Social Emotional Learning in High School: How Three Urban High Schools Engage, Educate, and Empower Youth

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The Context: Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning in High School

The psychological, social, and emotional aspects of education have enjoyed increased attention in recent years as oft-termed "non-cognitive factors" and "soft skills" have gained traction in research, policy, and practice circles as major drivers of student achievement.[1] This renewed attention represents an important shift, as social and emotional supports for students in school have frequently been called the "missing piece" in the accountability-driven practices that are the legacy of No Child Left Behind.[2] Further, failing to meet students' psychological, social, and emotional needs will continue to fuel gaps in opportunity and achievement for students—in particular, low-income students and students of color—who are frequently underserved by the schools they attend.[3]

Researchers in the field of social emotional learning, commonly referred to as "SEL," are working to better understand how schools can effectively implement practices that meet students' social and emotional needs and provide them with the opportunity to learn adaptive skills to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom.[4] Social emotional learning is commonly defined as the processes through which students "acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."[5]

Much of the existing research in the field has focused on elementary and, to a lesser extent, middle schools, where fostering social and emotional skills is often seen as part of the educational mission and early intervention is possible.[6] As a result, little is known about what effective social emotional learning practice looks like at the high school level—a gap that this study seeks to fill.

We studied three very different high schools that have centered their work on developing young people as whole human beings who are socially and emotionally aware and skilled, who engage a growth mindset that enables them to persevere when challenged, who learn to be mindful, conscientious, and empowered, and who develop a sense of social responsibility about making positive contributions to their school community and the wider community beyond. We designed our study to address the following questions:

1. How is effective social emotional learning practiced in high schools?[7] In particular, what can we learn from high schools that have developed an explicit mission to prepare students to be personally and socially aware, skilled, and responsible?

2. How can social emotional learning strategies be tuned to meet the needs of students in diverse socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic schooling contexts?[8]

3. How does a systemic, whole-school approach to social emotional learning, in contrast to an interventionist or programmatic approach, function as a model of school-wide practice?[9]

The Project: Learning From Models of Successful Practice

Through in-depth case studies of three urban, socioeconomically and racially diverse small public high schools, a student survey, and a comparison of student survey results to a national sample of students, we investigate the ways in which school-wide social emotional learning can be implemented and how these efforts shape students' educational experiences. A particular feature of the schools we study is that they draw on an expanded vision of social emotional learning that includes social justice education as a means to develop social responsibility and empower the student communities they serve as well as provide a culturally relevant, asset-based, and identity-safe education.

While social emotional learning, as typically conceived in the field, seeks to foster students' capacity to know themselves, build and maintain supportive relationships, and participate in their school communities as socially responsible citizens, a social justice education perspective goes further to engage students in tackling issues of community advancement and equity.[10] Social justice education encompasses "the conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action."[11] Social justice education seeks to bolster students' sense of agency, leadership, and capacity to positively transform their own lives and the lives of others in their

community, moving from awareness and understanding to engagement and empowerment.[12]

Taken together, our primary research questions were:

1. How is social emotional learning conceptualized and implemented at these high schools? How is it informed or shaped by a social justice education perspective?

2. How do these schools practice social emotional learning to meet the needs of their respective urban, diverse student communities and with what results?

3. How does effective social emotional learning practice shape students' educational experiences and provide them with critical psychological resources that foster personal, social, and academic success?

Overview of Research Approach and Methodology

We employed a multi-method, multiple case study research design. Schools were selected using a rigorous screening procedure that involved: nomination by a panel of experts in the fields of social emotional learning and social justice education, strong academic performance and attainment outcomes compared to each school's district, and a selection interview with school leaders and teachers to confirm a explicit, well-established, school-wide focus on social emotional learning and social justice education. The school sites we selected also represent a range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity among the student communities they serve, which provided us with the opportunity to investigate how these factors impact the school context and student experiences (Table 1, pg. 3).

The schools are: Fenway High School (Boston, MA), El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice (Brooklyn, NY), and International School of the Americas (San Antonio, TX).

