Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in the Context of New Accountability

Hanna Melnick, Channa M. Cook-Harvey, and Linda Darling-Hammond

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires state accountability systems to include indicators of "school quality and student success" along with indicators of academic outcomes. The new law provides an important opportunity for states to broaden the definition of student success to include measures of students' social-emotional, as well as academic, development.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a broad and multifaceted concept, which the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." Well-implemented programs designed to foster SEL are associated with positive outcomes, ranging from better test scores and higher graduation rates to improved social behavior.

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Schools can support students' social-emotional development by fostering a supportive school climate, as well as through explicit instruction. When classrooms are safe and engaging, and learning is both supported and rewarding, students feel connected and efficacious—which allows them to develop the social and emotional, as well as academic, skills, habits, and mindsets needed to succeed in life.

How might schools be encouraged to help students develop socially and emotionally, and to foster positive school environments, in the context of new accountability? This paper provides a framework for considering how measures of SEL and school climate may be incorporated in an accountability and continuous improvement system. We conceptualize such a system as multitiered, and designed to provide useful information about school status and progress at the state, district, and school levels.

In addition to indicators required by ESSA for identifying schools for intervention, a broader system of accountability and continuous improvement might also include state or local indicators that offer diagnostic information for improvement (see Table 1).

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Table 1
Types of Indicators That May Be Included in an Accountability and Improvement System

Federal indicators, used for federal and state accountability	Measures used for monitoring and identifying schools for intervention as required by ESSA. Data must meet ESSA's requirements for being valid and reliable, and for meaningfully differentiating schools statewide, as well as being disaggregated by student subgroup.
State-reported indicators, used for state and local information and improvement	Measures publicly available in a comparable way across districts and schools to inform ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement processes. May be used to inform state or regional support (but not to identify schools for intervention in the federally required system).
State-supported indicators, used for local information and improvement	Tools and measures provided by the state that districts or schools may choose to use to evaluate, monitor, and improve school and classroom practices and student learning.
Locally selected indicators, used for local information and improvement	Measures schools and districts may develop or select and adopt for their own purposes to guide their monitoring and improvement efforts.

Source: Adapted from *Preparing all students for college, career, life, and leadership in the 21st century: Superintendent's Advisory Task Force on Accountability and Continuous Improvement,* 2016, California Department of Education.

Different indicators belong in different parts of these systems, depending on the nature of the data, who will be using it, and for what purpose. These indicators should shine a light on successes as well as areas that need improvement. Schools should be held accountable for outcomes that they can reasonably affect, and the data an indicator provides should be able to clearly identify an area for improvement—or at least point to an aspect of school functioning that merits deeper investigation.

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This report offers guidance on how states and districts might determine which measures of social and emotional learning, development, and supports they can use in different parts of their accountability and continuous improvement systems, and how they might use the resulting data. We consider (a) measures of students' social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets; (b) measures of school climate and supports for SEL; and (c) measures of student outcomes, such as chronic absenteeism and suspension rates, that are related to school climate and supports for SEL. Some measures could fit in multiple tiers, depending on a state's context. Table 2 gives an overview of these measures and where they might fit in a multitiered accountability system, depending on state values, data, and readiness.

Table 2
Where Measures of SEL and School Climate Might Fit in an Accountability System

	Federal indicators, used for federal and state accountability	State-reported indicators, used for state and local information and improvement	State-supported indicators, used for local information and improvement	Locally selected indicators, used for local information and improvement
Students' social-emotional competencies				
Student surveys of their own social-emotional competencies		*	x	x
Teachers' observations of students' social-emotional competencies			x	x
Performance assessments of students' social-emotional competencies			x	x
School climate and supports for SEL				
Student surveys of school climate, learning opportunities, and support for SEL	x	x	x	x
Teacher and/or parent surveys of school climate and conditions		x	x	x
Observations of teacher practices			x	x
School quality reviews examining school practices		x	x	x
SEL implementation rubrics			x	x
Student outcomes related to school climate and supports				
Suspension rates	x	x	x	x
Chronic absenteeism rates	x	x	x	x

* A state may choose to implement a statewide survey of school climate and learning supports that includes questions about students' social-emotional competencies. We recommend that data on these constructs be used for local information, and not for state accountability.

