FROM A NATION AT RISK

TO A NATION
AT HOPE

*Recommendations from the National Commission
on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE COMMISSION AND THIS REPORT

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, careers, and life. The Commission's work has drawn on research and promising practices to recommend how to make all these dimensions of learning part of the fabric of every school and community. The Commission's members are leaders from education, research, policy, business, and the military. The full Commission team includes a Council of Distinguished Scientists, a Council of Distinguished Educators, a Youth Commission, a Parent Advisory Panel, a Partners Collaborative, and a Funders Collaborative.

This culminating report *from* the nation, *to* the nation, draws on the input we received over the past two years from conversations, meetings, and site visits across the country, as well as from the members of all these groups. It reflects the more detailed recommendations for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers contained in three separate, related reports: *A Practice Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens*, *A Policy Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens,* and *A Research Agenda for the Next Generation.* All four reports, and related resources, can be found on our website at www. NationAtHope.org.

INTRODUCTION: A NATION AT HOPE

After two decades of education debates that produced deep passions and deeper divisions, we have a chance for a fresh start. A growing movement dedicated to the social, emotional, and academic well-being of children is reshaping learning and changing lives across America. On the strength of its remarkable consensus, a nation at risk is finally a nation at hope.

Familiar arguments over national standards and the definition of accountability are not as relevant as they once were. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act passed in 2015 devolved a great deal of authority and power to states and communities—placing the future of education more directly in the hands of parents, teachers, and school leaders. This presents an obligation and an opportunity.

Devolution creates an obligation on the part of adults to use their influence in creative, effective ways to serve every student. Local control is not a release from rigor and responsibility; it is the broader distribution of responsibility. This sense of obligation should extend to all of the adults who constitute a child's whole universe.

Devolution also creates a tremendous opportunity to get beyond the rutted debates of the last generation and to seek solutions that are both hopeful and unifying.

We began with the simple intention of listening—really listening—to young people, parents, teachers, school and district leaders, community leaders, and other experts. This document, in many ways, is a report from the nation. What we heard is profoundly hopeful. There is a striking confluence of experience and science on one point: Children learn best when we treat them as human beings, with social and emotional as well as academic needs. As one teacher put it, "I don't teach math; I teach kids math." To reach a child's mind, we must be concerned for the whole person.

More specifically, children require a broad array of skills, attitudes, and values to succeed in school, careers, and in life. They require skills such as paying attention, setting goals, collaboration, and planning for the future. They require attitudes such as internal motivation, perseverance, and a sense of purpose. They require values such as responsibility, honesty, and

integrity. They require the abilities to think critically, consider different views, and problem solve. And these social, emotional, and academic capacities are increasingly demanded in the American workplace, which puts a premium on the ability to work in diverse teams, to grapple with difficult problems, and to adjust to rapid change.

Helping children to learn these traits and skills may sound ambitious. But it is—and has always been—central to the educational enterprise. It is the reason that education begins with concerned and involved parents, who provide emotional support and set high expectations. It is the reason that community institutions that mentor children and encourage self-respect are essential allies of parents and schools. It is the reason that good teachers can change lives, helping students find unsuspected gifts and inner purpose. And it is the reason that everyone involved in education shares an amazing calling: to foster in children the knowledge, skills, and character that enable children to make better lives in a better country.

This calling is an honor, but not an elective. Since all education involves social, emotional, and academic learning, we have but two choices: We can either ignore that fact and accept disappointing results, or address these needs intentionally and well.

The promotion of social, emotional, and academic learning is not a shifting educational fad; it is the substance of education itself. It is not a distraction from the "real work" of math and English instruction; it is how instruction can succeed. And it is not another reason for political polarization. It brings together a traditionally conservative emphasis on local control and on the character of all students, and a historically progressive emphasis on the creative and challenging art of teaching and the social and emotional needs of all students, especially those who have experienced the greatest challenges.

> **The promotion of social, emotional, and academic learning is not a shifting educational fad; it is the substance of education itself.**

In fact, the basis of this approach is not ideological at all. It is rooted in the experience of teachers, parents, and students supported by the best educational research of the past few decades. More than nine in 10 teachers and parents believe that social and emotional learning is important to education.[1] At least two-thirds of current and recent high school students think similarly.[2] As one student said, "Success in school should not be defined just by our test scores … but also by the ability to think for ourselves, work with others, and contribute to our communities."

Part of our project was to convene a Council of Distinguished Scientists—leaders in the fields of education, neuroscience, and psychology—to identify areas of agreement. The consensus they define is broad and strong: Social, emotional, and academic skills are all essential to success in school, careers, and in life, and they can be effectively learned in the context of trusted ties to caring and competent adults.[3]

It is a mistake to view social and emotional learning as a "soft" approach to education. Quite the opposite. An emphasis on these capacities is not the sacrifice of rigor; it is a source of rigor. While many elements of a child's life improve along with the cultivation of these skills, one of the main outcomes is better academic performance. An analysis of more than 200 studies of programs that teach students social and emotional skills found that these efforts significantly improved student behavior, feelings about school, and most importantly achievement, and made schools safer.[4] It only stands to reason. When children are motivated, responsible, and focused, they are more able to persist in hard tasks and respond to good teaching. These capabilities are a booster rocket for everything we measure, including test scores.[5] But the point is larger. No one involved in education can view the values and beliefs held by students as trivial or secondary. They are the very things that can grip the imagination and determine the direction of a life.

> **While many elements of a child's life improve along with the cultivation of these skills, one of the main outcomes is better academic performance.**

This approach to learning also contributes to educational equity. As this report documents, social and emotional learning benefits all children, of every background. But it disproportionally benefits children from low-income communities, many of whom experience trauma and adversity resulting from insecure access to housing, food, health care, and safety.[6] All students need supportive relationships and nurturing learning environments, but students facing additional stress have a particular need to be surrounded by caring adults who treat them as individuals with potential and inherent worth. And when adults create this environment, children of every background can thrive.

The evidence also indicates that these efforts can be undertaken by schools at a reasonable cost relative to the benefits.[7] A change in educational culture and spirit does not require a major increase in resources, but it does require a prioritization of resources. Studies indicate that investment in social and emotional programs brings broad social benefits.[8] The evidence

also shows that these positive adult influences must begin early and continue during a child's entire school career.[9]

Educating the whole learner cannot be reduced to a simple set of policies or proposals. It is, instead, a mindset that should inform the entire educational enterprise.

This strong consensus has naturally produced many institutions and approaches that come at this issue from different angles. The mentoring movement, a focus on the whole child, social and emotional learning, character education, service learning, deeper learning, national service, an emphasis on the science of learning—all these may focus on different aspects, but they agree that effective education involves values, healthy attitudes, social skills, and a commitment to the betterment of the community. This makes them part of the same, gathering movement in America.

And that is exactly what is needed at this promising moment. The research is compelling. Now we need everyone to take responsibility to spread this practice more broadly. This approach didn't take shape at the federal level. It is based on the emerging consensus of successful communities, convinced that this is the missing piece in American education. It will only expand to scale on the strength of local ownership, promoting these efforts school by school, district by district, and state by state.

The members of this coalition of conscience are educational leaders, engaged parents, concerned citizens, business leaders, military leaders, researchers, committed youth organizations, and young people themselves. They are working to transform schools into places that foster empathy, respect, self-mastery, character, creativity, collaboration, civic engagement and—on the strength of these values—academic excellence. They are encouraging communities to embrace the ambition, compassion, and rigor of social, emotional, and academic education. They are urging states to prioritize social, emotional, and academic development in their visions for learning and their support for training of teachers, district leaders, principals, and other staff.

This is the message from the nation on learning. We want to add our voice to these voices. And through this report, we want this remarkable, hopeful consensus to be understood and spread as widely as possible.

At a time when national political debates often seem toxic, this movement of local leadership and civic responsibility is a welcome contrast and a refuge from ideological bitterness. It is not just a way forward; it is a way forward together. It is motivated by hope and confidence.

Hope in the appeal of values such as perseverance, hard work, and human decency. Confidence that young women and men of every background—like generations before them—will be challenged, transformed, and empowered by contact with such ideals, demonstrated in the lives of caring adults around them.

"In dreams begin responsibilities," wrote William Butler Yeats. All of us dream of creating environments where the minds and spirits of children can thrive. Now it is our responsibility to make it happen. That is the high calling of education and the urgent task of our time.

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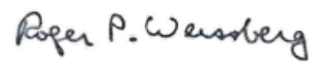
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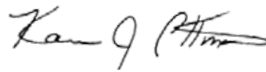
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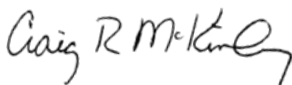
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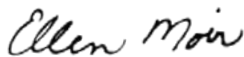
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1

HOW LEARNING HAPPENS

THINK ABOUT THE SKILLS THAT HELP YOU LEARN AND GROW AS AN ADULT EVERY DAY

The ones that help you think, relate, and act responsibly. What if we could help our children develop that same set of skills in school? We know more than we ever have about what it takes for optimal learning; now is the time to put that knowledge into practice for all children everywhere.

WHAT DO STUDENTS, FAMILIES, EDUCATORS, AND BUSINESS LEADERS ALL WANT FROM OUR SCHOOLS?

Across the nation, communities are redesigning schools to support how students learn best. These communities recognize from intuitive experience, backed by a solid body of scientific evidence, that learning happens best when social, emotional, and cognitive growth are connected. By taking a more balanced approach to teaching and learning that develops the whole child, these local efforts are generating a renewed sense of hope in what is possible. It is this vision of possibilities that is motivating students, parents, educators, and business leaders to demand more and to reject the false choice between academic excellence and broader student outcomes:

▮ More than nine in 10 **parents** think that schools have a role in reinforcing the development of what they typically call "life skills."[10]

▮ At least two-thirds of current and recent high school **students** agree that attending a school focused on social and emotional learning would help improve their relationships with teachers and peers, their learning of academic material, and their preparation for college, careers, and citizenship. [11]

▮ Nine out of 10 **teachers** believe social and emotional skills can be taught and benefit students. Four in five teachers want more support to address students' social and emotional development.[12]

FAST FACT

8 in 10
employers say social and emotional skills are the most important to success **and yet are also the hardest skills to find.**[13]

- Ninety-seven percent of **principals** believe a larger focus on social and emotional learning will improve students' academic achievement.[14]

- Eight in 10 **employers** say social and emotional skills are the most important to success and yet are also the hardest skills to find.[15]

For the past two years, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development has been talking with students, families, educators, youth development professionals, policymakers, and employers in communities across the country about what they want for future generations of Americans. The Commission has also learned from scholars about how to improve teaching and learning. This report is intended to elevate those conversations and that body of scientific knowledge. It is a report *from* the nation, *to* the nation, about how best to support learning and development for all our children. And it's perhaps best summed up by young people themselves:

"We know that we learn best when adults know us, make us feel safe, hold us responsible for our learning, and help us work constructively and productively together," wrote members of the National Commission's Youth Commission in their *Youth Call to Action*. "In too many of our schools, key pieces of this equation are missing. This affects our learning and our performance and we risk not learning key skills that will set us up for success both now and in the future."[16]

"We know that we learn best when adults know us, make us feel safe, hold us responsible for our learning, and help us work constructively and productively together."

As humans, we are naturally wired for learning.[17] The challenge is to ensure that schools provide the relationships and opportunities that optimize every child's chance to grow, develop, and learn and then to carry those conditions from the school day into the rest of young people's waking hours.

The Commission was formed to seize on the momentum in local communities—as well as in policy, practice, and research—in order to build an even larger, more sustained conversation and call to action. Our aim is simple: to align what we've heard from educators, families, and students, and what we know from evidence about how children learn, with how schools and classrooms are designed and operate. We know more than we ever have about what it takes to educate all children well; now is the time to put that knowledge into practice for all children everywhere.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LEARNING THAT WE DIDN'T KNOW 25 YEARS AGO (AND WHY DOES IT MATTER)?

Learning has many dimensions, and they are inextricably linked.

Scientists have told us that we have reached a milestone in what we now understand about how people learn.[18] More than two decades of research across a wide range of disciplines—psychology, social science, brain science—demonstrates that learning depends on deep connections across a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits.[19] 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 16—represent 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; communicate clearly; negotiate and resolve conflict with others; advocate for oneself with adults and peers; 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; cope with frustration and stress; and demonstrate respect and empathy toward others.

