

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.

Defining Equity

The Aspen Education & Society Program defines educational equity as every student having access to full and equal opportunity to succeed in life. To achieve this outcome, all students deserve access to the right resources, academic rigor, and rich opportunities to develop their agency and identity, all of which are essential to prepare for college and career—irrespective of their race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, tribal status, language, nationality/immigration status, disability, family background, or family income.

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.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

How do we honor and develop students’ identities as learners and as people across key content and subject areas, and in their interactions with adults? How might students be forced to leave certain aspects of their identities at the door to be considered a learner in our school?

What is the evidence that we include student and family voice in our decisions about the student learning experience? How do we gather and act upon feedback from students and families?

To what degree do materials and assignments provide students authentic opportunities to collaborate, engage in discourse, experience multiple perspectives, and apply newly learned content? What amount of time do students spend

solving grade-level problems with peers? To what extent do our instructional materials and districtwide units of study engage students with standards-aligned, grade-appropriate, and culturally-relevant content?

How do school, district, and state grading and assessment practices encourage or limit our vision for student success? How are students assessed to maximize the demonstration of their learning? How are students and families involved in the assessment process? How do students and families have access to and use information from assessments?

How does learning happen outside of the classroom? What types of interactions influence this? What can we learn from the community and student home experiences?



HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

Engage all school-based staff in a professional learning agenda around building positive adult-student relationships. Monitor these relationships and celebrate and highlight positive adult-student relationships when they happen.

Interview or survey students and families to ensure a safe and positive school environment where students can thrive. Incorporate multiple perspectives to co-lead and co-create the decision-making and continuous improvement process.

Use high-quality instructional materials aligned to grade-level content that are inclusive of students’ identities, experience, and culture. Review instructional materials to ensure authentic connections to social and emotional learning and supplement as needed.

Use a framework to identify and prioritize social and emotional competencies; identify opportunities to explicitly teach the vocabulary and practices of social and emotional development and embed opportunities to develop social-emotional competencies in academic instruction.

Use student work to engage teachers in cycles of inquiry that include collaborative planning, observation/feedback, and improvement planning to ensure instruction includes opportunities for student collaboration and discourse in the context of engaging, grade-appropriate content across all subject areas.

Broaden assessment practices to include project-based assessments and student self-assessments to more accurately measure progress towards academic, social and emotional goals.

Teach conceptual understanding and vocabulary regarding social, emotional and academic skills and competencies. Give students chances to practice these skills by embedding them into instruction across all content areas.

Adult Learning in Support of Student Success

Teachers, school leaders, and other adults in our school community positively influence students’ social, emotional, and academic development. Strong professional learning practices and continuous improvement systems improve adult relationships and create a context for integrating social, emotional, and academic development into instruction and the overall student experience.



WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

Trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, school leaders, and school staff are foundational to improving practice that increases student learning.^{xii}

Teachers have a profound influence on many dimensions of student performance (e.g., attendance, behavior, engagement), and these dimensions are highly predictive of high school graduation and college outcomes. Therefore, teacher professional learning should emphasize academic content and building inclusive, engaging classrooms and relationships.

Shared curriculum across classrooms creates a context for educators to have conversations about the what, the how, and the who of student learning.^{xiv}

Teachers improve their practice most effectively when they are organized in teams that convene regularly for discussions of content and student progress toward goals. Teams should be facilitated by teacher-leaders and/or school-based administrators/specialists who have dedicated time to focus on planning/facilitating and coaching colleagues.^{xv}



EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Biases are an inherent part of the human condition and strongly influenced by early socialization and pervasive stereotypes about race and gender. In schools, bias affects everything from how educators manage classrooms, adapt curriculum and differentiate instruction, to hiring decisions. To effectively identify and mitigate bias, adults need opportunities for self-reflection to understand and explore their own identity and how biases show up in their practice and interactions.

Students’ subjective experience of school—their sense of belonging, safety, and purpose—are influenced by their relationships with teachers

and peers, and whether or not they feel seen, known, and respected in school. Teachers deserve training and support to better understand this and to develop healthy relationships to improve their practice.

There are power dynamics that are inherent in our education system and in our schools. Educators can reflect on the relationship between their identity, their (formal and informal) roles, and their ability to use their power to challenge policies and practices that lead to disparate outcomes for students. School leaders must create space to discuss equity and power and model how to lean into discomfort and not to reach closure.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

What does our leadership team and staff already know/believe about integrating social, emotional, and academic development? How is the integration of social, emotional, and academic development made an integral part of every adult’s responsibilities?

How are we attending to adults’ social and emotional and academic needs?

How does the school community co-construct an understanding of equity and power? Do school leaders model interactions that result in trusting relationships and real changes in instructional practice for other adult learners in the building?

Where faculty already are doing a better job integrating social-emotional development with academics, what examples can be highlighted as models for other staff to adapt? How are we providing time and space for staff to collaborate, reflect, and discuss SEAD integration?

How are we utilizing continuous improvement cycles to evaluate the impact of and relationship between professional learning and student academic and social-emotional growth?

