NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

A Practice Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens

Ron Berger, Sheldon Berman, Joshua Garcia, and John Deasy

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, & ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

ABOUT THE COMMISSION AND THIS PRACTICE AGENDA

The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development was created to engage and energize communities in re-envisioning learning to encompass its social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions so that all children can succeed in school, career, and life. The Commission's members are leaders from education, research, policy, business, and the military. The full Commission team includes a Council of Distinguished Educators (CDE), Council of Distinguished Scientists (CDS), a Youth Commission, a Parent Advisory Panel, a Partners Collaborative, and a Funders Collaborative.

This Practice Agenda was informed by the CDE's previous document, *The Practice Base for How We Learn*; the CDE's collective knowledge and expertise as leading practitioners focused on supporting the whole learner; and the experiences and perspectives of the many schools and communities that are engaged in this work. It also has been revised with the suggestions of a wide variety of reviewers.

This document features practice recommendations that seek to provide a framework through which key voices within schools and communities—students, teachers, families, after-school and youth development organizations—can work together to create learning environments that foster the comprehensive development of all young people.

In addition to this Practice Agenda, the Commission has released three related reports: *A Research Agenda for the Next Generation* developed by members of the CDS; *A Policy Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens* developed by the Commission's policy subcommittee; and the Commission's culminating report, *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope*, which reflects key points from all three agendas. All of these documents, and related resources, can be found on our website at **www.NationAtHope.org**.

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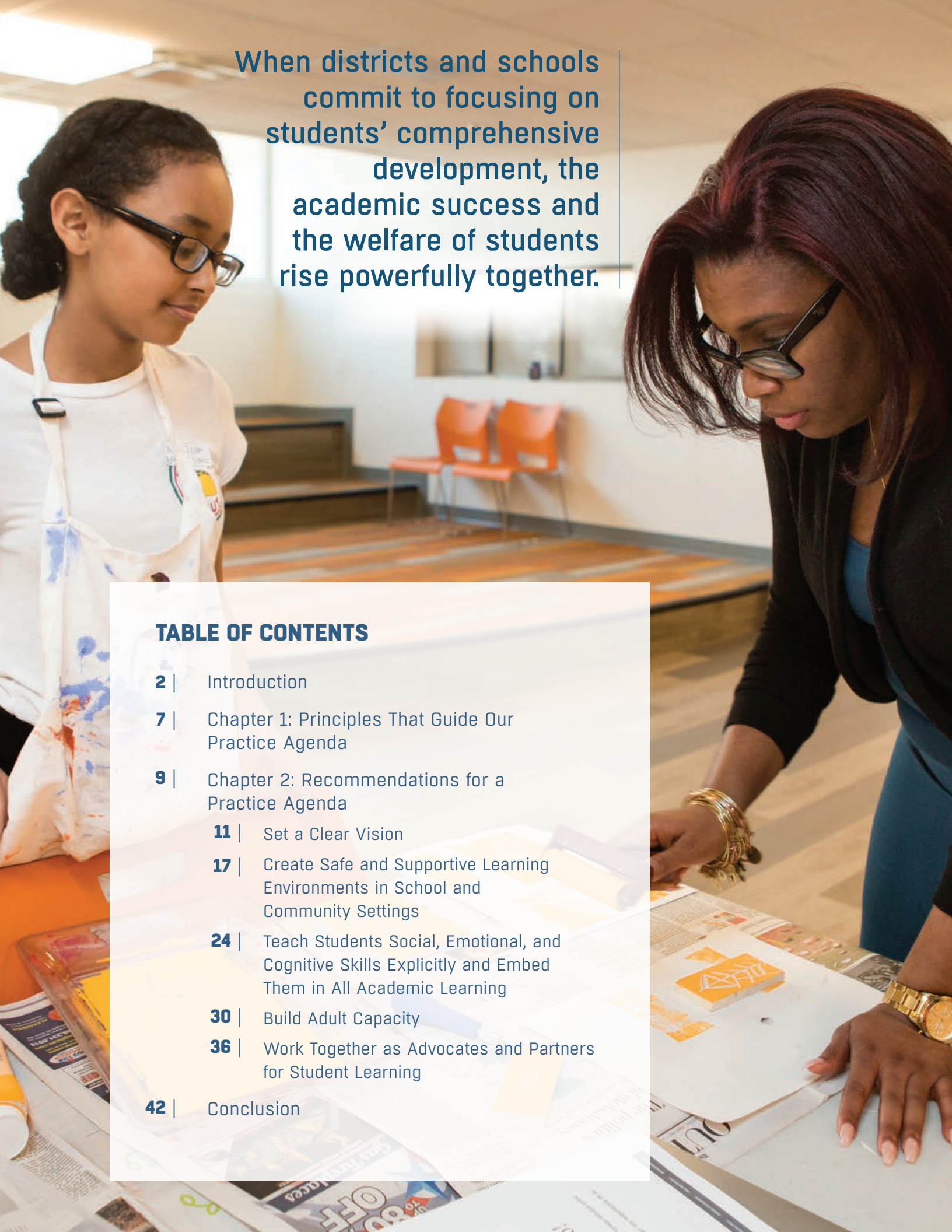

When districts and schools commit to focusing on students' comprehensive development, the academic success and the welfare of students rise powerfully together.

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INTRODUCTION

On the front lines of education, students, families, communities, and educators are demanding a more balanced approach to our vision of learning: One that recognizes learning is always social, emotional, and academic, and these strands cannot be teased apart. One that goes beyond test scores in reading and mathematics to an authentic picture of what it means to be a successful graduate—with the academic and social skills and good character to become a positive, contributing member of society with a productive and fulfilling life. One that reflects what all families want—that children of all abilities and backgrounds are recognized, engaged, and supported.

There is abundant evidence that when districts and schools explicitly and meaningfully commit to focusing on students' comprehensive development as a central part of their academic growth, the academic success and the welfare of students rise powerfully together.[1]

More than two decades of research across a wide range of disciplines—developmental psychology, economics, and learning and brain science—demonstrates that learning has social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. We now know that students will make far more progress academically when they're given the opportunity to learn in environments where these skills are recognized as mutually reinforcing and central to learning. We also know that these skills grow over time, are influenced by one's lived experiences, and are best facilitated through relationships.

A range of programs and approaches that intentionally foster the whole child are achieving results, increasing students' academic achievement and their ability to get along well with others, persist at hard tasks, and believe in themselves as effective learners and individuals.[2] Young people with stronger social, emotional, and cognitive competencies are more likely to enter and graduate from college, succeed in their careers, have positive work and family relationships, better mental and physical health, reduced criminal behavior, and to become engaged citizens.[3] Similarly, employers recognize that it doesn't matter how much workers know if they can't work well in teams, communicate clearly, and grapple with difficult problems.[4]

The Evidence Base for How Learning Happens

The evidence base[5] demonstrates that there are a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits that are embedded in and support learning. These generally fall into three broad categories: (1) *skills and competencies;* (2) *attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets;* and (3) *character and values*.

Skills and Competencies—shown toward the center of the figure on page 4—represents approximately a dozen specific behaviors that decades of research and practice indicate are important. Though they are interrelated, these can be organized into three areas: cognitive, social, and emotional.

Cognitive skills and competencies underlie the ability to focus and pay attention; set goals, plan, and organize; and persevere and problem solve.

Social and interpersonal skills and competencies enable children and youth to read social cues and navigate social situations; negotiate and resolve conflicts with others; and cooperate and work effectively on a team.

Emotional skills and competencies help children and youth recognize and manage their emotions; understand the emotions and perspectives of others; and demonstrate empathy.

Importantly, these skills and competencies develop and are used in dynamic interaction with attitudes and character traits—shown in the second ring in the figure.[6] **Attitudes, Beliefs, and Mindsets** includes children's and youth's attitudes and beliefs about themselves, others, and their own circumstances. Examples include self-concept and self-efficacy, and motivation and purpose. These types of attitudes and beliefs are a powerful influence on how children and youth interpret and respond to events and interactions throughout their day.

Character and Values represents ways of thinking and habits that support children and youth to work together as friends, family, and community and encompasses understanding, caring about, and acting on core character traits such as integrity, honesty, compassion, diligence, civic and ethical engagement, and responsibility.

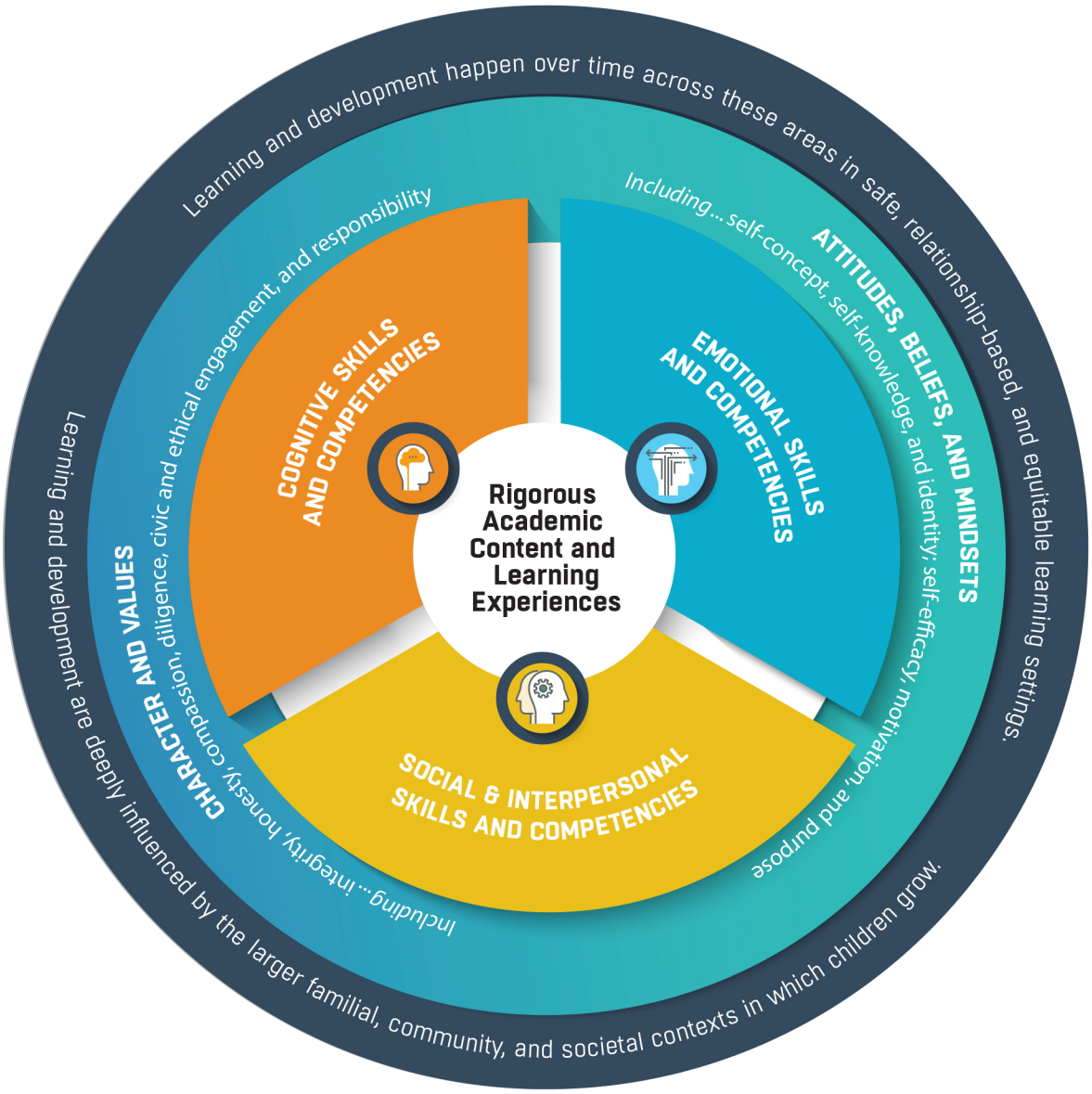
These multiple dimensions of learning are inextricably linked. They develop interdependently and are often processed in the same parts of the brain.[7] When educators integrate social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning into classroom culture and instructional practice, the learning environment shifts to one that best supports student learning. And when children and youth possess a full array of these skills, attitudes, and character traits, they are better equipped to prosper in the classroom and to engage in **Rigorous Academic Content and Learning Experiences**.[8]

