

# HOW LEARNING HAPPENS: SUPPORTING STUDENTS' SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

An Interim Report



JASON LEE

NATIONAL  
COMMISSION  
*by the*  
NUMBERS

25

COMMISSIONERS

18

YOUTH  
COMMISSIONERS

28

Council of  
DISTINGUISHED SCIENTISTS

34

COUNCIL OF  
DISTINGUISHED  
EDUCATORS

15

PARENT  
ADVISORY  
*Panel*

46

PARTNERS  
COLLABORATIVE

11

FUNDERS  
COLLABORATIVE

## How Learning Happens

### **This powerful, three-word theme is driving the work of the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.**

We are drawing from scientific evidence that social, emotional, and cognitive capabilities are fundamentally intertwined during the learning process. We're also listening to a growing chorus of voices—students, educators, parents, community leaders, researchers, and policymakers—to make the case that students are most successful when they're given the opportunity to learn in environments that recognize that these skills are mutually reinforcing and are central to learning. We know that, when done well, an integrated approach to social, emotional, and academic development benefits each and every child and can be part of achieving a more equitable society.

Now, at about the midway point of our deliberations, the Commission is inviting a new round of feedback and deeper collaboration on our emerging agenda that will translate into practice and policy what we've learned and concluded so far. Our final recommendations are slated to be released this fall.

"We have already reached remarkable consensus on the need for this new focus on learning in schools," says Tim Shriver, a co-chair of the Commission, the chairman of the Special Olympics, and a co-founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. "Parents, educators, and kids, they all understand that successful schools help students become all that they can be."

Indeed, the Commission's work comes as educators, policymakers, business leaders, and community members are increasingly calling for students to develop a range of skills crucial to success in school and in life. These include the ability to think critically and solve problems, communicate effectively, collaborate and resolve conflict, and be a lifelong learner.

Effectively weaving social, emotional, and academic components into the fabric of a school helps students remain motivated to develop skills to navigate and succeed within their learning communities and to serve as responsible, contributing members of society.

# An Idea in Demand

Momentum is building across the country. State plans submitted under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act all include a “nonacademic” measure of school and student success. Including indicators in these plans related to chronic absenteeism and school climate and culture is a clear signal that districts and schools need to explicitly foster students’ sense of safety, belonging, and purpose and can be a catalyst for focusing on the learning conditions necessary for developing the whole student.

Moreover, parents and families want schools to support the comprehensive development of their children. Results from the [2017 PDK Poll](#) of the Public’s Attitudes Toward Public Schools show Americans overwhelmingly want schools to help their children build such skills as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems.

Principals also support this approach. In a [recent survey](#) conducted by Civic Enterprises and Hart Associates on behalf of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, virtually all principals said they believe a stepped-up focus on students’ social and emotional skills would positively affect school climate, build citizenship, improve relationships between students and teachers, and enhance academic achievement.

As the nation is becoming increasingly interested in how children learn, efforts like the landmark consensus report issued by the National Commission’s Council of Distinguished Scientists are providing new insights. This report, [“The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Academic Development,”](#) unites scholars from multiple fields to affirm the interconnectedness of the social, emotional, and academic components of learning.

The [Spring 2017 edition](#) of *The Future of Children*, a journal published by Princeton University and the Brookings Institution, features essays by leading experts on the research on social and emotional learning, the need for the development of students’ social skills both inside and outside the classroom, and policies to improve teacher preparation and assessment to bolster social learning.

And the Science of Learning and Development Initiative (SoLD)—a coalition of leaders in developmental science and education research, policy, and practice—is synthesizing and translating the diverse, but increasingly convergent, body of scientific literature to support the transformation of education systems. Launched last year, the SoLD Initiative has produced two peer-reviewed articles on the development of children in context that will be published in the journal *Applied Developmental Science*. [One paper](#) synthesizes the foundational knowledge, from multiple scientific disciplines, about how humans develop in context. A [companion paper](#) explains the role of relationships and context in supporting or undermining the healthy development of children and youth.

Meanwhile, the Commission is heartened by the accumulating knowledge being produced by schools and entire districts that are intentionally developing students’ social, emotional, and academic skills. During site visits to Cleveland and Tacoma, Wash., as well as in a virtual visit to Nashville, the Commission learned about efforts to build the capacity of teachers; to integrate whole-child development into all aspects of school practice and district policy; to create supportive learning environments that enable all students to engage with rigorous academic content; and to ensure families and community partners have critical, complementary roles in supporting success in school.



Gene Wilhoit, Commission member and chief executive officer of the University of Kentucky's Center for Innovation in Education, listens to a student from Wade Park School in Cleveland.