Table 1: Study School Student Demographics (2012-13)

Demographics	Fenway High School	El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice	International School of the Americas
Enrollment	320	219	465
Race/Ethnicity	African American: 41% Asian/Pacific Islander: 4% Latino: 46% White: 6% Other: 3%	African American: 10% Asian/Pacific Islander: 1% Latino: 87% White: 2%	African American: 2% Asian/Pacific Islander: 4% Latino: 55% White: 36% Other: 3%
Free or Reduced Lunch	67%	83%	23%
English Language Learners	12%	19%	0%
Special Education	17%	23%	2%
Gender	Female: 53% Male: 47%	Female: 53% Male: 47%	Female: 60% Male: 40%

Sources: Demographics provided for the 2012-2013 school year when the majority of data collection took place. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/; http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/default.htm; http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/adhocrpt/adste.html, http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/, http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/tapr/2013/index.html

Qualitative data sources included: observations (e.g., of classrooms, student events, and faculty meetings), document analysis (e.g., of school websites, student handbooks, and course syllabi), and interviews and focus groups (with school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community partners). Quantitative data sources included publically available school record data (e.g., attendance rates, graduation rates, and state achievement test performance) and a survey of current students' educational experiences (e.g., perceptions of school climate, attitudes about learning, motivation for school, and attainment goals). The majority of the student survey items were drawn from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, which enabled us to compare the data from the student sample in our study to a national sample of high school students with similar school characteristics.

We found that each of the schools had stronger persistence, academic outcomes, and gradua-tion rates than other schools serving similar students in their districts. We then explored the conditions that supported these outcomes as well as the social emotional outcomes so closely intertwined with them.

In examining each school as an ecological or sociocultural system, nested within a par-ticular community context, we traced and mapped how social emotional learning was implemented and practiced across three key aspects of the school—school climate and culture; organizational features and struc-tures; and school practices[13](Figure 1, pg. 4).

Our research team also evaluated how social emotional learning and social justice educa-tion were conceptualized at each school and examined how key social emotional learning and social justice education skills and compe-tencies prevalent in the literature both con-verged with and diverged from each school's understanding and practice. See Table 2, pg. 5 for operational definitions of social emotional

Figure 1: A Sociocultural Approach to Studying Schools' Social Emotional Learning Practice
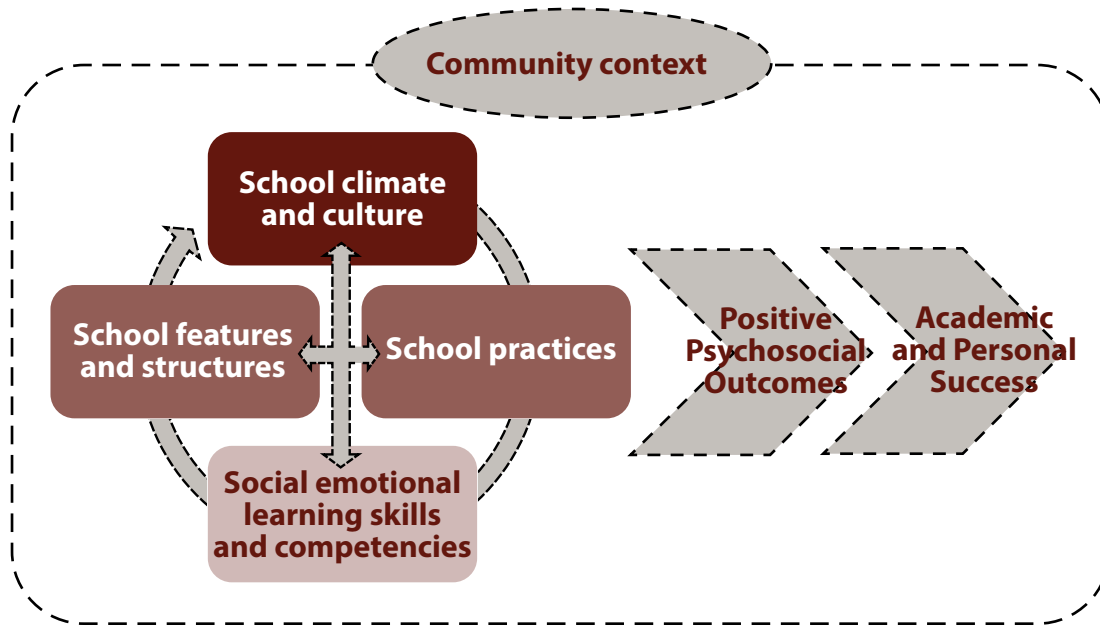

Figure 1: Conceptual framework: A sociocultural approach to studying schools' social emotional learning practice. This figure represents our theoretical and conceptual approach to studying schools' social emotional learning practice and outcomes.

learning and social justice education skills and competencies that are common in the literature.

