



# Student Empowerment Through SEL in Music Education



**ArtsEdSEL**  
The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning



Reflection Guide



# Getting in Tune for Musical SEL

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) was around before the COVID-19 pandemic and will be around long after. However, the collective trauma we are experiencing has put a magnifying glass on the necessity for schools to help students survive and thrive when confronted with profound challenges.

*The singular priority of schools as they seek strategies to navigate these challenges is student and staff safety—physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally.*

SEL is a skill-based approach that can help achieve that safety by building students' self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making skills (simplified to the three goals of: SELF/IDENTITY, OTHERS/BELONGING, DECISIONS/AGENCY). SEL enables us to effectively manage challenges instead of simply reacting to them. Music is inherently emotional: it makes us feel; music is social: it has been a rallying call for humans, always. SEL helps students build the life skills needed to navigate their world after they leave our music classroom. It is essential that music educators make connections between SEL and music and create safe spaces to practice both—this is our untapped superpower and students need SEL-informed music education now more than ever!



***For SEL to be effective it must be embedded into curricular content—for us, it must be MUSICAL.***

We must make SEL intentional and meaningful—it does not “just happen” and we cannot rely on the assumption that SEL is inherent in music education. Let go of the idea that social and emotional learning is an “extra” thing to do and embrace and reclaim it as a necessarily integrated aspect of all learning that centers the whole student(s). When done well, musical SEL should feel like great music teaching and learning! Our classes should be spaces where students build and practice social emotional skills. If it feels like SEL is distracting from teaching music, it's a good idea to re-evaluate our goals.

Embedding SEL into music education starts with identifying a musical concept or piece of music and building SEL experiences around that concept(s). SEL should not happen before and after the music; it should be the music, only with a deeper connection to students' lives.

Facilitating an environment where students learn about themselves and others is not easy (especially as we learn about ourselves as teachers in the process). It may be difficult and messy. Stay encouraged and know our students are worth it. The music classroom is the perfect environment to help students learn about themselves and others, and gain, explore, and apply agency. As we navigate

embedding SEL into our music classrooms, the following pages are intended to help guide teacher and student reflection processes to deepen the connection between music, identity, belonging, and agency. Using these prompts will help reveal how SEL can look and live organically in music classrooms. The resources are intended to help broaden the context for the reflection questions. There is no one right way to “do SEL,” and discovering the right balance, blend, and timing are critical. When done well, SEL and music live in harmony.

The following is a collection of topics to help embed SEL in music education. Each topic includes a framing definition, guiding principles, sets of questions to help explore the topic, and resources to learn more. Explore, learn, and adapt these ideas to develop the connections in ways that make sense for you and your students.

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*Some content has been excerpted directly from the monthly Heart of the Arts [briefs](#).*

# Social Emotional Learning



## WHAT IS IT:

SEL is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL; SEL4NJ)

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



SEL is one of the most powerful tools we have to help our students and ourselves confront the many challenges we are facing.



SEL is a culture, not an isolated activity, and needs to be embedded into all levels and parts of a school environment, connected to families and community.



When students attend schools where SEL has a strong presence, they are more likely to enjoy school, less likely to be distracted and disengaged, more likely to feel accepted and inclusive of their schoolmates, and more likely to do better academically. (SEL4NJ)

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What SEL or SEL-related initiatives already exist in my school?

Are there stigmas associated with SEL in my school that would need to be broken down before it can be advanced?

What are common life challenges my students face?

What are ways I already support students' social emotional growth in my classroom?

What SEL skills would be most beneficial to build in my classroom?

How will SEL need to be adapted for my students so it is developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant?

How can I build routines to help me become more in tune with my students' needs?

How can I be intentional about creating a classroom environment where each student will experience belonging?

How can I engage the school, family, and broader community more intentionally and deeply?

## STUDENT REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are skills I learn in school that are not on a test and will benefit me for the rest of my life?

What are ways that my school makes me feel welcomed?

