

Integrating Social, Emotional and Academic Development

An Action Guide for School Leadership Teams

MARCH 2019



INTRODUCTION

This action guide provides school leadership teams with a resource for integrating the social, emotional and academic needs of young people into the daily student experience, from the time a bus driver greets a student until the end of the day. It supports the school leader and her/his team in mapping out an approach for integrating the social, emotional, and academic needs of students into the way adults and students experience school each moment of each school day.

As part of their academic mission, schools contribute to students developing social-emotional skills that are critical to success in school, career and life. The graphic on the next page, which is excerpted from the final report of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, illustrates these broader skills and competencies in three categories: (1) social and interpersonal (e.g., working on a team, resolving conflicts); (2) emotional (e.g., coping with frustration and stress, demonstrating empathy); and (3) cognitive (e.g., goal-setting, staying focused, persevering, etc.). Academic instruction creates an ideal context for practicing these broader competencies and skills, which research validates as important to success beyond school and malleable.

Social, emotional and academic development (SEAD) requires rethinking the school experience for students and adults so that social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning are mutually reinforcing in practice, and infused into every aspect of the school and student experience. Enacting SEAD in practice rests on a three-legged stool: Students need (1) explicit instruction in understanding and applying social-emotional competencies/skills; (2) embedded opportunities to practice these competencies/skills during academic instruction; and (3) a learning environment that is infused with healthy relationships and that models safety, belonging, and purpose so that students can invest their whole selves in learning. Integrating SEAD has two meanings in this context: addressing social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning together because they are inextricably linked in students' experiences; and integrating a SEAD approach into overall school improvement strategies—not as a siloed initiative or an “add-on” program.

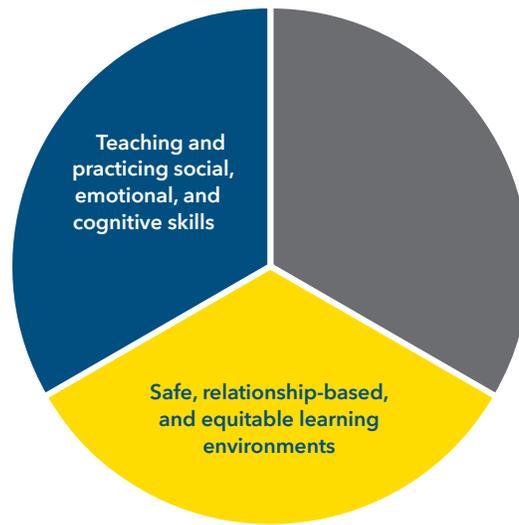
Each school community must draw on the science of learning and the wisdom of experience while responding to the unique aspirations and values of students, families, faculty, and other stakeholders. To guide action on this agenda, this resource is organized into five sections:

1. Vision of Student Success
2. Student Learning Experience
3. Adult Learning in Support of Student Success
4. Learning Environment and School Climate
5. Asset Mapping and Resource Allocation.

Each section summarizes  **foundational research**, identifies  **equity implications**, offers  **guiding questions** to stimulate inquiry, and suggests  **high-impact actions**. Finally, there are **vignettes** that illustrates what this looks like in practice, and links to **curated resources** that support deeper exploration of the issues and opportunities.

The school principal and leadership team (including teacher leaders) are key levers of transformation for a school community. This action guide both challenges and supports school leaders in advancing SEAD to meet the excellence and equity mission of public education.

ENACTING SEAD RESTS ON A THREE-LEGGED STOOL



EXAMPLES OF SEAD SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES



COGNITIVE

Including the ability to:

- Focus and pay attention
- Set goals
- Plan and organize
- Persevere
- Problem solve



SOCIAL & INTERPERSONAL

Including the ability to:

- Navigate social situations
- Resolve conflicts
- Demonstrate respect toward others
- Cooperate and work on a team
- Self-advocate and demonstrate agency



EMOTIONAL

Including the ability to:

- Recognize and manage one's emotions
- Understand the emotions and perspectives of others
- Demonstrate empathy
- Cope with frustration and stress

These graphics are excerpted from the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development's final report "From A Nation at Risk to a Nation At Hope: Recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development," published January 2019 by the Aspen Institute.

Vision of Student Success

Our school is guided by a vision of student success that is clear and reflects the shared aspirations of our students, families, and the whole school faculty. The vision guides all key decisions regarding instructional strategy, resource allocation, learning environment and day to day operations.



WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

Success in life, and in college and career specifically, relies on students' cognitive, social, emotional, and academic development.

Engaging with rich academic content creates opportunities for students to develop knowledge, skills, and social and emotional competencies. Weak development in one domain undermines healthy development in the others.ⁱ

Students progress through multiple developmental phases as they mature from pre-K through 12th grade.ⁱⁱ A vision of student success needs to account for their distinct developmental needs.

Teachers and principals—as well as parents and employers—place a high value on students' holistic development, including good character and skills like communicating with diverse groups of people, navigating social situations, and managing emotions when presented with challenging academic content.ⁱⁱⁱ

Effective school leaders use a vision for student success to “establish a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school” and use the vision “as a touchstone against which all new developments, policies or initiatives are tested.”^{iv}

Learning is a social process and students need to feel connected to their school, classrooms, teachers, and peers.^v

Schools have a role in shaping each students' development of their own identity, agency, and a sense of purpose in their learning, as well as a role in preparing students with the high-level knowledge and skills they need to be thriving adults. This happens in partnership with family, community, and other institutions. Schools should not seek to displace or diminish the primary influence of family and community, but they have a unique and essential role and should be intentional about it.^{vi}



EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Both academic and affective dimensions of learning and development are essential for equity because both are required to access meaningful opportunities inside and outside of school.

