



Key Takeaways from the Inaugural Convening of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

This summary provides key takeaways from the Inaugural Convening of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. Presented first are the operational highlights distilled from the full, three-day proceedings, followed by key takeaways from the Commission's Council of Distinguished Educators and Council of Distinguished Scientist and notes from the Commission's "full team" progressive conversation focused on SEAD challenges and opportunities in K-12 education.

Overview of the Inaugural Meeting

Two overarching themes emerged that have implications for the roles of the Youth Commission, Parent Advisory, Council of Distinguished Educators and Scientists, and the Partners Collaborative: (1) The need to frame K-12 education in terms of the broader community and (2) The need to frame SEAD in terms of a social movement or civic endeavor. Beyond those two themes, several recommendations surfaced for the communications plan, and there was a clear request for a Commission subcommittee structure. The following five recommendations elaborate on those themes.

1. Expanding the Ecosystem: Shifting from K-12 Education to the K-12 Education Community

The first theme centered on the need to shift our ecosystem from the K-12 Education Schoolhouse to the K-12 Education Community. Community engagement is essential to effecting meaningful change, in particular for urban schools within communities of color where the broader community is critical to an equity frame. The broader ecosystem also has implications for language and messaging that suggests the SEAD audience should be defined not simply as *K-12 education* but as *the K-12 education community*.

2. Motivating Civic Engagement: Empowering the K-12 Education Community

Engaging the full K-12 community can be best accomplished by generating grassroots awareness and demand for SEAD by creating a social movement. Importantly, the magnitude of this undertaking points to the need to be clear about the distinction between what the Commission can do during its two year life versus what the Commission ultimately recommends be accomplished in order to *fully integrate SEAD*. Clearly, this is not something that the Commission can accomplish in two years. Rather, it is most appropriately thought of as a potential *strategy* to be included in the Roadmap or Framework that the Commission ultimately recommends. If the mission (or desired outcome) of the Commission is *uniting state and local leaders to fully integrate social, emotional, and academic development in K-12 education*

so that all students are prepared to thrive in school, career, and life, a key strategy to achieve this would be the creation of a social movement behind SEAD based on grassroots demand for its implementation.

3. Rethinking the role of the Youth Commission, Parent Advisory, Council of Distinguished Educators and Scientists, and the Partners Collaborative

The current strategy gives primary responsibility to the Partners Collaborative for moving the work forward following the life of the Commission. If we assume a more expanded view of the K-12 education community and also believe that a grassroots movement is critical to widespread implementation, we need to revisit our partner strategy and reassess whether the Partners Collaborative alone should be the focus of our implementation strategy. Arguably, parents, students, and educators are better positioned to generate grassroots demand and a bottom-up, community approach to implementation. If so, our current strategies to engage these groups are too modest.

In addition, some of the most powerful impact of the meeting resulted from the intentional mixing of scientists, educators, youth, commissioners, partners and funders. Richer insights emerged from breaking down the traditional “silos” and brainstorming across perspectives. As a result, we were urged to consider merging at least some of the work streams of the Council of Distinguished Educators (CDE) and Council of Distinguished Scientists (CDS) in an effort to bridge the gap between SEAD research and practice.

4. Communications Plan

Several strategies to refine language, increase awareness, and generate demand for SEAD could improve the communications plan. These include key message testing, parent and youth surveys, white papers authored by members of the Council of Distinguished Scientists, spotlight papers authored by members of the Council of Distinguished Educators, and “Turn the Lights On” documentaries. The complexity of multiple audiences and the need to generate grassroots demand should be the fundamental drivers of the communications plan. To accomplish this, our current plan and funding to engage these audiences needs to be more ambitious.

5. Potential Commission Subcommittees

Effectively, we already have a few subcommittees or work groups: the Council of Distinguished Educators and the Council of Distinguished Scientists, the Youth Commission and the Parent Advisory. Further subcommittees or work groups can be identified by audience including a partners subcommittee that could leverage the expertise of the many institutional and SEAD-aligned organizations that have expressed interest in supporting the Commission. An alternative, or complementary approach, would be to identify functional subcommittees to address communications, policy development, and getting to scale. Most importantly, the subcommittee structure should be aligned with the revised goals for the Commission and potentially be interdisciplinary to capture the richness of the discussion that occurred when the various Commission entities came together on the opening day.