After reviewing each measure in greater depth, we reach the following conclusions.

1. **States should not use measures of students' social and emotional competence for high-stakes accountability purposes, at least for now. They can, however, support the use of these measures at the local level to inform teaching, learning, and program investments.** These indicators can provide important information that identifies students' strengths and needs as they relate to SEL, which might be reported on an aggregate basis to inform school decisions about programs and supportive strategies. However, most surveys of social-emotional competencies are relatively new, were not designed for cross-school comparison, and may be particularly vulnerable to reference bias, because students are not always the best judges of their own level of competence. The authors therefore conclude that these measures are not currently appropriate for accountability systems at the state or federal levels, although they might be used locally.

2. **States could consider including measures of school climate, supports for SEL, and related outcomes in their federal accountability and statewide reporting systems.** These measures may be more appropriate for a high-stakes accountability system than measures of students' individual social and emotional competencies because school climate and supports for SEL are areas that school staff can directly influence, and measurement tools tend to be more advanced.

   States might consider using student surveys to evaluate school conditions and supports. They can evaluate the outcomes of these conditions by tracking suspension rates and chronic absenteeism—indicators that are eligible to be used as measures of 'school quality and student success' under ESSA, providing a more comprehensive picture of school functioning. If used for statewide reporting, school climate surveys should be well validated and meet criteria for comparative use.

   States may also opt to report these indicators without using them for federal accountability (i.e., to identify schools for intervention under the federal law). Teacher and parent school climate surveys might be considered as state-reported indicators, since they provide important insight into school functioning, despite not meeting ESSA's requirements for federal accountability.

3. **Even if not incorporated in federal accountability or statewide reporting systems, states can provide districts with well-validated tools for measuring SEL and school climate.** Well-designed and well-implemented measurement tools can help educators make strategic decisions about needed investments in student services, programs, and professional development. These can range from measures of school climate and students' social-emotional competencies to diagnostic measures such as protocols for observing and reflecting on teacher practices and school structures.

4. **State agencies and districts should provide schools with resources and technical assistance as they seek to encourage SEL.** Data alone will not drive school success. Staff need to be trained on how to analyze and act on the data they collect and how to implement high-quality programs, professional development, and school organizational changes that

support students' development. State-level support may include technical assistance for program development or the facilitation of peer learning networks, as well as providing state and federal funding to support schools' efforts.

Until recently, social and emotional learning has often been placed on the sidelines, seen as a distraction from academics. Research suggests, however, that SEL and a positive school climate are the foundation for students' academic and later-life success. States should encourage schools to support them in the context of new opportunities for accountability and continuous improvement under ESSA.

Introduction

Long-standing demands from business and industry have recently converged with advances in the science of learning to establish the critical importance of social and emotional, as well as academic, development for school and life success.[1] Variously called "soft skills," noncognitive or co-cognitive factors, or 21st-century competencies, these skills, mindsets, and habits help people succeed in a social world, enabling them to accomplish their goals. Young people's abilities to manage their attention and feelings, collaborate well with others, show perseverance, build strong relationships, and learn from challenging experiences are the building blocks for future success.[2] Schools can help children succeed by supporting their social, emotional, and academic development through a culture of inclusiveness and a climate that supports their physical and psychological safety.[3]

The growing movement to attend to these aspects of education has accelerated since the passage in December 2015 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which offers new possibilities for defining and supporting student and school success in American public education. One of the most notable shifts from ESSA's predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is that states have greater responsibility for designing their state accountability systems and determining supports and interventions for schools.

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ESSA marks an important move toward a more holistic approach to accountability by encouraging multiple measures of school and student success. These measures are intended to complement standards that encourage high-order thinking.[4] In addition to adopting measures of math and English language arts proficiency, states are expected to monitor high school graduation rates, English learners' language progress, and one other academic indicator of their choosing for elementary school, plus one or more additional measures of school quality.

