

# The Practice Base For How We Learn

## Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

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Consensus Statements of Evidence  
From the Council of Distinguished Educators

National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development  
The Aspen Institute

Sheldon Berman with Sydney Chaffee & Julia Sarmiento

March 12, 2018

## FOREWORD

The Consensus Statements in this document contain profound wisdom. The educators who together forged this consensus represent great distinction and diversity: they are teachers and counselors; they are superintendents and social entrepreneurs; they come from traditional public schools and charter schools; they come from Anchorage, Alaska to Andover, Massachusetts and from Tampa, Florida to Tacoma, Washington. They articulate an inspiring vision for learning in our public schools, and state clearly the conditions that need to be in place to make this vision a reality for all students.

These statements of practice build on and complement scientific consensus statements regarding The Evidence Base for How We Learn that were jointly developed by leading neuroscientists, psychologists, physicians, economists, and education scholars and published in September 2017. Taken together, these statements reinforce deep insights that parents and educators have always understood, and that science now establishes empirically: the social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning are inextricably linked in the brain; healthy development across all these domains is essential for success in school and in life; schools have the ability to positively shape students' social, emotional, and academic development, in partnership with families and communities; and integrating social and emotional learning with academic instruction contributes to greater achievement and equity in education outcomes.

The Aspen Institute deeply appreciates the contributions of these distinguished educators, who unanimously endorse The Practice Base for How We Learn. Their collective effort lays the cornerstone for achieving much better learning outcomes for students. We are especially grateful to Shelley Berman, Julia Sarmiento, and Sydney Chaffee, who took lead in drafting these consensus statements, with active participation and guidance from the whole group throughout the process.

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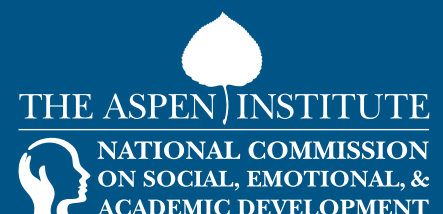
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## WHY SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT IS IMPORTANT

As educators, we envision a world in which students graduate from high school not only prepared for college and career, but accepting their responsibility to take an active role in their communities and contribute to civic life. We envision a world of principled, compassionate civility, where students learn through guided practice in real-life situations how to engage in open dialogue and to treat one another with dignity and mutual respect. We envision a world in which school is where children learn how to be the best possible versions of themselves and to pursue the positive difference they can make in the world. We see the integration of social, emotional, and academic development as the pathway to learning that achieves these ends.

Social and emotional development is the process through which people acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills 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. Weaving together social, emotional, and academic development creates high-quality learning environments in schools and classrooms. In these environments, children can confidently do their best work because they interact with a cooperative and welcoming community of learners. When social, emotional,

and academic development are deliberately and thoughtfully interconnected, students benefit from learning experiences that enrich their understanding of academic content and strengthen their critical thinking skills. Such experiences enable students to be more effective contributors in their classrooms today and in their workplaces and communities tomorrow.

Schools and districts across the country already have set in motion strategies that pave the way forward. These promising practices, highlighted throughout this report, can serve as catalysts for education leaders and policymakers to fully integrate social, emotional, and academic development.

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## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HOW WE LEARN

In September 2017, the Council of Distinguished Scientists of the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development issued *The Evidence Base for How We Learn*—a brief on the connections among social, emotional, and academic development. Drawing from research in brain science, medicine, economics, psychology, and education, these 28 scientists concluded that learning, by its very nature, is both social and emotional.

In essence, cognitive abilities, emotional competencies, and social and interpersonal skills intertwine in the learning process. Since

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strength or weakness in any one of these three areas can foster or impede growth in the others, academic learning is best achieved when its social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions are all well supported.

The scientists also agreed that the research provides clarity on several deeper issues.