Key Takeaways from the First Meeting of the Council of Distinguished Educators

Presented here are key takeaways from the first meeting of the Council of Distinguished Educators, on November 1-2, 2016.

1. The Greatest Barriers to Implementation Require First Defining the Who, What, When, Where, and Why of Social and Emotional Development.

The major barriers to implementing SEAD in K-12 revolve around a communications problem that causes confusion and misinformation about the who, the what, the when, the where, and the why of social and emotional development. The *who* includes, among many considerations, teachers, leaders, and other staff who may not be equipped with the requisite social and emotional skills themselves, or understand what their precise role in SEAD is—as well as students, who *all* benefit from SEAD regardless of whether or not they “need” it. The *what* requires nailing down a definition for SEAD amongst the range of definitions in common usage so that educators have a shared language when speaking with each other, as well as with students, parents, and the community. The *when* has to do with the jam-packed schedules and competing demands of educators, which can prohibit attending to anything beyond the curriculum, testing, and their many other already-existing responsibilities. The *where* concerns whose responsibility the S and the E of SEAD are, with special regards to the role of the family, religion, and the community at large. Finally, the *why* demands a concise description of SEAD that makes the case for integrating it into K-12, answers the common objections raised by critics, and readily lends itself to clear and concrete actions at the level of policy and practice. Key to this message is maintaining a student-centered approach that doesn’t allow for the separation of cognitive and social and emotional development. It must be clear that these are equal parts that make a whole.

2. In order for SEAD to take hold it mustn’t simply be another add-on. The whole school system and community must get on board.

Schools face what can seem like an endless stream of initiatives, spread across the many often-siloed entities that make up the school system and community. This creates what is commonly referred to as “initiative fatigue,” making real buy-in for any given initiative difficult. SEAD mustn’t simply be another add-on or initiative among initiatives. It is critical that SEAD becomes an explicit part of the school’s mission and fully integrated into teachers’, leaders’, and staffs’ daily work. This requires breaking down siloes at a district, school and community level and cultivating a sense of shared responsibility around a common mission. In order to do this, all staff within the school must be given the necessary time and resources for professional development (PD), planning, and execution of SEAD supports. That time should be explicitly dedicated to SEAD, and the PD must be of high quality, both for the purposes of pedagogy and to develop school staff’s own internal social and emotional competency. At the level of the school system and community, SEAD must be understood to be more than simply a means to improve academics, while at the same time ensuring that high standards are maintained.

3. We must develop SEAD at all levels for teachers and students.

In order for SEAD to take hold and be long-lasting, it must be integrated at all levels for both teachers and students. Relying on PD alone to produce SEAD-educated teachers is not enough. Teacher training must begin at teacher prep and induction in addition to ongoing PD to maintain excellent SEAD practice. The same goes for students, who benefit most when there is continuity in their education. SEAD cannot

just be for early childhood, but instead must be for middle and high school students, too. The SEAD programs and practices students receive in lower grades must be communicated to upper grades so that there is continuity across the student's experience with SEAD. When teachers and students are provided with this continuity, SEAD can take hold as a fully-integrated part of the fabric of education.

4. Classroom Instruction Alone is Not Enough. A Positive School Climate and School-Community Partnership is Essential.

Reiterating the whole school community approach, educators maintain that while SEAD can be taught through direct instruction in the classroom, instruction alone is not enough. The school is an ecosystem and students interact with the larger school climate within that ecosystem, in addition to the classroom. That means teachers, leaders, and staff, in collaboration with students, must foster a school climate that is supportive of and nurtures SEAD. Teachers, leaders, and staff will also need to creatively engage the community at large, including the family, out-of-school time groups, and other external organizations that youth regularly engage with. Schools and the community can learn from one another, tailor their approach to the integration of SEAD, and come closer together as a result, truly walking the talk of SEAD.