"We already know a lot about what it takes to implement programs and approaches that help students develop the full set of skills they need to succeed," says Roger Weissberg, the chief knowledge officer of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and a member of both the Commission and its Council of Distinguished Scientists. "It's exciting to build off an evidence base that's been accumulating for more than two decades, as well as the lived experiences of schools and districts across the nation."

Gerard Robinson, the executive director of the Center for Advancing Opportunity, a former resident fellow in education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, and a thought partner to the Commission, sees a big uptick in interest in pre-K-12's role in developing the whole child. In addition to the exciting contributions from brain science, he says, one reason for the growing interest is "people are exhausted with having conversations that compartmentalize the social and emotional development of children separate from their

intellectual development. An integrated approach allows for the dots to be connected."

At the same time, Robinson adds, the Commission's work speaks to a "reawakening of interest" in ensuring a civil society.

**"Dialogue has become so toxic. More than ever, there's a hunger to ask bigger questions: Who am I? What is my purpose in life? [Working to integrate students' social, emotional, and academic development] gives us a frame to explore these bigger issues that play out in society."**

—Gerard Robinson

Shriver succinctly sums it up this way: "We've arrived at a huge moment of leverage, and we need to seize the opportunity we have."

# Advancing the Vision

Launched to “advance a new vision for what constitutes success for our schools and our students,” the Commission began our work by listening to students who shared their thoughts on how they learn best. The young people were clear and unequivocal: They want positive relationships with educators and peers who enhance their sense of belonging in the school community. They want to know that the adults in their schools trust them and care about them. And they want to have meaningful choices and opportunities to make their goals a reality.

Those insights—along with others raised in subsequent conversations with students, educators, youth-development professionals, researchers, and civic and business leaders—are guiding our work. Our goal is to develop recommendations in practice, policy, and research that help schools comprehensively support their students.

## Highlights of the Commission’s first year include:

■ The [Council of Distinguished Scientists](#), a 28-member alliance of leading scientists and scholars, unanimously developed and endorsed a [research brief](#) outlining the scientific evidence for how people learn. The brief draws from brain science, medicine, economics, psychology, and education research to illuminate how the major domains of human development—social, emotional, and academic—are deeply intertwined in the brain and during the learning process.

“The evidence should move us beyond debate as to whether schools should address students’ social and emotional learning to how schools can effectively integrate social, emotional, and academic development into their daily work,” says Stephanie Jones, a Harvard University professor and Council member who had a lead role in writing the brief.

The Council of Distinguished Scientists is now collaborating with the Commission’s Council of Distinguished Educators to articulate a next-generation research agenda that bridges the gap between research and practice.

■ The 34-member [Council of Distinguished Educators](#) is working to identify opportunities for the intentional integration of social, emotional, and academic development in districts, schools, and classrooms, as well as to recommend strategies for changing practice. A consensus statement on these topics will be published early this spring.

This group has identified the need to navigate district and school systems and structures; prepare teachers and leaders so they have the ability to develop students’ social, emotional, and academic skills; and engage families and partners to augment district and school efforts.

Sheldon Berman, a Council of Distinguished Educators member and the superintendent of the Andover, Mass., public schools, speaks from experience when he says that implementing a comprehensive approach to developing students’ social, emotional, and academic skills requires starting with a simple foundation and deepening the approach over time. Done well, though, he adds, it can have an “extraordinary impact on academic performance and school climate.”

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Drawing on the educators' input and the researchers' consensus, the **National Commission's Policy Subcommittee** has begun to identify policy opportunities to create the conditions within states, districts, and schools for supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development. In the next stage of work, and to further ensure convergence with the findings by the Councils of Distinguished Educators and Scientists, experts from research, practice, and policy will be invited to provide advice and concrete examples of how policy can both help and hinder the work of districts and schools.

"We've been through a period when schools and learning organizations have done a good job of setting standards and raising academic expectations for all students. Now, demand is growing to focus on how to meet these higher academic expectations by attending to the social and emotional dimensions of learning," says Gene Wilhoit, a Commissioner and chief executive officer of the University of Kentucky's Center for Innovation in Education.

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The **Partners Collaborative**—a coalition of more than 40 organizations representing the education, policymaking, business, health, youth development, and community and civic sectors—brings invaluable perspectives on what it takes to support students' social, emotional, and academic development. Our partners have contributed to the Commission's work, including our case studies, convenings, and ongoing deliberations. They've also used Commission tools and resources to communicate about the importance of social, emotional, and academic development with their own networks and constituents. Moving forward, the partners will be invited to inform policy and practice discussions about social, emotional, and academic development within their sectors. Ultimately, partners will be instrumental in supporting the comprehensive implementation of the Commission's final recommendations.