- Social, emotional, and academic development matters. These interdependent competencies are essential to success in school, workplace, home, and community. Their integration also improves school climate and teacher effectiveness, and children benefit regardless of where they live, their racial/ethnic background, or their socio-economic status.
- Social and emotional skills are malleable. As with cognitive skills, we can teach and develop them throughout childhood, adolescence, and beyond. High-quality programs and practices shape environments and experiences to positively affect students' social and emotional learning as well as their academic outcomes.
- Schools play a central role in fostering healthy social, emotional, and academic development, particularly when their work is reinforced by safe and supportive family and community environments. Success depends upon consistent implementation, modeling by adults and peers, and professional development that deepens school staff's social and emotional skills.
- Supporting the integration of social, emotional, and academic development is a wise public investment, well worth the expenditure of effort and resources. Higher social and emotional competencies are associated with wage growth, job productivity, and long-term employment. Such competencies can reduce violence, drug use, delinquent behavior, and

mental health problems and provide internal support for children who experience the stress of poverty, violence, and trauma in their families or neighborhoods. They have the potential to help create a more equitable society where all children can succeed.

The Council of Distinguished Scientists closed its report by noting that, "Integrating social and emotional development with academic instruction is foundational to the success of our young people, and therefore to the success of our education system and society at large." The Council's work encourages us—as parents, educators, and community members—to elevate the nation's vision of high-quality programs and practices and to hasten the integration of social, emotional, and academic development for all students.

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## NATIONAL COMMISSION'S COUNCIL OF DISTINGUISHED EDUCATORS

Responding to the urgent need to weave social, emotional, and academic development into preK-12 education, the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development convened a Council of Distinguished Educators. The Commission charged the Council with developing a consensus report that frames what we know about effectively integrating social, emotional, and academic development within our schools.

The Council is composed of teachers, school counselors, principals, system leaders, superintendents, and community partners from a diverse range of schools and educational systems across the country. The members bring wide experience in the emerging field of integrating social, emotional, and academic

development, including myriad models of practice. Their views build upon and validate the earlier brief, “The Evidence Base for How We Learn,” presented by the Council of Distinguished Scientists. The Council of Distinguished Educators drew on its collective, firsthand experiences in schools and classrooms to develop this companion document, “The Practice Base for How We Learn,” which corroborates the interconnectedness of the social, emotional, and cognitive domains as essential to all learning. It also examines how the role of the teacher, as well as the classroom and school environment, encompass these same three dimensions—parallel conditions that our profession needs to recognize and capitalize on if we are to maximize the learning outcomes of all students. The conclusions of the Council members underscore the critical role that preK-12 institutions can and must play in the full integration of social, emotional, and academic development.

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## LEARNING AND TEACHING ARE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL

Learning necessitates taking risks. It means challenging oneself to master new skills and explore new understandings. It means tolerating ambiguity and being willing to make mistakes. Effective academic development requires an environment where students feel socially and emotionally safe in taking the risks necessary to learn and grow. The essential character of that environment is the degree to which students feel known, cared about, included and supported. The social and emotional environments of the classroom and school have a profound impact on students’ ability and willingness to learn.

Just as students’ academic learning is integrally tied to social and emotional factors, so is academic

teaching a social and emotional endeavor. Research provides clear direction for instruction that best supports student engagement and intellectual risk taking, and for the environments that foster strong learning communities. The way teachers and administrators interact with students, facilitate relationships among students, and model positive relationship-building plays a critical role in students’ sense of belonging, emotional safety, ability to collaborate with peers, and identities as learners. These attributes enable students to engage with rigorous academic content.

Educators typically develop frameworks for academic learning by creating a scope and sequence in each curricular area. However, we have not paid the same close attention to structuring the social and emotional environment of the classroom or to sequencing students’ social and emotional development. The Council of Distinguished Educators endorses the Council of Distinguished Scientists’ assertion that it is time to move the nation “beyond the debate as to whether schools should attend to students’ social and emotional development, to how we can integrate social, emotional, and academic development into the mission and daily work of all schools.” The principles highlighted below articulate pathways to accomplishing this goal.

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# CONSENSUS STATEMENTS ON PRACTICE

## SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT IS FOR ALL STUDENTS

**The integration of social, emotional, and academic development shifts the emphasis to learning environments.**

Integrating social, emotional, and academic development enables all students to work together well to achieve the goals of the classroom, while appreciating and respecting interpersonal differences. Social and emotional learning is sometimes regarded too narrowly as a targeted intervention just for students who experienced trauma or who have behavior issues or other special needs. Although the integration of social, emotional, and academic learning does benefit students who are confronting challenges, this integrated approach is for all students. This reality shifts the emphasis from addressing particular students' behavior or motivation to understanding the central role of the learning environment. By not viewing students as the problem, this approach directs adults to explore the broader environmental and social context in which students learn.