What supports do we need to better integrate social, emotional, and academic development into instruction and the overall school experience? How are we differentiating for team members who need extra support, and creating differentiated roles for developing teacher expertise?



HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

Structure distributed leadership for the school to ensure diverse perspectives. Include the faculty member with responsibility for school climate and SEL as a part of the school leadership team.

Organize teachers into teams that have dedicated time for looking at student work, identifying priorities for students’ social, emotional, and academic development, and jointly planning instruction—with specific reference to shared, high-quality instructional materials.

Engage in empathy interviews¹ and shadowing of students to better understand the lived experience of students in our school; make sure a diversity of students (e.g., English-learners, accelerated learners, students with disabilities) are considered.

Create structures and support for educators to do reflective internal work to understand their own identities and how privilege and bias can influence perceptions of and relationships with students, families, and colleagues. Ensure a growth-orientation, non-judgmental process as you push for authentic insights and application to practice.

Provide concrete examples of instructional practices that are valued by the teaching framework and that guide students in developing social and emotional competencies in the context of academic instruction.

Adapt lesson-planning templates and other artifacts that guide instruction and pedagogical decisions to make the opportunities to embed social and emotional development into academic instruction explicit.

¹ Empathy interviews are used “to gain a deeper understanding of a user’s experience of the issue you are working on,” according to the High Tech High Graduate School of Education, which has developed a protocol for planning and conducting empathy interviews in schools. <https://hthgse.edu/empathy-interviews-learn-about-the-problem-from-a-users-perspective/>. The Institute of Design at Stanford University has developed an Empathy Field Guide: <https://dschool-old.stanford.edu/sandbox/groups/dtbcresources/wiki/15fd1/attachments/75438/FIELDGUIDE-Screen-DTBC-March-2013.pdf>. ”

Learning Environment and Climate

Our school intentionally builds a climate that reflects the community’s character, honors student identities, values trusting relationships, and meets students where they are. This climate creates a healthy foundation for student learning and development.



WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

The strongest impact principals have on student learning is through building and maintaining a strong learning climate in their schools.

Students learn more in schools with a positive climate, and climate is both measurable and malleable. When all the adults in a school building share responsibility for creating a positive learning environment, it benefits the health, well-being, and holistic development of all members of the school community.^{xvii}

Trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, school leaders, and school staff are the foundation for creating a positive school climate.

Everyone has a clear understanding of the school’s vision and goals and of the role of each adult in realizing that vision.^{xviii}

Students progress through multiple developmental phases as they mature. Teaching and modeling positive social-emotional skills and supporting positive identity development (especially for middle and high school students) directly contribute to a strong school climate.

When the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and norms of behavior in a school do not reflect the lived experience of students, it interferes with their ability to engage intellectually or to develop as whole people. Students learn best in schools and classrooms in which adults know and value them and affirm their social and academic identities.^{xix}



EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Students receive different support for their social, emotional, and academic development on the basis of their race, income, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, prior achievement, or special educational needs, even within the same school. This may include differential access to and participation in high-quality coursework, warm relationships with adults, affirmations of their intellectual abilities, and opportunities to participate in rich developmental experiences. Understanding the varied experiences of students and identifying the reasons behind these differences help create more equitable learning environments.

For students to be able to devote all their internal resources to learning, schools must create affirming climates, mitigate implicit bias, and advance positive counter-narratives that

support every young person in developing a healthy, integrated identity. Derogatory stereotypes about people of color and other marginalized social groups are pervasive in American culture. All educators, but white educators in particular, play important roles in having high expectations for all students and disrupting deficit narratives about students and families. Students should be able to bring their whole selves to school and not suppress or abandon their racial, cultural, or gender identities in order to feel safe.

School leaders should strive to staff their school to reflect the communities they serve, build a professional culture that promotes open dialogue about race and poverty as well as the effects of trauma, and support

educators to critically examine the outcomes the school produces for students of color and other marginalized groups. When educators work together with families to understand how current and

historical structures and practices contribute to different experiences and outcomes for students, they are better equipped to make meaningful change.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

How do we create a climate where students, families, teachers and community members feel significant? How do we create joy for both adults and students? Are diverse viewpoints respected? How do we establish a place where students can put forth their tentative thinking?

How can we integrate all of the support staff—counselors, behavioral supports, SEL specialists—to ensure they are not siloed from academics?

Why do families send their kids to our school? Why don’t they? Why do teachers stay/leave?

How do students’ out-of-school experiences affect the learning environment? What can you learn from out-of-school providers?

What evidence do we have that we hold high expectations for all our learners?



HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

Administer a survey to students, parents, and teachers to gather data on their perceptions of the school climate. Use the data to celebrate areas of strength and to identify and address areas for growth, sharing back with participants.

Provide regular opportunities—in multiple modes & structures—for seeking and integrating student, parent, family, and community feedback on learning environment and school culture. Bring a mindset of continuous improvement to your school culture work. What matters most is that your school’s policies feel right to students, families and the community, not just to you. Solicit and act on feedback on a regular basis, using a variety of methods, to ensure that all voices are heard. For instance, consider holding in-person community meetings at regular intervals and varied locations and times, along with distributing surveys (in multiple languages and through multiple modalities, if needed).