Specifically, the law requires state accountability systems to have "at least one measure of school quality or student success that allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance, [and] is valid, reliable, and comparable across the state."[5] Although this is colloquially referred to as the "fifth indicator," a state can choose any number of indicators to satisfy this particular requirement in the law and need not feel restricted to choosing only one. States seeking to create more robust systems of information to support continuous improvement may in fact decide to add other indicators that measure elements such as student engagement, student access to advanced coursework, postsecondary readiness, and school climate, as well as potential measures of social and emotional learning.

Students' social and emotional well-being in school has frequently been called the "missing link" in the accountability-driven practices and policies that are the legacy of NCLB and that dominate how schools operate today.[6] Under ESSA, states can now include measures of school climate and culture, as well as measures of social-emotional competencies that have been linked to student academic

progress, health, and other positive long-term outcomes.[7] States and localities can also report indicators that are considered part of a continuous improvement system, beyond what is required by federal law and used for high-stakes accountability.

Although social-emotional competencies and the school climates that support their development are critical to student success, policymakers should be thoughtful about how they hold schools accountable for SEL. It is important to support, rather than punish, schools and students in need and to avoid labeling as deficient those who experience adversity. In the pages that follow, we offer a framework for considering how measures of SEL and school climate may be incorporated in an accountability and continuous improvement system. We conceptualize such a system as multitiered, and designed to provide useful information about school status and progress at the state, district, and school levels.

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We suggest that measures of students' social-emotional skills, habits, and mindsets—what we call "competencies" in this report—may be most useful for informing teaching and learning at the school or district level, rather than as part of the federal accountability system. As will be discussed, these measures are still in development, and potentially useful data are likely to be compromised if used for high-stakes accountability. Furthermore, we believe policymakers should be cautious when holding schools responsible for students' social and emotional competencies, the development of which occurs well beyond the classroom walls.

Measures of school supports for student learning, however, including surveys of school climate, may in some cases be appropriate for state-level reporting or federal accountability, along with measures of related outcomes such as reduced rates of absenteeism, suspension, or expulsion. School climate and supports for student learning are critical inputs for greater academic performance and social and emotional development. Furthermore, these measures can provide schools with data that is actionable at the school level and reflective of factors that are within educators' control.

In this report, we suggest where states might use measures of students' social-emotional competencies, school supports for social and emotional learning, school climate, and related student outcomes within an accountability and improvement system. We begin by summarizing how social-emotional competencies, school climate, and other supports for students influence students' success in school and beyond. Next, we discuss how states and districts might determine which measures to include for accountability, for reporting, and for local diagnostic purposes, and how they might use the resulting data. We then describe the various measures states, districts, and schools might use to encourage attention to SEL and school climate in a multitiered accountability and continuous improvement system. We conclude with specific recommendations regarding the use of these measures for information and improvement in this broader version of accountability.

How Students' Social and Emotional Learning Matters

Fundamental insights from the learning sciences have shown that children learn when they feel safe and supported, and their learning is impaired when they are fearful, traumatized, or overcome with emotion.[8] Thus, children need supportive environments and well-developed skills, mindsets, and habits to manage stress and to cope with the inevitable conflicts and frustrations of school and life beyond school. In addition, they need to be able to get along well with others to succeed.

Defining Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a broad and multifaceted process that occurs in many contexts—home, community, and school. A wide range of constructs falls under this umbrella.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) offers a widely used definition of SEL as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."[9] In recent years, the term "SEL" has expanded to include concepts such as grit, resilience, perseverance, and growth mindset. Figure 1 shows CASEL's five constructs, nested within the various contexts where social and emotional learning occurs, alongside the skills, habits, and mindsets often referred to in the field.

The Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills describes three domains in which academic, social, and emotional learning knowledge and skills intersect: the cognitive domain, which includes thinking and reasoning skills; the intrapersonal domain, which involves managing one's behavior and emotions to achieve goals; and the interpersonal domain, which involves expressing ideas and communicating with others. The skills and knowledge in these domains are malleable, rather than fixed, meaning that educators can foster the development of these abilities in school.[10]

In this report, we will refer to students' social and emotional competencies as an umbrella term. We use this term to refer to social-emotional skills, such as the ability to solve problems or relate to others, in addition to mindsets and habits. Mindsets include individuals' beliefs about whether they belong, how much their effort affects their success, and how good they are at certain tasks, while habits include behaviors such as arriving to school prepared or doing homework regularly.[11] Thus, when we refer to students' competencies, we mean not just students' abilities, but how they think and act.

Importance of SEL for Student Success

A substantial body of research has shown that social and emotional learning is critical for preparing students for productive college, career, and civic participation.[12] Well-implemented programs designed to foster SEL are associated with positive outcomes ranging from better test scores to improved social behavior. In an oft-cited 2011 meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs that focused on different aspects of SEL, researchers found that these programs had positive effects on students' social competence, behavior, and academics.[13] Specifically, researchers found that in the 37 studies that looked at academic achievement, students achieved, on average, an 11 percentile-point improvement in academic performance as assessed through report card grades and test scores.

Figure 1
Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Self-awareness	Self-management	Social awareness	Relationship skills	Responsible decision-making
The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."	The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations—effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.	The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.	The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.	The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.
• Identifying emotions • Accurate self-perception • Recognizing strengths • Self-confidence • Self-efficacy	• Impulse control • Stress management • Self-discipline • Self-motivation • Goal-setting • Organizational skills	• Perspective-taking • Empathy • Appreciating diversity • Respect for others	• Communication • Social engagement • Relationship-building • Teamwork	• Identifying problems • Analyzing situations • Solving problems • Evaluating • Reflecting • Ethical responsibility

Subsequent analyses also found robust academic benefits, confirming that students who experienced one of many SEL programs showed improved academic effort and achievement (as measured in reading, writing, and math tests).[14] While these studies covered a range of SEL constructs, the body of evidence as a whole shows that noncognitive factors matter in students' development, and at least some can be intentionally developed.

Research suggests that the integration of social and emotional with academic learning is beneficial to students in school and beyond. A recent report that reviewed more than 100 years of research on several different aspects of SEL found that, when well implemented, SEL programs have been linked to a host of important educational and life outcomes, including

- improved classroom climate and teacher instructional support;
- higher graduation rates;
- prevention of bullying and low-level aggression;
- reduction in teacher stress (via teacher-focused SEL interventions such as mindfulness training), which can reduce exclusionary discipline and discipline disparities;
- improved social performance, job outcomes, and higher education attainment; and
- improved college and career readiness and 21st-century skills such as flexibility, adaptability, collaboration, and creativity.[15]

Many schools and districts have begun to focus on SEL, given a more welcoming policy environment and compelling research on the science of learning and human development.[16] Yet policymakers and educators who want to address SEL in their schools should be aware that, while there are many known programs and interventions that address some aspects of SEL for some children, there are still important gaps in our knowledge. For instance, many programs appear to be successful in the early grades, but less is known about successful programming for older students.[17] Furthermore, while some aspects of SEL are well studied and are addressed in established curricula, such as self-management or social awareness, researchers caution that others, such as growth mindset, are still in development.[18]

School Climate: The Foundation for Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

A positive classroom and school environment is important for students to develop in healthy ways. It is important that schools provide a learning environment where students feel secure and supported and that maximizes their ability to learn academic content as well as social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets. Educators play a key role in helping children understand and manage their feelings, develop coping strategies, and learn interpersonal skills and social responsibility.

According to the National School Climate Center (NSCC):

> … school climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.[19]

The nature of the school climate, also sometimes referred to as school culture, can reinforce or undermine learning. A school's values, expectations, and norms influence how the various actors within a school experience or perceive the environment. These perceptions, and the resulting behavior, in turn affect the school climate. A school's climate "sets the tone" at the school and

can be seen in the physical environment, experienced during the learning process, and felt in how people within the school interact with one another (see Table 3). This greatly affects students' social-emotional as well academic development.