What This Looks Like in Schools and Communities

In the past two years, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development has visited schools and programs across the country that are putting this research and practice into action. These learning settings have developed a broader vision of student success, and they have supported it by focusing on three essential elements.

First, children and youth are intentionally taught social, emotional, and cognitive skills—such as how to resolve conflicts and work in a team, recognize and manage emotions, weigh evidence and problem solve, and plan and manage their time. Today, many programs and approaches that intentionally develop such skills are showing promising results.[9] For example, teachers may use role-playing activities to practice relationship skills. Specifically, students might discuss playground scenarios and practice

Evidence Base for How Learning Happens



COGNITIVE

Including the ability to:
- Focus and pay attention
- Set goals
- Plan and organize
- Persevere
- Problem solve

SOCIAL & INTERPERSONAL

Including the ability to:
- Navigate social situations
- Resolve conflicts
- Demonstrate respect toward others
- Cooperate and work on a team
- Self-advocate and demonstrate agency

EMOTIONAL

Including the ability to:
- Recognize and manage one's emotions
- Understand the emotions and perspectives of others
- Demonstrate empathy
- Cope with frustration and stress

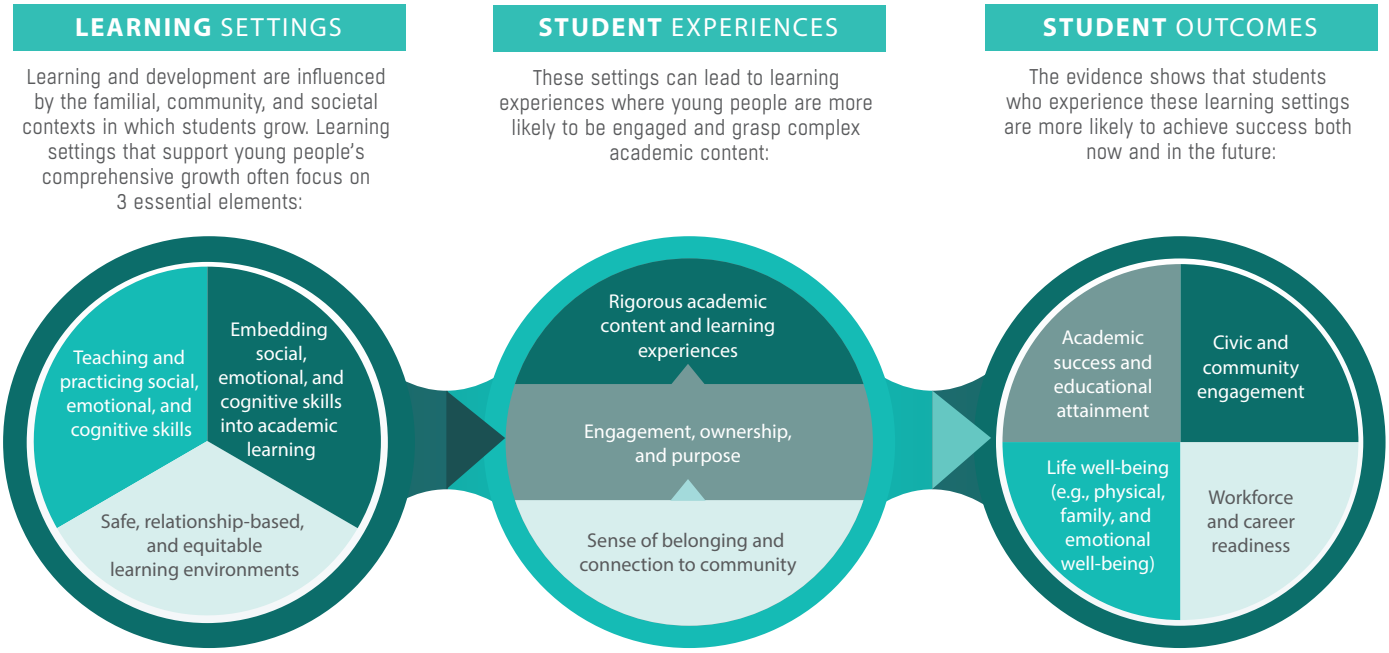
asking to join a game or using problem-solving steps to resolve a conflict that arises during recess. Educators could similarly have students focus on these skills in advance of a cooperative group project by talking about the different roles each person would play and anticipating possible challenges. *What if we don't agree? What will we do? What if one person is doing all the work or one person isn't engaging at all? How will our group manage these situations?*

Second, students are asked to exercise these skills as they learn academic content and in their interaction with peers and adults throughout the day. How we learn depends on experience and use.[10] It's not enough to teach specific skills if students do not have opportunities to develop and apply them on a regular basis. For example, if "mathematical courage" is explicitly taught and valued, students are emboldened to take positive risks—by asking questions, making mistakes, presenting their thinking, and receiving suggestions from their peers—all of which enhance their learning of mathematics.

An emphasis on these capacities supports rigor and challenge in learning. Schools must ensure that students exercise the full complement of social, emotional, and cognitive skills, not only in academic subjects like mathematics or reading, but also in enrichment activities such as sports, music, and the arts, and in how students and adults interact with each other, whether in the hallways or in the cafeteria.

Third, students have equitable access to learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe and that feature meaningful relationships among and between adults and students.[11] For example, students help develop classroom and school norms that are followed by everyone in the building. And there are structures and practices in place, like morning meetings, teams of teachers who share a cohort of students, mentorship programs, and advisory groups that enable every student to be known well by at least one adult. A respectful learning environment models and reinforces the

What This Looks Like in Schools and Communities



PLEASE NOTE

As we use the term **educator** throughout our recommendations, we include the following individuals unless otherwise specified: classroom teachers; school administrators and district-level staff; school librarians; paraprofessionals; specialized instructional support personnel (including but not limited to counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other related services personnel); non-instructional school staff members (including but not limited to coaches, custodial staff, cafeteria staff, and school office staff); as well as youth development professionals working in and out of schools.

Additionally, as we use the term **student**, we include children in grade levels preK-12, spanning all physical, emotional, social, psychological, and cognitive abilities; all socioeconomic, regional, and familial backgrounds; all races, ethnicities, languages, tribal status, and nationalities; all genders, identities, and orientations; and all religious and spiritual affiliations.

development of students' social, emotional, and cognitive skills throughout the school day, not just in a single program or lesson. Respectful learning environments in schools also model and reinforce the norms set and followed by other learning settings that partner with schools.

As illustrated on page 5, these three elements are the hallmarks of a learning experience where children and youth are **engaged**, have a sense of **ownership**, and find **purpose** in their learning. They also learn to see themselves as **contributing members** of their school and broader community. Most important, they are likely to **grasp difficult academic content** and concepts, because the instructional practices and learning environments reflect what we know about how people actually learn.

Some argue that school is not the place to build social and emotional skills and habits—to foster good character—that this is the realm of families or faith-based institutions. But the reality is that schools are already shaping the skills, dispositions, and character of students all day, every day. The experience of schooling communicates our expectations of how people will relate to and treat each other. Therefore, we need to construct environments that model the behaviors we want to foster in students. School environments encourage students to be either more respectful, responsible, compassionate, and resilient or less so. We can embrace the role that schools play in students' learning and development and do it intentionally and meaningfully, or ignore it and do it poorly.

Equally important is the role that families and out-of-school-time organizations play in the development of young people. We must build on the strengths of students and their families and work collaboratively with them to create positive learning communities. Learning settings need to recognize, embrace, and capitalize on students' and families' strengths and assets. As educators, we must build on students' existing competencies and work to create environments where they can thrive, targeting additional supports where needed.

CHAPTER 1: **PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR PRACTICE AGENDA**

The process for developing our practice recommendations began with the Commission's critical learnings and understanding of the education landscape following school site visits; consensus-building processes with leading researchers and educators; as well as panels and discussions with teachers, students, families, and community leaders across the country who reflect diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. Efforts to support the whole learner need not—indeed, should not—look the same everywhere because they need to be developed in partnership with young people, their families, and their communities. However, they should be grounded in the evidence base and adhere to the following cross-cutting principles that undergird the practice base for how learning happens.

Academic Success is Central

Educators and families are often concerned that time and resources spent to foster social and emotional skills in students will detract from academic growth. Research makes clear that just the opposite is true. When students build their social and emotional skills—become more resilient, responsible, empathetic, and collaborative as learners—their academic success rises in concert.[12] These skills are also vital for success in college[13] and match what employers prioritize most.[14] There is no tradeoff here: students' learning dispositions are tied to academic success.