Have a formal structure for student decision-making and sharing power. Distributing leadership builds investment. Using classroom advisories, morning meetings, restorative justice processes, and other structures to honor student perspectives and viewpoints, and strengthen relationships. While students should not be making all decisions, be transparent

about when they will, and follow through on your commitments. Student surveys can also be useful tools for gathering student opinions.

While every adult in the school bears responsibility for creating a positive school climate and culture, make improving school climate a staff member’s primary responsibility and include this person on the school leadership team. Strong school culture doesn’t just happen—it must be built, maintained, and improved. And given the hundreds of other things school leaders are responsible for, “culture” responsibilities can become little more than a euphemism for student discipline. This individual should be a part of the instructional leadership team to help ensure that climate issues are heard and integrated into decision-making. Having a staff member prioritize this work will help to build a stronger culture.

Asset Mapping and Resource Allocation

Our school’s resources—people, time, money, technology, physical space, and community partnerships—are deliberately organized around our vision for student success. We have a full understanding of the assets that exist inside and outside of our school that will help us achieve this vision.



WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

To enact a research-based vision for social, emotional and academic development, school leadership teams must identify the full scope of resources available to support implementation and how well they are currently being used.

School resources include more than the traditionally defined school discretionary budgets: a school’s staff, time, technology, physical space, community assets, and budget must be considered in designing around the desired vision for student success. Meaningful improvements to the student and teacher experience demand changes in resource use.^{xx}

Decisions on resources should be grounded in a deep understanding of school priorities.

Mapping the full scope of assets (perspectives, languages, cultures, skills, networks) that students,

teachers, families and the broader community bring will help ensure scarce resources are used well.^{xxi} Strategic use of resources requires understanding how much and how well existing resources are used relative to your school’s vision for student success. **Traditional efforts to address students’ social-emotional needs typically add positions or programs on top of core instruction. This approach is insufficient because it rarely attends to the classroom teachers that comprise over 80% of a typical school’s budget.** These teachers are key players in building strong relationships with students, explicitly teaching social-emotional competencies and reinforcing those competencies in rigorous academic instruction throughout the day. Identifying opportunities to use existing staff and time more strategically should come before making additional investments.^{xxii}



EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Resource equity does not mean every student gets the same thing. Staff assignment, student time, and budget decisions should be based on need rather than reinforce existing racial and socioeconomic inequities.

Meeting students’ needs may require changes to how staff are hired and assigned. A school’s teaching force should reflect the diversity of its student body, and hard-to-staff grades or subject areas (e.g., grade 9 algebra) demand the most effective teachers in the building rather than novice teachers students usually see in these courses.

Student/teacher relationships can be strengthened through deliberate staffing and

grouping structures. Reducing teacher load in grades that students transition to new school levels can enable stronger relationships when students need them the most. In the early grades, teachers can loop with the same set of students across two grade levels. In the secondary level, teachers can be assigned across complementary subject areas (e.g. ELA and social studies) to reduce their load.

Every community has out-of-school resources that are integral to students’ social, emotional, and academic development. Taking an asset-approach to community resources can increase school-community partnerships and improve the cultural responsiveness of schools.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

How much are you currently investing in SEAD, and how well are these resources aligned to students’ and teachers’ needs?

- How well does our school’s academic curricula reinforce social-emotional competencies?
- How much time is available to explicitly teach students social-emotional skills, and is this sufficient to meet students’ needs? What district-provided or external curriculum is the best fit for your students and teachers?
- How well do current staffing and grouping structures enable strong student/teacher relationships? Are there opportunities to lower teacher load in targeted grades?

- How much time do teachers have to collaborate with each other and experts around shared academic curriculum and shared students’ social-emotional needs?
- How well are the perspectives of social-emotional support staff (social workers, counselors, etc.) integrated into classroom teachers’ decisions about how to foster a positive climate, relationships, and teach social-emotional skills?

Has an asset mapping of community resources determined available resources within the community such as after school care, health centers, and nonprofits that support children and families?



HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

Evaluate student need, teacher need, and resources with your school community. Include all resource types, including student and teacher time, SEL specialists, and federal Title I funds and other grant allocations to identify opportunities to align existing resources more equitably before adding any new programs or positions. Check for initiatives that appear duplicative or disconnected from your vision, which can drain scarce resources.

Ensure your vision for student success drives timely resource use decisions. Align stakeholders around priorities in the fall to see that your team is ready to make resource use decisions in early spring. This timeline will allow schools to make changes before the school year ends, prepare for teacher professional learning over the summer, and hire employees early. Start the master scheduling process no later than early March, if possible.

Prioritize collaborative professional learning in your master schedule. Teachers in shared-content (i.e. shared curriculum) teams will need at least 90 minutes per week with instructional experts to analyze student work, plan instruction using high-quality curricular materials, and identify opportunities

to reinforce social-emotional skills during lessons. Sufficient time for teachers to collaborate with social-emotional support staff around how to meet the needs of individual students may vary by school, but typically requires at least one hour every three weeks.

