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A BRIEF FROM THE
COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (CASEL)

**HOW STATE PLANNING FOR THE
EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)
CAN PROMOTE STUDENT ACADEMIC, SOCIAL,
AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING:
AN EXAMINATION OF FIVE KEY STRATEGIES**

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The *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* provides an opportunity for states and local education agencies (LEAs) to rethink the goals and policies that they have in place for public education. Under the new law, education leaders have greater flexibility to define student success and to design their own systems and programs to ensure educational equity. This paradigm shift allows policymakers to develop comprehensive strategies that take into account all aspects of children’s learning and development, including social-emotional skills, that are instrumental for success in school and in life.¹

Children’s social and emotional development has often been called the “missing piece” of America’s education system. Yet a large body of research shows that social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches—such as those that teach self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—are associated with students’ long-term academic and career success. SEL interventions can be powerful components of positive school change. Studies have identified benefits ranging from improved classroom behavior, increased reading and math achievement, higher graduation rates, and increased ability to handle stress.²

There is growing consensus among states, school districts, educators, and stakehold-

ers to focus more attention on this critical area of students’ development. This paper suggests five ways that policymakers can integrate SEL approaches into their efforts and identifies strategies that have been proposed in several Consolidated State Plans.³ These examples are instructive for states as they work to finalize their plans for submission to the U.S. Department of Education by September 18, 2017.⁴

1. Articulate a well-rounded vision of student success

The first, and arguably most important, step that policymakers can take when developing their ESSA plan is to articulate a comprehensive vision of student success that encompasses the multiple domains of students’ development, including social and emotional development. States may define and describe SEL skills in different ways (e.g. nonacademic skills, whole child development, 21st-century competencies, etc.), but they all stem from an overall premise that students need to be able to apply knowledge and skills to understand and manage their emotions, set goals, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Some states already have pre-school through grade three (PreK-3) or K-12 standards that address these skills. In addition, all states have formally adopted early

¹ Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432.

² Ibid.; Osher, D. et al. (2016). Advancing the science and practice of social and emotional learning: Looking back and moving forward. *Review of Research in Education*, 1–38.

³ Identified strategies have been proposed in various publicly available drafts of states’ Consolidated State Plans as of March 2017..

⁴ Letter from U.S. Education Secretary DeVos to Chief State School Officers dated March 13, 2017 specified that states may choose to submit their consolidated state plans either by April 3, 2017 or September 18, 2017.

childhood standards that include social and emotional domains of learning.⁵

Being able to articulate a comprehensive vision for student success in the state’s consolidated plan enables policymakers to develop programs and systems that address the multidimensional aspect of children’s development. The following states have outlined a strong vision as the foundation of their ESSA plans.

- South Carolina’s vision specifies that all students will “graduate prepared for success in college, careers, and citizenship” and has developed the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate as the basis of its plan.⁶ This framework identifies the knowledge, skills, and life and career characteristics that each student should have upon graduation from high school, which includes self-direction, global perspective, perseverance, and interpersonal skills that are important aspects of students’ social and emotional development.
- Illinois has developed comprehensive PreK-12 standards that reflect the state’s vision of “whole, healthy children nested in whole, healthy systems supporting communities wherein all citizens are socially and economically secure.” Throughout its plan there is a recognition of the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students in addition to the challenging

academic standards and high expectations for student achievement.⁷

- In Massachusetts one of the core educational strategies is to support social-emotional learning, health, and safety. As a result, the state is committed to building out supports and policies in partnership with practitioners in the field and other state agencies to promote systems and strategies that foster safe, positive, healthy, culturally competent, and inclusive learning environments and address students’ varied needs in order to improve educational outcomes for all students.

2. Provide professional development to improve educator SEL capacity

In order to achieve a vision that values the social and emotional development of all students, educators must be able to effectively integrate it into their everyday practice. Students learn social-emotional competencies in the classroom when teachers model appropriate behavior and provide them with opportunities to learn and apply such skills. The Center for Great Teachers and Leaders has identified 10 teacher practices that support SEL, including:⁸

1. Student-centered discipline
2. Teacher language that encourages student effort and work

⁵ States with K-3 SEL learning standards include: CT, ID, OH, and WA, States with PreK-12 standards for SEL include: IL, KS, ME, MO, PA, VT, WV.

