



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



**NATIONAL COMMISSION
ON SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, &
ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Commissioner Background Reading Materials

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The background readings for the May 2017 Convening and Site Visit are meant to provide Commissioners with: (1) A background on Cleveland's efforts to integrate SEAD, as well as a sampling of other schools' models; and (2) A grounding in how classroom-, school-, and district-level practices can support SEAD integration and student success. We present this selection of readings recognizing that there are myriad approaches to promoting SEAD in K-12 and a rich set of literature to draw from. As such, this list is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather instructive, and we welcome any suggestions for additions to be shared with the Commission.

Background on Cleveland and Other Approaches to SEAD

[Urban Districts Embrace Social-Emotional Learning](#) – Evie Blad, Education Week, (2015).

This article describes the social-emotional learning program (Humanware) being implemented in Cleveland Metropolitan School District. It begins with a brief review of the program's history—sparked by a school shooting in 2007—and provides examples of classroom- and school-level practice and policy—such as the use of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) social-emotional learning curriculum and a union contract and professional development program that ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of Humanware. A brief discussion of measurement issues and equity concerns, as well as implications for state and federal policy are included, alongside interviews with the district's chief executive officer, Eric Gordon, and the principal investigator of the district-wide evaluation of the program, David Osher. Cleveland serves a predominantly minority and low socio-economic status population and has had major issues with law enforcement, yet since implementation of the Humanware program there have been significant improvements in attendance and academic performance in the district.

[Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools](#) – Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

This two-page executive summary describes the four pillars of Cleveland's school improvement plan. Those four pillars are: (1) Grow the number of high-performing District and charter schools in Cleveland and close and replace failing schools; (2) Focus the District's central office on key support and governance roles and transfer authority and resources to schools; (2) Create the Cleveland Transportation Alliance to ensure accountability for all public schools in the city; and (4) Invest and phase in high-leverage system reforms across all schools from preschool to college and career.

[Cleveland Schools Progress](#) – Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

This one-page infographic presents nine key metrics that demonstrate the major improvements that have been made across the Cleveland Metropolitan School District since implementation of 'The Cleveland Plan.' The improvements cited include: (1) Expanded quality preschool, including an additional 1,200 "high quality seats" and an 80% kindergarten readiness rate; (2) Increased third grade reading proficiency as indicated by 85% of students promoted to third grade; (3) Improved scores on 'The Nation's Report Card' (the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), with CMSD being one of only three districts in the nation to improve on all four reading and math tests; (4) Graduation rates increased by 17%; (5) More students ready for college and careers indicated by a 10% reduction in the college remediation rate; (6) State report card improvements, including the 15th highest improvement in Ohio from 2012-2016; (7)

increased enrollment, including 1,100 new students—the first increase in enrollment in decades; (8) increased student attendance, indicated by a 6.3% reduction in chronic absenteeism; and (9) growing public trust, indicated by 72% of citizens recently surveyed agreeing that the district is headed in the right direction.

[Inside Expeditionary Learning at the Springfield Renaissance School](#) – Emily Hanford, Radioworks, (2015).

This in-depth article explores one of the more than 150 Expeditionary Learning (EL) Schools, which are spread across 30 states and serve over 50,000 students. A brief history of Expeditionary Learning is included, alongside interviews with two EL principals, a teacher, a student, and a parent. The EL model was developed through a collaboration between Outward Bound USA—which stresses experiential learning and character development—and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Learning at EL schools is contextualized by real-world, hands-on projects, and students are empowered to take an active role in structuring their education and building strong character traits for life success—those distinctive features are a part of EL’s two core practices, “student-led conferences and learning expeditions.”

[How Valor Collegiate Academy is Rethinking SEL](#) – Amanda Ronan, EdSurge, (2017).

This article provides a brief history of Valor Collegiate Academy’s development, current SEAD practices, and future directions for its work. Valor opened in 2014, in Nashville, with 150 fifth-grade students, and has grown to serve 750 students in grades 5-7, with the addition of another campus in 2015. At its core, Valor uses the “Valor Compass” (an SEL framework) to guide instructional practice and foster the development of “non-academic” skills. Included in the compass are ten “habits” spread across five “disciplines,” including: Sharp Mind (curiosity & diversity), Noble Purpose (joy & identity), Big Heart (courage & kindness), Aligned Actions (determination & integrity), and at the center of the compass, True North (balance & presence), which is core to all of the other disciplines. The “Compass Developmental Pathway” is a competency-based framework that informs curriculum development by organizing the ten “habits” into seven “phases of learning.” A set of activities and projects are overlaid onto these two models, along with an “Individualized Compass Pathway” for each student. Each week, students meet for two and a half hours to consider progress on their Compass plan. Valor outperformed 99% of Metro Nashville Public Schools on state tests in its first year, and received funding from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and the Charter School Growth Fund to expand its Compass work. As a result, Valor is developing a Compass-in-Academics, focused on mindsets and learning strategies is in development. Valor intends to share that work with schools outside of its network, in professional learning communities.