Importantly, scientists tell us, this set of skills and competencies develop and are used in dynamic interaction with attitudes, beliefs, and values—shown in the second ring in the figure.[20] **Attitudes, Beliefs, and Mindsets** include children's and youth's attitudes and beliefs about themselves, others, and their own circumstances. Examples include self-efficacy—a

Evidence Base for How Learning Happens

Learning and development happen over time across these areas in safe, relationship-based, and equitable learning settings.

Learning and development are deeply influenced by the larger familial, community, and societal contexts in which children grow.

COGNITIVE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Including...compassion, diligence, civic and ethical engagement, and responsibility

CHARACTER AND VALUES

Including...integrity, honesty, compassion, diligence, civic and ethical engagement, and responsibility

EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, AND MINDSETS

Including...self-concept, self-knowledge, and identity; self-efficacy, motivation, and purpose

SOCIAL & INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Rigorous Academic Content and Learning Experiences

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

belief that you have what it takes to achieve your goals—and motivation and purpose. These types of attitudes and beliefs powerfully influence how children and youth interpret and respond to events and interactions throughout their day.

Character and Values represent ways of thinking and habits that support children and youth to work together as friends, family, and community. They encompass understanding, caring about, and acting on core ethical values 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.[21] Like the roots of a great tree, these dimensions of learning entwine to promote academic accomplishment in any subject. When learning environments are constructed to teach these skills, attitudes, and values as mutually reinforcing and central to learning, children are better equipped to engage in **Rigorous Academic Content and Learning Experiences**[22] and make greater academic progress.[23]

Academic learning requires the integration of these skills.

As the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research notes, curriculum, standards, and tests have limited effects if students are not actively engaged and participating in their learning. That means that emotionally, students are interested and feel connected to the work and what they are doing; and cognitively, they are actively focused on learning and working diligently to master new skills and knowledge.[24] A consensus study from the National Academies of Sciences concluded that effective instruction depends on understanding this complex interplay among students' prior knowledge, experiences, motivations, interests, language, and cognitive skills and the cultural, social, cognitive, and emotional characteristics of the learning environment.[25] When challenging work is coupled with high expectations and high levels of support, and when students are actively working and cognitively, socially, and emotionally engaged, this produces greater motivation, stronger identity development, and deeper learning.[26]

Integrating the multiple dimensions of learning benefits all children.

Evidence confirms that supporting students' social, emotional, and cognitive development relates positively to all of the traditional measures we care about: attendance, grades, test scores, graduation rates, success in college and careers, more engaged citizenship, and better overall well-being.[27]

Today, a range of researched and evidence-based programs, typically classified as social and emotional learning, and approaches that intentionally develop the whole learner are achieving results: increasing students' grades and test scores, their ability to get along well with others, to persist at hard tasks, and to believe in themselves as effective learners and individuals. Young people who have stronger social, emotional, and cognitive skills are more likely to enter and graduate from college; succeed in their careers; have positive work and family relationships, better mental and physical health, and reduced criminal behavior; and be more engaged citizens.[28]

Success in the future economy also rests on this broad set of integrated skills, as reflected over the past 30 years in greater labor market demand and higher wages for people who have these skills.[29] Employers recognize that it doesn't matter how much workers know if they can't work well in teams, communicate clearly, and persevere when confronted with complex problems.[30]

When children and youth possess a full array of social, emotional, and cognitive skills, habits of mind, and character, they are best equipped to prosper in the classroom, perform in the workplace, and succeed in life as contributing and productive members of society. As one student said, "What we learn now should be what we need later in life." By integrating—rather than separating—young people's social, emotional, and cognitive development, we position all students to have more success academically. We also improve their overall well-being.

These skills can grow.

People are not born with these skills intact, scientists tell us. Their development is open to change, growth, and intervention over time.[31] We continue to develop social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competencies throughout childhood and adolescence, into adulthood, with unique needs during each stage of life. For example, young children need support to identify and manage their emotions and focus their attention. Adolescence is a period of remarkable exploration and opportunity, as young people begin to develop their sense of self and their purpose in the world, along with their decision-making, long-term planning, and critical-thinking skills.[32]

Social, emotional, and cognitive skills can be taught.

Not only do social, emotional, and cognitive skills unfold and change over time, there's also strong evidence that they can be taught.[33] A review of more than 200 programs for teaching social, emotional, and cognitive competencies in grades K-12 found students' skills, behaviors, attitudes, and academic performance improved significantly while their emotional distress and behavior problems decreased. Moreover, these programs were beneficial across student populations, regardless of race or income.[34]

Learning happens in relationships.

How children and youth develop these skills and competencies is fundamentally shaped by their experiences, contexts, and relationships. Our brains develop through constant interaction with the world around us. We learn within social contexts, and emotions are essential for our learning.

"The power of the social brain has been totally underestimated," said Patricia Kuhl, co-director of the University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences. "It's the driving force in cognition; it's the gateway to learning."

"There's something about being in the presence of another human being, and watching their eyes, and watching their movements, and paying attention to what that person is doing—that social context is extremely important to learning," she said.[35]

Positive, supportive relationships and rich, stimulating environments spur the brain to form, prune, and strengthen connections that promote further development and learning. A lack of social and emotional support and stimulation can hamper development and growth. Thus, babies who are deprived of touch can fail to thrive, lose weight, and even die.[36]

Social, emotional, and cognitive development offsets the effects of stress and trauma.

Integrating social, emotional, and cognitive development benefits all children. Similarly, all children can experience stress and trauma, regardless of family income or background. But low-income students and students of color in our society, as well as their families, are more likely to be exposed to chronic, unbuffered stress—such as violence, food shortages, homelessness, or the loss of a parent. About one in five children in the U.S. live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level. A similar percentage live in households experiencing food insecurity. About 1.4 million children are reported as homeless.[37] Poverty makes it less likely that children will benefit from rich learning experiences and enrichment opportunities

and more likely that they will experience stress-producing adversity and health challenges.[38] Ensuring access to high-quality, equitable learning environments that respond to each child's needs, assets, culture, and stage of development can help mitigate some of these stresses and provide a pathway to a more equitable future. In contrast, when students' backgrounds give rise to stereotypes, marginalization, or lowered expectations, this can add to children's feelings of stress and reduce their sense of emotional safety, belonging, motivation, and performance.[39]

Researchers have found that social, emotional, and cognitive development is especially important for children and youth who have experienced trauma or adversity.[40] These external influences can place our bodies and minds in a constant state of stress or high alert that interferes with learning and growth. Teaching students the skills and providing settings that build their efficacy and self-control, providing them with supportive adult relationships, and directly addressing their physical, emotional, and mental health needs can buffer against the negative effects of stress.[41] It also gives young people a set of tools that provide on-ramps to learning.

FAST FACT

Teaching students **SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL,** and **COGNITIVE SKILLS** and providing them with supportive adult relationships can buffer against the negative effects of **stress and adversity**.[42]

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO EDUCATE THE WHOLE STUDENT?

In the past two years, the National Commission has visited schools and communities across the country that are translating the research about how people learn into action. These places have discovered it is not as simple as adding another year of mathematics instruction or adopting a new reading program. Rather, they've told us, it requires rethinking teaching and learning so that academic content and students' social, emotional, and cognitive development are joined not just occasionally, but throughout the day. That's a big change from decades of educational practice that assumes focusing on social and emotional skills takes time away from learning academics, particularly for older students.

"I can tell you anecdotally that children who get along, who are comfortable in their classrooms and are comfortable seeking help and advocating for themselves when they need it, I can tell you that those kinds of children tend to do better in school," said one superintendent, "and that our programs are designed to help children develop in those ways."[43]
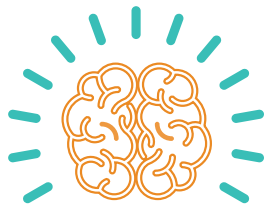
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS
help to build cognitive skills. They help students learn academic content and apply their knowledge.[44]

The Elements of Success

As the Commission observed and talked with these practitioners around the country, some common elements emerged that guide their work. These sites have developed a clear picture of what it looks like to educate the whole student, and they have supported it by focusing on three essential elements—shown in the first circle in the visual on page 23.

1. **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.[45] For example, teachers may use role-playing activities to practice relationship skills. Specifically, students might discuss playground scenarios and practice 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?

2. **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.[46] 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 raising

their hands, asking questions, making mistakes, presenting their thinking, considering others' perspectives, 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. Opportunities to connect with and exercise the full complement of social, emotional, and cognitive skills exist 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.

3. **Students have equitable access to learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe and feature meaningful relationships among and between adults and students.**[47] 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 that 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 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.

Putting it All Together

When local sites put these elements of success together into a single framework, the Commission clearly observed a learning experience where children and youth are **engaged, have a sense of ownership, and find purpose in their learning**. They also have explicit opportunities **to contribute to their school and broader community**, and to be recognized for those efforts, which is critical to preparation for active citizenship. In these settings, children and youth are more successful in **mastering difficult academic content and concepts**, because the instructional practices and learning environments reflect what is known about how people actually learn.

As the Commission has seen on its travels around the country, there are classrooms, whole school models, districts, and charter school networks that exemplify this integrated approach to learning. But there is far more demand for change than help to make the transition. We're still stuck in a paradigm that views social and emotional development and mastery of academic content as competing priorities. To create learning environments that support the whole student, educators will need a coherent plan that is supported by policy and research and that fosters the comprehensive development of young people.

What This Looks Like in Schools and Communities

LEARNING SETTINGS

Learning and development are influenced by the familial, community, and societal contexts in which students grow. Learning settings that support young people's comprehensive growth often focus on 3 essential elements:

Teaching and practicing social, emotional, and cognitive skills

Embedding social, emotional, and cognitive skills into academic learning

Safe, relationship-based, and equitable learning environments

STUDENT EXPERIENCES

These settings can lead to learning experiences where young people are more likely to be engaged and grasp complex academic content:

Rigorous academic content and learning experiences

Engagement, ownership, and purpose

Sense of belonging and connection to community

STUDENT OUTCOMES

The evidence shows that students who experience these learning settings are more likely to achieve success both now and in the future:

Academic success and educational attainment

Civic and community engagement

Life well-being (e.g., physical, family, and emotional well-being)

Workforce and career readiness
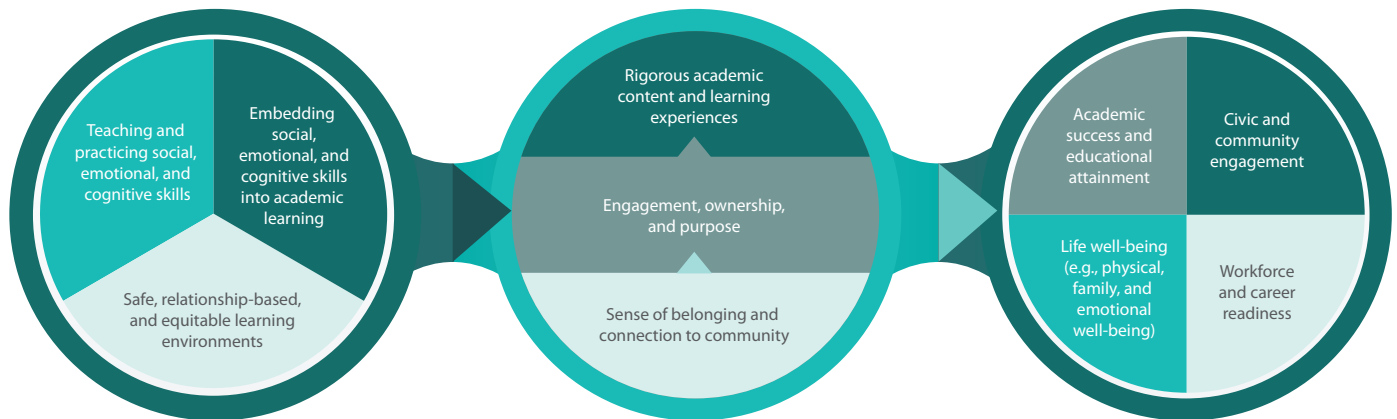
HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO PARENTS' BIGGEST CONCERN: THE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF THEIR CHILDREN?

