



The Research Basis for Ori Learning's SEL Curriculum

Emotional Well-Being Curriculum • Grades 6–12

How the lessons are designed, the research they draw on, and what a third-party study of the high school curriculum found.



Includes a third-party study of grades 9–12

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At a Glance

Ori Learning's Emotional Well-Being Curriculum is an SEL curriculum for grades 6–12. It teaches students to understand their emotions, manage stress, build healthy relationships and make responsible decisions. This document sets out the research the lessons are built on and what a third-party study of the high school curriculum found, so that districts can review it and cite it.

7

grade-level courses,
one for each grade
from 6 to 12

175

lessons, 25 in each
grade

20 min

core lessons, with
extension activities

84

pre- and post-
assessments

The 84 assessments are a pre- and post-assessment for each of the 7 courses (14) and each of the 35 units (70).

Five CASEL Competencies, One Unit Each

The alignment shown here is Ori Learning's own mapping of its units and lessons to the CASEL framework.

Every grade has five units, one for each competency in CASEL's framework. Each unit has four core lessons and an end-of-unit project. Themes return each year with more depth, and grade 12 looks ahead to life after high school.

CASEL COMPETENCY	WHAT STUDENTS WORK ON	SAMPLE LESSONS
1 Self-Awareness	Identity, strengths, values, beliefs and aspirations	My Identity (6) · My Voice (7) · My Values (10) · My Future Self (12)
2 Self-Management	Emotions, stress, habits, procrastination and goals	Handling Stress (6) · Overcoming Procrastination (8) · My Goals (11)
3 Social Awareness	Perspective-taking, empathy, respecting differences and recognizing bias	Taking Perspective (6) · Empathy (9) · Uncovering Bias (11)
4 Relationship Skills	Friendships, communication, boundaries and conflict resolution	Fitting In (6) · My Boundaries (8) · Resolving Conflict (10)
5 Responsible Decision-Making	Peer pressure, saying no, learning from mistakes and big decisions	How to Say No (7) · Peer Pressure (9) · Taking Healthy Risks (12)

Sample lesson titles, with grade in parentheses.

Every lesson title is public in the scope and sequence, so families, teachers and board members can see exactly what students learn.



The Learning Theories Behind the Lessons

Each row shows a line of research and where it appears in what students do. Evidence from the curriculum itself is on page 5.

Positive psychology

Seligman (2002)

The research: Well-being grows from strengths, positive relationships and a sense of meaning, not only from the absence of problems.

In the lessons: Students identify their strengths and values, for example in “Finding My Strengths” (grade 6) and “Knowing My Strengths” (grade 9). Gratitude is one of the most frequent topics across grades.

Growth mindset

Dweck (2006)

The research: Dweck’s research describes how students who see ability as something that develops with effort and good strategies respond differently to challenges and setbacks.

In the lessons: Grades 6 and 9 each have a lesson called “Growth Mindset”. The idea returns in “Making Mistakes” (grades 6, 8 and 11) and “My Potential” (grade 12), where students practice treating setbacks as a chance to learn.

Cognitive behavioral theory

Beck (1993)

The research: Thoughts, emotions and behaviors influence one another, and changing how we interpret a situation can change how we feel and act.

In the lessons: Students look at how their thoughts, emotions and actions connect, and use that to choose how they respond to stress, conflict and decisions.

Social learning theory

Bandura (1977)

The research: People learn many behaviors by observing others, talking with them and practicing together.

In the lessons: Students learn from one another through class discussion, collaboration boards (in 159 of the 175 lessons), realistic scenarios such as “Peer Pressure” (grade 9), and end-of-unit projects they can share (35 in all).

Mindfulness

Kabat-Zinn (1994); Hölzel et al. (2011)

The research: Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In a study of adults, an eight-week program was linked with changes in brain regions involved in learning, memory and emotion regulation (Hölzel et al., 2011). This is research on mindfulness in general, not on this curriculum.