The goal is to create an inclusive environment where each student feels affirmed and valued, receiving the supports and developing the competencies to be successful. Through approaches such as explicit skill instruction, classroom community-building activities, and the embedding of social and emotional learning into

academic instruction, educators create a culture and climate that enhance the growth of each student's social and emotional competencies in ways that also support equity and excellence in academic achievement. As educators, as policymakers, as parents and community leaders, we must consciously design, implement, and support environments where all students can successfully develop the social, emotional, and academic skills required for success in an increasingly complex world. To do otherwise is to risk accelerating and deepening inequality.

**The integration of social, emotional, and academic development promotes equity.**

The mission of public education is to provide all individuals with access to the opportunity to be successful. However, preK-12 education in the United States is providing neither equitable opportunities nor equitable outcomes for all students, as evidenced by markedly and persistently lower rates of high school graduation and college access and completion for low-income students, English language learners, students with learning differences, and students of color.

A key goal of integrating social, emotional, and academic development is to foster a school climate and culture as well as learning opportunities that are inclusive of and responsive to the diversity of interests, aptitudes, perspectives, races, and cultures represented in the classroom. Enabling students to feel respected for their cultural identities and perspectives and to learn culturally relevant



material is an essential element in creating safe, affirming, and inclusive classrooms. For example, various cultures approach social situations differently. Drawing out and valuing this diversity acknowledges students' cultures while promoting equity and expanding choices and opportunities for all students. Open conversations about culture and cultural experiences teach students to appreciate the perspective of others and the richness that diversity brings to learning.

In addition, far too many students come to school from circumstances of poverty, violence, and/or childhood trauma. These adverse experiences generally put them at a disadvantage compared with students from more privileged environments. We know that the chronic stress associated with growing up in poverty, especially intergenerational, concentrated poverty, can have long-lasting consequences for learning, behavior, and well-being.

Integrated learning ensures that the underlying skills that give some students a social, emotional, or academic advantage in learning are explicitly and intentionally developed in all students, enabling them to express themselves and perform at their highest levels. By addressing the social and emotional dimensions of learning along with

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academic development, teachers get to know their students better, recognize the strengths that each student brings to the class, and create an environment where all students' cultures and backgrounds are leveraged as assets for learning. Teachers can further personalize the learning environment by providing customized instructional strategies and evidence-based supports and by promoting positive relationships with multiple adults in the school. We need to ensure that all schools, especially those in high-poverty areas, have sufficient person power, resources, and the necessary partners to provide students with the educational opportunities they deserve. Combined, these strategies can serve as a buffer against the effects of chronic stress, enabling students' social and emotional competencies to blossom and heightening their engagement in academics.

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## SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC LEARNING FOR STUDENTS STARTS WITH ADULTS

**Professional and collegial support for integrating the three dimensions of learning enhances educators' effectiveness in the classroom.**

Teachers who integrate social, emotional, and academic development are more effective at engaging students in learning, managing their classrooms, and resolving conflicts. They create safe and supportive settings where students can take the necessary risks for academic growth and personal development. Adept at managing relationships within the classroom and supporting challenged students equitably, these teachers foster highly effective learning environments.

To fully integrate social and emotional dimensions of learning with academic instruction, teachers



and other adults need support. Colleges seldom incorporate this integrated method of teaching into programs for prospective teachers or into advanced degree programs. However, high-quality professional development can provide practicing teachers with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to integrate social, emotional, and academic learning.

The best professional support takes place not in one-time workshops, but through ongoing dialogue and interaction with colleagues and coaches/consultants over an extended period. Teachers learn by engaging peers in rich conversations about lesson design, about the ethical handling of challenging situations, and about applying an integrated approach to best practices. When schools routinely enable such conversations, they foster continuous growth and professional expertise that result in more effective classroom instruction.