Students and families should be actively engaged in setting the vision for student success and should see their background, values, and culture reflected and affirmed in that vision and in curriculum and learning experiences.

Students should have the opportunity to learn about who they are in the context of America's histories, including understanding and critiquing dominant (white, male, middle class or wealthy) perspectives. Traditionally, history has been told from a single perspective based on these dominant identities, which undermines learning and development for all learners.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

Is there a state and/or district vision of student success to which we need to align (often expressed in “Profile of a Graduate” statements)? How is our school’s vision distinct, and how does it reinforce/strengthen the state and/or local vision?

How do students and families see evidence of our vision for student success in school policies like attendance and discipline, in interactions with their children, with teachers, in the curriculum, etc.? How do we incorporate family voice?

What data do we regularly consult to monitor progress against our vision for student success and make strategic decisions which are reflected in policy? What additional data do we need to examine?^{vii}

Does our vision pay adequate attention to developing students’ individual identities and unique cultural capital? Does it attend to the diversity of the community we serve?

How does our vision develop students’ agency, including exercising meaningful choices in their learning and participation in decision-making and continuous

improvement of the school? Do our students agree with our assessment of this?

How are school resources of time, talent, and financial assets allocated in support of our student vision of success? What gets in the way of better aligning resources toward our vision? How are these resource allocations continuously evaluated for sustained impact?

How is the vision of student success connected to every adult role in the building (i.e. job descriptions, goals of custodial, cafeteria staff, etc.) so there is shared ownership and responsibility for student success?

How are teachers prepared to meet expectations for student success?

How do we as a school leadership team need to grow and develop to align to this vision?

How do we communicate and generate buy-in and engagement with the vision?

What do we do well that we can build on?



HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

Annually use data to review your school improvement plan and engage the whole community in updating the school’s vision for student success aligned to that plan, including goals for social, emotional, and academic development.

Ensure that your vision for student success addresses the distinct developmental needs of the students you serve (e.g., young children vs. adolescents).

Communicate clearly and consistently about specific attributes of the school’s vision for student success, and the strategies and resource decisions that advance this vision. Honest conversations as a staff ensure that every aspect of the vision, and each student, is reflected in school plans and enacted in practice.

As a school leadership team, map investments (e.g, instructional programs, personnel, co-curriculars, partnerships) against specific elements of the school’s vision for student success and determine whether every aspect of the vision is actively being pursued.

Invest every adult who interacts with students—including specialists and support personnel—in clearly understanding the school’s vision and taking ownership for enacting it.

Establish classroom communities and build authentic relationships with students that are warm, positive, and welcoming with clear rules and procedures.

Reinforce the vision for student success as an organizing principle for every decision the school makes. Feature this vision in school newsletters and other communications, represent the vision graphically in school publications and on the website, and look for additional ways to convey the centrality of the vision for setting priorities and allocating resources.

Develop measurable outcomes for each critical aspect of achieving the vision for student success (i.e., what data tell us whether students meet our expectations for learning and development, in addition to annual state test scores and accountability measures?).

Student Learning Experience

Our school provides a rich learning experience that is aligned with our vision of student success. We consider all of the features of the educational setting that contribute to, or inhibit, learning. They include interactions among students, interactions between students and adults throughout the school (including hallways, cafeteria, sporting events, etc.), as well as academic content, curriculum, pedagogy, and co-curricular activities.



WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

Learning is a social process, and thus students need to feel connected to, and supported by, their peers, teachers, and other adults in the building.^{viii} Stronger relationships among students and between students and adults build the trust necessary for students to fully invest in learning.

Four learning mindsets support students' academic behaviors, persistence, and performance on academic tasks. Expressed from the point of view of a student, the four mindsets are:

- I belong in this learning community.
- I can succeed at this.
- My ability and competence grow with my effort (also known as a "growth mindset").
- This work has value for me.^{ix}

In order for all students to meet high expectations for learning and development, the heavy lifting must be done by the student, but schools and teachers need to provide

relevant, rigorous, grade-level, opportunities and support; students need high-quality curriculum, complex texts, and aligned assessments, along with engaging instructional practices and meaningful assignments/tasks. Educators need to design rich developmental experiences that provide meaningful opportunities for students to engage with others and the world around them, and to reflect on their experiences.^x

Students need to see purpose in their learning and experience of school. Teachers can foster this by connecting classroom discussions to issues that students care about and selecting texts, materials, and classroom experiences that reflect students' identities, cultures and interests.

Developing agency is an important factor in students' long-term success, which is facilitated by students exercising choice and voice in their learning. While maintaining high expectations for all learners, teachers can nurture student agency through instruction and tasks that allow for multiple ways to engage in the lesson.^{xi}



EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

All students should be engaged in their learning and should see their background and culture affirmed in materials and instruction.

A climate of mutual respect strengthens student belonging and engagement in the social and academic aspects of the learning experience. Schools have an important role to play in helping

students acquire the skills to effectively navigate complex social situations and work across differences.

The assets (culture, perspectives, experiences, networks, and skills) students and families bring with them to school should be valued and integrated into the learning experience.