

# Starting the Year Off with SEL-Academic Integration

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The beginning of the school year always brings a mix of emotions for educators and students — we may be excited to see our friends and colleagues, curious about what we learn, anxious about how well we do, and well a little sad that summer is winding down. As we think about starting the school year with SEL-Academic Integration, the first inclination might be to start with the students and what we are going to do for them. But I want to encourage you to start with YOU. Remember, we are learners too with our students. So even before your students enter the room, ask yourself, what do I bring with me to the classroom that I want to learn? What do I want to learn with my students? How am I going to learn with them? What do I need to work on so that I build meaningful relationships with my students, and I am attuning to my own wellbeing.

You can use this [self-assessment tool](#) I developed with colleagues to reflect on your own social and emotional competencies. For example, you might reflect on the on the degree to which you engage with each of the following strategies:

- I reflect on how my emotions influence my interactions with students. (self-awareness)
- I am able to get calm (e.g., stop, think, act) or stay calm when I have a strong emotional reaction in the classroom (e.g., stress, anger). (self-management)
- I am concerned about and pay attention to how my words, actions, and behaviors influence my students. (social awareness)
- I use collaborative problem solving with my students when issues arise in the learning environment. (relationship skills)
- I reflect on my own assumptions/biases as well as external factors when making decisions that affect my students. (responsible decision-making)

Once you have connected with yourself as a learner, now it's time to think about how to connect with your students. And we know there are always fun activities to get to know your students at the beginning of the year and ensuring their voices are heard. But how are you setting them up with skills they need to continue to build those relationships and use those relationships to successfully learn throughout the year? I encourage you to read this [brief on 10 educator practices that promote social, emotional, and academic development](#). This brief provides strategies that help you think about ways in which you can create equitable and inclusive learning environments, not only at the beginning of the year, but maintained throughout the year. Specifically, we provide a taxonomy that includes four approaches on how SEL and academics integrate with one another:



- Explicit skill alignment – a direct link exists between academic standards and social and emotional skills.
- Explicit strategy alignment – a direct link exists between content specific practices and social and emotional skills needed to engage in those practices.
- Ways of interacting – students use a variety of social and emotional skills to engage in instructional tasks.
- Ways of being – students use social and emotional skills differently in different content domains.

So, as you begin your back-to-school planning, don't forget to be *intentional* in thinking about you AND the ways that you build relationships with yourself, your students, and your colleagues through SEL-academic integration strategies.