### **Adults model social and emotional skills in their interactions with students and other adults.**

Students learn by what they hear and observe as adults relate to students and other adults. They notice whether adults' actions are congruent with their words and whether adults demonstrate the same social and emotional competencies they expect of students. Whether they are aware of it or not, adults are always on display and students are absorbing subtle lessons about how to communicate with and treat other people. By heightening adults' mindfulness of the impact their words and actions are having, schools can intentionally take advantage of daily interactions to further develop students' social and emotional competencies.

Ideally, on-the-job training offers occasions for teachers to reflect on the language they use with students, the way teachers themselves manage their emotions in challenging situations, and

the relational trust they build with colleagues, students, and families. Just as students need to reflect on their evolving social and emotional skills in order to improve them, teachers need the opportunity to not only learn how to teach these skills, but to understand how they can advance their own social and emotional development. Through guided practice, teachers can learn to recognize the messages they are sending and to model positive social and emotional approaches.

Managing emotions, setting and achieving goals, expressing empathy, maintaining positive relationships, and making responsible decisions are as relevant for how staff work together as they are for fostering the social and emotional development of students. As teachers refine their own competencies, the resulting collegiality enhances professional morale, which in turn improves student performance. It also correlates with greater retention of early-career teachers, prevention of mid-career burnout, and increased public respect for the role of educators.

### **Social, emotional and academic development flourishes when everyone in the school is involved.**

Essential to creating and sustaining a positive school culture is the degree to which students feel known, cared about, appreciated and included, and have a meaningful voice in the community of the classroom and the school. Social, emotional, and academic development is best achieved when all adults—teachers, administrators, support personnel, and community partners—share a commitment, use a common language and approach, and model the mindsets and behaviors they seek to develop in students. When social, emotional, and academic development becomes the collective effort of faculty and administration within a school, the culture and climate improves teaching and learning across the entire school.

A consistent approach across all classrooms and administrative offices creates a reliable environment with well-defined social norms, understandable terminology, and clear expectations. This consistency provides the kind of structure and culture that supports children as they work to develop their own social, emotional, and academic competencies.

Creating consistency in culture extends beyond teachers and administrators. Students learn every day from every interaction with adults. The driver's greeting as students board the bus; the cafeteria worker's attention to individual children's food preferences; the office administrator's respect for students' queries; the way custodians maintain the building and value students; the attitude of community partners toward students inside and outside the school setting—all of these elements contribute to the climate and culture of a school and help to determine whether it is inclusive, welcoming, fair, and supportive. The language that staff use, their receptivity to students, their responsiveness when there is a problem—these factors make a genuine difference in how children feel about their school and their place in it.

School climate and teaching and learning are enhanced when all staff understand the direction the school is taking and receive the necessary training to create consistency and coherence. Although professional development in this area may not be as intensive for support staff as it

is for teachers and specialists, it is still valuable in ensuring the success of social, emotional, and academic development. The expectation that support staff will contribute to a positive climate and culture, and the importance of their contributions, can be clearly expressed by professional staff and formalized in personnel and contracting processes.

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## STRONG LEADERSHIP IS CENTRAL

**A clear vision, mission, and strategic plan provide the foundation for integrating social, emotional, and academic development throughout preK-12 education.**

Most schools and districts develop statements of their vision, mission, core values, and beliefs. These statements reflect the organization's culture. They are intended to establish meaningful goals for student outcomes and to inspire the staff and community to align resources and strategies to achieve those outcomes.

These stated commitments provide an opportunity for the district or school to publicly articulate its commitment to integrating social, emotional, and academic development. If well crafted, the statements can focus attention on reshaping the school environment. In addition,

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because they serve as a framework for decisions from the administrative level to the classroom, they constitute an important vehicle for moving the integration of social, emotional, and academic development forward.

Strengthening the collective investment in the district's vision and values involves collaboration by school board members, administrators, teachers, parents, partner organizations, and community members. To formally set expectations for staff and partners at all levels, these statements can be followed by specific activities and targets within a strategic plan as well as through the standards and indicators embedded in processes such as hiring, induction, evaluation, and selection of partner organizations. Each of these processes presents another opportunity to affirm the district's support for social, emotional, and academic learning.