The Commission has heard parents' and the public's legitimate concerns about bullying and school shootings. While not a stand alone solution, ensuring that young people feel they belong and are emotionally and physically safe in schools can serve as a critical and primary prevention strategy against school violence. In school shooting incidents, 95 percent of attackers were current students at the school, and of those, 71 percent said that they felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the shootings.[48]

When schools work to build strong relationships, offer mental health supports, and teach students social and emotional skills—such as solving problems, advocating for themselves, and resolving conflicts with others—they become safer. 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.[49]

As one high school student said about his school, which emphasizes social and emotional learning, "I like it because the other schools that I went to, they are more violent. That's stereotypical, but I feel like it's true. My school doesn't really have that violence because, I think, of communication. Learning how to deal with it so that conflict doesn't occur even if there are arguments. Learning how to deal with that is a good skill."[50]

When schools embrace the reality that students' and parents' concerns for safety go beyond the school grounds, they acknowledge the broader conditions in which children live. And they recognize the need to partner with community, civic, and faith organizations to create safe and welcoming places both in and out of school where children, youth, and families can develop their own social and emotional skills and sense of belonging.

IS THIS YET ANOTHER BURDEN FOR TEACHERS?

The great teachers we have had in our lives have always paid attention to us as people, not just as repositories for information. Teachers tell us that when schools embrace the whole student, it gives them the space to teach in ways they have always wanted to teach. "My job is to build them as people," said one 6th grade teacher at a public charter school.[51] Providing teachers with tools and strategies to build their own social and emotional competencies, and to develop students socially, emotionally, and cognitively, helps them engage students, reduce behavior problems, and makes teachers' jobs more satisfying.[52] A recent study found that teachers' impact on students' social and emotional skills is 10 times more predictive of students' longer-term success in high school (as measured by on-time graduation, grade-point average at graduation, taking the SAT, and reported intentions to enroll in a four-year college) than teachers' impact on student test scores.[53]

Transforming instruction in this way is not easy. It does not happen overnight. It requires teachers both to teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills directly and to shift their instruction to reinforce such skills through learning academic content and through the features of the classroom and school environment.

Teachers are pivotal to creating the rich educational experiences that all children need and deserve. Supporting teachers so that they can support students is essential, especially in high-needs and under-resourced schools. This requires providing teachers with both the preparation and ongoing learning to change current practices, as well as organizational and policy supports that remove barriers to this more holistic approach to instruction.

Research reveals that teachers' own social and emotional competencies influence the quality of the learning experiences they offer their students.[54]

A growing body of research suggests that developing teachers' social and emotional competencies improves teacher well-being, reduces stress and burnout, and can reduce teacher and principal turnover. Teachers also report greater job satisfaction when their students are more engaged and successful.[55]

In addition to the importance of teachers, evidence points to the critical role that principals play in setting the conditions for classroom teaching and learning. Principals are highly influential in setting priorities and goals, providing human and material resources, and establishing and sustaining programs and practices that support social, emotional, and academic development. A recent study by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that principals influence school achievement primarily by improving school climate: they empower and coordinate the work of teachers and school staff around shared goals, organize and support shared leadership, and develop systems for supporting teachers.[56]

Yet too often, teachers and school leaders do not receive preparation and ongoing learning that address the science of human development and how to translate that science into their practice. Teachers, in particular, must understand this work, own it, and help shape it. "We have to start with adults' social and emotional learning, and then work on kids' social and emotional learning," said a 4th grade teacher in Seattle.[57]

HOW CAN WE HELP SCHOOLS DO THIS WORK?

Schools play a central role in healthy development and learning because school is where young people spend so much of their day. Schools can choose to take on this work intentionally and meaningfully, and do it well, or ignore it and do it poorly. But when the Commission asked "how, where, and with whom" learning happens, it became apparent that young people are shaped by all the formal and informal learning spaces in schools and in the community. The American Academy of Pediatrics, for example, recently published guidelines about the importance of recess and unstructured play as essential to contributing to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children.[58] Students' well-being and their academic achievement are strengthened by regular opportunities for physical activity, as well as opportunities for calming themselves, centering, and breathing deeply to focus.[59]

Youth development organizations, businesses, libraries, museums, civic and social groups, and faith-based groups are critical preK-12 partners. Organizations like 4-H, Scouts, YMCA, Special Olympics, and Boys and Girls Clubs have affiliates in most communities. These national organizations and others have enormous reach; combined, estimates suggest they serve half

of the country's children and youth. They provide extracurricular activities, enrichment, and development opportunities before and after school and during the summer; character development; and volunteer and internship experiences. If engaged fully and creatively, they can extend learning time and expand learning choices for children and youth. They can play an essential role in galvanizing community commitment to integrating social, emotional, and academic development across learning settings, from the periphery to the mainstream of American education.[60]

Similarly, organizations that provide health, mental health, and other social service supports for children and their families can be invaluable preK-12 partners by addressing physical and mental health needs, substance abuse, food insecurity, homelessness, and other issues that can interfere with healthy child development and learning. These organizations can help ensure that not only children but also their families have the holistic supports needed to thrive.

Research suggests that efforts to support social, emotional, and academic learning should be aligned across homes, schools, and communities because students benefit more when they have consistent opportunities to build and practice their skills.[61]

In Providence, R.I., for example, the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) has created a middle school strategy called the AfterZone. Each year, PASA coordinates between 50 and 70 community-based organizations that provide after-school programming to at least 1,200 middle school students. The students' afternoon begins and ends at a neighborhood middle school, where they have a meal. Students then can participate in a combination of off-site programming at multiple sites and an on-site club focused on social, emotional, and cognitive skill building. All participating organizations are held to a single set of quality standards and receive training and support to help students acquire a set of essential skills. A 2011 evaluation found the program had shrunk school absences by 25 percent after two years.[62]

Expanding the definition of where adults *should* expect young people to find formal and informal opportunities that support them socially, emotionally, and academically invites families, educators, youth advocates, and policymakers to "name and see" the size of the opportunity gaps in their communities. Helping educators and youth development programs effectively partner

to support whole-child development can increase their collective impact, as the Commission observed in visits to Austin, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; and Tacoma, Wash.

This partnership work can be difficult and time-consuming. It requires collaborative planning, open communication, effective coordination, and a strong commitment to placing young people's needs, rather than adult concerns, at the center of such efforts. "The question always has to be, 'OK, what do students need? How can we meet them where they are?'" said a member of the Youth Commission. "How can we motivate, encourage, inspire them to really reach their full potential?"

Where and When Learning Happens

Expanding our understanding of all the places and times young people grow and learn

HOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY PEER INTERACTION

Family experiences and responsibilities

Core academic classes

Elective classes

Formal and informal school spaces (e.g., advisories, cafeterias, libraries, buses)

DURING SCHOOL

Extracurricular activities (e.g., clubs, mentoring, sports)

Enrichment and development opportunities

Civic and employment opportunities (e.g., service learning, volunteering, jobs)

Community learning settings (e.g., libraries, museums, zoos, parks)

BEFORE/AFTER SCHOOL, SUMMER

2

RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR ACTION

TRANSLATING WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HOW PEOPLE LEARN INTO PRACTICE ON BEHALF OF YOUNG PEOPLE REQUIRES SYSTEMIC CHANGE

It's not a matter of tinkering around the edges. It requires fundamentally changing how we teach children so that the social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning are recognized to be mutually reinforcing rather than distinct. It also demands transforming the settings in which learning occurs, so that they mirror and reinforce these skills, habits of character, and mindsets, and foster relationships on which that learning is fundamentally based.

As we looked around the country, we saw many schools and districts doing part of this work— for example, implementing a curriculum to teach specific social, emotional, and cognitive skills or putting in place advisory groups so that students are known well. But very few have pursued all the essential elements of a comprehensive framework that teaches young people social, emotional, and cognitive skills, habits, and character; provides them with opportunities to learn and apply these skills while learning academic content and throughout the school day; and creates safe and relationship-based learning environments that model and reinforce these skills.

So, the Commission began to ask people: What would it take? What recommendations are needed to build from a set of promising practices to more widespread change? Based on conversations with hundreds of people across the nation over the past two years, including students and their families, the following takeaways have guided the recommendations that follow.

Opportunities to foster whole-child development happen in and outside schools and begin at home.

The social, emotional, and cognitive growth of children begins with the family. Nurturing family relationships provide the foundation for all other relationships. It's in the family that children learn trust, self-esteem, right from wrong, and how to cope with and manage their emotions. Parents and other caregivers overwhelmingly believe it's important to join forces with schools and youth-serving organizations to support their children's healthy development and learning.[63] When schools and community organizations actively engage all families, they strengthen the learning environments across homes, schools, and other out-of-school-time settings.

Acquiring social, emotional, and cognitive skills is important for all students, but equity means acknowledging that not all students are the same.

Students come to school with different experiences and access to opportunities that must be addressed to ensure all students have an opportunity to learn.[64] Diminished access to housing, health care, and other basic needs, along with discrimination on the basis of any difference— whether race, faith, disability status, or family income—are major sources of stress that can interfere with healthy development and learning. These stressors are often compounded when low-income students and students of color also attend schools with fewer resources, more disruptions, lower expectations, and less-engaging learning experiences.

Providing equitable opportunities for developing young people socially, emotionally, and academically requires calibrating to each student's and school's individual strengths and needs, while ensuring that those with greater needs have access to greater resources.

Local communities will need to shape and drive the process of comprehensively supporting students.

To do this work well, local leaders—including educators working alongside families, civic leaders, and out-of-school providers—need champions, a galvanizing agenda, flexible resources to support collective planning, and authentic representation of the students and families being served. They also need the autonomy and flexibility to determine the approaches that work best for their specific community context. And they must be able to modify and continue developing their strategies based on ongoing data about what's working and what's not.

Policy and research need to enable the conditions for good practice.

Federal policy, both legislation and regulations, can create the enabling conditions for state- and district-level innovation. This includes providing more flexibility for states and districts to combine federal dollars or to waive regulatory requirements in exchange for better outcomes for students. It also includes the federal government's ongoing, historical commitment to funding research and the translation of research into practice. All of this will require policymakers at all levels to work in a more collaborative, coherent fashion. It also will require new, more cooperative approaches between researchers and practitioners to answer high-priority questions in ways that are useful and actionable.

Rather than offer mandates aimed at compliance, the recommendations that follow view policy and research as providing the *conditions to enable good practice* in schools and classrooms. State policymakers can serve as leaders in the effort to support the whole student by advocating for an integrated approach to learning and development, reframing expectations for preK-12 education, providing the necessary resources, and facilitating research and networking to move the work forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow seek to accelerate efforts in states and local communities by strengthening six broad categories that impact student outcomes. We do not present the recommendations sequentially or assume communities will pursue every strategy. Illustrative examples are provided for each recommendation.

I.   Set a clear vision that broadens the definition of student success to prioritize the whole child.

This begins by articulating the social, emotional, and academic knowledge and skills that high school graduates need to be prepared for success in school, the workforce, and life.

II.   Transform learning settings so they are safe and supportive for all young people.

Build settings that are physically and emotionally safe and foster strong bonds among children and adults.

III.   Change instruction to teach students social, emotional, and cognitive skills; embed these skills in academics and school-wide practices.

Intentionally teach specific skills and competencies and infuse them in academic content and in all aspects of the school setting (recess, lunchroom, hallways, extracurricular activities), not just in stand alone programs or lessons.

IV.   Build adult expertise in child development.

Ensure educators develop expertise in child development and in the science of learning. This will require major changes in educator preparation and in ongoing professional support for the social and emotional learning of teachers and all other adults who work with young people.

V.   Align resources and leverage partners in the community to address the whole child.

Build partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to support healthy learning and development in and out of school. Blend and braid resources to achieve this goal.