Table 3
The National School Climate Council's 13 Dimensions of School Climate

Dimensions	Major Indicators
Safety	
1. **Rules and Norms**	Clearly communicated rules about physical violence; clearly communicated rules about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing; clear and consistent enforcement and norms for adult intervention.
2. **Sense of Physical Security**	Sense that students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school.
3. **Sense of Social-Emotional Security**	Sense that students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.
Teaching and Learning	
4. **Support for Learning**	Use of supportive teaching practices, such as encouragement and constructive feedback; varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; support for risk taking and independent thinking; atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention.
5. **Social and Civic Learning**	Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, including: effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection and emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making.
Interpersonal Relationships	
6. **Respect for Diversity**	Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g., gender, race, culture) at all levels of the school—student-student; adult-student; adult-adult; and overall norms for tolerance.
7. **Social Support—Adults**	Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students' success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and personal concern for students' problems.
8. **Social Support—Students**	Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including: friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.
Institutional Environment	
9. **School Connectedness/ Engagement**	Positive identification with the school and norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.
10. **Physical Surroundings**	Cleanliness, order, and appeal of facilities and adequate resources and materials.
Social Media	
11. **Social Media**	Sense that students feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse/teasing, gossip, and exclusion when online or on electronic devices (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms; email; text messaging; posting photo/video).
Staff Only	
12. **Leadership**	Administration that creates and communicates a clear vision, and is accessible to and supportive of school staff and staff development.
13. **Professional Relationships**	Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.

Source: The 13 Dimensions of School Climate was developed by the National School Climate Center (NSCC) for the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI). Reprinted with permission from NSCC, www.schoolclimate.org.

Social, emotional, and academic development and a positive school climate are mutually reinforcing. As students and school personnel develop their social and emotional competence, school climate improves; a positive school climate creates the atmosphere within which social and emotional and academic learning can take place.[20] Students with strong social-emotional competencies contribute to a positive school climate because, for example, they are better able to peacefully resolve conflicts and to adhere to positive behavioral norms. When there is less disruption in classrooms, and learning is both rewarding and supported, students feel connected and efficacious, which allows them to develop socially and emotionally and strengthens their allegiance to the school community. Conversely, in a chaotic or punitive classroom, it is much less likely that child will develop a sense of optimism, build strong relationships, or choose to work through tough problems.[21]

> Social, emotional, and academic development and a positive school climate are mutually reinforcing.

Social-emotional development occurs in the context of supportive school climates that affect instruction, relationships, and student decision making.[22] Schools can promote this development in all facets of the school day and community. Successful schools integrate SEL into daily life through the relationships they nurture in academic classes, during teacher-student interactions, and in hallways or cafeterias, such that the everyday nature of the school itself works to support students' social and emotional development.[23] In studies of high schools with positive outcomes in student engagement, achievement, and behavior, Stanford University researchers found these schools infused social-emotional learning opportunities throughout the school day. They used strategies such as curriculum focused on perspective taking in history, problem solving in science, and community service projects. These schools also teach specific conflict resolution strategies and use restorative discipline practices.[24] As researchers at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research explain, a "key task for educators becomes the intentional development of these skills, traits, strategies, and attitudes in conjunction with the development of content knowledge and academic skills."[25]

School climate is linked to academic, as well as social-emotional, development. A recent report reviewed 78 school climate studies going back to the year 2000, and found that "a more positive school climate is related to improved academic achievement, beyond the expected level of achievement based on student and school socioeconomic status backgrounds," and can mitigate the negative effects of poverty on academic achievement.[26]

Since a positive school climate and school supports are foundational in supporting students' social, emotional, and academic learning, states might consider including these aspects of school functioning in school accountability and reporting systems to support school improvement. The following section explains how policymakers might design accountability systems to put in place appropriate incentives and provide schools, districts, and the state with useful diagnostic data.

Multilevel Indicator Systems for Accountability Under ESSA

Given the foundational importance of SEL and school climate, many states are considering how supportive practices might be systemically included in their schools and reinforced under ESSA. In the following pages, we examine how accountability and continuous improvement systems might be used to support these goals.