States also play a significant policy role and can support districts that are pursuing the integration of social, emotional, and academic development. A number of states have embedded this integrated approach in their vision and mission, modeling support through their own culture and policy statements as well as through state standards for social and emotional learning. In addition, some states have supported the integration of social, emotional, and academic development through funding initiatives, standards for district and school improvement plans, and acknowledgments for achievement.

**Leadership positions dedicated to the integration of social, emotional, and academic development strengthen and speed its implementation.**

Authentic integration requires new ways of working. Many systems have pursued social and emotional learning through discrete, add-on programs that are disconnected from broader efforts to improve instruction and academic

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achievement. The challenge for educational leaders is to create conditions where both explicit and embedded approaches are complementary to and coordinated with other curricular initiatives. One effective strategy is to establish positions focused on this responsibility.

Internal leadership, coordination, and expertise strengthen these integration efforts and improve implementation, although roles and titles will vary with the size of the school system. A leadership position such as director of social and emotional learning or program coordinator for integration of social, emotional, and academic development sends a signal from the district leadership to staff that this field is valued and merits concerted effort. Such a position can help ensure that the social and emotional dimensions of learning are incorporated into professional development, school culture and climate, review of instructional materials and programs, and other instructional initiatives.

Identifying and elevating internal expertise also enhances a school's or system's ability to implement and sustain an integrated approach to social, emotional, and academic development. These internal "experts" may be instructional coaches who work directly with teachers to model integration and social and emotional learning strategies in the classroom. They may also be lead teachers who open their classrooms so other teachers can visit and observe, or who support colleagues in adapting practices for their own classrooms. Investing in in-house expertise demonstrates the value placed on this effort and the willingness to support teachers and administrators as they seek to improve their practice.

### **Monitoring progress promotes continuous improvement in the integration of social, emotional, and academic development.**

In recent years, assessment practices have mushroomed relative to social and emotional development. Commercial and open-source survey instruments can provide data on school culture and climate, as well as on the degree of connection, support, and safety that students experience—factors that are critical to deep engagement with rigorous academics. Such instruments enable educators to identify strong and weak points in implementation, monitor short-term progress, and detect longitudinal trends in attaining social, emotional, and academic development goals.

Still, caution is warranted in interpreting the assessment results. While learning-condition surveys are valuable in guiding next steps, they are not valid for accountability purposes. Policymakers and system leaders should resist basing sanctions or incentives on the results, instead taking time to learn from school systems that are using the data effectively to move practice forward.

There is also interest in directly measuring students' growth in competencies related to social and emotional development. Valuable research is under way on more useful measures of learning environments and direct measures of students' growth and development, such as observation protocols, simulations, and engagement in tasks with diverse groups. Again, however, assessment tools are lagging. Given the risk that such measures could be used inappropriately to label individual students, it is prudent at this time to focus on data for large-scale, continuous improvement purposes. Educators, researchers, and policymakers would benefit by working together to enrich the knowledge and evidence base for the field and to support continuous improvement, while avoiding the pursuit of accountability before the measures—and the field—are ready.

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## **EXPLICIT AND EMBEDDED INSTRUCTION AND A CARING CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL CLIMATE DEVELOPS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES**

### **Explicit instruction in social and emotional competencies provides students with a foundation for further development.**

Cooperating with others, resolving conflicts productively, managing emotions, and navigating social situations are social and emotional competencies learned over time. Explicit instruction provides students with understanding and ways of interacting that enable them to develop and expand skills in these areas. As with traditional subject areas, social and emotional abilities can be taught with a scope and sequence and with dedicated time and space in the curriculum. However, explicit instruction does not mean teacher-led lectures. Instead, it involves

creative and engaging learning experiences such as role-playing, story writing, interactive discussions, and problem-solving real situations in the classroom or school environment.