VI.   Forge closer connections between research and practice by shifting the paradigm for how research gets done.

Bridge the divide between scholarly research and what's actionable in schools and classrooms. Build new structures—and new support—for researchers and educators to work collaboratively and bi-directionally on pressing local problems that have broader implications for the field.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

SET A CLEAR VISION THAT BROADENS THE DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS TO PRIORITIZE THE WHOLE CHILD

While every community must craft its own vision of student success, these visions should prioritize the whole child and reflect the interconnected social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning. A clear vision engages all important stake-holders in a single, sustainable conversation and provides a north star that points them in the same direction across practice, policy, and research. The vision has to be foundational to all actions that support students, including those that ensure equitable access to a wide range of learning opportunities. It helps people understand why this work needs to be the top priority for changing existing practices.

This vision should be built in partnership with students, teachers, families, and youth-serving professionals to provide continuity across learning settings. Once a vision is established that resonates broadly, leaders at the state, district, and school levels need to communicate that vision clearly and regularly to help everyone understand that developing the whole child is not a program, a department, or a one-off initiative.

PRACTICE & POLICY STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

STRATEGIES

▮ Start with a broader definition of student success

▮ Align behind the vision

▮ Track progress

HOW DO SCHOOLS, EDUCATORS, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS, AND POLICYMAKERS ROLL OUT THEIR VISION?

START WITH A BROADER DEFINITION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

State and local leaders, in partnership with their communities, should articulate the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities of a successful high school graduate to encompass the social, emotional, and cognitive competencies, character, and habits of mind demonstrated to contribute to success in school, work, and life. Education leaders at the state, district, and school levels can identify a developmentally appropriate trajectory of social, emotional, and cognitive learning objectives and align them across school and out-of-school settings to provide a coherent learning progression from preK through grade 12.

ALIGN BEHIND THE VISION

Once a community has a clear and compelling vision, it's important to draw the thread of the vision through the way teaching and learning are described, planned, and implemented at every level. At the district and school levels, the vision should drive a process for change that aligns strategic action plans, budget priorities, and adult workforce development. Policymakers can support this work through state standards, guidance, and frameworks that signal to districts and communities the importance of prioritizing the whole child. For example, states can embed social, emotional, and cognitive competencies into existing learning standards; require local communities to articulate learning standards or competencies for developing these skills; and leverage existing guidance from early childhood or youth development agencies to create coherence across preK-12 education.

TRACK PROGRESS

Once a community has a clear vision for student success, it's important to develop and use measures across school and out-of-school settings to track progress and make adjustments. School climate and culture surveys—that ask questions of students, teachers, school leaders, and families about the quality of the learning environment and their evolving experience of learning over time—are examples of the types of measures communities can use for improvement. Policymakers can support these efforts by supplying measurement tools as well as training and assistance in interpreting and using data. Researchers can help refine such measures over time in collaboration with practitioners.[65]

WHAT DOES A VISION IN ACTION LOOK LIKE?

TACOMA WHOLE CHILD INITIATIVE

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 social, emotional, and academic 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 make up the district's approach to supporting each student's social, emotional, and academic development 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 youth development groups, like the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs. So far, the results have been encouraging: In 2018, the high school 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.

KANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The **Kansas State Board of Education** has expanded its definition of what it means to be a successful high school graduate to include academic preparation, cognitive preparation, technical skills, employability skills, and civic engagement. The Kansans CAN school redesign project, launched by the State Department of Education, invited local districts to apply to become one of seven statewide that would redesign at least one elementary school and one secondary school to help prepare students to meet these five outcomes. Each district needed the support of its local school board, teachers, and teachers' union or other professional association. The seven districts chosen, out of the 29 that applied for the initial phase of this initiative, launched their new designs in the 2018-19 school year and will serve as sites for others to study, learn, and visit. At the Coffeyville district's Roosevelt Middle School, this entails implementing a trauma-informed approach to education, which has already begun to change the culture, reducing discipline issues and helping students learn to manage their emotions. Meanwhile, Liberal School District began its redesign journey with Meadowlark Elementary and Liberal High School by focusing on engagement, personalized learning, problem solving, civic engagement, and attendance. The redesign effort has since expanded to include every building in the district. These two examples illustrate the flexibility that local communities have in translating the state's vision for students to their own contexts and needs.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

TRANSFORM LEARNING SETTINGS SO THEY ARE SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

Safe learning environments that foster meaningful relationships among children and adults and that reinforce and model the skills and habits of character we expect of our young people are essential for helping students develop holistically. Research shows that the contexts and relationships in which children develop fundamentally affect their learning and growth.[66] When schools create a healthy culture and climate for learning, both behavioral and academic outcomes improve.[67]

Yet the overall quality of learning environments in schools varies widely.[68] Students of color and low-income students, who are more likely to experience external stressors outside of school, are less likely than their peers to report high levels of support, safety, and trust in school, and they are more likely to experience punitive disciplinary practices.[69] For this reason, efforts to improve school climate that seek to address inequitable practices and outcomes—such as exclusionary discipline practices—often show the largest positive effect for low-income students and students of color.[70]

When schools embrace educating the whole student, young people learn the skills and character that help them take responsibility for their actions and treat others with respect and compassion; this leads to safer, better organized, and more purposeful learning environments for everyone.[71]

PRACTICE & POLICY STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

PRACTICE

- Build structures that support relationships
- Create schoolwide cultures that encourage student voice and agency
- Affirm students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- End punitive and counterproductive disciplinary strategies
- Integrate community-based organizations into school life

POLICY

- Provide equitable access to high-quality learning environments
- Enable the flexible use of existing resources
- Include measures of the quality of learning environments in accountability systems

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SCHOOLS, EDUCATORS, AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS?

BUILD STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT RELATIONSHIPS

Districts, schools, classrooms, and youth-service organizations can develop structures and practices that foster positive, long-term relationships among students and between students and adults. Evidence shows that these structures can make a difference in student attitudes, attainment, and achievement.[72] Examples include looping (in which students stay with the same teacher for more than one year), class meetings, advisory groups in which a teacher serves as a guide and advocate for a small group of students over multiple years, team teaching of cohorts of students, and mentoring. Such structures enable each child to be known well and prevent any student from falling through the cracks. Some of these structures, like advisories and class meetings, also provide a setting within which social, emotional, and academic skills can be explicitly taught. "Every school should make sure each student has at least one adult to go to and trust," said a member of the National Commission's Youth Commission.

CREATE SCHOOLWIDE CULTURES THAT ENCOURAGE VOICE AND AGENCY FOR STUDENTS.

Educators can enable students to exercise agency and leadership through schoolwide practices and activities, such as student-led par-

> **"Every school should make sure each student has at least one adult to go to and trust."**

ent-teacher conferences, choice in assignments, and participation on advisory groups and in collaborative decision-making structures. Schools can use sports, arts, and recreational activities to promote values and expectations of responsibility, inclusion, and communications.

AFFIRM THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS OF THE DIVERSE STUDENTS THAT SCHOOLS SERVE

Schools and youth development programs should create inclusive learning communities in which all young people and adults feel a sense of belonging and respect for their culture and background.[73] They can provide instructional materials and professional development that incorporate strategies for affirming students' varied backgrounds. And they can help teachers and youth development workers recognize and address their own biases and stereotypes to create equitable learning environments.[74]

END PUNITIVE AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES

Too many students—disproportionately students of color—are being pushed out of classroom and school environments as early as pre-kindergarten because of unnecessarily harsh and punitive discipline practices, such as zero-tolerance policies. Research suggests 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.[75] "Schools should handle conflict and discipline in ways that help us find our way back in, rather than pushing us further out," said a member of the National Commission's Youth Commission.

Given the pressure to address issues of school safety and violence, it's tempting to crack down on discipline or to place more metal detectors in schools. But evidence suggests that explicitly teaching social and emotional skills and enabling students to take responsibility for their community can and does reduce bullying, violence, and aggressive behaviors.[76] District and school leaders, educators, and youth development professionals can respond to student behavior in ways that are developmentally sound, give

students tools to resolve conflicts and learn how to behave appropriately, and, when needed, enable students to make amends and heal relationships with adults and peers. Schools can use practices such as class meetings, students' contributions to school and classroom norms, and peer mediation to teach responsibility and help students contribute to a positive school and classroom climate.

INTEGRATE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS INTO THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Schools can bring the assets of a broad array of community-based groups—in the arts, music, recreation, youth development, and health and mental health services—into the life of the school to enrich the learning environment and address young people's whole needs.

HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS SUPPORT THIS WORK?

PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR EACH AND EVERY STUDENT THROUGH FUNDING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, AND OTHER RESOURCES.

State and local policy can provide the support and resources for communities and districts to work together to define the characteristics of a high-quality learning environment where each student experiences safety, belonging, and purpose. Once a clear understanding of a quality learning environment has been codified at either the state or local level, policy leaders can then work to align policies and resources to ensure equitable access.

ENABLE THE FLEXIBLE USE OF RESOURCES— INCLUDING THE ALLOCATION OF STAFF, TIME, AND FACILITIES—TO SUPPORT THE WHOLE CHILD AND TO ENCOURAGE THE INTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS INTO THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.

Understand and remove the barriers in state funding, regulations, and compliance that inhibit schools and community partners from

"Schools should handle conflict and discipline in ways that help us find our way back in, rather than pushing us further out."

working collaboratively to support students' comprehensive learning and development. Communicate this flexibility widely.

INCLUDE MEASURES OF THE QUALITY OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN FORMAL STATE OR DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS IN ORDER TO SHOWCASE GROWTH AND IDENTIFY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT.
Examples include prioritizing improvements in the learning environment in school improvement plans and in school quality reviews, and making data from school climate surveys public. State and local leaders can couple the provision of school climate surveys and other tools with training and resources for people to use such data to get better. Encouraging staff members to use data to continually improve requires building a high level of trust. State and local leaders should report such data in ways that align with legal practices, monitor for unintended conse-

quences, and protect student privacy. School climate surveys should be well validated, meet criteria for comparative use, and be developmentally appropriate. (It's more reliable to survey high school students than those in preK-3, for example.)

While assessments of learning settings should be part of accountability systems, individual student data that directly measure social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competencies should not be used as a metric in accountability systems. Until we have tools that we are confident adequately capture these skills and attributes in ways that are sensitive to age, developmental stage, and context, and commit to using the measures appropriately for improvement, we risk putting more weight on these measures than is useful.

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE?

DAMONTE RANCH HIGH SCHOOL

In 2005-06, *Damonte Ranch High School* in Washoe County, Nev., was graduating just over half its students, and only about 40 percent of its freshmen were earning enough credits to move on to sophomore year. "We needed to do something to help increase our graduation rate and have a positive impact on our culture, overall," said Principal Darvel Bell.

So, the school created seminar classes for students in grades 9-11—often called advisories in other schools—that meet for 45 minutes at the end of each day to review homework and grades, directly teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills, and build rapport with teachers. The skills students build through the curriculum—such as self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills—are reinforced by the school's culture, which focuses on respect for others, a readiness to take on challenges, and sharing responsibility for oneself and others.

The high school's efforts are supported by the Washoe County School District, which created K-12 standards for social and emotional learning in 2012, and developed a districtwide implementation strategy that provides all schools with the tools and supports to improve school climate, teach social and emotional skills directly, and integrate them into academic instruction. Washoe is a member of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL) partner district initiative.

Damonte Ranch's focus on knowing each student well extends to the school's use of data. Every week, the central office tracks credit accrual and grades for each student to support strategies for those not on track to graduate. Seminar teachers send regular communications about progress home for parents to sign and return. The school also uses the results of an annual school climate survey of parents, students, and staff to plan for the coming year. For example, in 2014, results showed a disconnect between students' and teachers' perceptions of how engaged students were in their learning. As a result, the school trained the entire staff (custodians, groundskeepers, office staff, as well as paraprofessionals and teachers) on how to embed social and emotional learning throughout the school day. Last year, the school's graduation rate was 93 percent. Discipline issues have gone down in the last four years, and student surveys show positive gains in the levels of adult support, relationship skills, self-management of emotions, and responsible decision making.

CALIFORNIA'S CORE DISTRICTS

In California, eight school districts (Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Santa Ana) are working together to measure and improve social and emotional learning and school culture and climate. Known as the **CORE districts**, they initially developed self-reported surveys of students' social and emotional learning and of school culture and climate as part of an innovative accountability system under a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education. That waiver has since expired, but districts and schools in the CORE network, which serves over a million students, continue to use those measures to help focus attention on the importance of social, emotional, and academic development and to guide improvement. A recent report by Policy Analysis for California Education, CORE's research partner, found a high level of awareness and support for the surveys among district and school leaders, although less so among teachers.[77] Principals generally used the data to plan and identify areas for improvement on an annual basis.

