



## Purpose

Today's youth must navigate a complex, economically competitive, and globally connected world. Yet the nation's predominant approach to K-12 education fails to fully prepare students for this future. From the schoolhouse to the state house, we have emphasized—appropriately—the rigorous academic skills our students need to be ready for college and the workforce. But overwhelming evidence demands that we complement the focus on academic achievement with the development of the social and emotional skills that are equally essential for students to thrive in school, career, and life. Now is the time to re-envision what constitutes success in our schools.

To advance a broader vision of education success, the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development is uniting key constituencies from multiple sectors, including education, research, business, health, and the military. Over the coming months, the Commission will explore how to fully integrate social, emotional, and academic development in school design and culture as well as teaching and learning. As part of this work, the Commission will learn crucial lessons from teachers, parents, and students in communities across the country.

Along the way, the Commission will spark local and national conversations, examine challenges and opportunities, and highlight promising practices. A culminating, action-oriented roadmap will identify next steps in research, practice, and policy to help usher in a new era of K-12 education focused on the whole student. This roadmap will point the way toward a future where every child receives the comprehensive support needed to succeed in school and in our evolving 21st century workplace.

## Who We Are

Led by co-chairs Linda Darling Hammond, President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute and Charles E. Ducommun Professor Emeritus at Stanford University; Governor John Engler, President of the Business Roundtable and former Governor of Michigan; and Tim Shriver, Co-Founder and Chair of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and Chairman of the Special Olympics, the Commission is composed of leaders representing wide-ranging experiences and viewpoints—each of whom shares a common commitment to re-envisioning K-12 success. The Commission is housed at the Aspen Institute because of its commitment to sponsoring non-partisan, non-ideological dialogue that leads to meaningful action.

## Rationale

We are experiencing a unique moment in education. Despite schools' focused attention on academics, persistent achievement gaps remain and too many of our youth are unprepared for the rigors of college and demanding careers. At the same time, compelling research demonstrates what parents have always known—*the success of young people in school and beyond is inextricably linked to healthy social and emotional development*. Students who have a sense of belonging and purpose, who can work well with peers to solve problems, and who can persevere through challenges, are more likely to reach their full potential. Educators, too, understand the benefits of educating the whole student, and have been calling for more support and fewer barriers in making this vision a reality. Similarly, employers recognize the high value of “soft skills”—more aptly referred to as “power skills”—for the future of our workforce.

Many schools and districts are doing this work, but they remain the exception rather than the norm. Prior policies and test-based accountability approaches predicated on a narrow vision of student success limited more widespread

momentum. The Every Student Succeeds Act, as well as emerging efforts at the state and local levels to prioritize social and emotional development, are beginning to change the landscape.

This convergence of policy momentum, research advances, and support from the education and business communities creates a rare window of opportunity. The National Commission and its partners can build on this momentum while ensuring progress is made with careful deliberation.

## Goals

The Commission is engaging educators, families and community leaders, researchers, and policymakers in reframing what a successful K-12 education entails. Specifically, it will:

- 1) Elevate and participate in grassroots conversations about the need to fully integrate social and emotional development into the fabric of K-12 education.
- 2) Highlight promising practices in schools across the country and innovative policies that support their work.
- 3) Identify the next generation of research needed to effectively integrate social, emotional, and academic development.
- 4) Develop a 5-10 year roadmap that recommends specific action steps in research, practice, and policy to create a K-12 education system that supports the whole student.

## Approach

The Commission should not—and will not—do this work alone. It is committed to an open learning journey that meaningfully involves individuals with diverse perspectives. Through field hearings, site visits, and expert testimony, the Commission will hear directly from those engaged in and affected by this work.

Along the way, the commissioners will collaborate with several entities in a deliberate effort to break down silos and work at the intersection of research, practice, and policy:

- A Council of Distinguished Scientists will illuminate relevant evidence from brain science, education, and psychology and recommend next steps in research.
- A Council of Distinguished Educators will identify challenges and opportunities for taking efforts to scale.
- The Aspen Institute Youth Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development will contribute firsthand experience and real-time insights to the conversation.
- A virtual Parent Advisory Panel will provide a family and community perspective about the role that K-12 education can play in comprehensively supporting youth.
- A Partners Collaborative, joined by a mutual passion for the work, will offer advice on direction and feasibility.
- A Funders Collaborative will ensure the Commission's activities are informed by the many philanthropic efforts dedicated to deepening and accelerating this work.

## Join Us

Help us advance a new vision of education success that supports the whole student. Visit [www.AspenSEAD.org](http://www.AspenSEAD.org) and follow us @AspenSEAD to learn more, sign up for Commission updates, and discover ways to engage.