What are ways that my school makes me feel unwelcomed?

What are ways my school could facilitate a space that better sets me up for success?



## RESOURCES:

[casel.org](https://casel.org)

[sel4us.org](https://sel4us.org)

[place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/](https://place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/)

# Social Emotional Learning *and* Music Education



## WHAT IS IT:

Music IS social. Music IS emotional. Musical SEL capitalizes on the power of music education to help students build the competencies of IDENTITY (self-awareness & self-management), BELONGING (social-awareness & relationship management), and AGENCY (responsible decision-making). SEL should facilitate a space for students to practice and explore core values, shared agreements, and student learning goals intentionally embedded into musical instruction. It should never feel like “one more thing” or a box to check; it should feel like deep music teaching that connects to students’ lives.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Music educators often work with the same students in class for multiple years, positioning them well to positively impact students’ individual growth.



The most conducive environment for SEL is one that includes positive developmental relationships. Music education can provide contexts for those relationships when norms for collaboration and creativity in a safe environment are established.



Musical experiences can help us connect with deep emotions. Music can even elicit measurable physiological responses, providing students the opportunity to reflect on the influence emotions have on their physical and emotional states.



Music programs involve school staff, families, and local communities, supporting alignment of the parties necessary to support social emotional development.

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are the most important life skills I learned from my K-16 music education?

What about music education makes it unique to help me and my students build relationships and develop social emotional skills?

How do I model my own commitment to SEL growth and how do I share that with students?

How can the process of music-making build social emotional skills?

How do traditional pedagogical approaches in music education potentially pose challenges to building social emotional skills?

What are the outcomes I would like to see from embedding SEL into my music classroom?

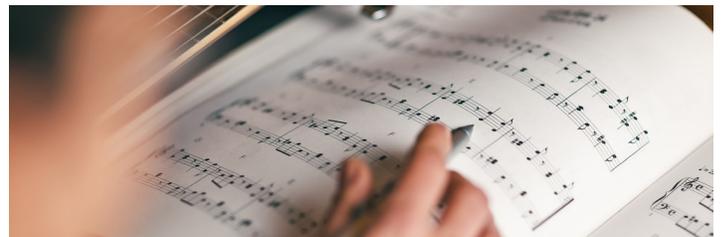
How can I ensure that no student disengages from learning in my classroom?

## STUDENT REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What makes me love music and music class?

How do I feel most welcomed in music class?

How comfortable do I feel singing or playing my instrument alone or in small groups in front of my music class?



## RESOURCES

[education.musicforall.org/sel/](https://education.musicforall.org/sel/)

[artsedsel.org/](https://artsedsel.org/)

[artsedsel.org/wp-content/uploads/JUNE-2021-HotA\\_Final-for-Web.pdf](https://artsedsel.org/wp-content/uploads/JUNE-2021-HotA_Final-for-Web.pdf)



# Impactful Implementation

## WHAT IS IT:

For SEL to be most impactful, music educators plan for implementation that is embedded, intentional, and sustained.

## EMBEDDED

Embedding SEL into the musical process and product results in SEL instruction that is musical, and advances SEL along with musical objectives. When student musicians see themselves reflected in curriculum, scaffolded learning experiences in music become an invitation to explore identity, belonging, and agency in meaningful ways.

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How does SEL connect to and influence the creative process?
- Where do I see natural connections to social emotional learning within my current practice?
- When have I observed others modeling social emotional learning in their teaching practice?
- How will I ensure that my students can incorporate their cultural assets and knowledge to advance their social emotional development and learning objectives in music?

## INTENTIONAL

Intentional implementation of musical SEL includes purposeful and thoughtful incorporation of SEL into the musical process, and will influence both the creation and presentation of student musicians' works. Explicitly naming SEL connections within the artistic process can help student musicians to identify how SEL informs their musicianship, and also help them to understand how social emotional competence developed through music learning can be applied in other contexts.