For example, as Principal Scott Fleming prepared for his second year at MacArthur Elementary School in Long Beach, he saw data that concerned him: One out of two students reported that they believed that if they weren't naturally smart in a subject, they wouldn't do well. This fixed mindset contrasts with the "growth mindset," or belief that ability and competence grow with effort, that researchers have identified as important for learning and performance.[78] This statistic, from the CORE surveys, raised a red flag for Fleming. "I can remember thinking to myself, if these kids don't believe they can get smarter, how can we hope to teach them anything?"[79] MacArthur teachers decided to build up their students' thoughts about their abilities and potential to grow. Fleming began each week by issuing words of inspiration over the PA system Monday morning. Teachers presented students with hypothetical examples of children their age struggling in school and asked how they would solve the problem. Making mistakes was reframed as a part of learning. By the end of that first year, eight out of 10 students gave positive responses when surveyed about their perception of their ability to grow academically. On state tests in math and English, students' scores rose by more than 25 points, with the largest gains by children from low-income families, who account for about half of the student body.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

CHANGE INSTRUCTION TO TEACH STUDENTS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE SKILLS; EMBED THESE SKILLS IN ACADEMICS AND IN SCHOOL-WIDE PRACTICES

Some educators wonder whether it's best to cultivate social, emotional, and cognitive skills through discrete programs or by embedding them into instructional practices and classroom protocols throughout the day. The answer is both. There is a wide range of effective programs that provide frameworks, activities, and developmental sequences for teaching these skills. In addition, many districts and schools have developed their own programs and resources. But if a single curriculum or program is the extent of a school's or district's commitment—if students and teachers see developing these skills as a focus only in morning meetings, or in grades 5 and 8—there is little hope for real impact.

Opportunities for formally and informally developing and practicing social, emotional, and cognitive skills, habits, and character can and should happen throughout the day. Teachers need to focus on these concepts in classes, in extracurricular work, in the cafeteria, and on the playground. 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 academic development takes root in the hearts and minds of the community.

PRACTICE STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

STRATEGIES

▮ Explicitly teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills
▮ Embed social, emotional, and cognitive development in instruction and schoolwide practices
▮ Embrace demonstrations of learning and supports that prioritize the whole child

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SCHOOLS, EDUCATORS, AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS?

EXPLICITLY TEACH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE SKILLS

Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations should use evidence-based instructional materials, practices, and resources that teach social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Anyone who has tried to help kindergartners stay patient, focused, and collaborative, or 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. While there are families, teachers, community organizations, and faith-based leaders who do a remarkable job of helping children learn these skills and develop positive character habits, we can't count on every child getting access to natural mentors. To ensure that every child is given guidance, support, and accountability in this area, schools and districts can select an evidence-based national program or develop one locally that will give school staff the framework, language, lessons, and resources to cultivate these skills and habits in students.

EMBED SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT INTO ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION AND IN SCHOOLWIDE PRACTICES

If learning is social, emotional, and cognitive, then teachers should routinely build such connections into academic content to increase student engagement and learning. A primary reason these skills are not prioritized in schools is that we view academic learning as distinct from social and emotional learning; time spent on one detracts from time spent on the other. Given limited time, the focus must be on academics. This assumption is self-defeating. Academic learning is powerfully enhanced by the cultivation of social, emotional, and cognitive skills, like problem solving and critical thinking, and by character habits. For example, creating and upholding classroom norms and responsibilities, or using discussion protocols to engage all students in listening respectfully and making thoughtful contributions, can free academic learning from many of the challenges of disengagement and social distraction. Students' understanding of history, literature, and science is deepened when they can reflect on the ethical and moral choices that people made, think critically about big ideas, and understand how what they are learning might help them achieve a desired goal. Many teachers legitimately fear "taking time away from learning" to focus on how students are feeling, behaving, and interacting in their classroom. Principals can provide teachers with the professional development, time, and permission needed to integrate social, emotional, and cognitive skills into their academic lessons and into the classroom environment.

EMBRACE ASSESSMENTS AND OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS OF LEARNING AS WELL AS SUPPORTS THAT PRIORITIZE THE WHOLE CHILD

Families, students, and staff are acutely aware of what really matters in a school by how time is allocated and the systems for rewards 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 not by test scores but by the quality of her work and the quality of her character—social, emotional, and cognitive skills and habits.

In many high-performing schools across the country, students already are required to present evidence of their strengths, challenges, and growth across academic subjects and social, emotional, and cognitive skill development through structures like student-led family conferences, portfolios of their work, and public presentations of finished projects.[80] This signals to both educators, students, and families that development of this full complement of skills and habits is a highly valued priority and enables young people to fully demonstrate what they know and can do.

Districts and schools also can shift toward real-world needs by focusing on the big picture of the children they serve—their backgrounds, strengths, and needs. There are individual students who remarkably overcome significant physical, cognitive, or emotional challenges or trauma arising from poverty, unstable homes, or language barriers, despite all odds. They are the exceptions. If we wish to give all children the best chance for success, we need to combine a focus on developing social, emotional, and cognitive skills for all students with equitable support for all, making strategies such as nutrition and health support, counseling, accessible settings, teaching that respects diverse cultures and backgrounds, and community collaboration central to schools.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO EMBED SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE SKILLS INTO ACADEMICS?

KING MIDDLE SCHOOL

At *King Middle School* in Portland, Maine, science teacher David Mann designed an expedition that engaged his 7th grade students as citizen-scientists.[81] "Expeditions"—long-term, collaborative projects that produce learning of real value to students and their communities—are a central feature of schools affiliated with the *EL Education* network, which works to develop students' character and academics. Working with the city arborist, the students identified individual tree species and their needs throughout the city, contributed to a database of trees in their community using professional software, and then wrote proposals for planting trees in neighborhoods that lacked them. The students presented their proposals to a community audience that included the city arborist, other city officials, and citizens, along with their peers. This real, meaningful field work enabled students to take on professional roles and draw on multiple social, emotional, and cognitive skills—including working in teams, communicating clearly, understanding the perspectives of others, and applying science and mathematics knowledge and skills in the real world. The EL Education network includes 152 schools in 30 states, serving some 50,000 students. The approximately 550-student King Middle School serves a diverse student population, about 35 percent of whom are from immigrant or refugee families and about half of whom qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch. During EL Education's time at King, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding their growth goals in math and reading.

VAN NESS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Van Ness Elementary School, which serves students in grades preK-3 in the District of Columbia, encourages students to become persistent, creative problem solvers by providing time and space for them to practice problem-solving skills. The "maker space" is a physical space in every classroom where students use hands-on tools and materials to work on projects related to what they are studying. Every project is designed to do three things: build on academic content and skills; give students an opportunity for creative problem solving, agency, and perseverance; and build students' compassion and empathy. For example, for a 1st grade unit on money, students crafted necklaces with clay beads and sold them to raise money for hurricane victims in Puerto Rico. By engaging students in interesting projects, children learn to manage their time and emotions, organize their approaches, reflect on what they're learning, and cope with frustration and try again. "Teachers show kids how they have to fail multiple times before they get things right. They have to iterate on their prototype," said Cynthia Robinson-Rivers, the head of school. "So, in the act of responding to a challenge, inevitably students are building grit and persistence and receptiveness to feedback from their peers."

The school also uses a series of activities at the beginning of every day, called Strong Start, to get students ready for learning. Each student is personally greeted by the classroom teacher, sets a goal or commitment for the day, engages in a partner activity to practice appropriate social skills, participates in a community-building exercise to create a sense of belonging, and learns an explicit strategy for coping with stress, such as deep breathing, that can be practiced throughout the day. In a districtwide early childhood assessment in 2016-17, Van Ness ranked first of 77 D.C. elementary schools in emotional support and second in classroom organization.

Schools can use sports, arts, and recreational activities to promote values and expectations of responsibility, inclusion, and communication.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
BUILD ADULT EXPERTISE IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Educators should develop expertise and understanding in child and adolescent development and in the science of learning. This will require major changes in educator preparation that must be accompanied by ongoing professional support for the social and emotional learning of teachers and all other adults who work with young people. If our goal is for children and youth to learn to be self-aware, to appreciate the perspective of others, to develop character and to demonstrate integrity, educators—both in and out of school—need to exemplify those behaviors within the learning community.[82] When adults model these skills for young people, their own well-being improves.[83] They also need to understand how to foster these skills and dispositions in young people. This requires providing ongoing training and support to effectively implement programs and strategies that support the whole child.[84]

While teachers are central to this work, each and every adult who interacts with children and youth plays a role. Broadening young people's access to caring, socially and emotionally competent adults means making a communitywide commitment to ensuring that all adults who interact with young people take responsibility for, have training in, and are recognized for supporting the integrated nature of learning.

PRACTICE & POLICY STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

PRACTICE
- Redesign educator preparation programs
- Create collaborative decision making around healthy development and learning
- Prioritize social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competencies in workforce decisions
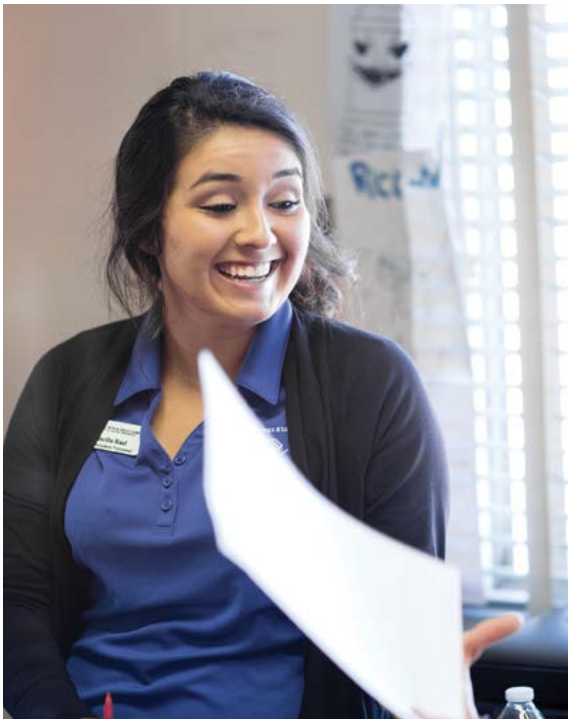
POLICY
- Incent innovation among educator preparation programs
- Redesign licensure and accreditation
- Ensure that induction programs for new teachers support social, emotional, and academic learning
- Restructure adult workforce systems

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD ADULT CAPACITY FOR SCHOOLS, EDUCATORS, AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS?

REDESIGN EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS SO THAT ALL EDUCATORS DEVELOP EXPERTISE IN CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND IN THE SCIENCE OF LEARNING

Educator preparation programs can incorporate and reflect: (1) knowledge of human development and how to apply it; (2) pedagogical strategies that align with the science of learning and development, such as how to design motivating tasks that demand higher-order thinking skills; (3) practices that integrate social, emotional, and cognitive skill-building with academic content; (4) research on adverse childhood experiences, their influence on children's behavior and learning, and how to mediate these effects to support learning; (5) research that demonstrates the importance of psychological safety and belonging in the learning process, and an understanding of how this differs for students of diverse racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds; (6) clinical experiences that focus on applying the principles of child development in diverse learning settings, including youth development settings; (7) performance assessments for social and emotional competencies and knowledge to be administered at the exit of educator preparation programs and used as a condition of licensure; and (8) ongoing engagement with graduates, both to identify professional development needs and opportunities and to assess program effectiveness in preparing educator candidates for the profession.

