communities to thrive or does it emphasize correcting perceived deficits?

2. ACTION & EMPOWERMENT ORIENTATION

Do young people learn to be passive or active in facilitating personal growth and shaping strategies that improve their community and environment?

3. COLLECTIVIST ORIENTATION/COMMUNAL ACTION/COOPERATION

Does the SEL strategy recognize the importance of collective progress rather than solely individual development as vital?

4. EXPLICIT ANTI-OPPRESSION ORIENTATION

In keeping with the idea of robust equity as an intentional counter to injustice, institutionalized privilege and prejudice, and systemic deficits (Thriving Equity), does the SEL program maintain the elimination of oppression, the promotion of equity and justice, and healing trauma as central goals? Does the approach reinforce social hierarchies (e.g., racial, gender) or actively work to dismantle them?

5. CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Is the program culturally and historically affirming, open to, and supportive of, diverse perspectives and histories, or is it hegemonic (prescribing, promoting, and enforcing one set of cultural practices and worldview and destructive of others)?

6. SAFE & SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE

Do young people experience the institution's climate as welcoming and nurturing or as anxiety-heightening and threatening?

7. IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Do young people have sufficient opportunities to develop and explore their personal and collective identities as part of the intentional promotion of thriving across multiple domains? (Thriving Equity page 3)

8. ADAPTABILITY

Does the approach and strategy change in response to context and community input?

9. SUFFICIENT RESOURCES

Do learners have all the resources they need to thrive, including the level of funds, effort, and emphasis deployed to identify, report, and address inequities that exist across schools and districts? Are professional learning supports available and adequately focused on reflection and action to develop adult anti-oppression, pro-development skills, and attitudes in every adult who engages with youth?

10. LANGUAGE

Does the design use appropriate, accessible language?



1. ASSET-BASED APPROACH

Does the SEL program imply or communicate a mission of helping young people and communities to thrive or does it emphasize correcting perceived deficits?

Pro-Development

- Preparation and ongoing professional development of educators/staff to actively explore the defaults and harmful consequences of a deficit-based approach, especially for Black, Brown, and other diverse learners and the benefits to youth of asset-based approaches to development.
- Helps young people identify their own assets and strengths and build on them individually and in community.

→ Example

Programs like Brotherhood Sister Soul, which trains adults in the Liberating Voices/Liberating Minds Institute, empower youth, staff, and community allies to identify collectively and cultivate practices, norms, and traits that should be rewarded and celebrated, such as community uplift, reciprocity, and thoughtfulness.

Needs Improvement

- Offers a set of competencies to help young people conform and assimilate, while subtly denigrating facets of their own home cultures, youth culture, and community practices that may differ from established white, middle-class norms.

→ Example

Dress codes that are insensitive to religious observance, hair, and body type to train youth to assimilate and conform

→ Example

SLANT requirements that prescribe young people's posture and body/eye movements in the classroom in order to be worthy of accessing academic or enrichment activities

Destructive/Harmful

- Based on a deficit mindset to teach "those kids" how to behave or be good workers.

→ Example

Perfect attendance rewards and awards and punishment for "tardiness" that assume all kids are able-bodied and well-supported and can only be motivated externally with rewards or punishments to overcome "laziness" or "disengagement"



2. ACTION AND EMPOWERMENT ORIENTATION

Do young people learn to be passive or active in facilitating personal growth and shaping strategies that improve their community and environment?

Pro-Development

- Integrate elements of peer engagement, leadership development, co-creation, relationship building, and community-building, applied into all settings and spaces.

→ Example

Practices such as service learning, project-based learning and peer review and revision built on Freire's idea of "problem posing" to link learning and development to service, advocacy, and action in the wider world.

Needs Improvement

- Young people must go to extraordinary lengths to influence the educational setting's culture, treatment, or community. Because they receive little or no adult support or encouragement for doing this work.
- Young people are encouraged only to make small changes or adjustments to the pre-existing culture rather than to co-create and continually revise.
- Only a few young people chosen by adults receive occasional opportunities to reflect on positive personal qualities, norms, and practices.

