



May Convening and Site Visit and Field Hearing Cleveland Metropolitan School District Summary of Key Takeaways

The May 2017 convening of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, and the accompanying site visit and field hearing in Cleveland, Ohio yielded several insights for the successful integration of SEAD in K-12 Education. Some of the insights—including the need for a common language and clear conceptualization of SEAD as well as a policy framework that is sensitive to local contexts—build upon the themes that were raised during the Commission’s Inaugural Convening. The site visit and field hearing allowed the Commissioners to delve more deeply into issues of practice, with strong consensus emerging for an approach that includes both integrating SEAD into various aspects of K-12 education and explicit instruction of SEL. The critical role of teachers and adult social and emotional competency was also identified as central to full integration. Finally, there was an appreciation for the significant undertaking that this work requires for districts and schools to create the right climate and conditions for SEAD. The Cleveland example demonstrates that one approach that can create the right climate and conditions is the deliberate sequencing and scaffolding of SEAD integration, gradually over time. These themes are elaborated upon below. Additional key takeaways follow.

1. A common language, a clear conceptualization, and shared understanding are critical in order to integrate SEAD at the school and classroom levels.

A common vocabulary and clear conceptualization for social-emotional learning is an important first step in SEAD integration. Despite leaders in Cleveland working hard to establish these elements, it was not always evident that the various constituents in CMSD shared a deep, common understanding of SEAD integration. In the Superintendent’s view, ongoing work is needed to ensure that such an understanding is fully realized by teachers and school leaders. Importantly, there was general consensus that the language and conceptualization must be responsive to local context; however, whether that context is the state, district, or school level remains an open question. Finally, many expressed the view that the SEAD value proposition must be broad enough to encompass related initiatives (21st Century Skills, PBIS, other) so that partners, schools, and communities can begin to understand how the work connects.

2. Integrating SEAD and explicitly teaching SEL is not an either/or; both are necessary for full-scale implementation.

There was overwhelming agreement that the full integration of SEAD requires explicit instruction and SEL programming as well as efforts that address school climate and culture, and teaching and learning. Unless its implementation includes both integrated and explicit approaches, SEAD risks being characterized as an add-on program. Cleveland exemplified this dual/blended approach by using the Pathways and Second Step Curricula in its K-8 schools, and addressing school culture and climate through an array of strategies, including regular surveys of students and staff, and the use of planning centers.

3. The policy framework needs to be sensitive to local context and translated readily to corresponding practices.

“Being flexible is important because no two districts will be the same...we need to have guidelines to address the issues but not be prescriptive; let people experiment and adapt [SEAD] to their context.” – Robert Heard, Vice Chair, Board of Education, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Consistent with one of the overriding themes from the Inaugural Convening, the SEAD policy framework must be adaptable to the wide variety of contexts that exist in states, districts, and schools. This need for customization was evidenced by the variety of strategies utilized across the 102 Cleveland schools. The most effective policy framework will be sensitive to local context and promote experimentation and innovation within the local context. The policy framework must then be adapted or translated to corresponding practices at the district and school levels. As one panelist stated, “The challenge is how to engineer the practice.” By operationalizing the policies with supporting systems, practices, and tools, districts and schools will be able to see themselves in the work and begin to own it and implement it.

4. Deliberate sequencing and scaffolding of SEAD integration can create the right climate and conditions gradually over time.

“Gradually, it becomes a part of the culture—people see themselves in this tidal wave. But it is important to start small. People can get overwhelmed and simply not know where to begin. Prioritize what you can commit to and start from there.” – Jillian Ahrens, Teacher

The Cleveland case study illustrates one approach to integration that uses deliberate sequencing and scaffolding to create the right climate and conditions for SEAD that build gradually over time. As one Commissioner said, “it’s not about programs for kids, it’s about conditions for kids.” The incremental approach to integration in Cleveland helped foster buy-in, shared understanding, and a committed sense of ownership among educators, students, and families. The sequencing and scaffolding of SEAD integration also resulted in more teachers and school leaders taking ownership of the work as they were afforded the time and space to develop, innovate, and improve their practices. Measurement is key to this process; Cleveland uses some important measures (e.g. conditions for learning survey, planning center data) but other aspects of SEAD (e.g., integration in classroom instruction) have proven more difficult to measure. As one Commissioner noted, “a big message here is the role of sustained, continuous improvement.”