5. Assessment and Funding Cannot Be an Afterthought.

Two critical components of any educational endeavor are assessment and funding. For better or for worse, educators agree that what gets measured gets done. Hand-in-hand with that goes funding. In each case, extreme caution and carefully worded language is essential. The intent in measuring SEAD (e.g., for formative assessment or for accountability) can have major impacts on how SEAD is taught and integrated. At the same time, the funding directed to support integrating SEAD must be explicit and accessible for states, districts, and schools. A major pitfall for SEAD would be for it to fall amongst the many unfunded mandates schools face. Thoughtful, creative leadership that focuses on long-term results is a prerequisite for these elements of SEAD integration.

Key Takeaways from the First Meeting of the Council of Distinguished Scientists

Presented here are key takeaways from the first meeting of the Council of Distinguished Scientists, on November 1-2, 2016. These five core messages emerged from the Council's debate and deliberations and are meant to be complementary to the values statements developed by the Frameworks Institute.

1. Learning Is a Social and Emotional Enterprise.

A question that repeatedly arose during the Council's discussion was whether the Commission's framing—that increased attention to student social and emotional development results in improved academic performance—might unintentionally reinforce and perpetuate the false notion that social and emotional competencies are distinct from and operate separately from cognitive competencies. Instead of, or in addition to this messaging, members of the Council argued that the Commission should dispel that myth, and emphasize the interdependence of social, emotional, and cognitive abilities. Specifically, for example, social skills can enhance cognitive skills, and are supported by emotional competency. It was suggested that neuroscience demonstrates that learning devoid of emotion or without any social context is neither engaging nor effective.

The Council recommended that a key victory in messaging about the science would be to convince the public of the unified nature of the social, emotional, and cognitive faculties of the mind. It is critical for the public to understand that not only do social and emotional competencies support academic development, but that in fact learning is a social and emotional enterprise. Therefore, K-12's current, largely didactic approach to education is missing out on powerful levers for learning. Educators will be able to induce the deepest and most effective learning, and students will be able to reach their highest potential, only if the social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of learning are understood to operate in tandem and each is fully engaged within the classroom and the school.

2. Social and Emotional Skills Are Malleable, There Are Sensitive Periods for Their Development, and There Are Critical Implications for SEAD during Transition Grades across K-12.

There is a rich evidence base from prevention and intervention science, and educational psychology, demonstrating that social and emotional skills can be taught and nurtured by supportive teachers and schools environments. Research in developmental psychology provides instructive lessons on the sensitive periods during which certain social, emotional, and cognitive skills are ripe for development, and these lessons should be included in teacher preparation programs and professional development for teachers. Finally, there are critical implications for SEAD during several key transition grades, including school entry and the transition to middle and high school, during which extra attention should be paid to children and adolescents' social and emotional well-being and development. Each of these points merits attention by leaders in policy and practice for the effective integration and facilitation of SEAD.

3. Next Generation Research Needs to Better Serve Educators in Their Work to Integrate SEAD into School Climate and Instruction.

The Council consistently agreed that the systems, programs, and practices to support SEAD will likely vary by school and community. It is important that the approach used to foster SEAD is organically and enthusiastically embraced by teachers, administrators, and school staff, and that the practices have the approval and support of the community. This is critical in order to achieve high fidelity implementation and so that it is relevant for students in their own cultural context. However, the research community should provide clarity on precisely which skills the research evidence identifies as most malleable and most important in terms of outcomes, as well as what the research evidence says about when and how to best address them. Collaborating with educators to untangle these complex research questions may result in the best answers to these research questions. In doing so, research can inform teacher preparation programs, educators, administrators, and professional development providers as they prioritize and organize their efforts to integrate SEAD into school climate and instruction.

4. The Conversation about SEAD Must Focus on School Climate and the Conditions for Learning In Addition to Social and Emotional learning (SEL).