It's important that the Commission continue to be inclusive in its deliberations, says Karen Pittman, the

president and chief executive officer of the Forum for Youth Investment and a Commission member. "We need to figure out how key pieces play out across the many sectors that intersect with young people's development," she says, including schools, youth-serving organizations, human-services agencies, juvenile justice, higher education, and business. "We need to take time to understand the semantic landscape, the research landscape, and the policy and practice landscape."

She continues: "It's also important that we engage, and not just push out information and ideas. To do this work well and to make it last, we need to understand how other sectors are building the skills of our youth."

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We also have benefitted from firsthand insights and on-the-ground feedback from the **Aspen Institute Youth Commission** on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.

In addition to crafting narratives of their own school experiences, the youth commissioners are developing a Youth Call to Action that will identify what they know to be true about social, emotional, and academic development and will serve as a catalyst for galvanizing change in their schools and communities.

Chris J. Harried, a master's candidate in educational studies at Johns Hopkins University who represents the Youth Commission on the full Commission, says any discussion about the need to integrate students' social and academic skills development "needs to start and stop with students."

**"When we engage in this dialogue, the question always has to be, 'OK, what do students need? How can we meet them where they are? How can we motivate, encourage, inspire them to really reach their full potential?' "**

—Chris J. Harried

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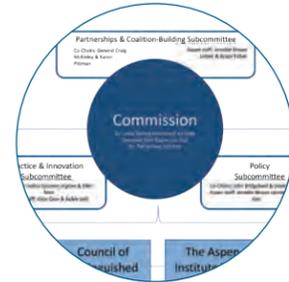
# LOOKING BACK NATIONAL COMMISSION MILESTONES



## INAUGURAL CONVENING

Commissioners, Scientists, Educators, Youth Commissioners, Partners, and Funders meet as a full team to examine lessons from research, practice, and policy.

NOVEMBER 2-3



## SUBCOMMITTEE CREATION

The Commission creates three subcommittees—Practice & Innovation, Policy, and Partnership & Coalition Building—to drive work in their respective areas.

APRIL

2016

SEPTEMBER 20

## OFFICIAL LAUNCH

The Commission launches with the goal of engaging and energizing communities to fully integrate the social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning in K-12 education so that all students are prepared for school, career, and life.

2017

FEBRUARY 15

## VIRTUAL MEETING

The Commission explores social and emotional skills in the workplace and discusses the many stakeholders that play a role in supporting students' comprehensive development.

MAY 1-2

## CONVENING IN CLEVELAND

Commissioners visit Wade Park Elementary School and Facing History New Tech High School and hold field hearings on the role of school-community partnerships and state and local leadership in supporting social, emotional, and academic development.

AUGUST 24

SEPTEMBER 6

## VIRTUAL MEETING

Commissioners see social, emotional, and academic development in action at three schools in Nashville: Fall-Hamilton Elementary, Valor Collegiate Academies, and Pearl-Cohn Entertainment Magnet High School.

SEPTEMBER 13

NOVEMBER 7-9

## CONVENING IN TACOMA, WASH.

Commissioners visit Jason Lee Middle School and the Science and Math Institute (SAMi) and explore the district's community approach to supporting the whole child.

DECEMBER 14

2018

JANUARY

## INTERIM REPORT

The Commission shares its progress, lessons learned, and questions to explore.



## CASE STUDY: "PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER"

The first Commission case study features examples of how schools and districts across the country are fully integrating social, emotional, and academic development into their K-12 classroom curricula.



## RELEASE OF THE "EVIDENCE BASE FOR HOW WE LEARN"

The research brief from the Council of Distinguished Scientists articulates a scientific consensus affirming the interconnectedness of social, emotional, and academic development as central to learning.



## CASE STUDY: "SUPPORTING THE WHOLE TEACHER"

The second Commission case study focuses on the need for teachers to have opportunities to develop their own social and emotional skills.



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Meanwhile, the Commission has looked to the expertise of our [Parent Advisory Panel](#) to lend perspectives on how schools and communities can best work with families to support students' comprehensive development. As part of this, panel members have considered how educators can effectively communicate with families and community members. Diana Prichard, a freelance journalist who lives in rural Michigan and serves on the panel, says gaining support for developing students' academic, social, and emotional skills in tandem needs to be pursued local district to local district. "Every community has its own dialect," she says. "Every community talks about these issues differently. That's a strength to be respected."