Instruction in social and emotional skills is best designed around a competency framework that provides clarity and structure to lesson and program development. Schools and evidence-based programs are using a number of overlapping competency frameworks to structure their approach to social and emotional instruction. One such framework highlights the five core competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Another focuses on cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. A third emphasizes cognitive skills such as attention control, inhibition, and planning; emotional competencies such as coping with frustration, recognizing and managing emotions, and taking the perspective of another; and social and interpersonal skills such as reading social cues, resolving interpersonal conflicts, and cooperating with others. Regardless of the specific competencies selected, the key to fostering social and emotional development is a continuing loop in which we first help students understand why the skills are important and how they can be used effectively, then create opportunities for students to practice those skills, and finally provide feedback and time for reflection.

**Academic instruction is most effective when teachers deliberately embed the social and emotional dimensions of learning.**

Learning is not a passive activity. How we teach is as instructive as what we teach. Just as the culture of the classroom must reflect social belonging and emotional safety, so can academic instruction embody and enhance these competencies and be enhanced by them. In fact, student

engagement in learning is essential if we want students to understand material more deeply and retain it longer.

To more effectively engage students in learning, regular classroom instruction in every curricular area includes opportunities for students to share ideas, discuss differing perspectives, work cooperatively, and engage in group projects. For these strategies to be successful, students need to be able to listen to and respect the views of others, work together to achieve group goals, and seek support as well as offer it to others. The goal is not simply to agree but also to learn how to disagree civilly and productively while moving forward on common objectives.

Students who learn to resolve their differences with words are unlikely to become adults who try to solve interpersonal problems with violence or discrimination. Student engagement strategies thus become fertile ground both for learning academic content and for acquiring and refining

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social and interpersonal skills. Providing students with opportunities to reflect on and improve their social and emotional skills as they engage in these activities can help them become more successful learners.

Every academic subject area provides opportunities for students to think through social and emotional issues. Literature and social studies offer occasions to discuss how fictional or historical characters handled social or emotional situations and what might have happened if they had dealt with these situations differently. The study of science requires investigations, observations, the formulation and testing of hypotheses, coping with ambiguity, and making judgments based on evidence. The learning of mathematics occurs best when students collaborate to solve problems and understand concepts.

The study of the arts invites students to ponder the artist's intention and frame of reference. Classes in physical education and health offer direct instruction in social and emotional competencies and provide context for learning to serve on a team, handle emotions, and display positive sportsmanship. Service-learning opportunities exist in all curricular areas, enabling students to demonstrate the social and emotional skills of empathy, compassion, and responsibility.

Through the planning of daily instructional processes, the very content students are studying can offer seamless ways of fostering social, emotional, and academic development. School leaders can bolster this work by organizing educators to review curriculum materials for the explicit integration of social and emotional dimensions of learning; to adapt scope and sequence documents, unit guides, lesson plans, and student tasks in order to make integration more visible; and to provide easily accessible resources to support integrated learning.

### **Creating inclusive and caring classroom and school culture deepens and enriches students' social and emotional competencies.**

Classroom and school environments can enhance or diminish students' social and emotional competencies. To effect positive change, the culture of the school and classroom needs to embody the social and emotional skills we want students to develop. When students practice these skills often and consistently, the classroom and school become inclusive and caring communities in which students experience being known, valued, and influential contributors to the work of the classroom and to other students. This process is reinforced through the daily modeling of these competencies by both adults and students within the community.

The creation of caring communities entails giving students opportunities to get to know one another, to help fashion classroom rules, to articulate common goals, to bridge differences, and to resolve the conflicts that naturally arise in every classroom, such as sharing in playground games or addressing hurtful statements made about a classmate. It also extends to classroom management strategies. Specific strategies for addressing conflicts and disciplinary issues—such as restorative practices, developmental discipline, and logical consequences—reflect the principles of social, emotional, and academic development. Through classroom-based community-building strategies, students connect to others and have a constructive voice in making their classroom community and school better places for everyone.

Building a sense of community within a classroom or school necessarily involves recognizing and affirming the diverse cultures and backgrounds that are present. Through open conversations about culture and cultural experiences, the inclusive classroom engenders respect for diverse cultural identities and helps children learn how



to make their peers feel safe and acknowledged. As community members, students have an opportunity to recognize how their actions affect others and to develop a sense of responsibility toward them.