See the cross-case report for an extended discussion of the study's background, theoretical framework, and literature reviewed as well as references.

Summary of Findings: Learning from Successful Practice

How does a social justice education perspective inform social emotional learning?

First, we asked how Fenway, El Puente, and International School of the Americas (ISA) approach social emotional learning and how a social justice education perspective informs how they conceptualize and practice social emotional learning. We found that:

- The schools work to increase educational opportunity for students who do not typically have access to high quality public schools or who are frequently underserved by traditional schools—i.e., students of color from low-income backgrounds who are often the first in their families to go to college. Students from backgrounds like these are the large majority at Fenway and El Puente, while fewer students at ISA live in poor or low-income communities. In all cases, educators at these schools believe that providing this kind of education for their least advantaged students is an act of social justice itself.

- All three schools seek to educate the "whole student" by providing a physically and emotionally safe learning environment, developing close and caring relationships among all members of the school community, challenging students with an engaging, relevant, culturally responsive, and high quality curriculum, providing community

Table 2. Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education Skills and Competencies

Social Emotional Learning Skills and Competencies	Social Justice Education Skills and Competencies
Self-awareness: accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.	**Interdependence:** seeing oneself as part of community; having a sense of shared fate and common destiny with others; recognizing how collective experiences shape individual lives.
Self-management: regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately.	**Social responsibility:** understanding how one's actions impact others; treating others with respect; acting with ethical standards; maintaining relationships and connections.
Social awareness: being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; recognizing and using family, school, and community resources.	**Perspective-taking:** taking the perspective of and empathizing with others; coordinating others' points of view with one's own; recognizing factors that shape multiple perspectives.
Relationship skills: establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on co-operation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed.	**Multicultural literacy:** recognizing and appreciating group similarities and differences; having a critical understanding of how identities and significant social categories of difference matter in everyday life and across social contexts; understanding experience through multicultural and equity-focused lenses; having an awareness of systems of privilege, power, and oppression.
Responsible decision-making: making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; contributing to the well-being of one's school and community.	**Community engagement:** actively contributing to the well-being of one's community; understanding democratic principles and values, citizenship, and civic participation; having leadership, voice, and efficacy to be a change agent and organize for social action.

engaged learning opportunities, and supporting students through critical transitions into college and career. Doing so requires viewing the academic, social, and emotional aspects of schooling as necessarily interdependent with one another as well as with the aims of social justice education.

- The schools work to prepare and graduate students who are socially aware, skilled, responsible, and empowered to stand up to

injustice and work for positive change in their own lives and for the lives of others. Building students' social emotional and social justice awareness, skills, and competencies works to engage and empower students as well as foster academic success and achievement.

- Fenway designs educational experiences that teach students the tools and confidence needed to lead and take action.

Fenway educators believe that this kind of awareness and empowerment requires skill-building opportunities tuned to meet the needs of their student community.

- El Puente's approach is grounded in acknowledging and affirming students' cultural backgrounds and identities as well as building their capacity for self-determination. It focuses on developing students' assets and potential rather than educating based on their deficits, connects students to their local community, and inspires social engagement.

- ISA challenges its students to consider what it means to act at one's fullest potential as a learner, leader, and global citizen. The school's approach to social emotional learning and social justice education centers on improving oneself through self-awareness and reflection as well as acting for the good of ever-broadening circles of others with whom the self is interconnected. Rather than seeking to combat powerlessness and disenfranchisement among its student community—which is relatively more affluent compared to the Fenway and El Puente student communities—ISA focuses on developing empathy for others and inspiring allyship, advocacy, and action.