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We are also working to help the field illustrate how learning happens. As part of this effort, we are [producing case studies, research briefs, videos, and other content](#) to paint a picture of what intentional social, emotional, and academic development can look like in classrooms, schools, and communities. These stories and tools will help parents and teachers, in particular, to understand and champion this approach to learning.

## What We've Learned

**As a result of listening to those engaged in this work and visiting local communities that have made students' social, emotional, and academic development a priority, we've learned that:**

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**Learning is social and emotional.** Decades of research in human development, cognitive and behavioral neuroscience, and educational practice and policy have illuminated that major domains of human development—social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, academic—are deeply intertwined in the brain and in behavior. Moreover, all are central to learning and success.

Importantly, says Council of Distinguished Scientists member Jones, "robust and irrefutable" research has confirmed that "these skills and competencies emerge, grow, and change over time from infancy, throughout childhood and adolescence, and even into adulthood." Thinking of young people and the time they spend in and out of school, Jones added, "Skills and competencies develop in a complex system of context and interactions, and these skills and competencies are deeply intertwined with settings and are embedded in relationships."

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**Supporting students' social and emotional development encompasses a range of instructional approaches that must be implemented intentionally.** Multiple instructional strategies can be used to support students' social and emotional development, including specific programs, integration into classroom lessons, and opportunities such as project-based learning and internships that require students to practice these skills. The common factor is that all approaches should be implemented intentionally and that students should have opportunities to explicitly learn about and apply social and emotional skills. Specific, stand-alone programs and interventions that focus on social and emotional skills development have been shown to improve behavior and academic performance, and are often a first step for educators seeking to comprehensively support their students. More work is needed, however, to facilitate the integration of social and emotional development into academic instruction.

Chris Poulos, a high school teacher in Redding, Conn., and a Council of Distinguished Educators member, says he and his educator colleagues have found that it takes both “stand-alone instruction” and integrated efforts. “We’re in the midst of so many social changes, and kids have so many distractions,” he explains, “that it’s important to share explicit lessons and strategies for how to manage. ... But best of all is when kids get opportunities to develop social skills as an integrated part of academic instruction.”

Meria Carstarphen, the superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools and a member of both the Commission and the Council of Distinguished Educators, agrees that efforts to help youngsters develop social skills should be embedded in the day-to-day work and rhythms of the classroom.

**“If you believe in whole-child development, then you need scaffolding for social and emotional learning concepts. Just as you scaffold learning concepts when teaching math, you need to scaffold learning opportunities when you’re explicitly helping students develop social and emotional competencies.”**

—Meria Carstarphen

**The interconnectedness of social, emotional, and academic development must be reflected in all aspects of schooling.**

That means from classroom instruction, to a school’s culture and climate, to family engagement. Efforts to approach these developmental domains from a lens of integration that encompasses the entire school community are likely to be the most effective and sustainable and are less likely to be considered an add-on or nice-to-have.

Antwan Wilson, the chancellor of schools in Washington, D.C., and a member of both the Commission and its Council of Distinguished

Educators, believes that “the importance of community in schools cannot be overstated.” Both for adults in the school and students, a “collective focus” on caring and success is needed.

**“A group of us is smarter than any one of us. ... We all need to work hard to create schools where students like coming to learn, where they are challenged by people who care for them, and where parents are invited to be partners in the process.”**

—Antwan Wilson

Jillian Ahrens, a first-grade teacher in the Cleveland public schools and a leader in the Cleveland Teachers Union, says supporting youngsters’ social needs “is a way to connect with kids in a real way.” It’s about the critical role that relationships play in student learning and the healthy development of young people.

“Kids need to know they can trust others in the classroom, both the teachers and the other kids,” she adds. “The classroom and the school need to be safe places.”

**Effective social and emotional development creates learning environments that support each student’s individual needs.**

To facilitate student success, adults must understand the broader environmental and social context in which students learn. They must also create and assess learning conditions that give students the opportunity to activate, demonstrate, and grow the social, emotional, and academic competencies they bring to the classroom. Our students’ diversity of cultural backgrounds and identities means that our approaches to social, emotional, and academic development must affirm their culture, background, and experiences.

It’s important to bring an equity lens to this work, says Pittman, the CEO of the Forum for Youth Investment. For instance, she says, “The fact is, we’re

not getting to the reality of how to connect equity and the development of skills for all kids. First things first: There first needs to be an opportunity and the resources for all kids to build the full range of academic and social skills.”