Improve the value proposition for your teachers to accept priority assignments: Incentivize your most experienced teachers to work in hard-to-staff courses and grades, including, but not limited to, important transition years (grades K-2; grade 9).

Deploy all staff to support SEAD. Every adult who interacts with students—paraprofessionals, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, security officers, nurses—need clear expectations for how to reinforce social-emotional and academic development in the classroom.

Addressing Academics and SEL Together

Casey, an African-American sixth-grader, always felt a knot in his stomach during math class. He was used to being placed in small groups with other students who struggled with math. Low standardized test scores undermined his confidence.

This year, he transferred to a new school and was no longer in remediation. He still felt scared. Even when he thought he knew the right answer, he hoped Ms. Adams would not call on him. Sometimes Casey whispered the solution to whoever sat next to him, but Ms. Adams would tell him to stop and be quiet. He wanted to give up.

Principal Eli Dennison observed Ms. Adams’ class with Amy Riggs, a social and emotional learning coach. Ms. Adams spent a lot of time at the board explaining long division while her students looked listless or lost. She demonstrated a problem, called on a student, and then moved on. They noticed Casey’s distress.

In the past year, Dennison’s district began integrating social and emotional learning with academics, piloting these efforts at 10 intensive learning sites, with his school as one of them.

The push for SEL was prompted by the frustrations expressed by principals and teachers that schools were too narrowly focused on raising test scores in the wake of No Child Left Behind. There was a lot of extra focus on literacy and math—with little room for anything else.

Dennison kept hearing from his teachers, “Yes, we need to boost their ELA and math scores, but we also need to address their needs as people, not just data points.”

For the most part, his teachers embraced the shift. However, some teachers, like Ms. Adams, were reluctant. She was mystified by how social and emotional learning had any relevance to their content. During staff meetings, she expressed her doubts.

“I don’t have time,” Ms. Adams said. “I have too many standards to teach and too many of my students are grade levels below where they need to be. Plus, it’s not my job to be a therapist.”

“We can’t afford not to do this,” Dennison said. “Social and emotional learning doesn’t have to be this extra thing you add to your class. We can embed SEL into what we’re already doing. When we give kids feedback

on their writing and asking them to revise, there’s an SEL component to that. Same goes for how they approach problem-solving or defending their reasoning. When students get feedback from you and talk with each other, we need to see the social-emotional components of academic discourse, and make sure we’re intentional about building these skills.”

Dennison knew it would be a slow, hard process to coax them into supporting SEL, but he wanted to start trying.

Each of the 10 learning sites has a core team comprising the principal, two champions of social and emotional learning within the school, be they teachers or support staff, and a coach who observes classes and collaborates with teachers on how they could incorporate strategies into their lessons. These teams participate in training from the district.

During one professional development training, staff watched and analyzed a video of a math lesson within the context of academic standards. After debriefing the video and the connection to the academic standards, they then re-watched the same video within the context of the five SEL core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The teachers then discussed how the teacher connected SEL skills to academic content.

After observing Ms. Adams’ class, Dennison and Riggs agreed the class would benefit from more student-led activities, such as structured turn-and-talks, to engage them. Students would do the heavy lifting first, talk more than the teacher, and reflect on academic and SEL skills.

They also thought having students gather in circles to share affirming thoughts before instruction would help to relieve anxiety students like Casey experienced.

“Kids see themselves as not being able to do mathematics well, which causes them to disengage,” Dennison said. “That’s Casey in a nutshell.”

Slowly and patiently over weeks, Riggs helped Ms. Adams create a warmer classroom culture. She began each class by forming a circle in which her students said aloud, “I can do math. Everyone can do math. We can help each other do math.”

Instead of demonstrating a problem on the board, Ms. Adams wrote one down and allowed students to pair off for five minutes and discuss how they would approach it. She walked towards each pair to hear their thoughts and asked questions to help them think through their productive struggle. After the five minutes were up, she asked students to share their methods and encouraged them to ask each other questions. Ms. Adams did not chide mistakes and praised students for their contributions.

She realized her mindset changed as much as the kids’.

Casey still felt uneasy during class but bit by bit, he opened up more. He occasionally asked questions of the other kids. If Ms. Adams saw him whispering, she went over to him and asked him to say the answer into her ear. Often, he was right and she encouraged him to share his thinking with the whole class. And when he wasn’t, she praised the effort he put into the problem, asked him a question to guide him to figuring out the correct answer, and noted how she could use the next whole-class instructional time to address the misunderstanding.

Math was no longer taught at Ms. Adams’ class, but with them. They felt part of the learning process. They could do math.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. **What supports and processes should the school leadership team provide for teachers to embed student-led activities in their daily lesson plans? What else is needed to foster this transition?**
2. **What are the classroom “look-fors” administrators should prioritize as they give teachers feedback on classroom observations regarding student voice and student engagement?**
3. **How can the school leadership team counter the belief held by many teachers that there is not time to focus on social-emotional dimensions of learning?**

Social-Emotional Development Cannot Be Color-Blind

Principal Alison Willis took over a school marked by racial tension. The district had redrawn its attendance zone and the makeup of Pine View Middle School changed from being predominantly white to 49 percent of Pine View students comprising children of color.