Elevate Student and Teacher Voice

No matter how smart the program or approach, integrating social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning will never succeed unless students and teachers value the work and take it seriously. If the work is seen as a top-down requirement—a mandate that teachers must deliver and students must follow—they may be compliant, but they will not put their hearts into it, and will certainly not live its values all day long. It is essential that student and teacher voices are involved continually in shaping the work and finding ways to make it their own.

Prioritize Equity

Good intentions to develop the whole child mean nothing if they are not grounded in a fierce commitment to equity. In an equitable education system, each and every young person has access to the resources, supports, and educational rigor that they need in their education, spanning all physical, emotional, social, psychological, and cognitive abilities; all socioeconomic, regional, and familial backgrounds; all races, ethnicities, languages, tribal status, and nationalities; all genders, identities, and orientations; and all religious and spiritual affiliations. This is particularly true for children of color and children from low-income families, who have been disproportionately tracked into less rigorous coursework and systematically provided with fewer resources and harsher discipline practices.[15]

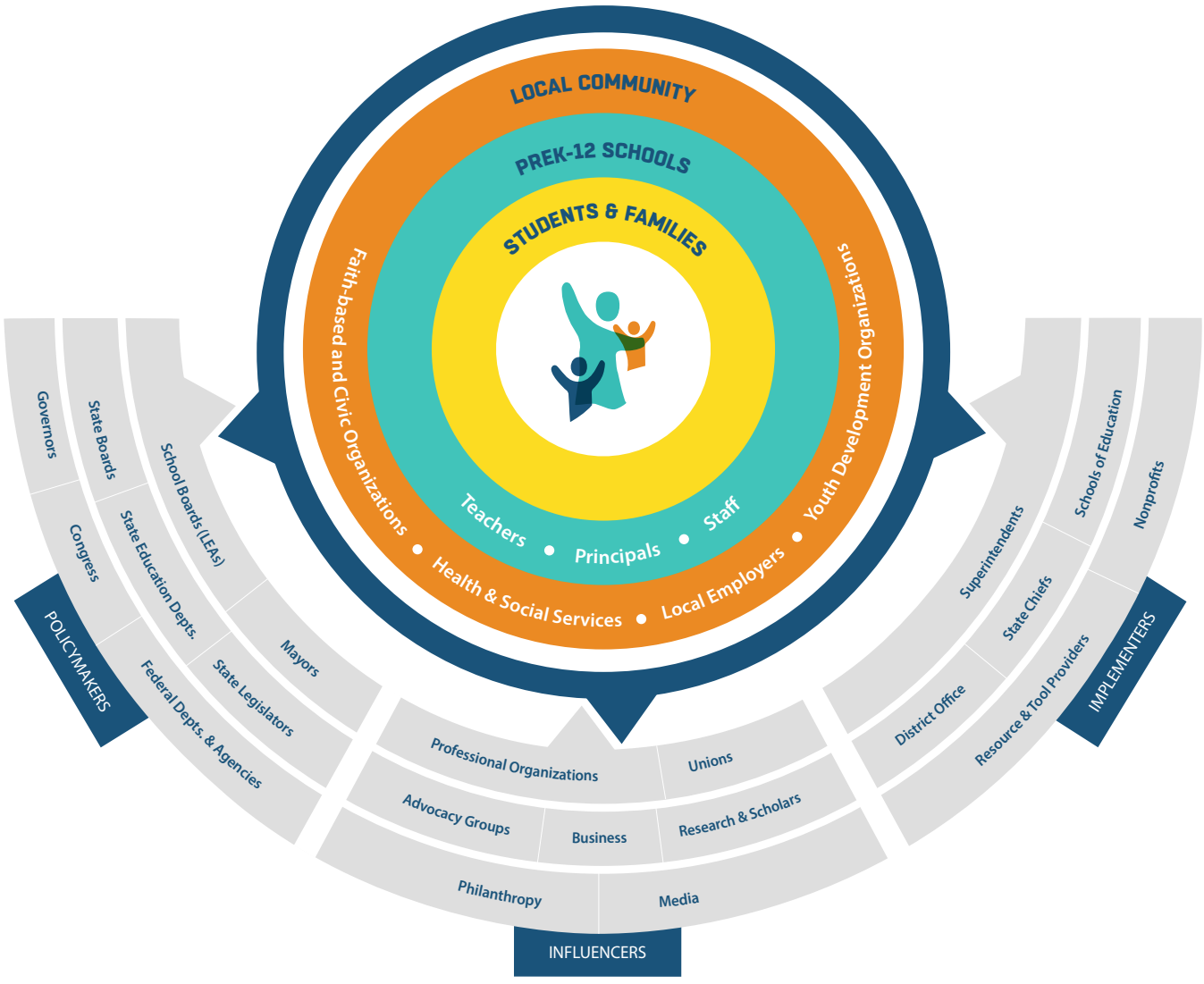
Focus on Relationships

No policy or program is more important than school culture. The safety net that protects students and lifts them toward success is actually a web of relationships. The way teachers and administrators interact with each other and with students, facilitate relationships among students, and model positive relationship-building plays a critical role in students' sense of belonging, emotional safety, ability to collaborate with peers, and identities as learners. When implementing a whole-child approach to learning within a community, success will depend on building trusting relationships among students, families, school staff, and community organizations.

Build Local Ownership

Communities need to make this effort their own and find ways to work together toward common goals. This is never an easy task. Each community, organization, school district, and school possesses a different culture, works with a distinct local context and student demographic, faces a different set of issues, and moves change forward in different ways. Change efforts need to recognize that no single policy, program, or initiative will automatically fit everyone. Change involves planning, and it also entails improvising and enabling local people to innovate and make the change their own. Uniformity is not the objective, but to the degree schools and youth-serving organizations in a community can find common ground—can agree on shared language for student outcomes or can collaborate in service of youth—it will help students' experience be more aligned and positive.

PreK-12 Education Ecosystem



CHAPTER 2: **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A PRACTICE AGENDA**

Our practice recommendations highlight schools as a central opportunity for developing the whole child. However, creating learning environments in schools that deeply integrate the social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of learning and development must be viewed as a shared responsibility of all the voices and capacities within the community. As illustrated in the figure on page 8, families, youth-serving organizations, social workers, counselors, mental health providers, and civic and faith-based organizations provide a major source of expanded capacity to support the work of educators in schools and classrooms. We must reach beyond the schoolhouse to embrace the broader community and to recognize both the formal and informal opportunities for learning and enrichment that fully support young people in their development. Community organizations also are vital partners in creating multi-tiered systems of support that can help address real challenges in children's lives—including physical and mental health problems, learning disabilities, discrimination, violence, homelessness, and hunger. In this way, capacity building becomes a joint venture across all the individuals, organizations, and institutions that serve young people. In short, the integrated nature of learning requires an integrated, community-wide approach to supporting children's education.

Efforts to integrate students' social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning should not be viewed as a new initiative. Rather, it is a rebalancing of preK-12 education to focus on the broad set of social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competencies that each and every student needs to be a lifelong learner, productive worker, and engaged citizen.

Our practice recommendations seek to provide a framework through which key voices within schools and communities—students, teachers, families, after-school and youth development organizations—can work together to create learning environments that foster the comprehensive development of all young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recognize that different communities will need different entry points for this work. Some communities may prefer to start by building adult capacity; others may view community partnerships as a critical first step. With the exception of beginning by setting a clear vision for students' comprehensive learning and development, we do not present the recommendations in sequential order. We also acknowledge that varying contexts and needs require different solutions. Thus, we offer specific strategies underneath each of the five broad recommendations as ideas for how communities can pursue a more integrated approach to student learning and development. We are not suggesting that communities pursue every strategy. Finally, schools and districts, along with their community partners, already have significant work underway that can and should be leveraged and amplified. We provide some of these compelling examples to illuminate our practice recommendations.

I. Set A Clear Vision

Articulate and prioritize a clear vision of students' comprehensive development that reflects the interconnection of the social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning.

II. Create Safe and Supportive Learning Environments in School and Community Settings

Create child- and youth-centered learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe, that respect all cultures and serve people equitably, and that foster meaningful relationships among and between adults and young people.

III. Teach Students Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Skills Explicitly and Embed Them in All Academic Learning

Use evidence-based practices that intentionally develop social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competencies in all young people. Provide regular opportunities throughout the day to integrate these skills and competencies with academic content in all areas of the curriculum.

IV. Build Adult Capacity

Provide opportunities for school faculty and staff, families, after-school and youth development professionals, and future professionals still in university pre-service programs to learn to model and teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills to young people across all learning settings, both during and out of school.

V. Work Together as Advocates and Partners for Student Learning

Unite districts and schools, youth development and community organizations, families and young people, higher education institutions and professional associations to create a cohesive preK-12 education ecosystem that supports students holistically.

RECOMMENDATION I: **SET A CLEAR VISION**

District, school, and youth development leaders—in partnership with students, families, educators, and the local community—should articulate and prioritize a clear vision of students' comprehensive development that reflects the interconnection of the social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning.

Many, if not most, of our nation's most successful schools are distinguished by having a clear shared vision that permeates the school culture: you know right away what this school is about, and the staff are on the same page. Students fortunate enough to attend such a school can experience a coherent set of messages across classrooms and grade levels; they do not need to hope to get "the right teacher" in order to find the guidance they seek. Even more powerful is when the vision of the school is informed by and supported by parents and youth-serving organizations in the community. When that is the case, every aspect of student learning becomes more aligned.

It is our charge as adults—particularly educational and community leaders—to work together across school staffs and the community to forge common language for the outcomes we hope all students will achieve. This is not an easy process. There will need to be compromises in ideas and language to build this shared vision of what we value. But the hard work is worth it. The more we can be coherent and clear about what we are aiming for, the more our students will grow as scholars and as people.

STRATEGY

ALIGN AROUND A SHARED VISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS. Schools, districts, and youth development organizations can align their visions, missions, values, and corresponding strategic action plans and budget priorities with a profile of student success that explicitly addresses their comprehensive development. This vision of successful learning and development can be co-constructed and shared broadly to facilitate the continuity of strategies across the school day, after school, on evenings and weekends, and during the summer.

The education sector is replete with disparate and fragmented initiatives. Alignment around a central vision creates clarity and coherence in the system, which enables principals and teachers to prioritize and focus their work. As systems strive for greater alignment, it's important that they continue to take the voices of teachers, youth development professionals, and students into account because of their first-hand knowledge of how school, district, and organizational policies affect them and what they need in order to

succeed. Teachers and other youth-serving professionals cannot focus on the whole learner unless they are explicitly given time and agency to do so. A district policy supporting the development of social and emotional skills is meaningless if teachers feel that they will get in trouble if they deviate from academic test preparation. Staff must be confident that school and district leadership support them to use core instructional time to instill and reinforce these capacities in students as discrete skills and as embedded in academic learning.