**“Building on students’ strengths is what great teachers, great parents, great youth workers, and great mentors do. They create environments in which young people feel comfortable owning and bringing in the skills and values they have and working on the skills they still need.”**

—Karen Pittman

“If we believe that kids come to the table with skills and experiences that matter,” says Atlanta Superintendent Carstarphen, “we need to make sure our schools and classrooms reflect that. We need to focus on students’ strengths. We need to focus on ‘what’s strong, not wrong’ about them and the school.”

#### **Educators’ social and emotional competence is crucial to this work.**

Teacher preparation and ongoing professional development must address the science behind how students learn and develop, and provide opportunities for educators to practice this work and observe and coach their peers. And teachers and school leaders must be given opportunities to build their own social and emotional skills so that they can, in turn, model and support these skills in their students.

At the beginning of the pipeline, says Ellen Moir, the chief executive officer of the New Teacher Center and a Commission member, teacher-preparation programs should emphasize the social and emotional skills that teachers will need to help their students succeed, and why those skills support academic learning. “Fundamental to learning is students’ social-emotional connection with teachers,”

Moir says, “but caring and rigor go hand-in-hand, and, if they don’t, we’re disadvantaging kids.”

Carstarphen adds, “It’s hard for someone to give what they don’t have. You can’t assume that, just because they’re adults, they have the skills and the mindsets they need to model healthy behaviors and understand the core knowledge of social-emotional learning. It’s a wonderful thing when adults and kids can grow together.”

#### **Local communities need to shape and drive the process of comprehensively supporting students.**

There’s no single, one-size-fits-all approach to social, emotional, and academic development. To do this work well, local leaders—including educators working shoulder-to-shoulder with families, civic leaders, and out-of-school-time providers—need resources, guidance, and a supportive policy environment. They also need the autonomy and flexibility to determine their approach based on their students’ unique strengths, needs, and contexts.

Kristen Amundson, the president and chief executive officer of the National Association of State Boards of Education, which is a Commission partner, couldn’t agree more that local context matters. “A program that works swimmingly in State A might be a colossal failure in State B,” she says.

**“You have to respect local differences and listen. You have to involve parents, and you have to listen to teachers. The goal is to have something take root. But before that can happen, everybody has to agree that this approach matters for our kids.”**

—Kristen Amundson



Jorge Benitez, Commission member and former chief executive of North America for Accenture, talks with a student at Jason Lee Middle School in Tacoma, Wash.

James L. Accomando, the president of the National PTA, which is also a Commission partner, agrees. “Integrating social, emotional, and academic development as well as engaging families and communities is the most effective—and sustainable—strategy to meet the needs of the whole child and ensure every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.” He adds: “Families play a critical role in supporting children’s success and reinforcing at home what they are learning in school. It is essential that they have a seat at the table.”

**“Community partnerships are vital. It can’t be just the family, it can’t be just the school. ... It’s got to be a network of organizations that support learning and then it has to be woven into the fabric of the community.”**

—General Craig McKinley,  
Commissioner, former president  
and chief executive officer, National  
Defense Industrial Association

## Areas for Further Learning

Even as the broad outlines of our vision are becoming clearer, we continue to grapple with myriad questions related to practice, policy, and next steps.

One key effort now under way is the work of the National Commission's Practice and Innovation Subcommittee. Building on the Council of Distinguished Educators' contributions, the panel is focusing on key areas of implementation. These include building the capacity of adults to integrate social, emotional, and academic development and to make it a priority in districts and schools, and aligning instructional resources and supports to social and emotional skills and competencies.

"I think the 'why' we're doing this is really, really clear," Jorge Benitez, a Commission member and former chief executive of North America for Accenture, says of the push for the integration of social, emotional, and academic skills development. "The demand is there."

"At this point, it's much more about the 'who,' 'when,' and 'how.' It's about figuring out a change-management approach that respects the local context," he continues. "We need to figure out ways to do this work better, faster, cheaper."

Work also continues by our Partnership and Coalition-Building Subcommittee to reach out to additional organizations to achieve broad representation across the pre-K-12 education landscape, and to ensure engagement in and commitment to this work well beyond the Commission's sunset. At our halfway mark, 46 education, youth-serving, civil-rights, and research organizations have signed on as partners. Several foundations are supporting this initiative.

**Over the next year, the Commission and its working groups and subcommittees will consider these questions:**

■ **How can we close the gap between what we know and what we do?** "[The Evidence Base for How We Learn](#)" by the Council of Distinguished Scientists concludes that high-quality learning happens when social, emotional, and academic development are connected. How can we build from this knowledge to help schools approach teaching and learning in ways that are based on the science of how students learn?