These three strategies—explicit instruction, embedding social and emotional competencies within academic instruction, and community building—are mutually supportive. Applied together, they bring a positive and productive consistency to the culture and climate of the classroom and school. They also reflect a commitment to equity in education by supporting the growth and development of all students. Investing classroom time in all of these strategies yields significant dividends in the form of more efficient, effective, and equitable learning environments.

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## HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS MATTER

**Parents, families, and caregivers are partners in extending social, emotional, and academic development.**

Parents, families and caregivers play a critical and foundational role in students' social and emotional development. Just as young people feel valued, heard and included at school when social, emotional, and academic development is integrated, so do they benefit when family members engage in similar experiences at home or in concert with the school and community. Family involvement can take many forms, from working with the school on policy statements to attending family education programs to participating in home-based social-emotional learning activities. Family education programs that explore social and emotional learning, particularly

in the area of managing conflict, help bridge gaps between school and home by advocating consistent use of language and discipline. These programs can take place in partnership with other organizations and in community venues that attract parents and families who may not have had positive school experiences.

However, partnership with families goes beyond parent education programs. School-sponsored events can draw families in and build a sense of inclusive community. Parent meetings can model the same community-building strategies that teachers use in classrooms and administrators use in faculty meetings to generate a sense of collegiality and community. Engaging families—for example, by ensuring they have a voice through committees or other parent leadership opportunities designed to enhance school climate and culture—is mutually supportive to the school and to parents. Involving families in the early planning for integrating social, emotional, and academic development not only educates them about the concepts but gives them ownership in their child's progress. Above all, school must be—and must be seen as—a welcoming and safe harbor for families.

**Community service and service learning enable young people to exhibit and strengthen their social, emotional, and academic competencies.**

Demonstrating social and emotional competencies in real situations extends and deepens these abilities. Volunteering in community organizations, participating in local food and clothing drives or disaster relief efforts, and mentoring younger peers are powerful ways for students to apply the social, emotional, and academic competencies they have been developing. Even more effective are service-learning activities that integrate service into academic instruction, such as participating in environmental cleanup efforts while studying ecosystems or volunteering at a local service



organization as part of a civics course. Service and service-learning experiences provide unique opportunities for students to express empathy and compassion while displaying their ability to make responsible decisions. Helping others as part of a school-sponsored undertaking often has a profound impact on a young person's confidence and willingness to reach out and assist people in need, even many years later.

**Community partnerships provide support for social, emotional, and academic development during the school day and beyond the schoolhouse doors.**

Students' in-school and out-of-school lives are touched by many organizations, including after-school programs, local youth services, social service organizations, faith-based communities, and municipal agencies such as the courts and police and fire departments. Because a number of these organizations focus on positive youth development and provide services to schools and students, they serve as valuable allies in the work of supporting social and emotional growth and development. They often know students from perspectives that schools don't and thus can shed new light on students' strengths and struggles. Where students experience the stress of poverty and trauma, community partners can strengthen schools' capacity to provide responsive learning environments. By welcoming organizations' representatives to professional development opportunities and community partnership meetings, schools extend the impact that community adults have on young people's development of positive social and emotional competencies.

The relationships built across organizational boundaries and the care exhibited by adults throughout the community serve to strengthen the support system for all young people, weaving a seamless safety net that promotes their

resilience and success. When educational, social, religious, and civic organizations apply common language and consistent strategies, young people's social, emotional, and academic development is reinforced and the sustainability of these efforts is enhanced.

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## CONCLUSION

Learning, by its very nature, is both social and emotional. Creating the right conditions for learning brings dramatic benefits for students, staff, and parents. A caring school community intentionally generates opportunities for students to develop the competencies they require to be successful in school, work and life; it also offers all of us a vision and model of the way the world could be.

The vision articulated by the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development is achievable. As educators who represent varied roles, geographical locations, and community demographics, we know from experience that the practices outlined in this report are effective. Like the Council of Distinguished Scientists, we believe that integrating social, emotional, and academic development is foundational to the success of our young people and will enhance the success of our schools and our society as a whole. The time has come to accelerate the work of bringing the integration of social, emotional, and academic development to every district, every school, every classroom, and every student. This work deserves a place at the forefront of our nation's education agenda.

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