CREATE COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING THAT ENGAGES ALL ADULTS IN OWNING YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Districts, schools, and youth-serving organizations can create norms for considerate, collaborative, and productive staff and youth interactions. Leaders and all staff members can then hold each other accountable for exemplifying these norms and ensure that all staff members in all positions, from all backgrounds and orientations, feel welcome, included, and respected as contributing colleagues. Opportunities for

authentic relationship-building and collaboration among adults are a crucial part of building a positive learning community. Such collaboration and alignment can occur both within a school or organization and across the various entities that support children. The Comer School Development Program, begun by child psychiatrist James P. Comer in 1968, for example, applies the principles of child development to improve student development, behavior, and academic learning in schools. Schools involved in the program create a school planning and management team, a student and staff support team, and a parent team that together create a comprehensive plan and school culture needed to promote student development and learning at home and at school, and identify areas for staff development related to the plan. The teams are guided by three principles: consensus decision-making, no-fault problem-solving, and collaboration. Research has consistently found that schools that implement the model at high levels tend to experience high levels of student achievement and development. The model has been implemented in more than 1,000 schools worldwide.[85]

PRIORITIZE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IN RECRUITMENT, HIRING, ORIENTATION, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Recruitment, hiring, orientation, and professional development should prioritize attracting and retaining staff members with the knowledge and skills to develop the whole student. For example, leaders can be hired who have a proven track record of integrating social, emotional, and cognitive development. Teachers might complete a demonstration lesson or respond to scenarios, such as how they would address an altercation between students. All new hires should be introduced to schoolwide norms and practices for creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. And all staff members should have opportunities for ongoing, job-embedded professional learning that prioritizes these skills.

HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS HELP BUILD ADULT CAPACITY TO SUPPORT THE WHOLE STUDENT?

INCENT INNOVATION AMONG EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Opportunities and resources can be provided for programs to collaborate around the development of educator expertise in human development and learning. This includes redesigning coursework and clinical experiences to focus on learning and applying the principles of social, emotional, and cognitive development in diverse settings, including youth development programs, and providing well-trained mentors during these experiences.

REDESIGN LICENSURE AND ACCREDITATION

Redesign licensure requirements for school leaders and educators, as well as the approval requirements for educator preparation programs, to reflect the knowledge base and competencies required to integrate social, emotional, and academic development.

ENSURE THAT INDUCTION PROGRAMS FOR NEW TEACHERS SUPPORT SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC LEARNING

This includes teaching novices how to support the development of these skills, attitudes, and habits in their students and how to develop them in themselves—including stress management, the ability to be calm and mindful in the face of stress, and how to be self-aware and able to problem solve, collaborate, and marshal resilience.

RESTRUCTURE ADULT WORKFORCE SYSTEMS

While schools can prioritize hiring and supporting staff members with the knowledge and skills to foster young people's comprehensive development, many of the policies regarding recruitment, hiring, performance management, and career advancement for teachers, specialized support professionals, and school leaders are set at the state and district levels, and should similarly prioritize demonstrated competency in social, emotional, and academic development and learning.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BUILD ADULT CAPACITY FOR THIS WORK?

ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

One goal of the 6,000-student **Andover, Mass., Public Schools** is to "create safe, caring, and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, and partner with families and the community to support students' academic growth and their social, physical, and emotional well-being." To advance that work, in 2016-17, the high-performing, suburban district created a social and emotional learning "sprint team." Sprint teams are agile administrative teams of principals, assistant principals, special-education coordinators, and other central office staff, charged with moving work forward in quick bursts. The team undertook several major initiatives. A number of teachers at all five elementary schools underwent training and began implementing the Responsive Classroom program, an evidence-based approach that emphasizes the modeling of appropriate behaviors and sends students a strong message that they belong and are important contributing members of their class and school community. The sprint team collected baseline data by surveying students in grades 3-8 about their sense of belonging, safety, and engagement. The team used the results to plan professional development topics for 2018-19 and to recommend that the district expand the use of the Responsive Classroom program at the elementary level, while introducing it into the middle schools.

Finally, the sprint team created a Cultural Climate Committee (C3) to become the go-to resource for incidents of racism or discrimination in the schools or community. C3 brings together building principals and assistant principals, classroom teachers, social workers, and curriculum coordinators to combat racism and to create identity-safe schools. The committee meets biweekly and provides

schools with resources and recommendations. Based on its recommendations, Andover is partnering with Facing History and Ourselves to provide districtwide training for educators and administrators on the topics of identity, membership, and belonging. "There is a very strong message of whole-child development that is layered throughout the organization," said Assistant Superintendent Sandra Trach. It begins with the district goals set by Superintendent Sheldon Berman and the school committee; threads through the social and emotional learning goals that the superintendent, district administrators, and principals set for themselves each year; and then is supported by ongoing professional learning. "Student connectedness, student belonging, is the conversation," she said. "That's our north star. I think that's what keeps us all moving forward."

EDTPA

EdTPA is a subject-specific performance assessment that measures prospective teachers' readiness to teach. The capstone assessment, given at the end of an educator preparation program, measures a prospective candidate's effectiveness by reviewing actual teaching materials, including: short video clips of instruction, lesson plans, student work samples, and the prospective teacher's analysis of student learning. More than 750 educator preparation programs in 40 states and the District of Columbia currently use the assessment, and at least 18 states have or are considering requiring such a performance assessment for teacher licensure or certification. As part of the performance assessment, prospective teachers must detail how their understanding of their students' social, emotional, and cognitive development guided their lesson design, their selection of materials and activities, and the supports they provided for students.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

ALIGN RESOURCES AND LEVERAGE PARTNERS IN THE COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS THE WHOLE CHILD

Build a broad network of community institutions to support children's learning and development in and out of school, and blend and braid resources in support of that goal. Learning does not begin with the first bell of the school day, nor does it cease when the final bell rings. Students' development and learning are constantly shaped by their experiences both in and out of school. Moreover, some students need additional non-school supports—ranging from food assistance to mental health services—to fully access learning. As illustrated in the visual on page 57, supporting students' comprehensive development requires leveraging partners beyond the schoolhouse—including families; community organizations; employers; faith-based institutions; colleges and universities; health, mental health, and social services; and other public agencies. Ensuring that all students have equitable access to safe and supportive learning environments also requires that policymakers at all levels ensure that resources are used equitably and efficiently, and can be flexible enough to support the needs of individual children and youth.

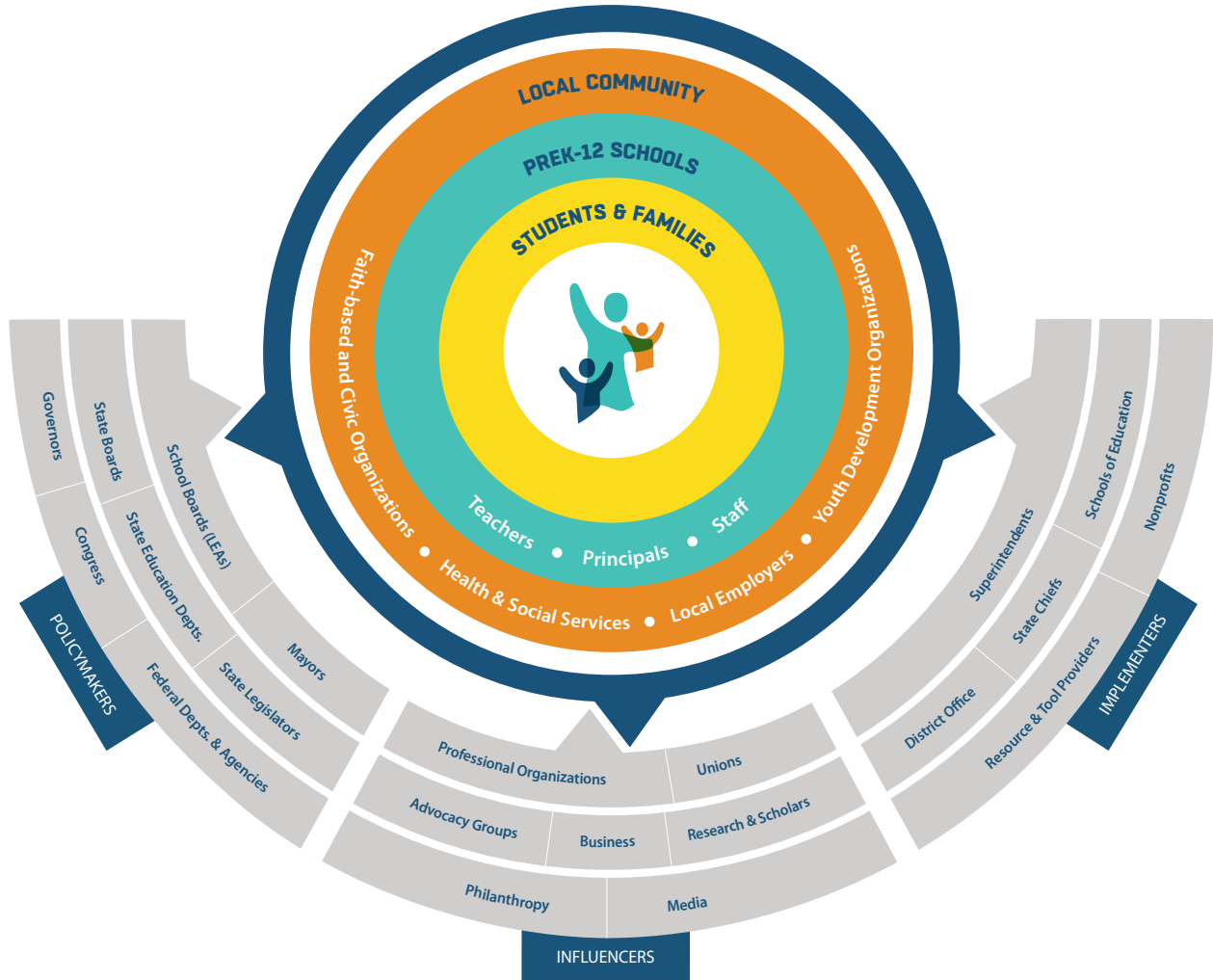## PRACTICE & POLICY STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

PRACTICE

- Engage families and young people in discussions about the resources they need
- Fund dedicated positions in schools and districts to intentionally engage partners
- Provide access to quality after-school and summer learning opportunities for each young person
- Use data to identify and address gaps in students' access to learning opportunities

POLICY

- Invest wisely and distribute resources equitably
- Allow states, districts, and schools to blend and braid resources

PREK-12 EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO WORK TOGETHER FOR SCHOOLS, EDUCATORS, AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS?

ENGAGE FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE RESOURCES THEY NEED

When designing and implementing approaches that support students' comprehensive development, educators should listen to student and family voices and involve them in opportunities to learn and lead, such as through home visits, student-led parent-teacher conferences, and student and parent advisory groups. Students can also help design and interpret the findings of school climate surveys and other needs assessments.

FUND DEDICATED POSITIONS IN SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS TO INTENTIONALLY ENGAGE PARTNERS

Partnerships don't just happen. They require an intentional outreach and engagement strategy that ensures the right partners are coming together to accomplish shared goals for the young people with whom they work at every level—classrooms, schools, districts, youth development organizations, faith-based groups, community partners, health, mental health, and social service organizations, universities, and businesses. This requires collaborative planning, open communication, intentional coordination, and putting young people at the center in order to ensure a consistent and unified approach toward youth development. At the district and school levels, this requires allocating resources to support a dedicated, full-time, culturally competent person who understands the community and the school district, and who can manage and promote partnerships with youth development organizations, as well as those providing health, mental health, and social services. To promote efficiency and alignment, this dedicated person should liaise with existing provider networks where possible.

PROVIDE ACCESS TO QUALITY AFTER-SCHOOL AND SUMMER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EACH YOUNG PERSON

Create a shared vision for fostering child development that aligns summer and after-school programs with how schools support children throughout their day and year. More than 40 empirical studies have found evidence of "summer learning loss" in academic skills, particularly for low-income youth, providing a powerful argument for expanding summer learning opportunities.[86] Embracing a vision that each young person deserves access to quality after-school and summer learning opportunities requires schools and districts to play a role in providing and identifying sufficient resources to achieve that vision in partnership with youth development organizations, faith-based institutions, municipal leadership, provider networks, and youth development intermediaries.

USE DATA TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS GAPS IN STUDENTS' ACCESS TO THE FULL RANGE OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL

By expanding the data collected on where and when students learn beyond the schoolhouse, school day, and school year, schools can assume an important leadership role in helping communities fill gaps so that each young person has access to quality learning and developmental supports in and out of school.

HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS SUPPORT THIS WORK?