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How can I create more opportunities to model SEL and explicitly name SEL connections using common vocabulary?
- How can I help students better understand how to apply musical SEL in a variety of different contexts?
- What strategies and approaches can I employ to ensure SEL will have a direct influence upon the creation and presentation of students' work?
- What classroom norms and routines can I create to ensure all students feel affirmed and valued?

## SUSTAINED

Sustained artistic SEL requires progressive, sequential, and regular musical SEL facilitation in the music classroom that builds both musical and social emotional competencies. When music educators make instructional choices that model musical SEL, their instruction reflects the value of social emotional learning as an important element of music education, while accelerating students' social emotional development and affirming student voice.

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How is SEL currently used in my planning for classroom instruction and experiences?
- How is SEL interwoven into classroom routines and musical instruction?

## RESOURCES:

- [artsedSEL.org/](https://artsedSEL.org/)
- [artsedSEL.org/wp-content/uploads/JUNE-2021-HotA\\_Final-for-Web.pdf](https://artsedSEL.org/wp-content/uploads/JUNE-2021-HotA_Final-for-Web.pdf)
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- [place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/](https://place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/)

# Core Pillars of SEL Skills

## Identity



### WHAT IS IT:

When connected to students' lives, the SEL core competency of SELF (self-awareness and self-management) becomes more focused on understanding and exploring identity. Who are we, what have been our experiences, and how do those inform our beliefs, mindsets, goals and biases? The perseverance needed to dedicate oneself to musical excellence fosters resilience both in and out of the music classroom. Musical creation can foster self-awareness and allow students to develop a greater sense of identity, autonomy, and emotional vocabulary. Musicians learn the necessity of personal goal-setting, self-assessment, and accountability as they develop personal goals for music-making and themselves.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Compared to other students, those with high music engagement, exhibit higher levels of self-concept in how they see and value themselves, their abilities, and their achievements. Music education experiences are connected with students believing in themselves. This provides a strong foundation to explore IDENTITY further.



Success in music depends on resilience, as the ability to self-monitor one's progress and delay gratification in the pursuit of excellence. Regular and sustained practice leads to increased abilities in performance skills and positive self-evaluation. These inspire further practice when students experience these successes as explicit intentional learning (metacognition).

### TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does the K-16 music education I received look the same/different from what I provide my students?
- How does my identity differ from that of my students and what impact might that have?
- How can I meet students where they are and use music education to have meaningful conversations?
- How and when do I seek to learn about my students, their interests, and their cultural assets?
- How and when can I help students solve challenges in their lives?
- How do I help students develop high expectations for themselves?
- How do I incorporate emotional check-ins during my classes?
- How do I create a healthy work/life balance for myself?
- How comfortable am I being vulnerable with my students?

### STUDENT REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are my musical strengths and needs?
- Do I "see" myself represented in the materials presented in my music education classroom?
- When have I learned most about myself in the music classroom?
- How do I define my identity? My musical identity?
- In what ways does music help me to identify my emotions?
- What are the core values of my music classroom?
- How am I encouraged to keep going when I am challenged by the music?

### RESOURCES

[artsedSEL.org/wp-content/uploads/May-2021-HotA\\_Final-for-Web.pdf](https://artsedSEL.org/wp-content/uploads/May-2021-HotA_Final-for-Web.pdf)

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[nafme.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NAfME-SEL-Brochure-for-music-educators-March-2021.pdf](https://nafme.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NAfME-SEL-Brochure-for-music-educators-March-2021.pdf)

# Belonging

## WHAT IS IT:

The core competency of OTHERS becomes centralized on creating safe and brave spaces for belonging. Are our music classrooms safe spaces for all of our students to be vulnerable and to take risks as they pursue their musical dreams? The relationship built between music teachers and students over multiple years of instruction fosters the caring environment necessary to help build school connectedness, foster empathy, and provide a sense of belonging. Collaborative music classrooms build connections between students, facilitate community engagement, and uplifts and celebrates the cultural assets of students. Music classrooms necessitate vulnerability and facilitate a space where students can explore, tinker, envision, and grow.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Cooperative music-making experiences which occur in group settings can positively impact students' skills for empathetic thinking and actions.