District, school, and youth development leaders can:

- Develop vision, mission, core value, and belief statements that combine social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic outcomes.
- Include specific targets in strategic plans to ensure that these goals are a priority.
- Empower and support staff members to make the vision real in their daily work.
- Develop a leadership structure that clearly identifies responsibility and support for this work at district, school, and organization levels.
- Ensure that these goals are priorities across the board in: human capital; teaching and learning; curriculum and assessment; professional development; support programs in English language learning, special education, gifted and talented education, Title I, etc.; and internal and external partnerships with families, community organizations, businesses, and postsecondary educational institutions.
- Communicate—internally and externally, through many avenues and on an ongoing basis—the value and importance of developing the whole child.

IN PRACTICE

THE TACOMA WHOLE CHILD INITIATIVE is a decade-long strategic plan designed to support student success in the classroom and beyond. With some 29,000 students, Tacoma Public Schools is the third-largest district in Washington State. In 2010, just 55 percent of the district's students were graduating from high school, and the district was struggling to engage students, reduce classroom disruptions, and put many more students on a pathway to college and careers. District leaders, together with the University of Washington-Tacoma, decided that to close achievement gaps, they needed to address the comprehensive needs of Tacoma's children and youth in partnership with the broader community. That led to an extensive set of conversations with leaders of the city's civic, business, civil-rights, after-school, and higher education communities. "We asked them, 'What will success look like, and what evidence will you accept in order to determine if we are successful?' " said Deputy Superintendent Joshua Garcia.

The result was an initiative built around four overarching goals for Tacoma's youth: academic excellence, partnership, early learning, and safety. Aligned to the four goals are 35 measurable benchmarks, ranging from performance on state tests to the percentage of middle and high school students enrolled in extracurricular activities. Together, the goals

and benchmarks compose the district's approach to supporting each student's social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning and tracking progress.

This clear vision, common language, and transparency about results have been essential to Tacoma's citywide approach to supporting its youth, which engages everyone from the mayor's office and city council, to the departments of parks and health and human services, to local foundations, and to youth development groups like the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs. So far, the results have been encouraging. In 2018, the on-time graduation rate was 89 percent. The district has also had significant decreases in chronic absenteeism and tardiness and increases in verified college acceptances and in the number of students earning industrial certificates.

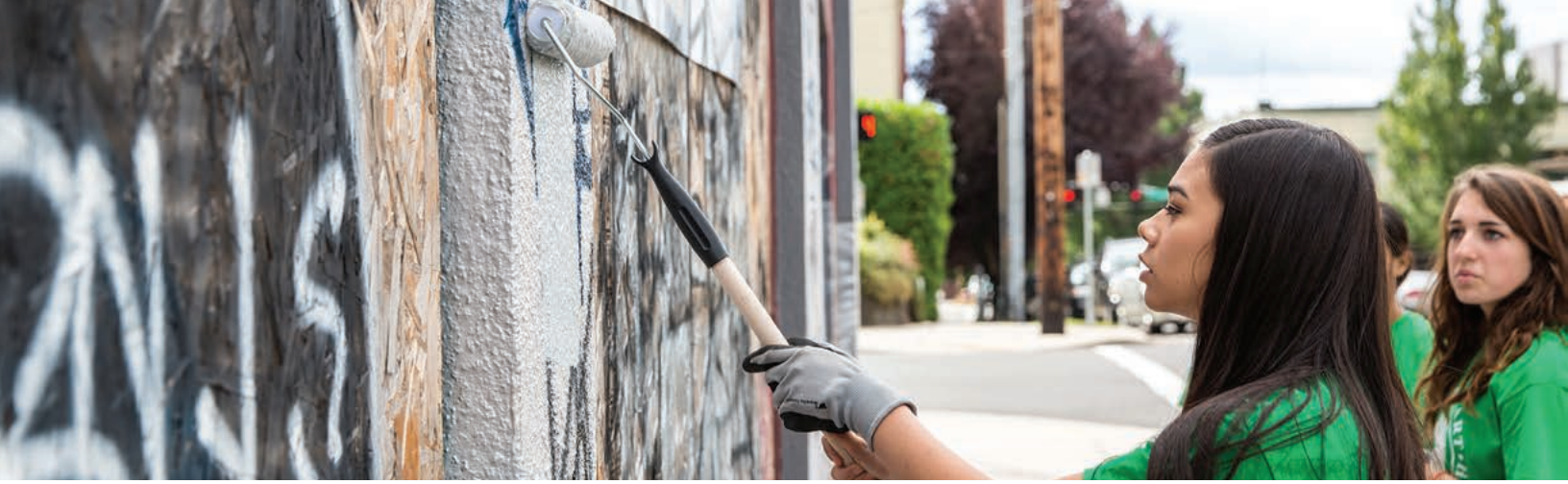
STRATEGY

IDENTIFY LEARNING OBJECTIVES. Schools and districts can identify developmentally appropriate social, emotional, and cognitive learning objectives and align them across youth-serving organizations to provide a coherent learning progression from preK through grade 12.

Social, emotional, and cognitive skills develop and change over time, beginning in the earliest years and continuing through childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood. This progression, in which some skills contribute to the development of more complex skills later on, points to different stages of education when particular competencies become more relevant. This suggests that certain skills should be taught before others, within specific grade or age ranges, and that instruction should be developmentally sequenced and age-appropriate.[16] Thus, young children need support to identify and manage their emotions and focus their attention. During adolescence, when students can deeply explore and expand their personal interests and are developing their identities as learners and as members of their schools and wider communities, they continue to build on these skills while other skills, including self-efficacy and agency, become more salient. Of course, students vary greatly in how they progress and develop, and this progression needs to honor and be responsive to young people's cultures, backgrounds, languages, and achievements.

District, school, and youth development leaders can:

- Incorporate learning objectives for social, emotional, and cognitive skills within existing academic standards or, alternatively, identify standards that specifically target social, emotional, and cognitive competencies.
- Adopt multi-tiered systems of support for learning that address the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and students who need additional academic interventions or individualized help to meet social, emotional, and cognitive learning targets.



IN PRACTICE

THE SACRAMENTO SCHOOL DISTRICT IN CALIFORNIA has developed curriculum maps for English Language Arts and mathematics that explicitly identify skills related to social, emotional, and cognitive learning, such as being able to collaborate, persevere in solving difficult problems, develop viable arguments, and critique the reasoning of others. Social, emotional, and cognitive learning skills also are embedded in the district's profile of a college- and career-ready graduate.[17]

THE WASHOE COUNTY, NEV., PUBLIC SCHOOLS have chosen to develop separate standards for social and emotional learning, focused on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. Staff members at each school attend a three-day training session on culture and climate, evidence-based programs, student voice, and the integration of social and emotional learning into academic content. Students demonstrate listening skills, empathy, and other competencies as they work in pairs, small groups, and as a whole class.[18]

STRATEGY

FACILITATE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations can use measures to track progress and to facilitate capacity building and continuous improvement of efforts to support the whole learner.

Measures such as climate and culture surveys and other indicators such as attendance and student discipline provide an indication of the types of learning environments we are offering students and can help to monitor progress and to inform decision making and action. Schools and districts can work with youth development organizations and other out-of-school settings to learn from one another's history and experience in measuring program quality in order to foster better alignment across sectors. Individual measures of students' holistic development can be considered for purposes of supporting student growth and continuous improvement, but should not be used for individual or school accountability.

District, school, and youth organization leaders can:

- Identify specific criteria for high-quality classroom, school, and community learning environments.
- Clearly and intentionally communicate these learning environment criteria to school leaders, classroom and youth development educators, as well as families and students.
- Employ measures such as climate and culture surveys involving students, families, and staff, and school quality assessments to evaluate progress toward achieving identified learning environment goals.
- Examine whether and how policies that are designed to support the whole learner are effective across all student populations in order to better target areas for action, intervention, and investment.
- Incorporate performance on progress measures in staff decision making relative to instruction, allocation of resources, and professional development.
- Ensure that survey responses and similar data are used for continuous improvement, and are not tied to identifiable students.

IN PRACTICE

FOR THE PAST SIX YEARS, THE CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL, A DISTRICT OF 16 PUBLIC MAGNET SCHOOLS IN THE GREATER HARTFORD AREA, has been using the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory to assess the learning environment across its schools, which were designed to further voluntary racial integration among students living in Hartford and the surrounding communities. CREC uses the results for annual school improvement planning. In past years, schools across the district scored relatively low on students' feelings of social and emotional security. "We think that just because we put children from different backgrounds together, kids are just going to get along and love each other," said Elaina Brachman, the assistant superintendent for the district. "That's not realistic." As a result of the surveys, the district mandated the Second Step curriculum in its elementary schools, to build students' social and emotional skills, and gave schools permission to adjust their schedules to find time for that instruction. Now, some middle schools have started to use the curriculum as well. This school year, the district has begun to administer the surveys in the fall, instead of in the spring, so that school-based positive behavioral interventions and supports coaches can use the data to make mid-year adjustments. "I believe that social-emotional learning is as important as reading and writing," Brachman said, "because a classroom teacher cannot instruct when they don't have a safe and respectful community in their classroom."

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND SCHOOL CLIMATE ARE EMBEDDED IN THE WORK OF THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS. Since adopting school climate standards in the 2014-15 school year, 88 percent of schools have completed a school climate self-assessment and 80 percent have used the results to build a school climate action plan

and to earn a "supportive school" certification. The district has also implemented a progressive disciplinary policy that limits the use of exclusionary practices, such as out-of-school suspensions, and provides staff with professional development to use more supportive disciplinary practices. That work is reflected in student outcomes. The graduation rate rose from just under 60 percent in 2012 to nearly 80 percent in 2017. Out-of-school suspensions have declined 76 percent and in-school suspensions 41 percent. Expulsion rates have dropped by 59 percent.

RECOMMENDATION II: **CREATE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SETTINGS**

District, school, and youth development leaders should create child- and youth-centered learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe, that respect all cultures and serve people equitably, and that foster meaningful relationships among and between adults and young people.