INVEST WISELY AND DISTRIBUTE RESOURCES EQUITABLY

Policymakers should account for the differing needs of students by weighting school funding formulas to provide more resources for students with greater needs, such as English language learners and students with disabilities. They should also consider additional investments in wraparound supports, such as health, mental health, and social services that take the whole child into account. The distribution of resources should account for qualified educators, reasonable class sizes, ratios of counselors and other support staff to students, and health and mental health services. Policy leaders should evaluate the adequacy of resources in each community in relation to student needs as a basis for making investments. Balanced and equitable preK-12 learning ecosystems require balanced and equitable funding.

ALLOW STATES, DISTRICTS, AND SCHOOLS TO BLEND AND BRAID RESOURCES

Too often, resources are not aligned and do not operate in a coherent fashion because of multiple funding streams, conflicting rules and regulations, and lack of coordination. Furthermore, resources are not always pointed at the most important supports and services. Most communities need investments to achieve a whole-child support system or infrastructure that can tie frequently siloed programs and initiatives together on behalf of young people and their families. There also are efficiencies that can be had by blending and braiding funds and services across schools and other child-serving agencies. This is an agenda for federal, state, and local policymakers. By pooling or combining school- and community-based resources across programs and funding streams, districts can reduce fragmentation, improve alignment with their goals, meet local needs, and better serve individual students.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO CREATE STRONG, RESOURCEFUL PARTNERSHIPS?

LOUISVILLE, KY., PARTNERSHIPS

In **Louisville, Ky.**, a wide variety of players are coming together to improve outcomes for young people in order to maintain a vibrant, knowledge-based economy. BLOCS (Building Louisville's Out of School Time Coordinated System) is a partnership founded by the mayor's office, the Jefferson County Public Schools, and the Metro United Way to improve students' access to high-quality out-of-school-time programs. It's based on the premise that attending such programs regularly will increase young people's social and emotional skills and their engagement and performance in school. The partnership works with 105 out-of-school-time sites throughout the city, helping them to meet quality standards and providing ongoing training for their staff. It works with the district to track a variety of data on program quality, participation rates, social and emotional learning, and academic performance. About the time BLOCS was launched, 55,000 Degrees was formed by city, business, school district, higher education, and philanthropic leaders to increase the number of residents who earn a two- or four-year degree. Now, the two initiatives are working together to support students from cradle to career, as part of the Louisville Promise.

The Promise will make a scholarship available to every high school graduate so that at least a two-year college degree is affordable and achievable, and provide wraparound supports, including summer learning opportunities, to help students succeed. "We got very good at looking at our data communitywide," said Mary Gwen Wheeler, the executive director of 55,000 Degrees. "But there was

still this sense of, now that we're aligning cradle to career, how do you make the connections inside and outside school and address the whole child?" The Louisville Promise will provide the collaborative governance structure that enables the city to plan together, look at data together, and put all the public dollars on the table to see what can be done, she said.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

The 86,000-student Austin Independent School District (AISD) has integrated social, emotional, and academic development into all of its 129 schools. This includes providing professional learning for its staff, intentionally teaching students social and emotional skills and embedding them into academic content and school culture, and reaching out to family and community partners. As a member of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL) partner district initiative, AISD has expanded its capacity through community partnerships. One of those partners, Communities in Schools (CIS) of Central Texas, brings resources and relationships onto school campuses to help address children's significant nonacademic needs that can get in the way of learning. CIS serves about 54,000 students a year, including more than 6,000 students who receive intensive case management, and close to 5,000 parents. Professional staff with master's degrees in social work or counseling, plus AmeriCorps members, work on school campuses in Austin and five surrounding systems to provide direct support to students and to coordinate a network of volunteers, social services, businesses, and community resources. As one example, a partnership with the local housing authority provides case management for students living in public housing, as well as after-school programming on site. "Communities in Schools is using the same language, the same ideas [as the district], but we provide a lot of individual counseling supports and guidance," said Eric Metcalf, the chief of program strategy for CIS of Central Texas, "so it just dovetails very nicely."

RECOMMENDATION 6:

FORGE CLOSER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE BY SHIFTING THE PARADIGM FOR HOW RESEARCH GETS DONE

We need a new research paradigm that meaningfully engages researchers and practitioners in generating actionable knowledge for the field. Too often, scholarly research does not make it into the hands of practitioners. Educators search for guidance, but cannot easily find the information they need in a form that's actionable. To support the use of research and to further refine the evidence base across diverse contexts requires new ways of working for both research-ers and practitioners. Achieving this paradigm shift will require the support of funders, including the federal government; research universities, working with school districts and community programs; and the broader research and educa-tion community.

A focus on refining the evidence base also requires a commitment from schools and youth development organizations to use data and evidence to maintain stra-tegic partnerships and to learn from each other. One feature of strong school-com-munity collaborations is their ability to partner to share data that can be used to measure and strengthen student performance and to better understand how to support improved learning environments that develop the whole child.

RESEARCH & PRACTICE STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

STRATEGIES

▌ Create research-practice partnerships to provide useful, actionable information

▌ Use data and evidence to build and strengthen partner-ships among research institutions, community organiza-tions, and schools

▌ Build tools to disseminate and communicate effective strategies

HOW CAN RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS WORK TOGETHER?

CREATE RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS TO PROVIDE USEFUL, ACTIONABLE INFORMATION FOR THE FIELD

Develop meaningful research-practice partnerships that engage researchers, school and program leaders, teachers and staff, policymakers, and families and youth themselves in collaborative inquiry and learning. These multi-disciplinary teams should include people at various levels of the system and with diverse perspectives; focus on critical and immediate problems of practice that are important locally and have larger implications for the field; and use iterative inquiry cycles and collaborative data analysis to learn together and test out proposed changes. The findings from this research should be intentionally crafted to be relevant and accessible to educators and policymakers, such as through field-facing summaries and video.

USE DATA AND EVIDENCE TO BUILD AND STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AMONG RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND SCHOOLS

There are many ways that schools, districts, research institutions, and community organizations can use data for collective improvement. These include: collecting and sharing evidence of how participating in quality youth development programs benefits young people and schools; identifying outcomes to which schools and community partners can contribute and conducting regular check-ins and assessments to chart progress; disaggregating data to identify any disparities as to which youth get access to which learning opportunities; undertaking periodic "community resource scans" to identify assets and gaps and organizations that support whole-child development; and ensuring robust data-sharing agreements between schools and their community partners to collaboratively address strengths and challenges. Such agreements should appropriately share data in ways that align with legal practices and protect student privacy.

BUILD NEW TOOLS FOR THE STRATEGIC DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO A WIDE AUDIENCE

Traditional research publications are designed for an academic audience with substantive expertise in a topic. However, educators, school leaders, and program staff or administrators are not likely to have such deep, substantive understanding of the research in a particular area. As a result, they may be unable to decipher or synthesize research in the same way a researcher might. Rather, educators need resources that are problem-focused and build upon their capacity to make informed decisions. Whether research findings come from the types of research-practice collaborations described above, or from studies using more traditional research methodologies (experimental and quasi-experimental studies, for example), the products coming out of education research can be much more intentionally crafted to be relevant and accessible to educators and policymakers. Part of a new research paradigm includes taking the next step, beyond producing articles for academic journals, to also crafting field-facing summaries that provide guidance for educators

and calling out specific applications in practice. Oftentimes this will require collaboration with practitioners to get guidance and feedback on framing and relevance. Examples might include a new practice-focused education research journal that includes both translational summaries of key evidence and the results of research-practice collaborations, and incentives for researchers in state colleges and universities to serve on advisory teams to states and districts as they develop new initiatives to support young people's holistic development and learning.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BUILD RESEARCH WITH THE FIELD?

THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

In 2016, *The Wallace Foundation* began the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative, a six-year investment aimed at improving and connecting social emotional learning practices across school and out-of-school settings. The $36 million in grants to six communities is intended to benefit children and generate useful knowledge for the field. In each site—Boston; Dallas; Denver; Palm Beach County, Fla.; Tacoma, Wash.; and Tulsa, Okla.—and through a phased approach, 10 to 12 schools will work with their community and an out-of-school-time intermediary to improve social and emotional practices both during and after the school day. The foundation regularly convenes the communities to learn from each other. They also receive support to share and use data to continuously improve their practice and to think about how to scale successful strategies. And they get technical help from national experts such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; the Forum for Youth Investment; and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. Over the six years, the effort will serve about 37,000 elementary school children in 76 schools, while gathering evidence on whether and how aligning school and after-school practices on social, emotional, and academic development helps students. This includes funding a multi-year research study by the RAND Corporation that will produce public reports for policymakers and practitioners. "Through this initiative we hope to learn not only what it takes for communities to successfully implement social and emotional learning across settings, but also the impact of the implementation for the adults and children in each of these environments," said Gigi Antoni, Wallace's director of learning and enrichment. "We will also help our grantee partners

to build the necessary system capacity (in school and out-of-school) to effectively scale, once we have a better understanding of the best practices and policies that need to be in place in order to make a real difference for children."

MINDSET SCHOLARS NETWORK

The **Mindset Scholars Network (MSN)** supports interdisciplinary research by some of the nation's leading social scientists to understand how students' psychological experience of learning and school influences their educational outcomes. When students perceive messages from society and their school environment that they belong in school, that their ability can grow, and that their schoolwork is relevant and connected to a larger purpose, they are more likely to develop beliefs (or "learning mindsets") that can nurture their drive to learn in the face of challenges, particularly in times of transition. Funded by five foundations, MSN comprises 40 scholars from 23 institutions. MSN directly funds interdisciplinary research, builds capacity for high-quality scholarship, disseminates the latest scientific knowledge, and engages education stakeholders in identifying the implications of this research for practice and policy. For example, MSN has funded 14 interdisciplinary projects to explore how educators, school systems and higher education institutions, and other learning settings, can create learning environments that send students messages that they belong and are valued, that their intellectual abilities can be developed, and that what they are doing in school matters. MSN also has brought together curriculum developers with experts in motivation and adolescent development for a workshop aimed at building insights from motivational research into instructional materials aligned with college- and career-ready standards.

3

ALL TOGETHER NOW

IN EVERY COLLECTIVE HUMAN ENDEAVOR THERE COMES A MOMENT.

A moment when we know so much more about what we ought to do. A moment when multiple voices and perspectives coalesce around a shared vision. A moment when, together, we can make the possible real. **In education, that moment is now**.

A ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

For years we have seen educational initiatives and programs that are promising, but partial. Today we have the opportunity to get it fully right. Decades of scientific evidence point to the most important missing ingredient in classrooms and schools today: making sure that all children have the social, emotional, and academic skills they need to learn and thrive.

This idea is rooted in the best educational and neurological research. But it has taken shape in local schools and communities. Students, families, teachers, and leaders are galvanizing around a growing recognition that we must support the whole learner; and they are making it happen in ways that fit their unique circumstances. Their efforts have revealed the emerging outline of a way forward and have fueled, informed, and shaped our task of bringing together all that we know and all that's been done into a unified framework for action. It is time to gather this momentum into a movement with the potential to improve the lives and performance of students across the country.