In the lessons: In “Making Space” (grade 7) and “Acceptance” (grade 10), students learn why pushing emotions away can backfire, and practice noticing and accepting them with the RAIN technique.

Flexible ways to teach

Teachers choose among three delivery options, lesson by lesson, to fit their class and schedule.

Front of Class

Project the lesson and lead a whole-class discussion.

Live Participation

Students respond on their own devices while the teacher sets the pace.

Self-Paced

Students work through lessons independently, at their own pace.



How the Lessons Are Built: Instructional Frameworks

Four instructional frameworks shape how each lesson is put together and how students take part.

Universal Design for Learning

Rose & Meyer (2002); CAST (2024)

The research: Learners differ in how they take in information, stay engaged and show what they know, so instruction should offer more than one way to do each.

In the curriculum: Nine activity types give students different ways to take part and respond, and teachers can choose among three delivery options. Built-in access tools include text-to-speech, translation into 136 languages, speech-to-text and zoom, with settings saved for each user.

Formative assessment

Black & Wiliam (1998)

The research: Black and Wiliam's review found that gathering evidence of learning during instruction, and using it to adjust teaching, is one of the most effective ways to raise achievement.

In the curriculum: Pre-assessments show where students start each course and unit, and post-assessments show where they finish (84 in all). Admin reports compare the two. Interactive questions and reflection prompts throughout each lesson show teachers how students are thinking.

CASEL's SAFE practices

Durlak et al. (2011)

Effective SEL programs are Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit.

- **Sequenced:** lessons in each unit build on one another, and themes return each year with more depth.
- **Active:** students discuss, collaborate, respond to scenarios and complete projects.
- **Focused:** each 20-minute lesson focuses on skills within one CASEL competency.
- **Explicit:** each lesson states the skills it targets, and unit pre- and post-assessments check them.

The 5E instructional model

Bybee (1997)

Lessons move through five phases, and extension activities give students more ways to go further.

1. **Engage:** spark interest and connect to what students already know.
2. **Explore:** students investigate the idea directly.
3. **Explain:** introduce key ideas and vocabulary.
4. **Elaborate:** apply the idea to new situations.
5. **Evaluate:** check understanding.



A Third-Party Study of the High School Curriculum

A recent third-party study following ESSA Level III standards looked at 1,829 students in grades 9–12, taught by 15 educators in a suburban New Jersey high school district, during the 2023–24 school year. It compared well-being scores among students who completed different amounts of the curriculum, controlling for prior academic achievement and classroom influences.

Grades 9–12

1,829 students

2023–24 school year

ESSA Level III (promising evidence)

MAIN FINDING • GRADES 9–12

Students who completed all 25 lessons had well-being scores **11% higher** than students who completed 5.

Other findings

- Students who completed unit projects had well-being scores up to 6% higher than students who completed none.
- Completing more extension activities and responding to more reflection questions were also associated with higher well-being scores.

The findings were statistically significant ($p < .05$) and consistent across grades 9–12. The study covered the high school curriculum only.

Source: Hunt, A., & Styers, M. (2025). *Ori Learning (2023–24) ESSA Level III report*. Instructure. [Read the study summary \(PDF\)](#).

Field Context: What Research Says About SEL Programs in General

These studies look at school-based SEL programs as a whole. They are not results for Ori Learning's curriculum.

- **Durlak et al. (2011)**: a meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programs found that participating students' academic performance was 11 percentile points higher, on average, than that of comparison students.
- **Cipriano et al. (2023)**: an updated meta-analysis of more than 400 studies of universal school-based SEL programs found benefits for students' social-emotional skills, behavior and academic achievement.
- **Taylor et al. (2017)**: a meta-analysis of follow-up studies found that benefits of school-based SEL programs were still present months to years after the programs ended.



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See every lesson title in the scope and sequence, or request a demo of a lesson from the grade you teach, at orilearning.com/emotional-well-being-curriculum.

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