Destructive/Harmful

- Young people are not involved in the rule-setting process.
- Young people are threatened and made to follow rules set by adult authorities and then punished for noncompliance.
- Young people passively receive platitudes about following rules.

Pro-Development

- Young people are exposed to and/or encouraged to research examples of diverse youth, adults, institutions, and systems to positively and actively transform both themselves and communities like their own.

Example

Freedom Schools, modeled after those founded immediately post emancipation and revived during the civil rights struggle by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, taught academic subjects as well as advocacy for oppressed

Needs Improvement

from the previous page

- *Young people must go to extraordinary lengths to influence the educational setting's culture, treatment, or community. Because they receive little or no adult support or encouragement for doing this work.*
- *Young people are encouraged only to make small changes or adjustments to the pre-existing culture rather than to co-create and continually revise.*
- *Only a few young people chosen by adults receive occasional opportunities to reflect on positive personal qualities, norms, and practices.*

Destructive/Harmful

from the previous page

- *Young people are not involved in the rule-setting process.*
- *Young people are threatened and made to follow rules set by adult authorities and then punished for noncompliance.*
- *Young people passively receive platitudes about following rules.*



3. COLLECTIVIST ORIENTATION/COMMUNAL ACTION/COOPERATION

Does the SEL strategy recognize the importance of collective progress rather than solely individual development as vital?

Pro-Development

- Process invites diverse local community leaders to have authentic dialogue with learners about how the roles of collective action (e.g., organizing and advocacy) and social movements demanding justice impact the identities-- and are driven by the shared goals--of people with shared interests.

Example

Community stakeholders (e.g., parents, youth, youth-serving workers) all meaningfully involved in identifying problems and designing and implementing potential solutions

Needs Improvement

- Never interrogates SEL concepts for a healthy conceptualization of individuals as part of communities and societies
- Mentions community only in passing, vague terms, with no explanation or exploration
- Individualism remains a central feature of the organization's practices.

Destructive/Harmful

- Focuses on the development of learners only as individuals.
- Promotes individualism and competition as normal and desirable.
- Assumes that individual rights/concerns are default.



4. EXPLICIT ANTI-OPPRESSION ORIENTATION

In keeping with the idea of robust equity as an intentional counter to injustice, institutionalized privilege and prejudice, and systemic deficits (Thriving Equity), does the SEL program hold the elimination of oppression, the promotion of equity and justice, and healing trauma as central goals? Does the approach reinforce social hierarchies (e.g., racial, gender) or dismantle them?

Pro-Development

- Elimination of oppression is a core goal. The approach centers on the most marginalized youth and supports, encourages, and equips students with tools to identify, interrogate and transform harmful systems and practices, including systems of which they are currently a part.

→ Example

Curriculum, practices, and institutional norms are based around social justice and an examination of how a broad range of peoples has defined and fought for equity (e.g., Cultivating Genius).

Needs Improvement

- Fails to speak to or covers up the ways that oppressive systems operate. Learners must figure out social ills such as racism, homophobia, misogyny, and ableism without meaningful adult support and must process their responses and relationship to these oppressive systems on their own.

→ Example

Colorblind approaches to learning and development ignore the lived experiences of Black and Brown youth and communities.

Destructive/Harmful

- Promotes and reinforces racist or other oppressive ways of knowing, being, and behaving, explicitly or implicitly, and re-inflicts oppressive trauma.

→ Example

Explicitly or implicitly communicates the idea that wealthy people or people from a specific race or ethnicity are smarter, more capable, or more moral than others.

Denigrates low resource parents and communities as disinterested, uninformed, and lacking ideas about how to improve their situation, despite their being most impacted.



5. SAFE & SUPPORTIVE CLIMATE

Do young people experience the institution's climate as welcoming and nurturing or as threatening and heightening anxiety?

Pro-Development

- Developmentally affirming approaches are integrated into the daily life of the school or out-of-school program. Young people behave in beneficial ways because they are part of a community with peers and educators through restorative practices.