To focus on learning, both young people and adults must feel physically and emotionally safe in school and in other learning settings. In light of the incidence of bullying and school shootings in recent years, building safe learning environments that generate a strong sense of community and mutual support serves as a critical and primary prevention strategy. Although a focus on social, emotional, and cognitive development cannot in and of itself completely prevent school or community violence and bullying, it does constitute a significant and viable strategy for helping staff and youth develop the character, decision-making skills, and interpersonal relationships that can make schools and communities physically and emotionally safer for all.[19] A review of more than 206 studies found that the more supportive the school climate, the less bullying and other aggressive and violent behaviors occur in schools.[20]

A positive school climate is also associated with better academic outcomes. A review of 78 school climate studies found that a more positive school climate is related to improved academic achievement, beyond the level expected based on student and school income levels, and can help mitigate the negative effects of poverty on achievement.[21] A recent study by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that principals influence school achievement primarily through improvements in school climate.[22]

STRATEGY

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS. Districts, schools, classrooms, and youth-serving organizations can use structures and practices that foster positive, long-term relationships among staff, among students, and between students and adults.

Whether in schools or other youth-serving organizations, positive relationships between students and adults and among students themselves are foundational to learning.[23] These relationships are characterized by consistency, trust, and responsiveness and attunement

to each child's needs, which enable students to mature in progressively more complex ways.[24] Every student should have at least one adult in the building whom they know and trust. These relationships provide young people with the social and emotional support to overcome obstacles and to become confident, self-motivated learners.

Districts, schools, classrooms, and youth-service organizations can:

- Create schoolwide structures and practices that enable all children to be known well. This may include regular class meetings; mentor relationships with older students or adults; looping structures that allow students to stay with teachers for multiple years; teaching teams that focus closely on student needs; and advisory groups where a small team of students meets regularly with an adult advisor, ideally for multiple years, guiding and supporting each other.
- Enlist, train, and support faculty—teachers, administrators, counselors—to lead student advisory groups. Recruit a diverse array of adults—including faculty, support staff, and community members—to serve as mentors for individual students.
- Provide and prioritize ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators to support their own social and emotional skills and their ability to lead students' comprehensive growth. This professional learning has multiple benefits: it guides faculty in how to model and teach these skills; it strengthens the capacity and resilience of teachers; and it fosters a positive school culture.
- Support and hold all educators accountable for modeling social and emotional skills, holding this as central to faculty expectations, as a focus for school walkthroughs and for educator reflection and critique.
- Provide dedicated meetings and events, and allocate time in existing staff and team meetings, to cultivate positive and trusting relationships among adults.

IN PRACTICE

MORE THAN 30 PERCENT OF FRESHMEN WERE FAILING AT LEAST ONE COURSE WHEN HEMET HIGH SCHOOL IN THE SAN JACINTO VALLEY OF CALIFORNIA decided to do something radically different to help its incoming students. So, the 2,500-student campus began implementing the Building Assets Reducing Risks (BARR) model, which aims to ease students' transition to high school and increase achievement by creating cohorts of teachers who work closely with students to address both in- and out-of-school factors that can hinder student success. Now, every freshman takes his or her English, math, and science courses with the same group of about 110 students. Teachers in the three subjects share students, allowing them to work closely to monitor progress and identify personal issues that may get in the way of learning. The teaching team also shares weekly responsibility for engaging students in BARR's I-Time Curriculum, which develops students' social and emotional skills, such as communicating effectively and setting personal goals. "It's allowed the staff-to-student relationships to build, which

makes our instruction for our subject area a lot more meaningful," said Suzanne Arnold, the BARR coordinator at the school. "When you have those relationships, you work better and your management flows better because everybody has a type of respect for one another."

For persistently low-performing students, a team led by the school's marriage and family therapist meets to coordinate both internal and external supports. Teachers also regularly call and meet with the parents or guardians of students who need more support, so that educators and families can share successes, assess challenges, and work together more effectively.

Since the program began, the proportion of Hemet freshmen who fail at least one class has dropped from 32 percent to under 20 percent, while suspension rates have plummeted from 29 percent to 6 percent. The graduation rate has climbed to 94 percent, and achievement gaps between the school's white students and students of color are closing. Results from a rigorous, randomized control study of the model across a sample of schools nationally found similarly positive results, with improvements in test scores, credits earned, grade point averages, and overall failure rate.[25] The experience at Hemet has prompted the district to expand the program to three more high schools, and several neighboring districts also have adopted the model.[26]

STRATEGY

AFFIRM THE CULTURE AND BACKGROUND OF THE DIVERSE STUDENTS THAT SCHOOLS SERVE. Schools and youth development programs explicitly value and build upon the assets that students bring to their learning.

When students feel that their cultures, backgrounds, home languages, and other attributes are valued, it builds ties between school and students' outside lives, boosting their motivation and achievement and encouraging them to take the risks required to learn and grow.[27] A teacher's affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds significantly impacts their learning, belief in themselves as learners, and overall academic performance.

Schools and youth development organizations can support educators in delivering instruction and constructing learning environments that value their students' backgrounds. One strategy that builds these ties is culturally responsive teaching, which recognizes that culture strongly influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors that students and teachers bring to the instructional process, and encourages teachers to consider students' cultures within both the curriculum and their instruction.[28] Another strategy is to address stereotype threats,[29] which occur when young people receive societal or school-delivered messages that they are less capable due to their identity or background.

Providing equitable opportunities for developing the whole learner requires differentiating for individual student needs, while at the same time addressing systemic disparities in school settings. It's also important to guard against approaches that reinforce inequities, such that students with the least need benefit the most while the students with the most need are not given the necessary resources and support. There are individual students who remarkably overcome significant physical, cognitive, or emotional challenges or trauma—who transcend challenges of deep poverty, unstable homes, or language barriers despite all the odds. They are the exceptions. If we wish to give all children a good chance for success, we need to combine a focus on the whole child with equitable support for all, making strategies such as nutrition and health support, therapeutic counseling, accessible settings, universal design for learning approaches, culturally responsive teaching, conflict resolution, and community collaboration central to schools.

Districts, schools, and organizations can:

- Adopt equity policies that publicly acknowledge the value that differences in student background play in promoting learning and development.
- Provide relevant instructional materials and professional development that incorporate strategies for integrating cultural responsiveness with practices that support social, emotional, and cognitive skill development.
- Help teachers recognize and address their own implicit biases, including differential expectations for students based on race and ethnicity, social class, learning ability, religious affiliation, or any other difference.
- Implement universal design and multi-tiered systems of support to provide all students with access to rich learning opportunities and to ensure differentiated support for students based on their needs.

IN PRACTICE

COLUMBIA HEIGHTS EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA is a globally themed, bilingual campus that serves grades 6–12. Its students come from over 50 countries and it uses this diversity to complement a globally themed curriculum. Every grade explores a global theme, which ties together students' learning and builds their awareness of other languages and cultures. Beginning in middle school, all students become bilingual in English and Spanish through a dual language immersion program. Students are engaged in project-based learning and portfolio assessments that enable them to incorporate and build on the knowledge of their home cultures. The school focuses on social and emotional learning as a key part of the instructional program, equipping students to understand and respect diverse perspectives and backgrounds. In 2015, the *Washington Post*'s Challenge Index of America's Best High Schools recognized CHEC as the top public nonselective (non-exam) high school in the District of Columbia. In 2018, CHEC was one of 32 schools in the district to increase the proportion of students scoring in the top two levels on PARCC, the district's standardized tests, in both math and ELA. It also significantly reduced the percentage of students scoring at the lowest level and shrunk achievement gaps for English language learners.

STRATEGY

GO BEYOND DISCIPLINE CODES TO TEACH RESPONSIBILITY. Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations can make discipline and behavior management strategies part of a more comprehensive approach to developing the whole learner, rather than stand-alone initiatives.

Research demonstrates that restorative approaches to handling a wide range of conflicts in schools—approaches that teach students how to take responsibility for their actions and repair any harm that may have occurred—can lead to reductions in misbehavior, violence, and suspension rates and can improve the overall school climate.[30] Recent evidence also suggests that positive and engaging relationships between teachers and students may help prevent disruptive behavior. These studies indicate that schools serving low-achieving students—who are already less likely to be comfortable and engaged—must make intentional efforts to foster trusting, collaborative relationships as part of cultivating a safe school environment that is conducive to learning.[31]

We counsel against a number of problematic and common missteps to discipline and behavior management. Districts should work to reduce exclusionary policies and practices, such as zero-tolerance policies and suspensions for preK-12 students. Districts should clearly document and communicate their policies about infractions and consequences. It's also important to guard against practices, often unconscious, that reinforce inequities, such as using disproportionally strict behavior management with low-income or minority students.

District, school, and youth development leaders and educators can:

- Create, maintain, and model a code of character for the school or organization, used to affirm good behavior and understand and resolve poor behavior. A code of character lists positive character habits as expectations (e.g., respect, responsibility, empathy); it is not a code of conduct that lists negative behaviors (e.g., no swearing, no bullying). These character habits should be exemplified in the daily life of the classroom and school.
- Teach staff and students strategies to help them recognize and manage their emotions, cope with frustration, and resolve conflicts with others to reduce the need for disciplinary action.
- Create structures within the school or organization to cultivate positive behaviors and address poor behaviors, such as: school and class norms for behavior, regular class meetings to consider behavior, student presentations of learning that include behavior targets, peer mediation, conflict resolution, and restorative justice practices.
- Respond to misbehavior in ways that are developmentally appropriate, preserve the dignity of the child, and enable the child to heal relationships with adults and peers, rather than focusing on punishment. Frame and address lapses in behavior as *poor choices*, rather than someone being a *bad kid*.
- In addressing behavioral infractions, minimize exclusionary practices (e.g., zero-tolerance policies); minimize out-of-school suspensions, particularly for younger students; and closely track data of behavioral consequences for sub-groups to examine possible staff bias.
- Monitor discipline data and engage faculty in regular discussion to ensure that students' backgrounds, including race and ethnicity, social class, learning ability, or any other differences, are not factors that work against students in terms of discipline.

IN PRACTICE

IN 2007, FOLLOWING A SCHOOL SHOOTING, THE FORMER SUPERINTENDENT OF THE CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT required a comprehensive evaluation of the conditions for learning in the Cleveland public schools. The report found that harsh and inconsistent discipline practices and a lack of social and emotional role modeling by staff contributed to poor school climate and student misbehavior. One of the district's strategies for creating a safe and supportive learning environment was to replace the in-school suspension program with Planning Centers in every district building, preK-12.