The parallel but often separate discussions about social and emotional learning (among the many terms referring to the instructional elements of SEAD) and School Climate and/or the Conditions for Learning (or the systemic, organizational, school and classroom elements of SEAD), is reflected in research, policy, and practice discussions about SEAD. Both elements are critically important to the successful integration and promotion of SEAD in K-12. In one respect there is the student's experience of school, and in the other there is the acquisition of social, emotional, and academic skills and competencies. It is critical to communicate that School Climate and the Conditions for Learning are an essential and necessary precursor to Social and Emotional Learning taking place.

5. Implementation Science is a Critical Next Frontier for SEAD Research.

The last major takeaway from the Council is that while we have plenty of evidence to support the importance of integrating SEAD, what is in shorter supply is high-quality and detailed evidence for effective implementation. As the Durlak meta-analysis points out, implementation fidelity and quality were important mediators of success, and yet nearly half of the 213 studies they reviewed made no mention whatsoever of implementation quality or fidelity. As SEAD programs and practices become more widespread and especially as they are integrated into the daily work of schools across a variety of socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts, it is critical that implementation be evaluated in order to facilitate continuous improvement as well as to identify what's working and what isn't in with respect to intended outcomes.

A Progressive Conversation between the National Commission, Distinguished Scientists, Distinguished Educators, Youth Commission, Partners and Funders Collaboratives

The full Commissions, Councils and Collaboratives came together on November 2nd for a progressive conversation about how to proceed with the driving purpose, to integrate social, emotional, and academic development in K-12 education. The conversation centered on three questions:

1. What are the most compelling reasons for integrating social, emotional, and academic development?
2. What are the risks and vulnerabilities of moving forward with this work?
3. What are the most important roles, both individually and as a group that the Commission, Councils, and Collaboratives can play over the next two years?

A vigorous and productive conversation followed, and a number of common themes emerged. Those themes are presented below, by question.

QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE THE MOST COMPELLING REASONS FOR INTEGRATING SEAD IN K-12 EDUCATION?

Members of the Commissions, Councils and Collaboratives cited a desire to enhance the educational experience for all students, to increase equity in education, and to ensure students' preparedness for higher education and the workforce as being the most compelling reasons to integrate SEAD in K-12 education. The following are some of the recurring key messages:

- I. **SEAD is more effective when it is integrated into traditional academics. It should not simply be an add-on—or an afterthought!**

SEAD's importance will be more widely embraced if it is understood to be a necessary component of every student's education, rather than a supplemental program for at-risk students. SEAD needs to be integrated throughout the school culture and practice. In particular, a major takeaway was that, "SEAD shouldn't just be incorporated into [one part of] the curriculum—it must be in every facet of teaching, learning, teacher practice, the whole building." There was strong consensus that focusing on SEAD is not an either/or tradeoff with focusing on "traditional" academics—those priorities are not mutually exclusive. Where SEAD is fully integrated it is no longer seen as a separate program competing for teacher and student time: "forming teacher-student relationships and teaching rigorous content are not mutually exclusive!"

- II. **Integrating SEAD prepares students for life beyond school.**

The belief that school is meant to prepare students for life after graduation—whether college or a career—was resoundingly supported by the group. Another common refrain was that to succeed in the post-graduation world, students must be socially and emotionally competent. SEAD empowers students, gives them a voice, and teaches them to advocate for themselves—all crucial skills for life inside and outside the classroom. In addition, the theme of globalization and the diversification of our communities was raised in recognition of the need for students to be

able to live in and collaborate in diverse communities. Being socially and emotionally competent is critical for effectively participating in a global society.

III. If Students make social and emotional connections to the academic subjects they're learning, their studies will feel more relevant to their lives and they will be more invested in those subjects.

Students who do not see a connection between learning and life disengage from academics. Real, engaged learning happens through relationships, where students have strong relationships with their teachers, feel that their teachers are invested in their well-being, and feel a sense of belonging in their educational community. With these supports, they are much more likely to care about, and perform well in, academic work.

Schools need to redefine success to encompass social and emotional competency, not just test scores. It isn't possible to fully capture students' academic potential through test scores alone, especially if students see tests as having little relevance to their lives. Moreover, many students are discouraged by their inability to succeed on traditional metrics. By placing more emphasis on social and emotional competency as an additional measure of success, more students would find areas of strength that could motivate their investment in school.