Social emotional learning schools provide students with key psychological resources they need to thrive in school

Using a student survey, we assessed what students' experiences were like at these social emotional learning schools. Compared to students in a sample of national comparison schools ($N = 2063$), we found that students in the social emotional learning schools ($N = 363$) we studied:

- *Reported a more positive, caring school climate and liked school more.* Students in social emotional learning schools reported a more positive school climate and strong relationships with teachers compared to students in the national comparison sample. They were also more likely to agree that they are a part of a caring, respectful, diverse community where teachers value students and where students feel safe and supported.

- *Reported greater engagement in school and social emotional support.* Students in social emotional learning schools, compared to students in the national comparisons schools, were more likely to say that they came to school because they were engaged in their schoolwork, that school was a place to see their friends, and that their teachers expected them to succeed. They were also highly likely to report that they were motivated to come to school because their social and emotional needs were supported—students felt cared for, part of a community, respected and valued, like school is relevant, and that they were learning to make a difference with their education.

- *Felt efficacious, resilient, and demonstrated a growth mindset.* Students in social emotional learning schools were more likely to say that they felt efficacious, were resilient, and viewed themselves through a growth mindset than students in national comparison schools. They were also significantly more likely to say that their teachers praised their effort—encouraging a growth mindset—compared to students in the national comparison sample.

- *Were more likely to value helping others in their community and working to improve society.* Students in social emotional learning schools were more likely to endorse making a difference, helping others, and acting for social change as key life values. They were also much more likely to have experience participating in volunteer or community work, indicating an experiential source for this difference.

- *Expressed ambitious goals for higher education and were more likely to receive support for these goals.* Students in our case study schools had higher educational attainment expectations—i.e., they were more likely to expect to obtain a master's or other professional or advanced degree—and were significantly more likely to report receiving support in the college preparation process from school counselors, teachers, parents, and peers than students in national comparison schools.

Taken together, student survey results revealed that students in the social emotional learning schools we studied reported more positive educational experiences, felt more connected to their schools, demonstrated higher levels of psychological and emotional support, engagement, and empowerment, and were more socially engaged than students in the comparison schools sample. While not a causal study, these findings suggest that social emotional learning school environments and practices hold the potential to better equip students with critical psychological resources and social emotional supports that they need to feel like school is important, that they belong there, and that they can be successful.

Leveraging a whole-school approach to social emotional learning supports students' social, emotional, and academic needs

Finally, we examined how these high schools engage in and implement social emotional learning through their climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices. We investigated how these key levels of the school context worked together to support and mutually reinforce how social emotional learning takes place. We also examined how the schools practice social emotional learning to meet the particular needs of their urban, diverse student communities.

With respect to *school climate and culture*—a school's physical and social environment and the norms, values, and expectations that implicitly and explicitly structure that environment—we found that:

- *Social emotional learning is front and center.* Social emotional learning does not happen behind the scenes at Fenway, El Puente, and ISA—it is front and center, highlighted in each school's mission and vision, reinforced through each school community's norms and values, and clearly articulated in expectations for students and graduates.

- *Strong relationships and a respectful community characterize school culture.* Strong relationships and a respectful, caring, and cohesive school community characterize school culture and set the stage for social and emotional learning to take place. The schools foster social emotional learning through an intentional culture that socializes both students and adults as community members and fosters effective ways of interacting that are modeled by adults at the school.

- *Students' psychological needs are not secondary to their academic needs.* The culture at each school, and the climate it fosters, is designed to support students' psychological needs and sees them as necessarily interdependent with students' learning needs and potential for academic success. There is a strong focus on supporting student growth, reflection, resilience, and agency in a space of physical and emotional safety, respect, and belonging.

- *Clear norm setting fosters a safe school climate.* One learning tool that the schools leverage to promote a trusting, safe, and supportive climate is explicit norm setting. While this takes place across situations and groups at each school—from relationship norms to working group expectations to classroom norms—each school also

articulates, posts, and promotes a set of comprehensive guidelines for interacting with community members that highlights self-awareness and self-management, social awareness and relationship skills, and responsible decision-making and social responsibility.