In the centers, instructional aides help students to problem solve, and develop social, emotional, and cognitive skills that support appropriate behavior, reducing the need to be removed from the classroom. "We had to have a place that wasn't strictly punitive, that would keep our scholars in school," said Bill Stencil, a psychologist and Interim

Executive Director of the Humanware/Social Emotional Learning Department with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. “It’s a place where a student can go, de-escalate, talk about what happened, and come up with a better plan for the future on how to handle that situation and how to get back into the classroom.” Students can be referred by teachers, their parents, or themselves, if they need a place to cool off. Students bring their classwork to the center so they do not fall further behind. “The basis for all of our work is in social-emotional learning,” said Stencil. “How are we going to build trusting relationships that help us foster future interactions with whomever we are struggling?”

The Planning Centers are part of a larger districtwide focus on building adults’ and students’ social, emotional, and cognitive skills, including self-awareness, trusting relationships, social awareness, good decision making, and self-regulation skills. Since the district’s social and emotional learning initiative began, incidents of disruptive behavior, fighting and violence, and bullying have all decreased, as have out-of-school suspensions.

RECOMMENDATION III: **TEACH STUDENTS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE SKILLS EXPLICITLY AND EMBED THEM IN ALL ACADEMIC LEARNING**

Educators should use evidence-based practices that intentionally develop social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competencies in all young people and provide regular opportunities throughout the day to integrate these skills and competencies with academic content in all areas of the curriculum.

Districts and schools may debate whether it's best to cultivate the whole learner through discrete programs—either published or locally developed—or through embedding these skills into the instructional practices and classroom protocols of teachers throughout the school day. This is a false choice. Of course, the answer is both. There is a wide range of effective programs to teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills that provide frameworks and activities in developmental sequences, and many districts and schools have independently developed programs and resources to directly address these skills. However, if a stand-alone curriculum or program is the extent of the district's or school's commitment to developing students socially, emotionally, and cognitively—if students and teachers see these skills as a focus only on Tuesday afternoons, or in morning meetings, or in the 5th and 8th grades—there is little hope for real impact. Educators need to build on the framework for social, emotional, and cognitive development by focusing on those concepts and skills throughout the day, in classes, in extracurricular work, and in hallways and the cafeteria. When students and staff feel accountable to be their best selves and help others all day long—whether in science class or on the athletic fields—then social, emotional, and cognitive skills take root in the hearts and minds of the community.

STRATEGY

EXPLICITLY TEACH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE SKILLS. **Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations can create or select and use evidence-based instructional materials, practices, and resources that directly teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills.**

There are families, schools, faith-based institutions, and community organizations who do a remarkable job of helping children learn social, emotional, and cognitive skills and develop positive character habits—such as resilience, perseverance, compassion, respect, and collaboration. To ensure that every child is given guidance, support, and accountability in this domain, schools, districts, and youth-serving organizations can use research-based

programs to give educators the framework, language, lessons, and resources to cultivate these skills and habits in students. Anyone who has tried to help kindergartners stay patient, focused, and collaborative, or has tried to help adolescents be kind and welcoming to all of their peers, knows that these skills and habits do not come naturally to all children, and cannot simply be mandated: they have to be learned through a careful process.

Districts, schools, classrooms, and youth-serving organizations can:

- Choose to adopt in full, or to use selectively as a source for language, lessons, and resources, one of the many excellent, research-based frameworks and programs that are available. More important than which program is chosen is the extent to which the school and broader community implement the program with integrity and genuine buy-in, commit to using it deeply and well, and customize it to local conditions.
- Commit to create and continuously evaluate their own framework for whole-child development, drawing upon a number of different curricular and program resources to provide educators with the tools for teaching the skills.
- Make it very clear through words and actions that this is a priority. For any single or blended program to be effective, staff need to feel empowered and expected to put substantial time into learning it and using it with students.

IN PRACTICE

VALOR COLLEGIATE ACADEMIES, A NETWORK OF HIGH-PERFORMING PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NASHVILLE, helps students build a sense of personal agency through a self-paced, competency-based curriculum called Compass. Compass helps students "find their true north" by building social, emotional, and cognitive skills and purpose. This includes developing such core habits or character strengths as courage and kindness, determination and integrity, intellectual curiosity and diversity, and joy and identity. Over eight years, students work through a playlist of activities, exercises, and experiences, with individual coaching, and earn mini-badges along the way, much like in Boy Scouts. Compass is one of three core anchors at Valor, along with a commitment to be in the top one percent academically of Nashville public middle schools and to have a diverse and inclusive community. "We think strong social emotional learning work is also advantageous to kids doing well academically in school," said co-founder and CEO Todd Dickson. "Scholars in order to learn have to be vulnerable. By developing strong social emotional learning practices with our scholars, we build a lot of trust, so they're much more likely to get their hand up and go to their peers to ask for help because they are very comfortable being okay that they don't know everything."[32] The two Valor middle schools are in the top one percent for growth and achievement in the state of Tennessee.

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF OTHER POWERFUL EXAMPLES of programs that intentionally develop these skills. One resource is Character.org, which facilitates a yearly recognition of State Schools and Districts of Character as well as National Schools and Districts of Character. All recognized schools and districts excel in the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills and habits, and also academic performance, and credit their success to the fusion of these priorities. Another resource is the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) published guide of research-based programs that have a track record of success with schools and communities.

STRATEGY

EMBED INTO ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION. School leaders and educators can support and use instructional practices that provide regular opportunities to integrate social, emotional, and cognitive development into academic curricula and throughout the day.

A primary reason social, emotional, and cognitive skills are not prioritized in schools is that we view the development of these skills as distinct from academic learning: time spent on one detracts from time spent on the other. Given limited time, academics must be the focus. This assumption is entirely wrong. Academic learning is powerfully enhanced by the cultivation of social, emotional, and cognitive skills like problem solving and by character habits. Let's consider a specific example: the primary impediment to mathematical learning is the disposition of students—their attitudes and behaviors. When students learn to develop "mathematical courage" and a growth mindset for math, they are willing to take risks in their learning (by raising their hands and asking questions, making mistakes, presenting their thinking, and considering others' perspectives), and they learn mathematics much more capably.[33]

By teaching, discussing, and reflecting on these skills and habits while studying academic content, teachers can transform their classrooms into more productive and fulfilling environments. Practices that integrate social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning can immediately boost academic motivation and learning in classrooms throughout the day. When educators build lessons in all content areas that have explicit social and academic goals, there are opportunities for students to interact and collaborate. In order to construct meaning from these learning experiences, students will need skills that support their interaction and foster engagement. For example, by creating and upholding classroom norms and responsibilities, or using discussion protocols that involve all students and require respectful listening and thoughtful contribution, academic learning can be freed from many of the challenges of disengagement and social distraction.

School leaders and educators can:

- Combine professional development for all staff that is dedicated to the integration of social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning through a clear mandate to bring this focus into lessons across the content areas.
- Adopt strategies that impel students to be better people and better learners in the classroom. This could include the use of co-constructed classroom norms or responsibilities; learning targets that include character habits such as growth mindset, perseverance, respect, and collaboration; and lessons that include targets related to the development of the whole learner such as agreeing or disagreeing respectfully, exploring multiple perspectives, sticking with a challenging problem and staying on task, and reflecting on one's behavior.

IN PRACTICE

IN SPRINGFIELD, MASS., THE SPRINGFIELD RENAISSANCE SCHOOL focuses sharply on fostering the whole learner. Community commitments (courage, self-discipline, responsibility, respect, perseverance, cultural sensitivity, and friendship) and Habits of Work (I come to class ready to learn; I actively and collaboratively participate in class; I assess and revise my own work; and I complete my daily homework) are posted in every room and focused on in all academic lessons. Habits of Work are 20 percent of students' course grades. "So, it could be that today, we're going to be grappling with a difficult problem, so persevering and working hard the whole time is going to be what your how-to grade is based on," said Lindsay Slabich, an EL Education lead teacher at the school. "The teacher might name it in the beginning of the class and sometimes have students reflect on it in the debrief."

Character traits are more explicitly connected to academic content in middle school, so a teacher might intentionally talk about courage when students have to make a public presentation, or explicitly connect the community commitment to cultural sensitivity to a social studies unit on that topic. They're also a discussion topic in "crew," Renaissance's student advisory system, in which an adult adviser stays with the same group of 12 to 15 students from grades 6-8, and then grades 9-12. Meeting daily during first period, crew is a credit-bearing course with learning goals and targets focused on social and emotional learning and academic goal-setting, advising, and support. Students are intentionally given voice and choice in leading crew sessions and in student-led class meetings by grade level. Students also use the community commitments and work habits as reference points when assessing their own progress in student-led family conferences and during "passage portfolios," public presentations of their work before a panel of family members, community guests, teachers, and students, at the end of grades 8 and 10.

Of the school's 702 students, more than half come from households receiving some form of public assistance and enrollment is remarkably diverse: about 25 percent Black, 1 percent Asian, 50 percent Hispanic, and 22 percent white. In a public choice school with no selective enrollment, in an urban district that struggles with graduation rates, the Renaissance School's results are remarkable: 98 percent of students are graduating on time and 100 percent of graduates have been accepted to college for 10 consecutive years.

IN THE SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, the preK-12 mathematics curriculum is taught using the principles of "growth mindset," developed by Carol Dweck, a Stanford University psychologist. Students are helped to expect and embrace mistakes as learning opportunities. They are given time to reflect on their mistakes and try again. And they are encouraged to learn from one another. "The goal is to help students stay motivated in the face of challenging work," said Lizzy Hull Barnes, the district's math administrator. The curriculum, in use for five years, centers on the vision that "all students will make sense of rigorous mathematics in ways that are creative, interactive, and relevant." Barnes explained that the units that make up each grade's scope and sequence are built around rich math tasks designed to spur students' conceptual understanding, problem-solving skills, and procedural fluency. These take time to solve and require collaboration, multiple perspectives, and opportunities for students to communicate their reasoning. Practically speaking, Barnes said, the tasks are designed to allow for divergent ways of thinking and to support students' "productive struggle." "Math is notorious for being one of the subjects that turns kids off to school," she said. "If we can promote the idea that 'mistakes are gifts' and that you can learn from your mistakes, we can counter that outcome. It should be like we think of the process of revising writing in English class."[34]

STRATEGY

EMBRACE ASSESSMENTS THAT PRIORITIZE THE WHOLE LEARNER. District administrators, school leaders, and teachers can use holistic assessment systems that allow students to demonstrate their progress in multiple ways.