The situation reached such a fever pitch, Willis’ predecessor left the school not long after the shift. Parents of color felt unwelcome. Willis, who is white, did her best to perform damage control meeting with angry parents and local community members.

“When I came in and held conversations with people in the community, it was very much ‘Those kids, this school, it’s a mess,’” she said. Students of color were blamed for disrupting class; they comprised the majority of students issued referrals and suspensions.

She recounted one student who clashed badly with other girls in her class. The student came from difficult circumstances; she had an extensive 504 plan and her family was homeless. Willis, after undergoing training on trauma-informed teaching and culturally responsive classrooms from her district, decided to bring them together into a circle and focus on affirming the students’ positive qualities, be it academic skill, musical talent, or a willingness to help, not criticizing their behavior.

Restorative practices such as circles are potent methods to resolve conflict, as Willis has witnessed.

“We had them say what they loved most about themselves, what they loved most about the people in the room. When we got to the conflict, it was as if the conflict had never existed. We haven’t had a conflict since between those girls.”

Willis and her school leadership team—an assistant principal, two teachers, a social worker, and a member of the support staff—went through training on implicit bias and then introduced professional development for the teachers aimed at identifying and addressing their own biases and boosting cultural sensitivity.

Willis nervously anticipated pushback from staff and her fears were not unfounded.

Some teachers said, “I don’t see color” or insisted Pine View had no problems. A few shifted uncomfortably in

their seats, looking as if they wanted to be anywhere else.

Over weeks, one teacher rallied other dissenting teachers to take their concerns to the district. Willis luckily had the support of an assistant superintendent, teachers whose classes had many students of color, and the support staff.

The fallout was significant. Willis knew the divisions would be around for a while. She gave her teachers space and time to wrestle with their discomfort and strong emotions. Rather than shy away from discussing race in the hopes that the broiling tension would eventually simmer down, she wanted her staff to tackle it head on.

Willis was convinced that only when teachers grappled with their own identity could they truly understand how it affected their instructional practice and students’ experience of their classrooms. SEL cannot be color-blind and it is just as important for adults as it is for children.

Willis cited one white female teacher whose class is creating podcasts for a unit lesson on apartheid in South Africa and comparing that struggle to more contemporary examples. The teacher grappled with her internal biases and privilege as she taught the lesson. “History,” Willis said, “especially subject matter dealing with racial or ethnic conflict, is rife with opportunities to integrate SEL.”

She added, “The way we talk about certain historical moments, we can help build compassion in students. The way we handle doing group work in class, we can use it to teach academic skills, but we can use it to build social and emotional competencies.”

Willis is interested in ideas like stereotype threat, or situations in which people feel at risk of conforming to stereotypes about their social group. She urged her staff to see how identity impacts a student’s ability to engage in learning. She wanted to figure out the best

approach to support students in demonstrating their own knowledge.

“Building relationships is a strategy to address achievement gaps,” said Willis. “Good teaching is sharing a part of yourself and connecting it to your students. Students can pick up if you are genuine about who you are.”

Staff must place their instruction within larger contexts, to understand students have accumulated experiences that shape their academic performance.

“You can’t separate history, race identity, gender identity, or income from the learning process,” she said. “They all affect how kids approach their schoolwork, and ignoring these dynamics is part of why we haven’t made more progress in closing achievement gaps.”

Pine View measures whether students feel more connected to school and to each other. It uses a responsive classroom model and teaching skills with anti-bias training as a literacy curriculum supplement.

Data drives Willis’ work and grounds it. Pine View monitors rates of chronic absenteeism, referrals, and suspensions every quarter. Her team uses a brief survey administered quarterly that asks students questions on how they experience school and classroom climate. For example, the survey asks if students sought help from a classmate or if they finished a difficult task. Aggregated data, sorted by race, from the survey is then posted onto an individual teacher dashboard.

Willis issues climate surveys for students, staff, and parents asking if they feel safe at school or have good relationships with colleagues. Her staff takes quizzes to determine what work appreciation language they prefer (analogous to bestselling author Gary Chapman’s five love languages). Every month, Pine View performs an activity related to that language to express gratitude to staff.

Parent engagement events occur each month dedicated to specific groups. One month was dedicated to the families with adopted children, another for East African families.

Key for Willis and her team is to equip students and teachers with skills to cope with stressors. Willis has instituted a schoolwide mindfulness moment, particularly after lunch when data showed referrals tended to spike. Mindfulness prompts teachers to consider their actions more carefully rather than punish students. De-escalation spaces are interspersed throughout the school allowing students areas to calm themselves down during heated moments when personal issues such as family struggles rise to the

surface and they need to step out of class. Yoga is another tool Willis uses for students who are challenged throughout the day, particularly those who need to move more in classes.