⁶ ed.sc.gov/newsroom/every-student-succeeds-act-essa/draft-consolidated-state-plan/

⁷ <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSA-Illinois-State-Plan-draft-3.pdf>

⁸ Yoder, N. (2014). *Teaching the whole child: Instructional practices that support social-emotional learning in three teacher evaluation frameworks*. Center on Great Teachers and Leaders; American Institutes for Research at: <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf>

3. Responsibility and choice given to students in the classroom
4. Warmth and support shown by teachers and peers
5. Cooperative learning strategies, such as supported group work
6. Classroom discussions
7. Self-reflection and self-assessment
8. An appropriate balance between direct instruction, group learning, and independent work
9. Academic press and high expectations for students
10. Competence building—instruction includes modeling, practicing, feedback, and coaching

ESSA provides multiple opportunities for states and LEAs to offer systematic supports for teachers in these areas. New flexibility within Title II, Part A, also allows LEAs to use funds for in-service training for school personnel in techniques and supports for referring at-risk students to mental health services, as well as how to address issues such as safety, peer interaction, drug and alcohol abuse, and chronic absenteeism. In their draft Consolidated Plans, states have proposed various strategies, including:

- Illinois proposes using Title II funds to build upon its resources for family and community engagement, SEL, cultural competency, behavioral health issues, and recognizing implicit bias, among other issues. Educators will be able to access professional learning through its educator dashboard, Ed360. In addition, the state will use Title II and state funding to

create and support an educator leader network to connect leaders among districts.⁹

- Massachusetts plans on sustained professional development and collaborative learning around issues of cultural competency and SEL through guidance that it has developed for administrators and school leaders on how to facilitate SEL as a schoolwide initiative. These materials include: *PreK-K Social and Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play Learning Standards*, *Guidelines on Implementing SEL Curricula*, and *Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practice*.
- Ohio plans to promote the integration of its existing K-3 standards for social and emotional learning into the regular instructional practices and supports provided by school counselors, educators, principals, and administrators through the development and delivery of professional learning and resources to support implementation.

3. Identify evidence-based SEL interventions as a school improvement strategy

Evidence-based interventions that impact students' social and emotional skills and development can be powerful levers of change at the classroom or school level. Research shows that students who experience these interventions demonstrate improved academic effort and achievement (as measured in reading, writing, and math tests).¹⁰ Including these practices as part of the

⁹ <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ESSA-Illinois-State-Plan-draft-3.pdf>

¹⁰ Sklad et al. (2012); Dymnicki, Kendziora, & Osher. (2012); Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg (in press); Bavarian et al. (2013); Jones, Brown, & Aber (2011); Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014); Schonfeld et al. (2015).

state's or district's school improvement strategy is a powerful way of integrating SEL into the everyday culture of schools.

Under ESSA states must reserve seven percent of their Title I allocations¹¹ to assist overall low-performing schools with comprehensive support and improvement, and schools with one or more subgroups of struggling students with targeted support and improvement. States have discretion under the law in how they award school improvement funds (i.e., through formulas or on a competitive basis) and in how they provide districts with information about conducting a comprehensive needs assessment. As a result, they are able to prioritize funding for specific strategies through the application and selection process. States may also provide technical assistance to LEAs regarding the implementation of specific interventions. Below are two approaches that states have proposed for incorporating SEL into their school improvement plans.

- Delaware plans on collaborating with its LEAs and regional assistance centers to develop a resource hub that will support low-performing schools with technical assistance and identification of regionally implemented, evidence-based practices that address social and emotional skills, provide access to wraparound services, and develop a positive school climate.¹² The state will monitor implementation of targeted strategies throughout the year and provide information on evidence-

based best practices, supporting resources, on-demand guidance, and other technical assistance to support effective execution and implementation.

