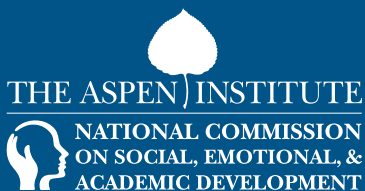


IN SUPPORT OF HOW CHILDREN LEARN

A Family Call to Action

About this Call to Action

This Call to Action from the National Commission's Parent Advisory Panel articulates the urgent need for schools and communities to support students' comprehensive development. It is part of a series of briefs that are being developed by various advisory groups to inform the work of the Commission. The official recommendations of the Commission itself, which will be released in late 2018, will draw from the parents' vision of learning.



As parents, we send our children to school each morning with multiple goals in mind. We want our children to be happy and discover passion in their learning. We want them to be safe and secure, growing increasingly comfortable with their place in the world. We expect our children will master the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic. We embrace K-12 schooling as a path to entering the workforce or pursuing further education. We also see school as an opportunity for our children to encounter and befriend children with different backgrounds and perspectives.

The more we watch our children grow, the clearer it becomes that learning is social, emotional, and

academic and that connecting these skills is integral to achieving these goals and more.

What We Know About How Our Children Learn

As parents, we want our children to develop the array of skills needed to build a solid foundation for a productive life. Skills such as respect, responsibility, self-confidence in the face of adversity, problem solving, kindness, teamwork, and self-control all form a solid foundation for continued personal growth and academic achievement.

Our children learn these important life skills in a variety of settings, including at home, in

FAMILY

extracurricular activities, as part of their faith communities, at afterschool jobs or volunteer opportunities, and at school. We are heartened that many schools have begun the process of integrating social and emotional development with academic instruction. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, this work has often been intermittent or viewed as optional to our children's growth and development, rather than fundamental to how learning happens.

We recognize that for our next generation to thrive, all schools must be intentional in their effort to educate the whole student—to help our children develop literacy, math, and science skills as well as the social, emotional, and intellectual capabilities that underlie them. We call on our fellow parents to join us in asking our schools to integrate social, emotional, and academic learning. And we call on educators, community leaders, and policymakers to help us re-envision and revitalize learning to prepare our children to succeed in school today and in their work, family life, and communities tomorrow.

The Parent Advisory Panel of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

The Aspen Institute convened the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development to re-envision what constitutes

success in our schools. From its beginning, the Commission has strived to ensure that a diverse set of experiences and perspectives inform its work. The Parent Advisory Panel was assembled to help meet this end. The Panel consists of 15 parents whose children range in age from 1 to 25. We hail from urban, suburban, and rural communities across the country, and we represent an array of cultural, religious, and political backgrounds.

This report is the result of our immersion in the topic of social, emotional, and academic development over the past year and draws on our diverse experiences as parents of students in America's public schools.

We hope this Call to Action illuminates the parent perspective on social, emotional, and academic development and informs the National Commission's final recommendations on research, practice, and policy. We also hope that this call inspires our fellow parents across the country and provides them with ideas for how they can work with their schools to enhance their children's learning—especially in ways that complement rather than compete with family life in America today.

We recognize that for our next generation to thrive, all schools must be intentional in their effort to educate the whole student.



OUR VISION FOR HOW OUR CHILDREN LEARN

WE NEED OUR SCHOOLS TO KNOW AND TEACH THE WHOLE STUDENT

As adults we know that what works for one child may not work for another. This important truth is why we believe one key theme has emerged so often in our conversations with other parents: a universal desire for our children to be recognized and valued as individuals at school.

We see social, emotional, and academic development as an opportunity to educate the whole student. In fact, a growing body of work shows that a focus on integrating social, emotional, and academic learning and development in school can result in a virtuous cycle where children prosper. When children are known and valued for their individual strengths, they are then able to more effectively develop and exercise those strengths in ways that benefit not only their personal and academic advancement, but also the advancement of their classmates, schools, and communities. All of this can make our schools not only happier and more productive places to be, but also safer and more conducive to learning and development.

To support our children's learning and development, we must:

Develop students' social, emotional, and academic skills in ways that ensure children of all abilities and backgrounds are recognized, engaged, and supported. All children, regardless of their strengths and needs, deserve opportunities to build and practice their social, emotional, and academic skills through instruction, experience, and community-building activities. By viewing children through their strengths rather than their weaknesses—regardless of background or circumstance—we can not only prepare each child to excel and achieve to their greatest potential, but also expect it of them.