The school is still figuring out how to reduce disproportionate rates of discipline among students of color and examines data each month to monitor its progress. But Willis said signs are promising and it is now working with a local organization that creates anti-bias educational programs and staff development. Parents now enjoy the diversity of the school, Willis is often asked whether she is hiring teachers, and student referrals have significantly decreased.

Willis emphasizes anti-bias training and efforts to address social, emotional, and academic development together build concrete skills for life rather than address negative behaviors. “It is not a fuzzy additive to classes,” she said.

“At one time, people believed social-emotional competencies were ‘soft.’ We’re finding that these are the skills that make kids successful,” Willis said. “It’s given us language on what we actually want students and adults to do. We’re naming it. We’re not talking about misbehaving, we’re talking skills gaps.”

She added, “SEAD has everything to do with the school-to-prison pipeline. Students of color keep getting suspended for issues that we can resolve more productively. Let’s keep them connected to school instead of pushing them out and having them believe there’s no place where they can belong.”

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. **What process should a school leadership team use to comprehensively review student data (achievement, attendance, discipline, etc., as well as climate data)? How can it design professional learning that supports the “how” of teaching and integrates social and emotional competencies into the daily student school experience?**
 2. **How can the school leadership team assess and prioritize the need for professional learning focused on culturally responsive teaching, implicit bias, and trauma-informed teaching?**
-

Making Trade-offs to Support SEAD

Principal Rogers never had enough time. Every day was a sprint from the moment she walked into school to when she left at night. She felt overwhelmed by the level of need she saw from students and teachers.

Many of Rogers’ 345 students experienced trauma and had little access to counseling or mental health services. A quarter of her teachers were in their first two years of teaching. The majority of her teaching staff felt unprepared to work with children with high levels of trauma and did not know how to navigate the new, rigorous ELA curriculum the district had introduced the previous year. Rogers wanted to leverage her social-emotional support staff in better ways, but she felt like she barely saw her school’s social worker and counselor; they constantly dealt with conflicts among students and teachers.

Altercations between kids sent Rogers running to a fifth-grade classroom, only to then be paged to a second-grade classroom in which one of her novice teachers was on the verge of quitting. Transitions between classes were chaotic despite the five hall monitors she had hired.

Despite the daily stress, Rogers saw curiosity and resilience in her students and her teachers. She had a clear vision for what joyful, responsive teaching and learning should look like and knew her teachers shared it. But they needed more time with her and with each other to understand how to get there.

Teachers had 200 minutes a week for independent planning time, spread over 40-minute periods each day. The one hour they had per week for collaboration was usually spent reviewing new protocols from the district or logistical items like planning field trips or reviewing upcoming assessment schedules.

As she began the annual school planning process in November, she decided to prioritize more time for collaborative professional learning. If she expected teachers to provide effective support to students, they would have to work together to get a better grasp on how to use the curriculum, explicitly teach social-emotional skills, and reinforce those skills throughout the day.

A paltry hour after school each week would not cut it.

By February, she assembled a small working group around the planning process, including her counselor, social worker, and two skilled teachers who were

informal leaders of their peers.

How could they organize their people, time and money in ways that created more time and resources where they didn’t exist?

They wanted more time to master the new curriculum and more time to support each other in meeting students’ social and emotional needs, which required more coverage for teachers to meet during the school day. With only three enrichment teachers (art, music, and PE), only three teachers could be freed at the same time. Rogers knew this wouldn’t enable all four teachers across two grades to meet at the same time. They needed to fund a new teacher and knew it would not come through the district’s staffing allocations. They turned to the school’s Title I and site-level discretionary funds and entertained difficult choices together about what could stay and what could go.

They made the hard choice of eliminating two teaching assistant positions across grades 4 and 5 and two hall monitors. They cut back significantly on funding set aside for external conferences and workshops. These choices came with trade-offs, but were made deliberately. The school kept teaching assistants in grades K-3 to reduce group sizes and meet urgent literacy needs, and the team hoped that a bigger investment in social-emotional skill-building throughout the day would help create smoother transitions, thus reducing the need for hall monitors. These choices freed funding for additional teacher stipends and the equivalent of salary and benefits for a new teaching position that would provide science instruction across grades K-5. The role would float as an enrichment teacher but provide core instruction.

The trade-offs, however, were tough. The new science teacher is the school’s only instructor in the subject and thus cannot form a team around content. Implications for this would be the need for the district to provide ample support in terms of professional learning and curriculum implementation, and try to connect the science teacher at other schools using a similar approach.

There were also concerns from the working group about the new teacher’s workload. The floating science

teacher instructs children across all grades, so it would be harder for the new hire to form relationships with students. A mitigating approach must be in place to make the position manageable for the teacher.