→ Example

Restorative justice practices, focused on stakeholders deciding together how to repair harm to transform individual and social conditions, are a holistic and daily climate intervention and way of maintaining healthy relationships.

Needs Improvement

- Behavior is transactional, discussed only in terms of control and varying levels of reward and punishment rather than encouraging youth to determine their strengths and to build upon them in the pursuit of their interests and the development of positive internal habits of mind.
- The threat of punishment is pervasive, even if passive. Surveillance, policing, and punitive responses are routine and assumed to be normal.

→ Example

Honor courts, over-policing, and surveillance in schools and other sites of development that mirror the criminal legal system.

Destructive/Harmful

- Rigid system of surveillance, behavioral rules, and harsh consequences (from corporal punishment and physical isolation to shame and denial of learning) disproportionately are applied to Black, Brown, neuro-diverse, and other learners from non-dominant groups.
- Buildings and settings are hardened against perceived threats. Young people are viewed and treated as potential threats whose emotions and actions must be carefully controlled by rigid rules with swift, certain punishment and punitive consequences.

→ Example

Zero-tolerance or no-excuses approaches, exclusionary discipline practices (suspension, expulsion, restraint, and seclusion), and corporal punishment.

Pro-Development

- Educational and developmental spaces and settings made safer through positive, trust-based relationships which are actively facilitated across the institution.

Example

Approaches such as peer mediation, near-peer mentoring, and violence interruption explicitly teach, model, and facilitate practices of compassionate communication and healthy conflict-resolution.

Needs Improvement

from the previous page

- Behavior is transactional, discussed only in terms of control and varying levels of reward and punishment rather than encouraging youth to determine their strengths and to build upon them in the pursuit of their interests and the development of positive internal habits of mind.*
- The threat of punishment is pervasive, even if passive. Surveillance, policing, and punitive responses are routine and assumed to be normal.*

Example

Honor courts, over-policing, and surveillance in schools and other sites of development that mirror the criminal legal system.

Destructive/Harmful

from the previous page

- Rigid system of surveillance, behavioral rules, and harsh consequences (from corporal punishment and physical isolation to shame and denial of learning) disproportionately are applied to Black, Brown, neuro-diverse, and other learners from non-dominant groups.*
- Buildings and settings are hardened against perceived threats. Young people are viewed and treated as potential threats whose emotions and actions must be carefully controlled by rigid rules with swift, certain punishment and punitive consequences.*

Example

Zero-tolerance or no-excuses approaches, exclusionary discipline practices (suspension, expulsion, restraint, and seclusion), and corporal punishment.



6. CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Is the program culturally and historically affirming, open to, and supportive of, diverse perspectives and histories, or is it hegemonic (prescribing, promoting, and enforcing one set of cultural practices and worldview and destructive of others)?

Pro-Development

- Educators and educational settings affirm and facilitate a range of cultures and ways of being as contributing to the flourishing of everyone in the community, recognizing that Black and Brown people have a diverse set of norms, values, and practices that lift up and define community, equity, excellence, and justice.

Example

Ethnic studies curricula and practices that affirm diverse and intersectional identities and situate these within the context of a broad and diverse legacy of achievement and contribution to society.

Needs Improvement

- Designers factor in shallow, sporadic efforts to recognize culture and difference as a periodic add-on or as special sessions.

Example

Black or Latino/a history is only mentioned during Black or Latino/a history month or focus on holidays and celebrations rather than values, traditions, and deeper conversations concerning cultural elements.

Destructive/Harmful

- Program is culturally normative and actively disparages and discourages other perspectives.

Example

"Kill the Indian to save the man" and all the practices motivated by that motto to erase and punish Native traditions, language, culture, ideas, and concerns.



7. IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Do young people have sufficient opportunities to develop and explore their personal and collective identities as part of the intentional promotion of thriving across multiple domains? (Thriving Equity page 3)

Pro-Development

- Supports healthy human development of multiple aspects of identity, understood in all their contradictions and complexities, particularly in relation to equity and justice.