Move away from one-size-fits-all policies and procedures to better meet the needs of each and every student. We are enthusiastic about personalized instruction that allows each child an opportunity to learn in the ways and at the pace that best suits them. We support efforts to shift from strictly punitive discipline procedures to practices that help children learn and grow from their mistakes. And we're committed to helping teachers transform classrooms into safe, affirmative environments where children receive the support they need to tackle the intellectual

challenges that lead to growth and development, academically and otherwise.

WE NEED TO BE PARTNERS IN OUR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Parents know that the home and family play an indispensable role in educational outcomes. We welcome every opportunity to collaborate with our children's schools.

Despite this, we have sometimes struggled to leverage the potential of a robust family-school partnership. At times, we have felt the sting of the refrain "it begins at home," pushing back on our ability to bring up our children. And we understand teachers and school staff members have sometimes felt unsupported and underappreciated in their work as they juggle an ever-expanding list of roles and responsibilities. We also recognize that schools operate under myriad resource constraints. And we trust that teachers and school leaders recognize families often operate under these constraints, too. All of this is why we believe it's important for parents and schools to join forces to support children's healthy development and learning.

To build strong family-school partnerships, we must:

Include families in developing policies and strategies that address the connection between social, emotional, and academic development. Families that understand the importance of curriculum, practices, and approaches that foster social, emotional, and academic development can go a long way toward ensuring long-term success. We encourage schools to partner with parents during both the planning and implementation of efforts to support students' social, emotional, and academic growth.

Communicate with families clearly, concisely, early, and often. Effective school-to-home communication can be a challenge. Parents today are facing information overload, and schools have a lot of important, valid information to share each day. To best bring all families into the fold when it comes to their children's social, emotional, and academic development, it's important to cast a wide net. Not only do schools have to be aware of cultural and linguistic needs in the community, they must choose to communicate in ways that overcome those differences. In addition to leveraging existing channels of communication, weaving social, emotional, and academic development into evening events, parent-teacher conferences, field days, sporting events, and assemblies can help reach all parents.

WE NEED TO SUPPORT ADULTS WHO SUPPORT OUR CHILDREN

From parents and guardians at home to teachers in school, from the bus drivers who greet students in the morning to the support staff who make our children's days run smoothly—every adult contributes to creating a supportive learning environment. Being surrounded by adults who practice positive social and emotional skills is an important component of students' ability to do so themselves.

To support the adults who work with our children, we must:

Address the connections among social, emotional, and academic development in both learning opportunities for families and ongoing professional development for educators. In order to effectively develop children's social, emotional, and academic skills, all adults need support with those skills

themselves. This includes families, educators, and community partners. Offering families opportunities to understand and develop the same types of competencies as their kids ensures a consistent family-school approach to building these skills.

In parallel, districts should provide educators with on-going access to opportunities to think about and develop their own social and emotional skills so they are supported as role models for their students. But modeling alone isn't enough; educators also need opportunities to learn how to develop lessons and establish classroom climates that build students' social, emotional, and academic skills simultaneously.

Make all staff members' mental health a priority. We understand that work in education today is particularly challenging. Schools are working to help all students reach rigorous standards and close achievement gaps while simultaneously navigating a complicated landscape around student safety. And they are often doing all of this with limited resources. These challenges can put school staff under tremendous stress. They need support in maintaining their own well-being as they confront these issues on our behalf.

Include school board members and other decision makers in early discussions about the social, emotional, and academic components of learning. Securing support for initiatives that address the connections across social, emotional, and academic growth depends on including decision makers in conversations early and often. When leaders understand the integrated nature of development, they're more likely to support measures that approach learning in this way, and are better able to construct district and community policies that support and do not hinder a more comprehensive approach to learning.

WE NEED SCHOOLS TO INTEGRATE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC GROWTH INTO THE SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

We want our children to enter school each day knowing they are going into an environment where their social, emotional, and academic well-being and growth are a fundamental part of learning. They should feel safe, supported, and known as individuals. They should understand that the support and mentorship they receive in school is not merely another program that can be added and dropped at any moment, but is, instead, a deeply-embedded and genuine way of interacting and learning.