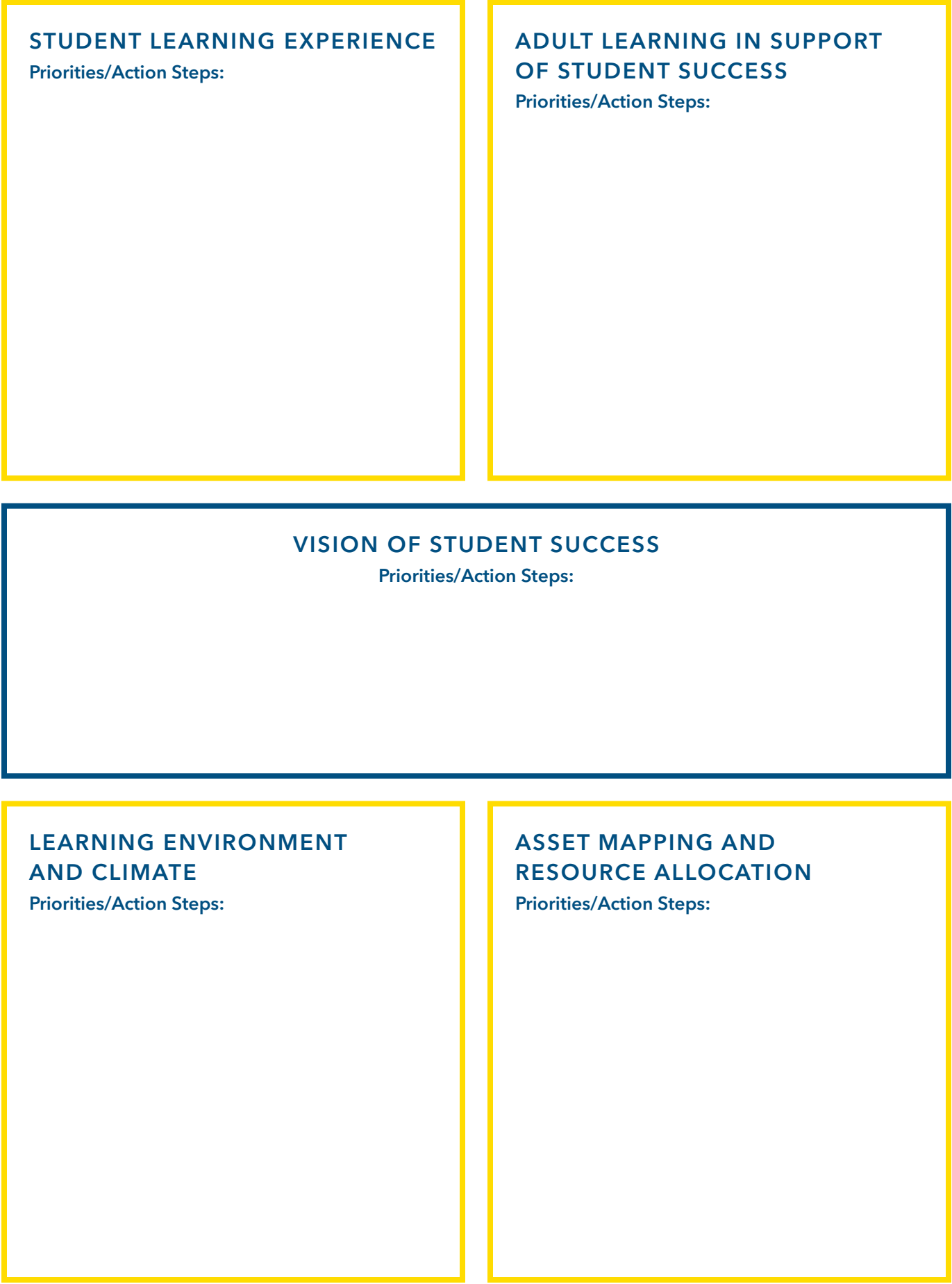
Nevertheless, the group felt hiring an additional teacher was worth the trade-offs, no matter how difficult. Two observations informed the working group’s decision: most teachers were overwhelmed by the breadth of the curriculum in ELA and math, and a current grade 4 teacher was eager to create more vertical alignment and apply project-based learning principles in science instruction across grades. This meant they wouldn’t need to hire for a specialized position and could re-assign an existing teacher. The shift would create a vacancy in grade 3, which was easier to fill. The team normed on the need to hire someone with a background and strong interest in integrating social-emotional skill-building into core academic instruction.

Introducing more coverage through this new position increased the amount of teacher planning time from 200 to 315 minutes each week. Rogers and her team aligned with the other staff on how to best use this new time and the previously scheduled faculty meeting. They landed on the following:

- All teachers will have 90 minutes each week to collaborate in teams around shared content, including analysis of student work and planning instruction around the curriculum (including adaptations to reinforce social-emotional skills). A combination of instructional coaches will facilitate this time. In the remaining 25 minutes, teachers will record updates for other teachers and the school’s social worker and counselor on the progress made by a prioritized set of high-needs students. They will address any questions or challenges during this period.
- Thirty minutes of the 60-minute faculty meeting will be repurposed for teachers to spend time in grade-level teams, norming on the needs that individual students present and how best to meet them. The logistical updates that previously dominated the time will be synthesized via email; only items requiring discussion will be included in the agenda.
- Once every three weeks, grade-level teams will meet with either the social worker or counselor before or after school for one hour of collaboration around how to explicitly teach social-emotional skills, problem solve, and continuously improve climate. Rogers and her teachers agreed that this time could be paid for via after-school stipends.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. **What process should a school leadership team use to weigh the resource trade-offs necessary to advance SEAD and build buy-in around these choices?**
2. **What type of support does a school leadership team need from its district office (e.g. guidance, flexibility) to make strategic resource use decisions and trade-offs?**