Music classes incorporate community-advancing activities which provide students with opportunities to express themselves, interact in new ways, and work collectively, practicing and developing interpersonal skills such as collaboration, communication, and conflict resolution.

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do I help students develop empathy for each other?
- How do I focus on creating safe spaces for all students?
- How do I experience a sense of belonging?
- Is my music classroom safe for students to be vulnerable?



## STUDENT REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do I feel a sense of belonging in my music classroom?
- Are there times I do not feel a sense of belonging in my music classroom?
- How do I feel supported by my peers and music teacher to be my best musically and personally?
- What is something that I am an expert at in my music classroom?
- How are relationships built in my music classroom?
- In what ways does music help me to understand and empathize with others?

## RESOURCES

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[nafme.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NAfME-SEL-Brochure-for-music-educators-March-2021.pdf](https://nafme.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NAfME-SEL-Brochure-for-music-educators-March-2021.pdf)

[place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/](https://place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/)

# Agency



## WHAT IS IT:

The core competency of RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING expands to ensure that our students' voices are heard, amplified, and can affect change in classroom, school, and community contexts. The collaborative music classroom welcomes discussions, nurtures acceptance and embraces diversity resulting in a greater sense of agency toward meaningful change. Student voice is amplified through the musical process facilitating an experience to develop efficacy. The musical process necessitates editing of the musical product. This process builds student capacity to hone their beliefs and become flexible to represent themselves in true, concise, and meaningful ways.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Musicianship encourages responsible decision-making in many ways: Student musicians depend on each other to be on time, prepare for performances, and to act honorably as ambassadors of their community.



Music classrooms can be a space for more than engagement. Students can be empowered to make meaningful change.



Empowerment is not something that teachers give, it is what happens when students' voices are amplified and are given choices.

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are meaningful ways my students can have a more impactful role in the music classroom?

How is diversity embraced and amplified in my music classroom?

How does student voice impact decisions being made in the classroom?

How do students contribute to the musical process and product?



## STUDENT REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How does my voice affect meaningful change in your classroom, school, and community?

What are ways that I would like to have an impact on my music program and school?

What is a unique contribution that only I can add to my music classroom?

What have I learned creating or performing music that would help me to overcome challenges?

How does this learning help me to accomplish my goals in music education?

How does this learning help me to accomplish other goals in my life?

## RESOURCES

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# The Framework for Arts Education *and* Social Emotional Learning

## WHAT IS IT:

The Arts Education and Social and Emotional Learning Framework is designed to illuminate the intersection between arts education and social emotional learning to allow for the intentional application of appropriate teaching and learning strategies, with the overarching goal of enhancing arts education. Arts educators often address different aspects of SEL in their everyday practice either through individual or across multiple competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). In some cases, these competencies are addressed in an implicit way, without making explicit connections to the visual and performing arts standards. This Framework is the result of careful consideration of the synergistic connections between the five SEL competencies (CASEL) and the eleven anchor standards in the visual and performing arts (National Core Arts Standards).



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



This crosswalk culminates in the creation of enduring understandings and essential questions melding SEL and the arts. The essential questions (EQs) and enduring understandings (EUs) that resulted from a detailed crosswalk provide a clear understanding of these connections.



The Framework provides arts educators a greater understanding of how SEL connects to and influences the artistic process. The Arts Education and Social and Emotional Learning Framework is designed to empower arts educators to intentionally embed social emotional learning.



The Framework is a tool that can help educators shape learning experiences and ensure that specific social emotional skills are intentionally being addressed at a developmentally appropriate level, thereby enriching and deepening the arts learning.



There are many right ways for educators to engage with the Framework to benefit their students. Exploration and getting to know the Framework will help make it organic to individual teaching styles and contexts.

## TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What does intentional, embedded SEL mean to me?

How can SEL become something that is part of everything I do, not just a discrete part of the class period or day?

How do the EQs and EUs found in the framework resonate with work I am already doing in my classroom?

What area of SEL (IDENTITY, BELONGING, AGENCY) is the best place for me to start doing this work?

## RESOURCES

[artsedsel.org/wp-content/uploads/JULY-2021\\_HotA\\_Final-for-Web.pdf](https://artsedsel.org/wp-content/uploads/JULY-2021_HotA_Final-for-Web.pdf)

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[selarts.org](https://selarts.org)

# Framework Elements

## ARTISTIC PROCESSES

The way we make and learn about the arts.

The four artistic processes are creating, performing/presenting/producing, connecting, and responding (National Core Arts Standards).



## ARTS ANCHOR STANDARDS

Specific demonstrations of artistic knowledge and skill. There are eleven anchor standards that crossover and connect the five arts disciplines (dance, media arts, music, theatre, visual arts).



## SEL COMPETENCY

Characteristics (i.e., knowledge, behaviors) that lead to social emotional success.

The five SEL competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL).



## SEL SUB-COMPETENCY

Specific, learned abilities that are manifestations of the 19 SEL competencies.



## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Deep, overarching, open-ended questions guiding student learning.



## ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Statements summarizing important ideas and core processes that are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the classroom.



## GRADE BAND INDICATORS

Social and emotional skills and benchmarks that are developmentally appropriate for students.



# Composing Musical SEL In Your Classroom

Once you understand the fundamentals of musical SEL, you will find that it can be refined in numerous ways. And, over time, you will feel more confident designing learning experiences that are SEL-informed. The resources below can assist you in thoughtful implementation of SEL in the music classroom.

To learn more about professional learning opportunities and tools to embed SEL into your curriculum see:



## The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning (ArtsEdSEL):

The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning (ArtsEdSEL) is dedicated to illuminating the intersection between arts education and social emotional learning to facilitate the embedded, intentional, and sustained application of SEL-informed arts education.

[www.artsedsel.org](http://www.artsedsel.org)

## Student Empowerment Through SEL in Music Education Webinar Series:

The Save The Music Foundation provides teachers with access to a new professional development program specifically geared towards teaching music educators how to embed social emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom. Through a partnership with the Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning (ArtsEdSEL), the program will offer nine, monthly webinars.

[www.savethemusic.org/sel](http://www.savethemusic.org/sel)

## Teaching Social Emotional Learning Through Music Series:

Music for All sponsors this video and podcast series dedicated to making connections with experts in music education to SEL. Hosted by Dr. Scott Edgar, composers, educators, students, and music advocates come together to realize the potential of music and SEL together.

[education.musicforall.org/sel/](http://education.musicforall.org/sel/)

## Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music Series:

Dr. Scott Edgar has created four books targeted at helping teachers embed SEL into the music classroom. Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music (2017); Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music Workbook (2018); The ABCs of My Feelings and Music (2021); and Portraits of Music Education and Social Emotional Learning (2021).

[giamusic.com/store/mesel](http://giamusic.com/store/mesel)

## Building the SEL Classroom:

Dr. Yorel Lashley, at The University of Wisconsin–Madison Office of Professional Learning and Community Education (PLACE) supports educator professional learning through sharing faculty research, and proven practices. Explore their new course Building the SEL Classroom, which supports hands-on implementation for building your classroom into a SEL community of practice using the STAY framework.

[place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/](http://place.education.wisc.edu/k12-programs/building-the-social-emotional-learning-or-sel-classroom/)

The most powerful way to learn more about embedding SEL into music education is to develop a community of practice in your schools. Classroom-based SEL is powerful; however when seen across all levels of schools, culture-building happens. To stay connected and receive timely updates, join the ArtsEdSEL mailing list: [artsedsel.org/contact-us/](mailto:artsedsel.org/contact-us/)

**artsedsel.org**  
**savethemusic.org/sel**



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