- *An interdependent community requires empathy, social responsibility, and action.* At Fenway, El Puente, and ISA, being an interdependent member of the community requires a commitment to stand up for one's community and against injustice experienced by one's community. This sense of social awareness, social responsibility, community engagement, agency, and empowerment is deeply embedded in each school's culture. When a school's culture fosters experiences of voice, agency, and action for students—in particular, for low-income students and students of color who often do not have these experiences at traditional schools—they have a productive place to channel their energy and work for change. Left unsupported, this energy may manifest in feelings of anger or a sense of powerlessness that can lead students to disengage from and disidentify with school as well as experience behavioral and disciplinary issues.

Turning next to *school features and structures* that shape how the school and its activities are organized, we found that:

- *Small school size and opportunities for personalization work together to support an intimate environment where social awareness and relationship skills are necessary and social emotional learning can take place.* A small school environment structurally allows for the opportunity to cultivate close relationships and requires the social emotional skills needed to get along with others—students and teachers work together in a close-knit community

for four years, which functions most effectively when trusting, healthy relationships are sustained. Moreover, given the level of intimacy that teachers are able to develop with students, they play a large role in students' lives and are able to deeply personalize how they engage and work with their students. As the points below detail, the kind of teacher dedication and accessibility that make this level of personalization possible are further supported by other school design features and organizational structures (e.g., "family" structures, course scheduling, and pupil load).

- *"Family" structures serve to further personalize relationships and map students' developmental trajectory.* Fenway and El Puente utilize house or academy structures, what we refer to here collectively as "family" structures, to further organize their small school communities. These structures provide additional opportunities to personalize relationships, foster social responsibility to one's community, and map the developmental journey that students take through each school. At El Puente, the academy system also serves to organize the school curriculum around a set of developmentally progressive questions that link social emotional learning and social justice education, starting with students' identity and self-awareness and moving to social responsibility and action.

- *Advisory provides a regular time and place to focus on social emotional skill-building.* While each school takes a whole-school approach to social emotional learning, advisory is a design feature that provides a regular time and place for direct instruction on social emotional skills. At Fenway and ISA, in particular, the advisory curriculum progressively links social emotional learning and social justice education objectives as students develop insight about themselves and how they are interdependent with

others. The links between social emotional and academic learning are also reinforced.

- *Student support staff steward social emotional learning and facilitate critical life transitions for the student communities they serve.* Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all have counseling staff dedicated to supporting students' psychological health and well-being; more important, however, these staff members are central to the life and culture of the school. They work to support the mental health of individual students and the student community as a whole, as well as provide critical social emotional support for students' impending transitions to college, career, and life after high school. The student support teams work closely with teachers, administrators, and families, and link the social emotional and academic components of students' experiences. They also tailor their services to the student communities they serve, understanding sociocultural variation in both the challenges and opportunities that their students are likely to confront.

- *Community-based partnerships, projects, and learning opportunities inspire responsibility, engagement, and action.* Each school leverages community-based partnerships, programs, and activities to help students practice social emotional and social justice skills in real-world settings and situations, learn more about their community and their responsibility to that community, and inspire students to develop voice and agency to take action for positive social change. While Fenway and ISA rely on several key features and structures to accomplish these goals, El Puente primarily leverages its special relationship with the El Puente community-based organization to engage and empower its student community. These school features and structures critically support Fenway, El Puente, and ISA's capacities to foster experiences of

voice, agency, and empowerment for their student communities and "back up" the ways in which these ideas are valued and promoted through each school's culture.

- *To support students' social and emotional needs, adults' social, emotional, and professional needs must also be a priority.* Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all recognize that in order to provide psychological resources and support to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of their respective student communities, adults in the school must likewise be supported. Each school works to provide professional development, collaborative opportunities, and shared leadership structures to empower and support school staff. With this support, teachers have the time, space, and skills to develop close relationships with their students, provide personalized learning opportunities, and dedicate the care and energy they need to be an educator in these nontraditional school contexts.

Finally, with respect to formal and informal *school practices* that reflect what people do, how they teach and learn, and how they participate in the school community, we found that:

- *Curricular design and instructional practices integrate social emotional learning with academics through both content—what students learn—and process—how they learn it.* Fenway, El Puente, and ISA's curricular design and instructional practices integrate social emotional learning and social justice education with academics and foster the application of social emotional and social justice skills across subjects and situations. Course topics and assignments are designed to be relevant and engaging, while instructional practices foster student reflection, resilience, a growth mindset, agency, and empowerment.