To provide a culture and climate that supports children we must:

Ensure students feel physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally safe. All adults have the responsibility to seek common ground and ensure students are physically safe in school. But physical safety cannot be achieved in a vacuum; intellectual and social and emotional safety are also essential. Intellectual safety allows students to engage in the free exchange of ideas, encouraging open and honest expression of diverse thoughts, questions, and opinions. It requires that students practice the social skills required to relate to others as well as exercise the critical thinking skills needed to evaluate new ideas rationally. Social and emotional safety ensures students are known and valued as individuals, provided with additional support when needed, and are connected to their school communities.

Shift resources that are being ineffectively and inefficiently used to instead support a whole student approach to learning and development. In some cases, existing programs or initiatives may be acting as a band-aid rather than addressing issues at their root. Evaluating all programs for efficacy will uncover opportunities to replace some with an integrated approach to social, emotional, and academic development that achieves equal or better results.

WE NEED A WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH TO OUR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

As we know, learning does not begin with the first bell of the school day, nor does it cease when the final bell rings. Students are constantly using their experiences both in and out of school to inform and alter both their worldview and their sense of self.

Each day many of our children spend a significant amount of time engaged in extracurricular activities. Add to this the school-free summer months most students still enjoy, and it becomes clear the hours outside of school continue to be just as important as those within.

To support children both inside and outside of school we need:

Greater alignment across all settings where students learn and develop. There is no stronger community for a child to grow up in than one that is united in its commitment to bringing up happy, healthy, well-rounded kids. We also know that development takes place every moment of every day. Leaders from schools and community organizations should work together to develop strategies that give kids a consistent and unified approach from which to understand and grow in their social, emotional, and academic skills.

Community resources that provide students with meaningful opportunities to practice their social, emotional, and academic skills. Skills such as respect, responsibility, teamwork, and self-control require practice and refinement. Because every student learns in unique and widely varied ways, developing community resources that give students an opportunity to use the skills they're developing is an invaluable investment in our communities and our future. Internships, volunteer opportunities, project-based learning, trade apprenticeships, and school-to-work programs can all be viable ways to meet these goals.

Being surrounded by adults who practice positive social and emotional skills is an important component of students' ability to do so themselves.



A CALL TO ACTION

Today, we call on every school leader, community member, and policymaker to join us in taking action. As the decision makers, trailblazers, and facilitators in our communities, you hold the power to chart a path forward that fully prepares our children for their futures. We commit to being a full partner in your efforts to make an integrated approach to social, emotional, and academic learning a unifying experience of American childhood.

We encourage fellow parents and guardians to form a united front with their own community leaders in moving towards a more socially, emotionally, and academically sound future for all children. As the keepers and nurturers of today's students, we hold the key to unlocking their potential for tomorrow, and the capacity to form a robust approach to learning and development.

Families, schools, and communities must join together to pursue a vision of education that gives all students the tools they need to navigate a world that demands their social, emotional, and academic prowess. Together, we can construct a world that acknowledges the student as a whole learner; encourages families to be active partners in their children's school life; supports the adults who support our children; embeds social, emotional, and academic growth into the culture of our schools; and nurtures a symbiotic relationship between our educational establishments and the communities children call home.

The Parent Advisory Panel of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development actively collaborated on and endorses this Family Call to Action.

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WE INVITE FELLOW FAMILIES TO JOIN US

Here's how:

1. Add your signature to the report at [as.pn/CallToAction](https://aspn.org/CallToAction). There is strength in numbers. We can show the world how much we value integrating social, emotional, and academic development.
2. Share this report with fellow parents and ask them to sign on too. And share the report with your children's teachers, schools, and community leaders. Find out what they're already doing to build students' social, emotional, and academic skills.
3. For more information about supporting students' comprehensive development, including on-the-ground examples of this work and the research behind it, see: [As.pn/EdResources](https://aspn.org/EdResources).
4. Stay tuned for the Commission's final recommendations, which will be released in late 2018 to help schools and communities fully integrate social and emotional development with academic instruction.



ABOUT THE PARENT ADVISORY PANEL OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT:

The Parent Advisory Panel represents families of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints from across the country who are providing the Commission with insights into how schools can complement families' and communities' efforts to support the whole student. Their efforts are part of the Commission's charge to learn from varying perspectives as it calls for the full integration of social and emotional learning with academic instruction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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