As he has throughout his more than 50-year career, James Comer, a professor of child psychiatry at the Yale University Child Study Center and honorary co-chair of the Commission, promotes an intentional focus on child and adolescent development as a way to improve schools. It's imperative, he says, that schools "create an environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging, where competencies needed to interact socially are learned and known."

Linda Darling-Hammond, a co-chair of the Commission and the president and chief executive officer of the Learning Policy Institute, points to the importance of high-quality teachers and teaching.

**"Teachers must receive the kind of training that ensures they can use research and also become researchers in their classrooms. This makes teaching more reflective and informed by evidence."**

—Linda Darling-Hammond

In addition, she says, teachers need opportunities to collaborate with peers, observe others' classes, and mentor others. "Teaching must be viewed as a team sport, not an individual act of courage," she adds.

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**What questions still need to be answered in order to effectively support student learning?**

There's much we still don't know about how to effectively integrate social, emotional, and academic development into classroom instruction, school culture and climate, and professional-learning opportunities. What questions should be a priority in a research agenda for the next generation?

One question centers on the lack of a clear, comprehensive framework on human development to guide school and classroom implementation, says Jones of the Council of Distinguished Scientists. "Because we often don't adopt developmental principles as a foundation for the work we do, everything is on the table all the time," she adds. "That makes it hard to do the work effectively. We need to identify a set of developmental progressions for [social, emotional, and academic development] in K-12 education."

In addition, says Camille Farrington, the managing director at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research and a member of both the Commission and Council of Distinguished Scientists, understanding how to change systems is "really important work."

**"We have to learn how to have our institutions reflect our knowledge and what we know. We have to learn how to better ensure that what happens in schools represents the best of what we know about humans and how they learn."**

—Camille Farrington

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**What are the most effective and efficient ways to build the capacity of teachers and other youth-serving professionals to support students' social, emotional, and academic learning and growth?**

Educators are central to the full integration of social, emotional, and academic development in schools, and supporting the social and emotional well-being of adults is a prerequisite for ensuring the work is done well. We know that few teacher-preparation programs make this integration a part of their curriculum, that it is rarely emphasized by cooperating teachers in student teaching, and that it is infrequently a focus of professional-learning opportunities for practicing educators.

Darling-Hammond points to research that shows that teachers who have honed their own social and emotional competencies have more positive relationships with students and peers, and are better able to create academically supportive classroom environments that engage students more deeply in their learning.

"Much of what predicts your ability to engage with academics or any other work is the ability to focus your attention, to manage your emotions, to be resilient when you run into problems, to be resourceful and engage with others to get and give information," says Darling-Hammond, a professor emeritus at Stanford University. "Those are all social-emotional skills, and they result in stronger academic performance and are also the behaviors you need in the world of work and in life."

It's no different for teachers, she adds. "Teachers also need to be aware of their emotions, manage their emotions, manage and adjust their stress levels, collaborate with others, and create good interpersonal relationships with students, colleagues, and parents."

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**How do schools support the social, emotional, and academic development of all students while addressing equity considerations that affect specific groups of students?**

There are multiple dimensions of equity. For instance, students from every cultural background deserve social, emotional, and academic development that affirms their identities and allows them to build on their strengths and life experiences. And students who have experienced trauma or adverse experiences must receive social, emotional, and academic supports matched to their needs.

Rob Jagers, a professor of education and psychology at the University of Michigan and a Council of Distinguished Scientists member, says an important first step is recognizing that certain groups of students—whether because of their race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English-language proficiency, or special needs—have received differential treatment, and analyzing why that's the case. "Then," he says, "we can identify what we need to do to address individual students' needs as well as the needs of whole groups of students."

Meanwhile, Pamela Cantor, a medical doctor and the president and chief executive officer of Turnaround for Children, explains the effects of trauma on learning. "Adversity is not something that just happens to students," says Cantor, a member of the Council of Distinguished Scientists. "It happens inside their brains and bodies through the biologic mechanism of stress. ... The good news is the brain is malleable. We can use science to address what stress does to children and to schools."

**"When children experience a consistent and supportive connection with a trusted adult, it can alter their brain chemistry."**

—Pamela Cantor

But trust doesn't just happen, she says. It has to be intentionally built for all children through the environments and relationships they are exposed to.

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**How can policy embrace and encourage this integrated approach to learning without creating a mandate for compliance or dampening local efforts and enthusiasm?**

Former Gov. John Engler of Michigan, a co-chair of the Commission, believes that "effective implementation is key."