5. Teachers are central to the full integration of SEAD, and the social-emotional competency of adults is a prerequisite for doing this work well.

“We have to foster deep engagement and respect for the teachers. This is counter to the usual directive that goes down to them without regard for their own thoughts and abilities.” – Gene Wilhoit, Commissioner

Central to the integration of SEAD are the exemplary teachers who serve as ambassadors of the power of SEAD to principals and other teachers who are far more willing to hear from, understand, and trust a colleague than a state policymaker. Teachers must embrace the work, own it, and help to shape it. As one teacher said, “Once teachers see the value, they want to do it.” Cleveland stands out as a model for collaboration between the teachers’ union and the district, exemplified by their prioritization and operationalization of the Humanware Initiative, including the collective bargaining agreement that sustains its SEAD focus. Teacher development and buy-in begins with the schools of education where better training on SEAD-related topics needs to include child development, cognitive and brain science, and instruction on the relationship between SEAD and school performance, educational attainment and

overall well-being. Professional development must then build upon this foundational knowledge with an ongoing focus on child development and the intersection between neuroscience and learning.

“I knew that adults played a role, but I was surprised by how many times that came up. It is a powerful narrative of their personal journey as they move through supporting kids and developing their own SE skills.”
– Steve Canavero, Commissioner

The social and emotional competency of adults, including the leadership, staff, and administrators, is a prerequisite for the high-quality execution and integration of SEAD in K-12 education. The district, including the board, superintendent, and school leadership must model and be the leaders of the work. Teachers care when they see investment and commitment by leadership. While examples of adult development were not evident in terms of intentional programming or supports in Cleveland, the need to attend to adult social-emotional development was recognized by both principals and teachers. As one Commissioner commented, “All problems are adult problems.”

6. [The full integration of SEAD is a significant undertaking for districts and schools, which are faced with multiple demands and limited resources.](#)

Almost ten years into the integration of SEAD, Cleveland challenges remain with alignment and integration at the school and classroom levels. But such challenges have not prevented Cleveland from moving forward on building a culture of inclusion and a commitment to SEAD, testing models of such integration, and creating a mindset of continuous improvement. Cleveland’s intentional sequencing is one model for a strategy that deliberately builds capacity and shared ownership before more formal expectations for consistent practice.

Additional Takeaways

In addition to the themes described above, other critical takeaways emerged from the presentations, field hearing discussions, and site visits that merit further thought and consideration.

STATES AND DISTRICTS NEED A MECHANISM TO SHARE GOOD WORK IN SEAD AND COLLABORATE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS TOGETHER.

- Mechanisms do not currently exist or at least are not powerful enough for best practices and effective strategies to be shared widely across the K-12 landscape.
- Among the 600 plus school districts and charters in Ohio alone, there are examples of best practices, but the state lacks a formal process for districts to share their experiences, in particular as they progress through different levels of integration.
- While we are cautious about heavy-handed State solutions, facilitating the networking of similarly-situated schools across Ohio may be a powerful role for the State to play.
- One potential solution is a “national clearinghouse”— a place to share and learn, and to represent the many voices, in a united way, around the work — where the related work is brought together, state by state.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT EMERGED AS A CRITICAL ELEMENT OF FULL-SCALE INTEGRATION OF SEAD.

- While community organizations and parents were universally recognized as foundational support, it was not always clear from the Cleveland field hearing that parents and partners were actually deeply engaged and knowledgeable about the District’s Humanware initiative.
- The learning should happen for all. Parent, local youth and adult organizations committed to similar work, and partnering with local universities and colleges are avenues to build capacity. Family and community engagement strategies should be a part of overall SEAD integration, with a menu for schools to use to best fit their needs.

STUDENT VOICE AND EXPERIENCES EMERGED AS POWERFUL DRIVERS AND VALIDATORS OF SEAD.

- SEAD enabled students to confront and address their life challenges; articulate visions of “success”; and take responsibility for their own learning and development in partnership with teachers.
- The Commission should capture more student voice and stories through videography and other means to bring SEAD to life.

THE COMMISSION PILOT TESTED PUBLIC HEARINGS IN CLEVELAND AND SAW WHAT A POWERFUL TOOL THEY CAN BE TO GIVE COMMUNITIES VOICE AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION WITH LEADERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

- There may be a unique role for the Commission to play in sharing best practice, policy, challenges and successes across a network of districts, like the CDI, that will be the laboratories for experimentation with SEAD.