IV. Integrating SEAD can help close the achievement gap.

In addition to the academic achievement gap, there is also a social and emotional competency gap. If we want to effectively prepare all students for the workforce, we must focus on closing the gap around those "soft skills".

V. Integrating SEAD is strongly supported by science.

A critical mass of research evidence from scholars across diverse fields of scientific research supports the integration of SEAD to maximize the effectiveness of K-12 learning. More research is needed to inform the most effective ways to integrate SEAD, but supporting SEAD is consistent with how humans develop and learn, and schools should allow research to inform their practice.

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES OF MOVING FORWARD TO ADVANCE THE INTEGRATION OF SEAD IN K-12 EDUCATION?

Two kinds of risks or vulnerabilities were identified: language concerns and implementation concerns. The language concerns related to a lack of consensus on terminology and the impact of certain language on the public's perception of the Commission's work. The implementation concerns related to measurement, school culture, community involvement, teacher training, scalability, and funding.

I. **Lack of a clear language may cause confusion about what SEAD is and what SEAD isn't.**

The proliferation of frameworks, programs, practices, and research supporting SEAD is both a blessing and a curse. While we are poised to act because of the great research and resources supporting SEAD, there exists a dizzying menu of terminology to choose from. This means that there is potential for confusion about what SEAD *is* and what SEAD *isn't*. For teachers, SEAD can come across as yet another initiative, or an add-on. For the public, SEAD can sound mushy and unclear, or even threatening. A role for the Commission could be to establish a field-aligning definition of SEAD.

II. **We must be clear that integrating SEAD doesn't mean watering down academics.**

A common concern in this category was that the public would perceive focusing on social and emotional skills as coming at the expense of attention to traditional academics. The Commission must strive to avoid an "either/or" paradigm. Including SEAD in standards of student progress could be seen as a "weakening of all academic standards."

Many recognized that inherent in this work is a desire to change the public's conception about the purpose of school, from addressing academic challenges to addressing societal challenges; or from "giving information" to "giving inspiration," as one group put it. Many foresaw a pushback to this shift, saying that the question of who is responsible for caring for children's social and emotional development is not one with a clear, universally agreed upon answer. One group pointed out that the belief that social and emotional development should be the family's domain is a likely challenge to and rebuke of the Commission's work (e.g., "why is the government trying to teach morals to my child?"). Many suggested marketing SEAD as a way of meeting students' health needs in order to avoid this criticism.

Framing the integration of SEAD to achieve the broadest possible appeal is a challenge. There was debate as to whether the Commission's strategy should emphasize: "we are failing at this and need to do better" or "we are hopeful about the current work being done and need to continue it." The question of how to best translate research so that it is accessible to educators and community members was also discussed, as well as how to translate research to inform practice.

III. **We must be clear that schools do have a role in socio-emotional development and it doesn't infringe on the role of the family.**

Integrating SEAD is about recognizing that social, emotional, and cognitive development are interdependent and instruction that addresses each of them simultaneously is integral to learning. Schools have always cultivated both hearts and minds. The movement to integrate SEAD is about making the connection between the two clear, and instituting their integration as central to the mission of schools in order to give students the best education possible. Being clear about this can preempt the accusation that schools and the government are infringing on the role of the family. In fact, integrating SEAD should bring the family, the schoolhouse, and the community closer together.

IV. **We must be clear that SEAD is for *all students* not just those who struggle.**

There are many who have criticized SEAD as a “Band-Aid” for poor kids. Indeed, much of the research on SEAD programs has involved targeted interventions for at-risk youth. However, we know that SEAD benefits all students and is essential to learning. It is critical that the Commission is very clear on this message to generate support and buy-in from all groups.

V. **Measurement is a contentious and unavoidable issue.**

Measuring SEAD is a major concern. There is vigorous debate in the science community about what constitutes success for SEAD and how to measure it—or if it can be measured. Nevertheless, parents and community members will demand measurable results to prove its value. Furthermore, educators have long held the belief that what gets tested gets taught. There is a dire need for next-generation research that can help answer this critical question.