→ Example

Explicit incorporation of frameworks such as Racial Identity Development (Cross) and Formation (Helms) which call on students from diverse backgrounds to develop pride in an anti-oppression stance and engage in joyful struggle against injustice as part of identity formation and development.

- Identity as a learner is cultivated when youth can experience various ways to understand, analyze, and apply information to discover what works best for them and practice how to advocate for themselves as learners.

→ Example

Youth are empowered to ask for one-on-one tutoring time, request to read texts in their home language, prepare a slide presentation rather than an essay, or ask for closed captioning.

Needs Improvement

- Identity is mentioned as a valued characteristic, but vaguely defined with no attention to power dynamics and context or is treated as a self-help process undertaken alone.

→ Example

Approaches are marked by concepts such as over-individualization, gender-neutrality, directives such as “be nice” that obscure and minimize the complexity and systemic nature of power oppression, injustice, and inequity rooted in identity.

- Identity as a learner is tied to production (e.g., test scores or grades) and procedure, where learners’ only path to success is to replicate processes and products exactly as they are shown. Hence, youth adopt external judgements about themselves as learners, without the chance to learn what works for them.

→ Example

Youth tennis players are rewarded only for hitting the ball or serving exactly as their coach does and are berated or ranked lower for making beneficial adjustments based on their understanding of their own bodies.

Destructive/Harmful

- Identity development is discouraged unless it meets the needs of the youth settings, for instance as “scholars,” while “inconvenient” identities (trans, activist, non-hetero) are repressed.
- Identity is ignored in a youth-serving setting or thought of in strictly individualistic terms, with no social orientation to community or justice.

→ Example

Forcing left-handed children to write, eat, or use equipment only for or with their right hand.



8. ADAPDABILITY

Does the approach and strategy change in response to context and community input?

Pro-Development

- Educators commit to an inclusive process of continual interrogation, refinement, and adaptation, where young people, families, and communities are engaged partners.

➔ Example

Parent or other stakeholder walk-throughs and site visits and advisory structures, to evaluate whether the institution is living up to its stated goals, practices, and values.

Needs Improvement

- Designers present a preconceived program for community approval or agreement and expect it to fit all young people and contexts with no or only superficial changes.

➔ Example

Codes of conduct or handbooks for youth that both parents and youth are expected to sign unquestioningly, with no regard for neuro-divergence, cultural traditions, or other ways that humans engage with institutions.

Destructive/Harmful

- SEL strategies and approaches are developed without input from impacted communities and remain rigidly fixed and inequitable, no matter the context or feedback.

➔ Example

Proponents for change hear “This is the way we’ve always done things” or “It’s unfair to past groups to do things more equitably now.”

9. SUFFICIENT RESOURCES



Do learners have all the resources they need to thrive, including the level of funds, effort, and emphasis deployed to identify, report, and address inequities that exist across schools and districts? Are professional learning supports available and adequately focused on reflection and action to develop adult anti-oppression, pro-development skills, and attitudes in every adult who engages with youth?

Pro-Development

- Policies, practices, funds, and materials from a variety of sources ensure youth have equitable access to high-quality curricula and content, mental health staff, social workers, guidance counselors, peer mentors, and other staff.

➔ Example

LAUSD’s commitment to redirect millions of dollars from school policing to hiring and training counselors and other support staff targeted to the schools and communities which have suffered the greatest disinvestment.

Needs Improvement

- Institutions have inadequate, direct service mental health and material resources contributing to positive human development.
- Institutions assess human development/growth but do not allocate or secure the resources needed to achieve justice and ensure that all diverse youth thrive.

➔ Example

Institutions measure climate (e.g., via surveys) but invest few or no resources to change it

Destructive/Harmful

- Little to no investment of staff, materials and time dedicated towards supporting youth holistically.

➔ Example

No mental health, growth or development support staff or consistent learning and modeling opportunities for SEL competencies.