- Connecticut will provide districts with a template, guidance documents (with requirements), and varied formats of training in completing the needs analysis preceding the LEA plan. The state will create Evidenced-based Practices Guides to identify evidence-based interventions/practices in multiple areas, including:
 - Early Learning (staffing, programming, instruction, social emotional supports, etc.).
 - School Climate (staffing, teaming, social-emotional supports, restorative/non-exclusionary discipline, etc.)
 - Student/Family/Community Engagement (staffing, absenteeism strategies, supports for engaging racially, ethnically, linguistically diverse families, etc.).

The revised structure of the school improvement program in ESSA presents an exciting opportunity for states and districts to work together to implement and bring to scale evidence-based SEL interventions.

¹¹ A state must reserve 7% of the amount it receives for Title I allocations to its eligible LEAs (under Title I, part A, subpart 2); or the sum of the amount it reserved for fiscal year 2016 for school improvement under subsection 10003(a) of the ESEA, as amended by the No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB) and its fiscal year 2016 School Improvement Grant allocation under 1003(g) of the ESEA, as amended by NCLB.

¹² <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/425/Feb%2028%20Release%20Documents/FINAL%20-%20Section%204.pdf>

4. Leverage Title IV grants to implement SEL strategies

Unlike school improvement, all LEAs are eligible to receive funds under the new *Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants* program in Title IV, Part A, to ensure that all students have access to a well-rounded education.¹³ ESSA specifies that an LEA or consortia of LEAs that receives \$30,000 in funding must use at least 20% to support well-rounded educational opportunities, at least 20% for activities to support safe and healthy students, and a portion to support the effective use of technology.¹⁴ LEAs have significant flexibility in the types of programs and services provided to students, as long as they address the particular needs identified by the district. For example, funds could be used for specific interventions that build resilience or self-control, or to implement a schoolwide framework of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) that integrate SEL approaches. LEAs also have significant flexibility to partner with community-based organizations to draw upon work that may already be underway regarding youth development, parent engagement, and/or behavioral health.

As with school improvement, states have the ability to influence how LEAs spend their funds through the development of the application that LEAs must submit to receive funds. A state education agency (SEA) may promote the examination of specific areas of need (e.g., school climate, physical education, etc.) by developing a uniform

needs assessment or by promising matching funding to scale up certain programs. The latter may be particularly useful depending on the amount of funding appropriated by Congress. In addition, states can reserve a small amount of funds to provide monitoring and technical assistance to districts. The following states are proposing strategies that combine federal and state resources to provide support to LEAs.

- Connecticut plans on using a combination of state and federal Title IV, Part A, funds to develop the Next Generation Student Support System that will provide tiered supports to LEAs to improve school conditions for student learning, including activities that create safe, healthy, and affirming school environments. The system will promote practices to reduce chronic absenteeism, reduce incidents of bullying, improve skills in trauma-informed practices, implement restorative justice discipline practices, and address students' social and emotional learning needs.¹⁵
- Massachusetts will support and encourage LEAs to consider how they are ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment for all students as part of their needs assessment and in developing their action plans for Title IV, Part A, funds.¹⁶ Specifically, the state education agency will collaborate with the state's Safe and Supportive Schools Commission to update and refine a safe and supportive schools framework and self-

¹³ ESSA authorizes \$1.65 billion in FY2017 for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. The amount of funds distributed to LEAs, however, will ultimately depend on appropriations from Congress.

¹⁴ Every Student Succeeds Act § 4106-4109.

¹⁵ http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/essa/draft_ct_consolidated_state_essa_plan.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/e/e/programs/accountability/financial-support/title-i-and-other-federal-support-programs/essa-every-student-succeeds-act/essa-state-plan.html>

assessment tool. It will also continue to engage districts in the *Rethinking Discipline* initiative to reduce the inappropriate and disproportionate use of long-term suspensions and expulsions for students with disabilities and/or of students of color.

5. Make data related to SEL transparent to the public

Under Title I, Part A, of ESSA, states and LEAs are required to develop annual report cards that provide information on state, district, and school performance.¹⁷ These report cards serve an important role in ensuring transparency for the educational outcomes and progress of all students and present an opportunity for states and LEAs to shine a spotlight on conditions for learning that enable social and emotional development.