- *Collaborative, project-based learning teaches social emotional skills and fosters social awareness and engagement.* The schools use project-based learning as a space for students to practice social emotional skills as they work in groups and in the community. Importantly, these experiential learning opportunities help build relationships between students and among students and teachers, enable students to practice collaboration and relationship skills, promote social awareness and interdependence, and foster community engagement.

- *Performance-based assessments foster reflection, resilience, responsibility, and a growth mindset.* Fenway's Junior Review, El Puente's practice of graduating students by performance assessment, and ISA's portfolio process and practice of student-led conferences provide opportunities for students to reflect on and demonstrate their academic progress while understanding the social emotional journey that it took to get there. These learning experiences foster reflection, build resilience and responsibility, show students that they have great potential to grow and change over time, and empower students with the information and agency they need to make thoughtful, informed decisions about the future.

- *Restorative disciplinary practices preserve relationships, foster responsibility, and respect students' dignity.* Even when disciplinary action is needed, Fenway, El Puente, and ISA draw on their social emotional learning and social justice education perspectives to provide opportunities for students to practice social emotional skills and remain part of the community. Restorative practices rely both on developing students' sense of personal responsibility as well as their essential interdependence with and responsibility to others.

- *School traditions, rituals, clubs, and activities build community, honor students, and support voice and agency.* Formal and informal school traditions, rituals, clubs, and activities support students' social and emotional needs by building community, honoring students and families, and fostering student voice and agency. From orientation activities that initiate students and families into the school community, to practices that celebrate student achievements, to clubs and activities that give students time and place to share their cultures and their struggles, social emotional support is both broad and tailored to the needs of each community. These kinds of practices importantly work to reinforce and make every day a school culture of engagement and empowerment as well as complement and support school features and structures that are set up to organize these kinds of experiences on a larger scale.

Lessons for Social Emotional Learning Research

Social emotional learning in high school: Adopting a developmental perspective

Our findings highlight the developmental knowledge that underlies effective social emotional learning practice. Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all seek to educate the "whole child"; successfully doing so requires understanding which social emotional needs, challenges, and opportunities for growth can and should be targeted along students' educational and developmental journeys. Effective social emotional learning in high school will benefit from incorporating a developmental perspective that aligns its practice with the processes of growth and transition that accompany adolescence.[14]

Social emotional learning across diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic schooling contexts

Our findings also underscore the need for research on social emotional learning to: 1) better theorize how social emotional learning can and should be conceptualized and practiced to most effectively meet the needs of students from different backgrounds and engaged in diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic schooling contexts and 2) better understand how to leverage the practice of social emotional learning to engage, educate, and empower students who are frequently underserved, and often profoundly "left behind," by the mainstream educational system. In applying a social justice education perspective to social emotional learning, the schools that we document here intentionally tune their practice to meet the needs of their respective student communities by working to empower students to be agents of change in their own lives, for their communities, and for society at large. Across each school's social emotional learning practice, we observed the powerful—and sometimes subtle—ways in which this sociocultural tuning takes place.

Social emotional learning through a whole-school approach

Finally, our findings illustrate what a whole school, comprehensive approach to social emotional learning can offer in contrast to program-based interventions. While programmatic interventions may lend themselves more easily experimental evaluation, as well as be more straightforward for traditional schools to insert into their ongoing activities and programs, they are rarely embedded into the life of schools in meaningful and sustained ways and, thus, may have limited potential to positively affect student outcomes and experiences. While relatively uncommon at present, social emotional learning is likely to offer the greatest benefit to students when practiced and reinforced in a comprehensive way.[15] We also observed that social emotional learning was not meant for students alone. In order to provide the psychological resources and support necessary to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students, supporting the social and emotional needs of school staff was also a priority.[16]

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policy Makers

As the psychological, social, and emotional aspects of education receive increased attention in policy and practice circles, there is growing opportunity to more fully integrate a developmental, whole child perspective into how we teach students and prepare teachers.

On the policy side, there are several pieces of legislation at the federal level that seek to provide resources for social emotional learning, prepare and support teachers and education leaders, make available more funding to schools and researchers, and prioritize social emotional learning implementation—parts of the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013, the current Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization bills adopted by the House and Senate, the Education Sciences Reform Act, and the Higher Education Act include such policy innovations.