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.
- 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.
- Is a place where teachers, school leaders, and other adults in our school community positively influence students’ social, emotional, and academic development. Strong professional learning practices and continuous improvement systems improve adult relationships and create a context for integrating social, emotional, and academic development into instruction and the overall student experience.
- Intentionally builds a climate that reflects the community’s character, honors student identities, values trusting relationships, and meets students where they are. This climate creates a healthy foundation for student learning and development.
- Deliberately organizes resources—people, time, money, technology, physical space, and community partnerships—our vision for student success. We have a full understanding of the assets that exist inside and outside of our school that will help us achieve this vision.

Equity

The Aspen Education & Society Program defines educational equity as every student having access to full and equal opportunity to succeed in life. To achieve this outcome, all students deserve access to the right resources, academic rigor, and rich opportunities to develop their agency and identity, all of which are essential to prepare for college and career—irrespective of their race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, tribal status, language, nationality/immigration status, disability, family background, or family income.

RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED LEARNING AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Vision for Student Success

Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework, UChicago Consortium for School Research, June 2015. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/foundations-young-adult-success-developmental-framework>

Supporting Social, Emotional, and Academic Development: Research Implications for Educators, UChicago Consortium for School Research, October 2018 <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/supporting-social-emotional-academic-development-research-implications-educators>

Building Blocks for Learning: A Framework for Comprehensive Student Development, Brooke Stafford-Brizard, Turnaround for Children (no publication date). <https://www.turnaroundusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Turnaround-for-Children-Building-Blocks-for-Learningx-2.pdf>

“Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A Call to Action,” The Aspen Institute, May 2018. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/pursuing-social-and-emotional-development-through-a-racial-equity-lens-a-call-to-action/>

Transforming Education’s web overview of *Student Agency* (includes a helpful guide to agency at different developmental stages). https://www.transformingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Agency-Overview_ready_Sept18.pdf

Many examples of *Profiles of a Graduate* can be reviewed at <https://portraitofagraduate.org/resource-hub>.

Student Learning Experience

Supporting Social, Emotional, and Academic Development: Research Implications for Educators, UChicago Consortium for School Research, October 2018 <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/supporting-social-emotional-academic-development-research-implications-educators>

“The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning” <https://schoolguide.casel.org>

“This Time, With Feeling: Integrating Social and Emotional Development and College- and Career-Readiness Standards,” Hilary Johnson and Ross Wiener, The Aspen Institute, March 2017. <http://www.aspendrl.org/portal/browse/DocumentDetail?documentId=2968&download&admin=2968%7C1262432076>

“How Learning Happens” is a collection of short videos (3-4 minutes each) illustrating actual classrooms using practices that integrate social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning. <https://www.edutopia.org/how-learning-happens>

Instructional Practice Guide for ELA/Literacy and Mathematics, <https://achievethecore.org/category/1155/printable-versions>

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Tools To Support The Whole Child, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, <http://inservice.ascd.org/category/education-resources/tools-to-support-the-whole-child-education-resources/>

Classroom Resources, Teaching Tolerance, <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>

Learning Environment and School Climate

Supporting Social, Emotional, and Academic Development: Research Implications for Educators, UChicago Consortium for School Research, October 2018 <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/supporting-social-emotional-academic-development-research-implications-educators>

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Adult Learning in Support of Student Success

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Creating Opportunities Through Online Relationships, developed at the University of Virginia, has online learning modules for teachers. <http://www.corclassrooms.org/>

White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism, Robin DiAngelo, Beacon Press, 2018.

A Race is a Nice Thing to Have: a Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life, Janet E. Helms, MicroTraining Associates, 2008.

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Education Resource Strategies, Professional Learning Diagnostic, https://www.erstrategies.org/tap/professional_learning_diagnostic_tool

Education Resource Strategies, Growing Great Teachers Toolkit, https://www.erstrategies.org/tap/new_teacher_support_toolkit

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^{xxiv} Teacher load is the number of students a teacher is responsible for individually knowing.

^{xxv} Lower teacher load often requires teachers to plan instruction across multiple content areas. Decisions about teacher load need to be made in the context of teachers’ current capacity and curricular demands.

^{xxvi} Karen Hawley Miles, David Rosenberg, and Genevieve Quist Green. *Igniting the Learning Engine: How School Systems Accelerate Teacher Effectiveness and Student Growth Through Connected Professional Learning*, https://www.erstrategies.org/tap/connected_professional_learning

^{xxvii} Social-emotional support staff may also want to periodically participate in content teams to identify ways to adapt the academic curriculum.

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Social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning should be infused into every aspect of the school and student experience.





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