Families, students, and staff are acutely aware of what really matters in a school by the focus of time and accountability. In many schools, that focus is narrowly constrained to high-stakes test scores in two subjects. In contrast, when a student graduates from school and enters her adult life, she will be judged for the rest of her life not by test scores but by two things: the quality of her work and the quality of her character—the full complement of these skills and habits. How can districts and schools shift toward real-world needs? By focusing on the big picture of the children they serve, their backgrounds, strengths, and needs, and by embracing assessment structures that allow and compel students to share the big picture of their learning and growth. Special programs that target

students of particular need or challenge understand this: the best of those programs build as much as possible on the assets of each student and of the community, and address as fully as possible the range of their physical, emotional, and social needs to support their academic success. They create assessment structures to support and celebrate growth in all realms. All students in all settings can succeed more effectively with this kind of full support and accountability.

District administrators, school leaders, and teachers can:

- Require students, as happens in high-performing schools across the country, to present evidence of their strengths, challenges, and growth across academic subjects, extra-curricular areas, and social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Through structures like student-led family conferences and presentations of learning, students learn to own their education and reflect on progress and goals with their families or community panels. They present a range of evidence that they have met academic as well as social, emotional, and cognitive targets—class work, homework, tests, projects, testimonies, and reflections—and take charge of their academic and personal journey toward success.

IN PRACTICE

SHARE YOUR LEARNING IS A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN, COORDINATED BY THE SUCCESSFUL HIGH TECH HIGH SCHOOL NETWORK IN SAN DIEGO, that encourages students to share their learning with authentic audiences through presentations of classroom projects, student-led parent-teacher conferences, and panel presentations of their work to peers and adults. According to Share Your Learning, more than 1 million students in a wide range of schools across the country will be publicly sharing their learning with authentic audiences beyond the classroom this year. High Tech High created digital portfolios because its students work on projects—work that could not be adequately captured in traditional assessments and letter grades. Students update their digital portfolios regularly to collect evidence of learning goals they have achieved, as well as feedback and reflections on their work, and how they have used habits of mind, such as perspective, making connections, evidence, and relevance, to accomplish their goals.

RECOMMENDATION IV: **BUILD ADULT CAPACITY**

District, school, and youth development leaders should provide opportunities for school faculty and staff, families, after-school and youth development professionals, and future professionals still in university pre-service programs to learn to model and teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills to young people across all learning settings, both during and out of school.

To be effective, a whole-child approach must begin with adults. If our goal is for children and youth to learn to be reflective and self-aware, to show empathy and appreciate the perspective of others, to develop character and a sense of responsibility, and to demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior, educators—both in and out of school—need to exemplify what those behaviors look like within the learning community.[35]

School leaders and teachers will not respond well to top-down mandates to "deliver" a new curriculum and change their instructional approach if it does not make sense to them and they do not believe in it. The professional learning community of a district or school needs to be founded on respectful relationships where educators can work collaboratively to consider and adopt new programs and approaches, learn together, and effect change over time with a shared vision. Leadership must establish and sustain a healthy learning community for all staff members that mirrors the positive culture they work to build with students.

Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations can prioritize these competencies for all staff members in their hiring practices, orientation processes, and ongoing professional learning. All adults in schools and youth development organizations require professional training and collegial support both in understanding and modeling the competencies themselves and in teaching them to children and giving them opportunities to apply them. This professional support cannot simply be a summer workshop; there must be ongoing professional learning structures. This professional training begins in pre-service programs, whether they are in institutions of higher learning or professional associations, using curricula that prioritize human development. To sustain a healthy adult learning community, social and emotional skills and growth must remain a priority for all adults throughout their careers, with dedicated time and focus supported by leadership and embedded in school structures.

STRATEGY

INCLUDE ALL ADULTS. **All staff members—from teachers to counselors, from cafeteria managers to school social workers, and from principals to bus drivers—can commit to a shared vision for the whole learner, contribute to a respectful and inclusive learning environment, and model positive behaviors for young people.**

Every adult who interacts with youth and children plays a role in supporting and reinforcing young people's growth and development. However, not all staff members are aligned in their expectations, language, and support for students. It is important that all staff see themselves in this role, that they embrace and use a shared framework and language, and that they model the behaviors they want to cultivate in students.

Districts, schools, and youth development organizations can:

- Create and maintain norms for considerate, collaborative, and productive staff interactions and interactions with youth. Leaders and all staff members hold each other accountable for exemplifying these norms.
- Communicate the vision and organizational commitments widely, broadly, and often.
- Ensure that all staff members in all positions, from all backgrounds and orientations, feel welcome, included, and respected as contributing colleagues. Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations can provide structures and support for authentic relationship building and collaboration among adults, within and across schools and organizations.

IN PRACTICE

THE READING, MASS., PUBLIC SCHOOLS has trained adults across the community in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA). An evidence-based, international program, YMHFA trains adults similarly to medical first aid and CPR to identify the signs and symptoms of a young person in distress and to take the appropriate steps in providing aid until further help comes. A common language and expectations regarding typical child development, as well as ways to manage crisis and non-crisis situations, were spread throughout the community. The Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse (RCASA) spearheaded the project and pulled together school administrators and staff, police officers, town librarians, clergy, youth sports, and other representatives from across the town who interact with young people. Together, RCASA and the Reading school system trained 10 adults to become certified YMHFA instructors, who then proceeded to train more than 600 adults over the span of two years. Food service workers, bus drivers, teaching aides, librarians, coaches, teachers, administrators, specialists, counselors, police officers, and even parents and interested community members became certified first aiders, so that all students throughout their day would have access to at least one adult trained in YMHFA to build relationships and access support.

STRATEGY

RESTRUCTURE AND REFINE SYSTEMS FOR RECRUITING, HIRING, AND ORIENTING NEW STAFF TO PRIORITIZE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES. It is particularly important to recruit a diverse educator workforce that models good character and social and emotional skills and is deeply committed to leading the work of a whole-child approach to learning.

Policies for recruiting, hiring, and orienting staff need to reflect the values and characteristics of the district's vision for student success. Candidates for positions need to know that this is a priority and that it is valued as part of their work. Job descriptions, postings, and advertising can include language that identifies the need for skills and experience with whole-child approaches, attracting people who value that orientation and who can bring their skills, interests, and enthusiasm to this work. Organizations can expand their hiring processes to include questions and performance tasks that highlight the social and emotional competencies of the candidate.

Districts and schools can:

- Ask applicants to demonstrate the behaviors and skills needed for success in the position as part of the interview and hiring processes (e.g., teachers might conduct a demonstration lesson and participate in a grade-level planning meeting, cafeteria workers would serve lunch and interact with students and colleagues, school leaders could observe a video depicting a disciplinary situation and provide the narrative for next steps).
- Be transparent through consistent public messaging that the focus of the school or district on developing students' comprehensive skills requires candidates who are collaborative, respect the community of learners they will serve, and are able to demonstrate culturally responsive and inclusive instructional practices.
- Ensure that orientation to the school or district and mentorship structures for new staff prioritize social and emotional competencies.

IN PRACTICE

"EVERYBODY TALKS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PRE-SERVICE BUT IT'S HARD TO GET TRACTION," SAID NANCY LOURIE MARKOWITZ, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR REACHING AND TEACHING THE WHOLE CHILD IN SUNNYVALE, CALIF. The Center works with teacher preparation programs and districts to help faculty members, student teachers, and their cooperating teachers in schools learn seven core competencies that support social and emotional learning and culturally responsive teaching. These are: building trusting relationships, fostering self-reflection, fostering a growth mindset, cultivating perseverance, creating classroom community, practicing

cooperative learning skills, and responding constructively to conflict. For each anchor, the Center has identified sample teacher moves, such as reinforcing the "power of yet," as in "you can't do long division yet," to support student practice and effort. "Future teachers need an opportunity to examine their assumptions, to see powerful modeling, to get a lot of practice, and to try it out in the field and reflect in an interactive process," said Markowitz.

Working with the 6,700-student Sunnyvale School District, the Center has developed about a half-dozen sessions for cooperating teachers to become fluent in the teacher moves so they can model and support student teachers. During the training sessions, the student teachers take over their supervising teachers' classrooms, so the veteran teachers can learn new skills and concepts, try them out as homework, and adjust. According to Deputy Superintendent Michael Gallagher, student engagement rates are up and suspension rates are half what they once were. The district also has begun paying attention to the social and emotional well-being of all its employees. The preK-8 district has partnered with the Acknowledge Alliance to provide support groups and professional development for teachers, as well as a resilience counselor for teachers at the district's highest-need middle school. "We've learned you need to support the care and capacity of adults so that they can take care of kids better," he said.

STRATEGY

BUILD CAPACITY. Build the organization's internal capacity and the capacity of all adults interacting with students to be able to lead the integration of social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning. Create and follow a comprehensive implementation plan, and create professional learning structures that support the continuous learning and development of all staff.

All adults in schools and youth development organizations should receive professional training and collegial support both in understanding and modeling these competencies themselves and in teaching them to students and providing opportunities to apply them. This includes helping all staff members develop their own social and emotional competencies as adults, in order to better teach and model those skills for young people. It also involves maintaining a strong and positive adult learning community that promotes mutual trust, respect, and growth. Professional learning should also be designed and facilitated with a focus on equity, diversity, and cultural responsiveness.

Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations can:

- Create a plan and timeline for implementation of the integration of social, emotional, and cognitive development with academic learning for all staff, and include ongoing assessment of progress through surveys, observations, and outcomes.

- Examine the organization's current professional learning structures and practices against frameworks that promote a system of professional learning.
- Examine and expand the professional learning opportunities and expectations for new and veteran staff in regard to social and emotional skills.
- If internal district or school capacity is not robust to lead professional learning in this domain, partner with an external organization that has a proven record of successfully leading professional learning in social, emotional, and cognitive skills.
- Highlight demonstration schools or classrooms that allow observation of embedded and integrated social, emotional, and cognitive development practices across grades, subjects, and varied parts of the day.
- Provide structures for ongoing growth, reflection, and accountability for staff modeling and teaching of these skills (e.g., incorporate these competencies into educator evaluations, include as a regular part of meetings and professional learning communities).

IN PRACTICE

THE DENVER AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE partners with Denver Public Schools to make social, emotional and academic learning (SEAL) a priority. The partnership focuses on building students' self-awareness and self-management, social awareness and relationship skills, and decision making. Denver's SEAL Initiative builds the capacity of school and after-school program staff—through aligned professional learning, coaching, partnership, and collaboration—to cultivate socially, emotionally, and academically rich, high-quality learning environments.