"All students need access to high-quality academic and social skills development," Engler adds, pointing to the need for "enabling" policy so that every student benefits from this approach. "We need to ensure proper training, access to resources and tools, and supports to improve outcomes for all students."

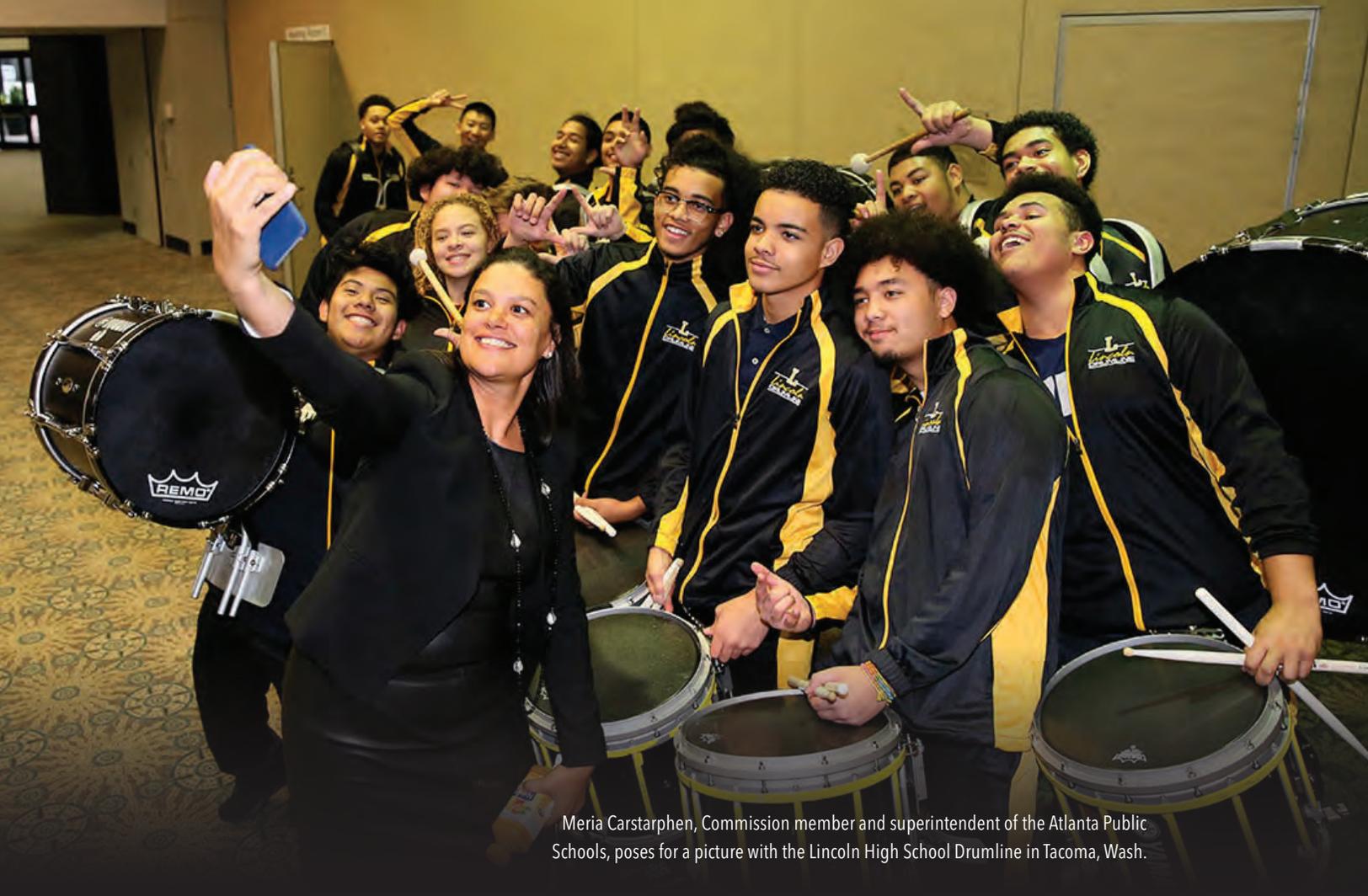
John Bridgeland, the chief executive officer of Civic Enterprises and a Commission member, is a believer in the power of public policy to spur school improvements. "I think the purpose of policy should be to awaken and unleash an understanding that learning is the combination of social, emotional, and academic development. For our students to achieve core academic outcomes, the kinds of skills employers are looking for, and success in civic life, our policies need to support practice that approaches learning in this integrated way," he says.

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**How can the field coalesce to build a movement for sustained improvement?**

What communication efforts and partnerships among the various experts and supporters of social, emotional, and academic development will inspire and engage educators and families to join together to call for and support this integrated approach to education?