There are several sources of data that states and LEAs may look to for this information: student surveys, observations of students and teachers, school quality reviews that assess practices within schools, and administrative data such as attendance and suspension rates. These data can be useful diagnostic tools for assessing the degree of student engagement, positive relationship building, and other factors at the school and district level. In addition to increasing public transparency in these areas, regular examination of these data can help school leaders to adjust planning and supports to make sure that all students are making continuous improvement.

States that are more advanced in their data collection efforts may develop indicators for these conditions as part of their statewide accountability systems. Under ESSA states now have autonomy to designate at least one measure of “school quality or student success” as part of their statewide accountability systems. The “fifth indicator,” as it has come to be known among policymakers, presents an opportunity for states to include one or more nonacademic measures that are reflective of their goals and priorities. States may choose among any number of metrics. However, each indicator must be valid, reliable, comparable across districts, used statewide, and allow for meaningful differentiation of schools.¹⁸ To meet these criteria, states might consider measures of school climate, student attendance, or supports for social-emotional learning that are proxies for individual students’ skills and abilities. Such metrics are more likely to be available across districts and can provide useful information on how outcomes can be improved.

Policymakers should be thoughtful when selecting indicators for state-level accountability systems in order to foster student success and improve teaching and learning without being overly punitive. Measures that ask students to evaluate their own progress in developing specific skills like self-regulation, executive functions, and social awareness are often helpful for teachers as they assess and monitor progress for individual students, but they may not be appropriate for purposes of accountability. Other measures such as those contained in school climate surveys that assess the degree to

¹⁷ Every Student Succeeds Act § 1111(h)(1) and (h)(2)

¹⁸ Every Student Succeeds Act §1111(c)(4)(B)(v)(I).

which students are safe, engaged, and supported, can be more useful in identifying schoolwide practices and culture that impact students or subgroups of students.¹⁹

Below are examples from two states that have proposed using a school quality/student success indicator that encompasses elements of or conditions related to SEL.

- Iowa plans on using its Safe and Supportive Schools Conditions for Learning Index,²⁰ which relies on student, staff, and parent surveys to measure three domains of conditions for learning: safety, engagement, and environment. The indicator includes data on such constructs as:
 - Emotional Safety—the extent to which students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.
 - Diversity—the extent to which students and adults demonstrate respect for each other’s differences (e.g., appearance, culture, gender, race, learning differences, etc.).
 - Expectations—the extent to which clear rules are delineated and enforced.
- The Ohio Department of Education will measure student engagement by considering chronic absenteeism and student discipline incidents. This indicator will include progress toward reducing chronic absenteeism so that schools have a gauge of their progress. The Department will also investigate the use of school climate surveys as both a school

improvement tool and a potential measure to include as part of Ohio’s accountability system in the future.

Conclusion

To be successful in school, work, and life, students need to be able to develop competencies that enable them to persevere through challenges, empathize with others, resolve conflicts, and make safe choices. In today’s changing, complex, and challenging world, these skills are more important than ever. The strategies and examples outlined in this brief demonstrate the ability that states and LEAs have to develop systems, programs, and policies that will support the social and emotional needs of all students. As policymakers work to develop their Consolidated State Plans under ESSA, stakeholders can ask:

1. Has the state articulated a comprehensive vision of public education that includes all aspects of students’ learning and social emotional development?
2. How does this plan build the capacity of educators to support students’ social and emotional needs?
3. Does the plan include evidence-based SEL interventions as a strategy for school improvement and success?
4. How can the state encourage LEAs to address SEL as part of a well-rounded education through Title IV and/or other funds?
5. Does the state report data on the conditions for learning that affect students’ social and emotional development?

¹⁹ Melnick, Hanna; Cook-Harvey, Channa M.; Darling-Hammond, Linda; *Encouraging Social-Emotional Learning in the Context of the New Accountability*, Learning Policy Institute, 2017.

²⁰ For purposes of ESSA, Iowa will only use the survey portion of the IS3 and not the school incidence data. <https://www.educateiowa.gov/documents/pk-12/2017/01/draft-state-plan-essa>

These questions offer a starting place for education leaders as they develop their Consolidated State Plans under the new

law and, more important, as they work to ensure the success of all children.

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