At the state level, a number of states are incorporating social and emotional learning standards into career and college standards in the Common Core as well as into standards for the preparation of teachers and administrators. States and districts are exploring how social emotional learning practices can transform school disciplinary practices by creating alternatives to suspension and expulsion and their disproportionate effects on students of color.

Several recommendations emerge from this study for practitioners and policy makers:

- *Erase the cognitive/non-cognitive divide in education.* Successfully educating all students requires both academic and psychological resources—academic, social, and emotional factors are essentially interwoven, mutually interdependent, and should not be considered in isolation from one another. They are critical to all students' opportunity to learn, but also matter in particular ways for students of color and for students in low-income contexts.

- *Leverage a "whole-child" perspective on student development.* Failing to overcome the cognitive/non-cognitive divide in education practice and policy will lead to innovations and strategies that are, ultimately, suboptimal. Education more broadly, and social and emotional learning in particular, also needs to align with students' key developmental pathways that evolve through their elementary, middle school, and high school years.

- *Engage systemic, whole-school change.* Integrating social emotional learning into schools and curricula will fail to be maximally effective if done by inserting isolated programs into factory-model high schools that continue to underserve and disadvantage many students. Social emotional learning will be most effective when practiced and implemented comprehensively and coherently across key levels of the school—climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices—as well as when its practice is supported by districts.

- *Teach social emotional skills explicitly and ensure that they are reflected and reinforced by school practices.* While a whole-school approach to social emotional learning is necessary, schools should also set aside a time and place to focus explicitly on social and emotional skill building.

Schools can do this by locating a place in the curriculum, possibly in advisory class, where students and teachers can develop and practice key skills and competencies.

- *Include a social emotional perspective in curricular and assessment policies.* Students are motivated, engaged, and responsible when their education is connected to who they are and what they care about. Curricula should be relevant, real world, and socially oriented. Assessment practices should reinforce the development of social emotional skills, enable students to apply what they learn in relevant ways, and reflect the ways in which learning is collaborative and interactional.

- *Establish approaches to discipline through practices that preserve relationships, respect dignity, and provide psychological support.* Common approaches to student discipline isolate students from their peers and teachers, expel students from the school community, offer little opportunity for students to learn from and make amends for their actions, and fail to provide psychological and emotional support. Moreover, students of color and students in poverty are disproportionately affected by harsh or zero-tolerance policies, fueling the school-to-prison pipeline, which do nothing to address the chronic stressors that often result in behavioral issues for these students.

- *Enable educators to become psychological, as well as academic, experts.* Preservice teacher training programs, as well as teacher and administrator certification requirements and continuing education opportunities, need to provide educators with the skills they need to cultivate classrooms and schools that support students' psychological, social, and emotional needs along with their academic needs. To serve students well, this requires increased expertise in social emotional learning and child development.

Conclusion

This research underscores how meeting students' psychological, social, and emotional needs is not simply an add-on to the academic goal of education. The psychological side of learning is already powerfully interdependent with the academic—what matters is whether schools leverage these connections to educate the "whole child" and provide students with the psychological resources that they need to succeed in school. Social emotional learning offers an effective way to meet students' psychological, social, emotional, and academic needs as well as prepare students to be personally and socially aware, skilled, and responsible to themselves and to their community.

As our findings show, taking a social emotional approach to education will be most effective when these strategies are developmentally informed, practiced through both whole-school implementation and direct instruction, and grounded in the needs of diverse student communities. Further, while incorporating a social emotional learning perspective is necessary to provide all students with an equitable, high-quality education suited to today's world, it is particularly critical to closing the opportunity gap and understanding the crucial ways in which schools today frequently underserve students of color and low-income students. While psychological resources cannot replace the material resource needs of schools, they are a vital part of the opportunity equation.

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This is a summary of the full report, which includes three case studies, a cross-case analysis, a technical report, and a research brief. To see the full series, please visit:
https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/1310

Endnotes

1 For example, the work of: Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House; Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi and other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. New York, NY: Norton; Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed*. New York, NY: Random House.

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