Pro-Development

- Strategies provide support and additional opportunities to help students effectively identify and deal with stressors and to develop positive, healthy identities, aptitudes, and skill sets.

Example

Chicago's investment in full-service community schools provides each school \$500k/year for an integrated system of supports for holistic youth development that extends from school to community health, youth development, and social service institutions.

Needs Improvement

from the previous page

- Institutions have inadequate, direct service mental health and material resources contributing to positive human development.*
- Institutions assess human development/growth but do not allocate or secure the resources needed to achieve justice and ensure that all diverse youth thrive.*

Example

Institutions measure climate (e.g., via surveys) but invest few or no resources to change it

Destructive/Harmful

from the previous page

- Little to no investment of staff, materials and time dedicated towards supporting youth holistically.*

Example

No mental health, growth or development support staff or consistent learning and modeling opportunities for SEL competencies.



10. LANGUAGE

Does the design use appropriate, accessible language?

Pro-Development

- Uses and consistently develops accessible and clear language that all the young people and families in a given community can understand, use, and modify for empowerment and self-determination.

Example

Taking the time to define and question terms such as anti-racist, accountability, integrity and justice for each community and the community formed within institutions.

Needs Improvement

- Language is respectful but vague or opaque, and difficult for young people and communities to understand.

Example

Sprinkling the terms anti-racist and anti-racism throughout discussions without explicitly defining them or questioning whether practices promote racism or not. Sarcastic or performative use of inclusionary language such as "social justice warriors."

Destructive/Harmful

- Language is denigrating, insulting, and based in stereotypes, shame, blame, deficit mindset, exclusion, and coercion.

Example

School team names and mascots rooted in racist, colonialist, violent or exploitive traditions and practices.

- Language is full of terms requiring specific social, educational, or professional experiences.



Endnotes

1. The National Urban League definition of Equity.
2. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," www.ted.com, October 16, 2009, [retrieved here: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en)
3. Standards of Equity and Excellence: A Lens on ESSA State Plans, National Urban League, in ESSA, No Ceilings on Success, [found here: http://ncos.iamempowered.com/pdf/ESSA%20Full%20Report.pdf](http://ncos.iamempowered.com/pdf/ESSA%20Full%20Report.pdf)



APPENDIX

DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND RUBRIC: CROSSWALK

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

RUBRIC DIMENSIONS



1. Promote Collective and Individual Well-Being, Growth, and Success

- Asset-Based Approach
- Action & Empowerment Orientation
- Collectivist Orientation/Communal Action/Cooperation
- Safe & Supportive Climate
- Cultural Orientation
- Identity Development
- Adaptability
- Sufficient Resources
- Language



2. Ensure the Equitable Distribution of Developmental Resources and High-Quality Learning Opportunities

- Sufficient Resources
- Adaptability



3. Center Cultural Values, Traditions, & Inspirations

- Cultural Orientation
- Explicit Anti-Oppression Orientation
- Asset-Based Approach
- Collectivist Orientation/Communal Action/Cooperation
- Identity Development
- Sufficient Resources
- Language



4. Use Asset & Strength-Based Approaches

- Asset-Based Approach
- Action & Empowerment Orientation
- Identity Development
- Cultural Orientation
- Explicit Anti-Oppression Orientation
- Language

DESIGN PRINCIPLES**RUBRIC DIMENSIONS****5. Develop Positive Racial Identities and Skill Sets**

- Identity Development
- Asset-Based Approach
- Cultural Orientation
- Explicit Anti-Oppression Orientation
- Safe & Supportive Climate
- Collectivist Orientation/Communal Action/Cooperation
- Language

**6. Meaningful Engagement & Leadership from Concept Development to Implementation**

- Action & Empowerment Orientation
- Explicit Anti-Oppression Orientation
- Adaptability
- Sufficient Resources

**7. Make it plain: Use Language for All Literacy Levels**

- Adaptability
- Language
- Explicit Anti-Oppression Orientation
- Cultural Orientation