VI. **Integrating SEAD requires a commitment from the whole school.**

Successfully integrating SEAD requires a supportive school environment and culture. This can't just be the work of classroom teachers. It must include the enthusiastic, informed participation of all school staff. This is critical to ensure that SEAD isn't simply implemented as a program, but rather is fully baked into a school's culture so that it survives even when the school's administration changes.

VII. **Integrating SEAD take a village.**

Community members outside the school building must see SEAD's value. It is critical to keep in mind the local perspective of individual communities. Successfully integrating SEAD will require also considering the role of out-of-school time.

VIII. **Teachers need support to effectively integrate SEAD.**

One of the most common themes was that integration of SEAD can only work if teachers (and other school staff) are well trained in successful implementation methods and are well

supported to experiment with and refine their approach to integrating SEAD into instruction. Low quality implementation can discourage students and teachers, causing them to believe SEAD is ineffective, and to abandon the initiative. Teachers need to understand that successful integration of SEAD requires a continuous improvement process—it doesn't happen overnight.

Teachers need to be socially and emotionally competent themselves, implementing SEAD *with* their students, not *to* their students.

Finally, many groups stressed that before teachers can become experts in SEAD, they need to understand the research.

IX. Integrating SEAD doesn't follow a one-size-fits-all approach.

School must avoid the pitfalls of attempting "cookie cutter" replication. Just because a method is working well in one school, doesn't mean it will be successful in another school. They stressed that SEAD cannot be a "one size fits all," but rather must pay attention to the nuances of school culture. Furthermore, while many elementary schools have implemented successful SEAD programs, it may not be possible to replicate those results using the same methods at the middle and high school levels.

X. Integrating SEAD must not be instituted as an unfunded mandate.

It would be unfair to place the burden of integrating SEAD on schools if they are not given the appropriate funding to do so. This is not a small initiative, and comprehensive teacher training deserves a specific allocation of resources. One group suggested that providing teachers who express interest in SEAD integration with bonuses is a great way of incentivizing it.

QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLES, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A UNIFIED GROUP, THAT THE COMMISSION, COUNCILS, AND COLLABORATIVES CAN PLAY OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS TO ADVANCE THE GOAL OF FULLY INTEGRATING SEAD INTO THE FABRIC OF K-12 EDUCATION?

To meet the challenges posed by the risks and vulnerabilities identified, the Commission will have to take on these same language and implementation issues.

I. The Commission can provide clarity about SEAD for the public.

It is not only important to define SEAD, but also to expand the public's understanding of what it means to be an educated person. From there it is critical to create a concrete plan for how the Commission is to move from science to action.

II. The Commission can be a spokesperson or messenger for the field.

The Commission should reach out to community members and community leaders, especially parents, to make sure that they are on board and that their voices and concerns are heard. Starting locally may be a very successful strategy to ensure that the Commission's message takes hold. The Commission can deliver a clear message on the benefits of SEAD to educators, parents, and community members. Effective messaging being used in some schools/districts

should be adopted by or built upon. The Commission should identify those messages and use them in its own work. The Commission can communicate that SEAD integration is not just something we should do, but rather something we must do.

III. Capitalize on student voice.

Integrating SEAD must be grounded in and driven by the needs and lived experiences of actual students. The stories told by the Youth Commissioners are very compelling.

IV. Commission work might be split up into fast-track and long-term goals.

The Commission should keep two time frames in mind: current work in SEAD, which the Commission should capitalize on, and the Commission's longer term goals to develop a sustainable infrastructure for SEAD. To do this, the Commission should explicitly create fast-track and long-term goals. By doing so, the Commission can both incentivize SEAD programs in the short term, and at the same time slowly embed SEAD into schools' long-term cultures.

V. The Commission can advocate for educators' needs around SEAD.

Educators will need support integrating SEAD. This includes allocating funds to teacher and administrator training, and creating a school culture in which teachers and administrators feel that their ongoing professional development is important and appreciated. The Commission can serve as an advocate for these and other educator needs.