Van Overton, the executive director of the child advocacy group SpreadLoveABQ and a member of the Parent Advisory Panel, says it's imperative to build demand for this integrated approach to developing students' skills. "The best way to build demand is to show that it works," he says. "The testimony of people who've seen it work is key; people have a hard time accepting things until peers and others serve as messengers."



Meria Carstarphen, Commission member and superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools, poses for a picture with the Lincoln High School Drumline in Tacoma, Wash.

Ultimately, though, he adds, “It’s a numbers game. It’s about making enough noise, making enough connections, and then making more noise. That’s how movements start.”

For Robinson, of the Center for Advancing Opportunity, it’s all about “starting locally and then moving globally.” Far from being a slogan, he says, the sentiment honors the integral role that parents, educators, and students must play in pushing for a more holistic approach to child development. “It’s important that they all get a chance to put their thumbs on the scale,” he concludes.

The bottom line, Co-Chair Shriver says, is that “we need new science, we need new training, we need new standards of implementation,

new policies to support [social, emotional, and academic development], new tools to measure its effectiveness. ... When you get all those things put together, that’s a field. That’s a new field with new programs and practices, new policies, and new ways of engaging the community.”

# An Invitation

Recognizing that deeper insights emerge when diverse perspectives are encouraged, the Commission has designed a process that purposely bridges communications and deliberations across subcommittees, advisory groups, and the many organizations leading this work. The ultimate goal of our collaborative approach is to align our efforts and recommendations in an agenda for change that is clear, comprehensive, and actionable.

“The time is now to begin defining what the change looks like and develop ways to manage the change effort,” says Benitez, the Commissioner who worked for the business consulting firm Accenture.

Building engagement and capacity across the many individuals, organizations, and sectors that support young people is an essential component of this change effort. The Commission recognizes the field’s robust knowledge, experience, and assets and is poised to help coalesce our collective learnings into action so that students across the country have every opportunity to thrive. We’ve already begun building opportunities for input into the Commission’s deliberations. Throughout 2018, our subcommittees will invite stakeholders and those working to support students’ social, emotional, and academic development to inform the Commission’s recommendations.

**As part of these efforts and to ensure we benefit from all stakeholder perspectives, advice, and concerns, we ask that you share your thoughts on three questions:**

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What key actions related to social, emotional, and academic development are you or your organization pursuing?

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As you think about your or your organization’s social, emotional, and academic development efforts this year and beyond, what do you need to ensure success?

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The Commission will make recommendations in research, practice, and policy to help schools and communities across the nation support students’ social, emotional, and academic development. If you were charged with writing this report, what would your headline or top recommendation be?

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**Please submit your thoughts to [as.pn/commissionsurvey](https://as.pn/commissionsurvey)**

The Commission will draw from your input as it develops its final recommendations. We’ll also be sure to add your email address to our distribution list—if you’re not already on it—so we can keep you in the loop as our work progresses through the year.

The Commission invites you to take advantage of our final year to engage in and shape the future of education in America. We’re at a moment of tremendous opportunity; **together, we can rethink how we approach learning for all students.**

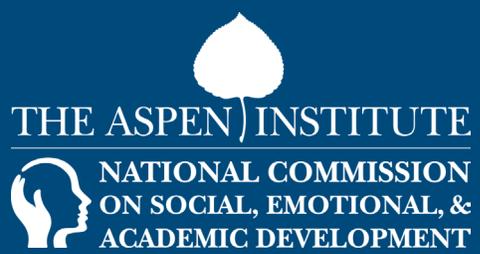


The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development is engaging and energizing communities to re-envision what constitutes success in our schools. Scientific evidence demonstrates that social, emotional, and academic development are interconnected in the learning process. The Commission is drawing from research and promising practices to explore how to make all these dimensions of learning part of the fabric of every school. Building on existing work in schools, communities, and states across the country, the Commission is working to identify specific action steps in research, practice, and policy that will help shape and sustain a new era of education that reflects what we know about how learning happens.

The Commission's 25 members are leaders from education, research, policy, business, and the military, and the full Commission team includes a Council of Distinguished Scientists, a Council of Distinguished Educators, a Youth Commission, a Parent Advisory Panel, a Partners Collaborative, and a Funders Collaborative.

Learn more [about the Commission](#), see our full list of [Commission members](#), [sign up](#) for our newsletter, follow us on Twitter at [@AspenSEAD](#), and email us with questions at [aspensead@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:aspensead@aspeninstitute.org).

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