[In Maine, Intervention Smooths 9th Graders’ Paths](#) – Sarah D. Sparks, Education Week, (2016).

This article details the history and scale-up of the Building Assets-Reducing Risks (BARR) Program, which is aimed at smoothing the transition from middle- to high-school by focusing on SEAD. BARR is the creation of Angela Jerabek, a 9th grade guidance counselor who in 1998 developed the program to help reduce risk factors for dropping out of high school. The program was so successful that it eventually received an Investing in Innovation (i3) Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, and has since been scaled up to include 45 urban, suburban, and rural schools, with more than 17,000 students and 800 teachers, across six states. Ninth grade students and teachers assemble in cohorts of thirty students that take core classes together and engage in weekly 30-minute social-emotional skills lessons, called iTime, while teachers meet weekly to check in on the SEAD of every student in their cohort. Course failure rates have dropped

dramatically across schools and academic achievement on standardized tests and grades has improved by significant margins. Evaluation of BARR will continue into 2018, and researchers as well as educators say that the results continue to provide evidence for the program's effectiveness.

[Moving Beyond Just Academics in Assessing Effectiveness](#) – Evie Blad, Education Week, (2015).

This article provides a background on the California Office for Reforming Education (CORE) Districts. It describes how, through a waiver under No Child Left Behind, six school districts in California began redesigning their accountability system to include metrics that assess factors related to school climate and students' noncognitive skills. Those metrics are added alongside accountability to academic standards in a 40/60 weighting to produce the final accountability score for a school or district. CORE pairs underperforming schools with higher-performing but demographically similar schools to facilitate professional development among teachers and principals. Data used to assess students' noncognitive skills include school climate surveys and school-level report cards that reflect an index comprised of chronic absenteeism, suspension and expulsion rates, and the rate of English language learners being re-designated as fluent. Additionally, student-, staff-, and parent-level surveys about students' social awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, and growth mindset are monitored.

Background on SEAD Practice and Support Structures

[Social and Emotional Learning in Schools: From Programs to Strategies](#) – Stephanie Jones & Suzanne Bouffard, Society for Research in Child Development (2012).

This report focuses on integrating teacher and school-level practices that support social and emotional development. It points out that currently these practices tend to occur within the context of a program, as opposed to being a part of everyday school operations, teaching, and learning. While the results of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs are promising, their full potential for impact is limited by the fragmented nature of their implementation in practice at the district, school, and teacher levels. The authors outline specific steps to take the powerful evidence-based practices from SEL programs and integrate them into the daily work of teachers and schools, including: (1) Routinize practices that support SEL; (2) Provide training and support for all teachers, staff, and leaders; (3) Provide support for adults' own SEL skills; (4) Consider the role of standards. The report also discusses considerations for federal, state, and local policy to support implementing these changes to practice, including funding, standards, training, assessment, systems for continuous improvement, incentives for integration with academics, and next-generation research.

[What Does Evidence-Based Instruction in Social and Emotional Learning Actually Look Like in Practice?](#) – Linda Dusenbury, Sophia Calin, Celene Domitrovich, & Roger P. Weissberg, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, (2015).

This brief article describes discrete and replicable classroom- and school-level practices that support students' social and emotional development across K-12 education. The four strategies are: (1) Free-standing lessons; (2) General teaching practices; (3) Integration of skill instruction and practices that support SEL within the context of an academic curriculum; and (4) Guidance to administrators and school leaders on how to facilitate SEL as a schoolwide initiative. Concrete examples of each strategy are given, along with a discussion of the key stages and sensitive periods for social and emotional development across K-12 and a brief summary of state- and district-level SEL standards.

[**This Time, With Feeling: Integrating Social and Emotional Development and College- and Career-Readiness Standards**](#) – Hillary Johnson & Ross Wiener, The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, (2017).

This recently-published research and policy brief from the Aspen Institute’s Education & Society Program reviews the evidence base for social and emotional development (SED) and identifies how current college and career readiness (CCR) standards provide opportunities for connecting SED with academics in a step toward integrated SEAD. It explicitly lays out those connections to CCR standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science; discusses how academic instruction can facilitate the development of social and emotional skill alongside academic subject mastery; and concludes with a set of recommendations for how educators can leverage the natural crossover between SED and CCR standards to promote the integration of SEAD in K-12 education.

[**Importance of School Climate**](#) – Lindsey O’Brennan & Catherine Bradshaw, Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence & The National Education Association, (2013).

This article provides a brief overview of school climate and its role in producing positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students and schools. The authors review some common practices that promote school climate as well as measures to evaluate progress, and make recommendations for integrating those practices and measures into the daily work of schools.