Leveraging their expertise in positive youth development, the Denver Afterschool Alliance works with its out-of-school-time organizations at six schools to elevate afterschool programming and to cultivate a climate and culture conducive to supporting the whole learner. Out-of-school-time staff work alongside school-based SEAL coaches to develop and provide 30-minute bursts of social and emotional learning content to both school and after-school staff in joint professional development settings. Providing the opportunity for out-of-school-time staff to be seen as experts within the school space has created a deeper partnership and improved communications, which benefit students and their families.[36]

THE WILLIAM JAMES COLLEGE, IN NEWTON, MASS., offers a nine-month graduate certificate in school climate and social and emotional learning that helps school teams create an action plan for systemically embedding social and emotional learning into their districts. Districts pay to enroll a team (an administrator, two teachers, and a mental health professional) in the program, which combines on-line and in-person instruction. The team completes courses on social and emotional learning, which address: defining, assessing, and improving school climate; offering mental health supports and evidence-based programming in schools; and promoting systemic change.

In addition, team members complete practicum courses in which they develop a vision for their school, assess what's working and what's not, conduct a needs assessment of internal and external resources, and devise a three- to five-year action plan. College faculty and partners follow up with on-site visits and coaching. "The team ends up with an action plan that's not only a school action plan, but a connected district action plan, so they really see the result of their investment," said Margaret Hannah, co-director of the program. The program launched in fall 2017 with a cohort of five districts and is currently in its second year with another full cohort.

RECOMMENDATION V: **WORK TOGETHER AS ADVOCATES AND PARTNERS FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

Districts and schools, youth development and community organizations, families and young people, higher education institutions and professional associations should join together to create a cohesive preK-12 education ecosystem that supports the whole learner.

Learning does not begin with the first bell of the school day, nor does it cease when the final bell rings. Students are constantly using their experiences both in and out of school to shape their worldview, develop their sense of self, and deepen their knowledge and understanding. The more aligned we can make the messages they receive from the adults in the different sectors of their lives, the greater the sense of clarity and empowerment students can experience in finding pathways to success.

It is essential that families and caregivers are involved in the visioning process and in the setting of priorities, commitments, and frameworks for whole-child success. This requires that schools and youth development organizations work with families to promote their understanding of this integrated vision of student learning and success so that they can advocate more effectively for their children. This also requires actively engaging families, providing them with multiple on-ramps for involvement.

Community partners and local businesses also can play a crucial role—providing support for students to build and practice these skills in a range of settings, from in-school mentoring and classroom and school-wide services to out-of-school and summer programming. This can include opportunities for students to serve and participate in their wider community, such as service learning or work-based experiences.

Institutions of higher education and professional associations are essential to the preparation and continuing professional development of teachers, youth-serving professionals, and school and community leaders. Through collaboration on research and program evaluation, these institutions also can help schools and organizations effectively implement and continuously improve their efforts to support the children they serve.

STRATEGY

ENGAGE FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE EARLY AND OFTEN. When designing and implementing social, emotional, and cognitive development approaches, schools and community organizations should meaningfully engage families and the young people they serve by listening to their voices and involving them in opportunities to learn, lead, and shape the work.

Any school- or community-based effort to support the whole learner must begin with families and young people themselves. Educators in all types of settings need to understand families' and students' hopes and dreams, honor their cultures, and provide them with respect and appreciation. Insights from families and students can help shape the paths that schools and organizations take to prioritize and support young people's comprehensive learning and development.

It is vital that as schools and districts embrace these priorities and programs, families do not perceive this as a retreat from academic learning. All families from all backgrounds are concerned that their children be academically prepared, and if they see this focus as a tradeoff that diminishes academic success, instead of a way to enhance academic success, it will be difficult to create community buy-in. Involving families at the outset in understanding the advantages for their children with this approach—showing them success data and getting their input on the work—is crucial for building shared ownership.

District, school, and organizational leaders can:

- Include families and young people in both the planning and implementation of efforts to support students' comprehensive growth. This could include drawing from their perspectives when developing a vision of learning and student success, as well as soliciting their feedback on the best policies and strategies that foster social, emotional, and cognitive development.
- Communicate with families clearly, concisely, early, and often. To engage all families in their efforts to support the whole student, schools and organizations must be aware of cultural and linguistic needs in the community and communicate in ways that overcome those differences. In addition to leveraging traditional channels of school-home communication, weaving social, emotional, and cognitive development into evening events, parent-teacher conferences, field days, sporting events, and assemblies can help reach all parents.
- Provide family-oriented workshops and classes on child development, discipline, conflict resolution, etc., to address the connections among social, emotional, and cognitive development in learning opportunities for families. Offering families the chance to understand and to develop the same types of competencies as their children ensures a consistent family-school approach to building these skills.
- Encourage authentic family and youth participation and input through home visits, student-led parent-teacher conferences, mentoring and volunteering, and student and parent advisory opportunities.

IN PRACTICE

PRIOR TO EACH NEW SCHOOL YEAR, ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT HOLDS A KINDERGARTEN ORIENTATION for students and their families who are just beginning their school journey. Each teacher coordinates a time for individual families to come in and see the classroom. During these meetings, the family spends time getting to know the teacher and taking a tour of the school. This one-on-one exchange provides children with a sense of comfort, which helps them feel at ease within the school and allows the teacher to connect with the child in a personal way. It enables children to see a familiar face when they walk in on the first day and provides the teacher with valuable knowledge from parents about each child's strengths and areas of growth. The connections the teacher forms with both the child and the family during orientation help create a supportive learning environment. In 2018-19, Chinook Elementary used this time to talk with incoming families about the importance of attending school and the impact of missing school days. Anchorage School District's goal is to increase the attendance rate to 90 percent by 2020. By communicating this expectation and building relationships during orientation, the leadership team at Chinook hopes to see a meaningful increase in attendance during the 2018-19 school year.

IN 2010, CONNECTICUT PASSED AN ANTI-BULLYING LAW that required all schools to conduct an annual school climate survey of students, staff, and families in every grade. In an unusual step, the superintendent of **WESTBROOK PUBLIC SCHOOLS** asked the district's high school students to collect the survey data from the community and help make sense of the results. As an outgrowth of that work, the school created several elective courses for students—two on developing leadership skills, such as dealing with social anxiety and communications, and one on school climate, based on modifications to the Teen Leadership Curriculum. Over the past six years, fully a third of students have taken the classes and become resources for their peers, educators, and students across the district's elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition to continuing to analyze school climate results and propose solutions, high school students have done presentations to elementary and middle school students about the importance of empathy and kindness when communicating with others. They also convinced the board of education to include three high school students on the search committee that selected their current principal. "As a school, we're pretty tiny, so we all know each other," said Lexi Loplas, a student member of the school climate team. "So, it's really important that all the relationships that we uphold are good and strong with other students."

STRATEGY

ENRICH STUDENT LEARNING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS. Districts and schools can collaborate with community partners, youth development organizations, local businesses, universities, and professional associations to support students' learning and growth, both during and beyond the school day.

It may not be possible to get all the youth-facing organizations in a community—schools, after-school programs, clubs, athletic leagues, churches, health services, and countless other groups—on the same page with the messages they promote and the language they use, or working together to create a tight safety net for youth. When you add the organizations that train and support youth-serving adults, and future employers, it can be overwhelming to think of alignment and collaboration. This is a situation where the perfect should not be the enemy of the good. Any successful effort to build bridges across these organizations, to find agreement on common messages and language wherever possible, to work together in service of youth, will pay great dividends in the lives of children. Imagine the clarity and coherence in students' lives when they begin to hear the same vision in school as they hear in other parts of their lives, and when they see multiple organizations working together to support them. Building bridges and partnerships is not easy work, but it is vital work.

District and school leaders can:

- Designate staff and family volunteers to focus on coordinating, prioritizing, and integrating partners into the design, planning, and implementation of work to improve students' social, emotional, and cognitive development.
- Engage university partners in field research and evaluation of efforts to support students' comprehensive learning and growth.
- Tap into community resources and local businesses to provide students with meaningful opportunities to demonstrate and extend their learning and development. This can include opportunities to contribute to the wider community, such as through service learning, volunteer projects, and community service. It can also include opportunities to experience the world of work through internships, project-based learning, trade apprenticeships, and school-to-work programs.
- Co-train and cross-train educators and youth development professionals to increase consistency across settings and create opportunities for co-working. This could entail joint professional development, attending each other's staff meetings, participating in professional learning communities together, and collaborating via networks that provide ongoing opportunities for the sharing of ideas and knowledge.
- Use data and evidence to develop and improve strategic partnerships. Collect and share evidence of how participation in various programs benefits young people and schools alike. Undertake a periodic "community resource scan" to understand gaps and identify community partners that can provide supports to help youth with social, emotional, and cognitive development.

IN PRACTICE

EXPANDED SCHOOLS IS A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP THROUGH ENRICHED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES. It supports schools and community partners to expand learning opportunities for young people and align practices in social and emotional learning throughout the day. In **FAR ROCKAWAY, N.Y.**, the organization helped **VILLAGE ACADEMY**, a public middle school, partner with the local YMCA to improve students' social and emotional skills and reduce the number of negative behavioral incidents. An ExpandED Schools Program Manager facilitated onsite professional development for more than 60 school faculty and YMCA staff, then supported staff through on-site observations, feedback, and guidance to assess which practices were working and which needed adjustment. ExpandED Schools also arranged for a Village Academy team to visit a partner school to observe and learn about promising practices. Village Academy implemented a variety of new strategies, including a 15-minute period after lunch in which students check in with their advisory teachers about how they are feeling and what they can do to improve how they are feeling, plus advisory periods that help students deal with conflicts and make better decisions. This partnership has paid off. The school's internal record system shows that teachers have reported fewer behavior incidents. The principal indicates that students feel empowered by their positive relationships with adults in the building and are leading in multiple ways.[37]

CONCLUSION

Research has made clear that social, emotional, and cognitive skills work in concert to build students' success in school and in life. Employers have emphasized that they need young people with these skills. Families and educators have long recognized that students learn best when they are recognized, engaged, and supported as whole people. And every school and learning setting is already shaping these skills all day long, whether the focus on such development is intentional or not. The question is not whether to make students' holistic development a priority of schools and communities. The question is how to do this work well. This is a question each community will have to explore together, and we hope our practice recommendations provide a helpful starting point.

The meaningful and effective cultivation of social, emotional, and cognitive development does not come from purchasing a program or mandating a new policy. It comes from districts, schools, organizations, and communities working together to forge a vision for students' comprehensive development; from building respectful learning communities that value all students and staff and foster positive relationships; from teaching social, emotional, and cognitive skills explicitly and embedding them into all academic instruction; from prioritizing and building adult capacity to model and teach these skills; and from working across schools and community organizations to align and collaborate for the good of all children.

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