To make meaningful progress, communities, districts, and schools must engage in comprehensive and long-term change-management processes
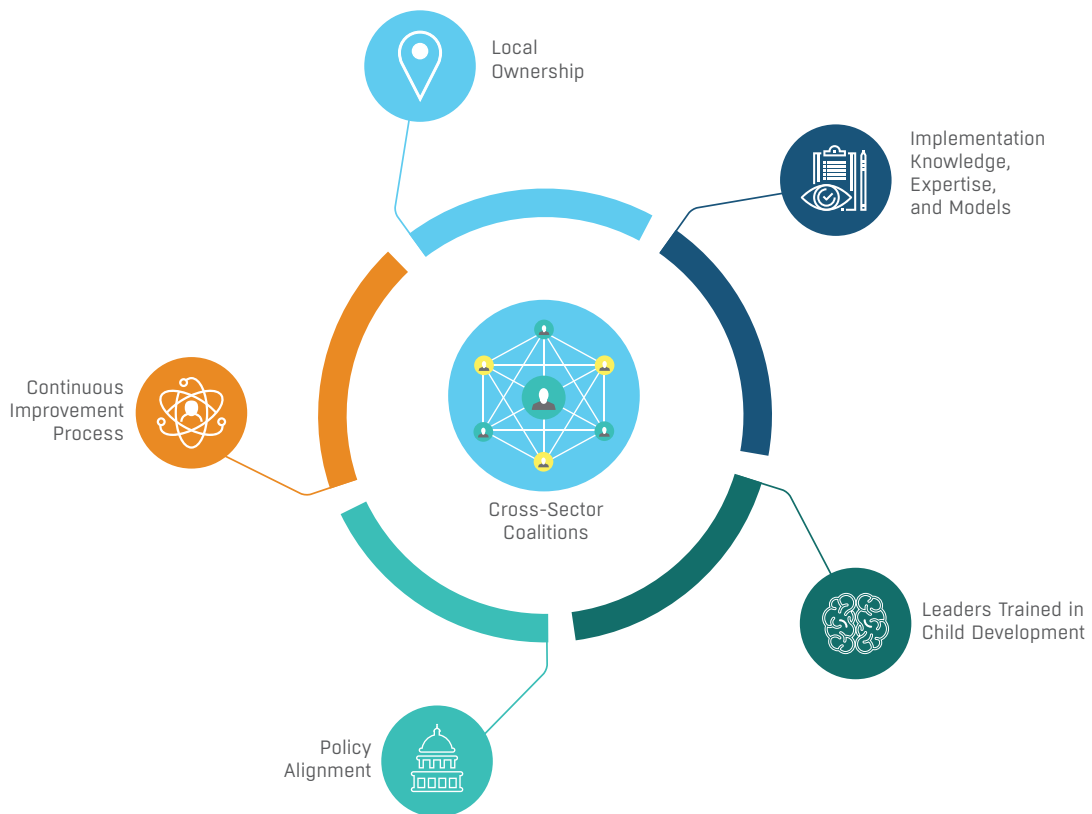
We recognize that these changes are not simple or easy. To make meaningful progress, districts and schools, in partnership with their communities, must embrace a process for change and improvement that is comprehensive, long-term, and can support the transformations in instruction, curriculum, teacher preparation, and school climate and culture that we seek. It's challenging for our education systems to effectively engage in this type of sustained, strategic implementation. It requires short-term wins to keep people engaged and an eye on long-term changes in the systems and policies that surround schools and classrooms. We can't expect communities to do this hard work alone; nor should they.

That said, the purpose of this movement is not to supplant community initiative. Far from it. We acknowledge that varying contexts and needs require different solutions. We also acknowledge that many schools and districts, along with their community partners, already have significant work underway that can and should be leveraged and amplified. Our goal is to help rally emerging leaders and organizations behind the good work of communities, and to elevate their examples for others to consider. No one needs to start from scratch. There are models to learn from, and to improve upon. The time to act is now.

Helping communities get from here to there

As a result of the Commission's deliberations over the past two years, six levers have surfaced as the clearest path forward for meaningful and sustained change. Taken together, these levers provide the elements of a change-management process to move from written recommendations to reality for classrooms, schools, and communities across America. These are not stand alone elements; they operate together in a supportive and interconnected fashion.

Sustained and successful implementation of the Commission's recommendations depends on the following change levers

Local Ownership

Implementation Knowledge, Expertise, and Models

Continuous Improvement Process

Cross-Sector Coalitions

Leaders Trained in Child Development

Policy Alignment

STRONG LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Local ownership drives change. That means communities must have the flexibility and autonomy to devise plans that work best for them and that address the unique strengths, needs, and contexts of their students and families. They also need a process for continuous improvement that provides the room to modify and continue developing their strategies based on data and experience. But that does not mean that communities must go it alone. They need access to outside experts who can help with evidence-based tools and knowledge.

IMPLEMENTATION KNOWLEDGE, EXPERTISE, AND MODELS

Schools, districts, and communities need knowledge about how to get from where they start to their end goals. This includes opportunities to learn from exemplar district, school, and out-of-school models. Many schools and districts begin this work by adopting a stand alone program or curriculum to develop specific social, emotional, and cognitive skills in students. But that should be the starting point, not the end point. Schools, districts, and communities need help to infuse social, emotional, and cognitive skills into learning academic content and into young people's experiences throughout the day. That requires implementation knowledge about various entry points and pathways to success. It also requires understanding and applying best practices in change management. As an example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL) state and district partner initiatives as well as its guide to schoolwide social and emotional learning are robust resources for the field.

LEADERS TRAINED IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Our children's teachers need to be grounded in what we now know about how people learn, and have the skills to apply that knowledge, and we've shared recommendations for the preparation and ongoing learning opportunities that teachers need to develop this expertise. But teachers also need strong, committed leaders who are themselves well-trained and well-supported. Comprehensive and long-term change requires strong, committed leaders who are knowledgeable about child development. These leaders must be willing and able to engage in collaborative decision making at the school and district levels to build cultures of trust in which continuous improvement can occur. They also must be able to model and lead the development of social and emotional skills in other adults.

POLICY ALIGNMENT

We need to break away from policies centered on narrow definitions and measures of student success and create enabling policies that can accelerate change toward a whole-child agenda. In the absence of such policies, educators and community leaders can only get so far. This report, and the related policy recommendations in *A Policy Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens,* suggest changes in state guidelines, funding mechanisms, assessment approaches, and licensing criteria to better support social, emotional, and academic learning. There is

a significant opportunity for policy-oriented organizations to embrace the Commission's recommendations and work together to align their advocacy strategies to promote these policy changes.

A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

This is an essential element of the change-management process. Hard changes require learning from data and experience, not expecting things to be perfect right out of the gate. Schools, districts, and communities need both permission to iterate and technical support to adjust and modify based on data and experience. Once a community has defined student success, it's important to develop and use measures across school and out-of-school settings to track progress and adjust. Policymakers can support these efforts by supplying measurement tools as well as training and assistance in interpreting and using data. Researchers can help refine such measures over time in collaboration with practitioners.

CROSS-SECTOR COALITIONS

Sustained improvement requires a broad, cross-sector coalition of the willing to drive change, marshal resources, share expertise, and give local communities voice and cover. Achieving this high purpose will require parents, educators, and community leaders who aim high, believe deeply, and insist on rigor and results for children of every background. It will also require allies—thought leaders, representatives of trusted institutions, and policymakers— who are determined to take the side of parents, teachers, and school leaders in their renewal of the educational enterprise. This means reaching out to an increasing number of players— bringing in multiple voices, such as business, civil rights, health and human services, civic, and faith-based communities, in addition to the voices of families and students themselves.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU: OUR OBLIGATION TO OUR CHILDREN

The tremendous energy and important new connections formed during the Commission's work over the past two years indicate what is possible to develop students as whole learners. Amidst all the political divisions in the country, here is an opportunity for all of us to come together, fulfill our personal obligation, and do what we know we need to do: focus on our children and their education.

For Students:

Your voices matter. You are powerful truth tellers for how well schools are meeting your needs. You have the right to schools that are safe. You should expect a welcoming school with a strong sense of community. You have the right to have good teachers who know you, understand you, and care for you. You have the right to learn and be evaluated as whole students. You can stand up for your classmates to make sure all of your peers are treated with respect, feel that they genuinely belong, feel that their cultures and backgrounds are honored, and most importantly, feel physically and emotionally safe in schools. Call for your families and communities to be embraced as partners in your learning. Be a part of making sure this happens—work with your teachers, administrators, coaches, and mentors to call for the learning and supports you need to become whole people.

For Families:

As your children's first and foremost teachers, you play an indispensable role in their learning and their overall growth and development. You should insist on a more enlightened and effective approach that nurtures your child's social, emotional, and academic growth. Work with your child's school and district to build structures for the adoption and implementation of these policies and strategies. Expect regular and meaningful communication and the opportunity to provide input and perspective throughout the process. Consider not only the well-being of your own children, but also the well-being of their classmates. Work collaboratively with other families to push for a whole-community approach that ensures resources are available for young people to learn and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across all the formal and informal learning settings in which they find themselves. You should demand schools that provide the same level of care and support for your child as you yourself provide.

For Teachers, Principals, and Youth Development Professionals:

You can transform the learning environment and practices in your classroom, school, or organization to support the whole child. Demand the resources, time, and professional development you need to get started. For teachers, work collectively to seek the time and permission to make this a priority and make it a schoolwide effort. For youth development professionals, commit your group to meeting standards for quality learning environments and require that all staff be trained in developing and fostering social, emotional, and cognitive skills. For principals, you lead by example—especially as the primary ambassador of your school's culture and climate. Make integrating social, emotional, and academic development a priority in your school. See to it that these skills and competencies are present in every classroom—every day. Model them for your students and staff in your school's daily operations, interactions, and leadership decisions. Communicate to parents, families, and the community—constantly—the importance of a whole-child education to the long-term success of their children. Make the case to the central office staff and district leaders for greater resources and support.

For Superintendents and School Board Members:

Your vision, mission statements, strategic plans, communitywide engagement, public communications, and budget choices all signal whether developing the whole child is a top priority in your district. You need to go beyond mission statements and spoken priorities. Unless you truly endorse this work explicitly and publicly with policies, it won't happen. You can use the recommendations in this report and the supporting practice recommendations in *A Practice Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens* to examine your own practices, assess how well your district supports the whole child, and determine how you can further advance these critical strategies that enhance student learning.

For Higher Education Institutions and Professional Associations:

You prepare and empower teachers, principals, and other adults who work with children and youth. Collaborate to redesign preparation programs to ensure educators are deeply knowledgeable about human development. Radically rework clinical placements and mentorships to give adults a chance to practice and reflect on how best to develop a broad array of skills, attitudes, and values in young people and in themselves. Support ongoing, professional learning to help adults continue to improve once in the field.

For Local and State Policymakers:

Your leadership sets the tenor for how communities approach education. Achieving better outcomes for all youth requires broad, cross-agency prioritization of the whole child. Through your leadership, you can help recognize exemplar efforts and

incentivize promising strategies to educate the whole child; support the development of high-quality tools and resources that enable implementation and measures to track progress; and support networks of schools and districts to engage in joint problem solving and sharing of best practices. You also can use the recommendations in this report and the related policy recommendations in *A Policy Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens* to invest and align resources behind a vision for how children learn, and to give local communities the flexibility and autonomy they need to blend and braid resources on behalf of young people.

For Researchers:

You have built a robust evidence base for how people learn. But a new research paradigm is needed to bridge the gap between what we now know and what happens in schools and classrooms. Use the related research recommendations in *A Research Agenda for the Next Generation* to inform your own work. Commit to participating in research-practice partnerships that bring together researchers, educators, and those being served to build actionable solutions that address variations in local contexts. Work to translate the existing knowledge into evidence-based tools and practices. Continue to develop research-based measures to track implementation progress, as well as valid and reliable measures of individuals' acquisition and demonstration of specific competencies, to support a culture of continuous learning.

For Funders:

With growing national awareness of and appreciation for the importance of comprehensively developing young people, your commitment of resources may never be more urgent or significant. With the demand for measurable progress accelerating in communities across the country, the need for coordination and collaboration among funders will be essential to avoid duplication of effort, cover gaps, and ensure collective advancement up a single learning curve. This is a moment when the funding community will need to mirror and model the ethos of partnership and unwavering commitment to both short-term outcomes and long-term goals that you are asking of grantees.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Preparing this report has been an exercise in hope, but hope must not be passive. We must come together now and act on our collective hope. Opportunities create responsibilities. And we are all responsible—all of us who interact with students and all of us who care about students—for an approach to learning that touches and challenges the whole child.

No one is alone in this work. The Commission's many partners are taking our continuing responsibility seriously, building on existing efforts by forming new coalitions and partnerships to drive collective action. The goal is to engage, support, and facilitate the work of the many players in the field: students, families, educators, youth development professionals, business and higher education leaders, state and local policymakers, and members of the civil rights, civic, and faith-based communities. Together, we can change learning in America. We can write a new American narrative that lifts and binds together the exciting chapters being written today in schools and communities across the country.

We hope you will consider the serious duties we share, and the urgency of the task ahead. Join us in a movement that seeks nothing less than the social, emotional, and academic success of every child.

> Find recommendations for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers as well as additional resources at www.NationAtHope.org

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