Our view of accountability systems is based on a perspective that accountability should be designed to help leverage improvement, not just to label or sanction schools, and should take into account the multiple outcomes of schooling that parents and the public care about. A helpful accountability system will consider inputs, processes, and outcomes, and enable its users to understand the relationships among them, so that they can pursue useful changes.

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A strong accountability system also provides data to stakeholders who are in a position to use it to improve school practices. At the state and district levels, this might be data that is used for flagging schools and subgroups that are struggling and need extra resources and external support. At the school and district levels, it can be data that gives insight into which aspects of school- and classroom-level practices are working and which need improvement. Locally, teachers, administrators, and families could examine data as they consider whether to experiment with changes to instruction or policy, or to examine whether new or existing strategies are working. Such data reviews can occur on a periodic basis for all schools, as well as more frequently for schools in need of improvement.

States may thus think about the indicators that inform their accountability systems as a multilayered system, rather than just a federally mandated set of indicators. In addition to indicators included for federal purposes used to identify schools for intervention, a broader system of accountability and continuous improvement might also have state or local indicators that offer diagnostic information for improvement, as described in Table 4. These indicators might be presented together on a dashboard, and may be measured in terms of status—how well a school is doing in the current year—and/or growth over time.

Federal indicators are those required to identify at least the bottom 5% of schools under ESSA. Under federal law, the indicators used for federal accountability (including school identification for intervention) must be valid, reliable, and comparable statewide; allow for meaningful differentiation between schools; and be reported for each of the student subgroups specified in ESSA. Required subgroups for accountability include major racial/ethnic groups, English learners, children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities. States must also publicly report results for students who are homeless, have a parent in the military, or are in foster care.

Table 4
Types of Indicators That May Be Included in an Accountability and Improvement System

Federal indicators used for federal and state accountability	Measures used for monitoring and identifying schools for intervention as required by ESSA. Data must meet ESSA's requirements for being valid and reliable, and for meaningfully differentiating schools statewide, as well as being disaggregated by student subgroup.
State-reported indicators used for state and local information and improvement	Measures publicly available in a comparable way across districts and schools to inform ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement processes. May be used to inform state or regional support (but not to identify schools for intervention in the federally required system).
State-supported indicators used for local information and improvement	Tools and measures provided by the state that districts or schools may choose to use to evaluate, monitor, and improve school and classroom practices and student learning.
Locally selected indicators used for local information and improvement	Indicators schools and districts may develop or select and adopt for their own purposes to guide their monitoring and improvement efforts.

Source: Adapted from *Preparing all students for college, career, life, and leadership in the 21st century: Superintendent's Advisory Task Force on Accountability and Continuous Improvement,* 2016, California Department of Education.

State-reported indicators are those that are publicly reported, but would not be used to identify at least the bottom 5% of schools. These indicators could complement federal indicators by providing a more holistic picture of school performance and improvement, and could draw upon measures that may benefit from lower stakes or that do not meet ESSA's requirements for comparability across schools or disaggregation by student subgroup. Both federal indicators and state-reported indicators may be used to group schools that are struggling with particular problems of practice.

State-supported and locally selected indicators may provide additional information for school and district diagnostic purposes, but their use would not be required and would largely be used to inform ongoing improvement. The state may provide support for measures such as surveys or new assessments, or may offer tools, technical assistance, or financial support.

California has recently adopted this kind of multitiered system (see Table 5). Some indicators will be used for school identification under ESSA, while others, such as measures of parent engagement or implementation of state standards, will be used mainly for transparency and local improvement purposes.[27] Districts may add indicators for their own purposes that are distinct from the state system; these would not impact state accountability determinations. California's Office to Reform Education (CORE) districts, for example, use additional metrics for SEL and school climate that were begun under a waiver as an alternative to federal accountability requirements, which they may choose to continue publicly reporting under ESSA.[28]

Table 5
California's Proposed Multitiered Indicator System Under ESSA[a]

Federal indicators, used for federal and state accountability	• ELA and math test scores (both status and growth) • English learner proficiency gains • Graduation rates (including extended-year rate) • College- and career-readiness indicator • Chronic absenteeism rates • Suspension rates
State-reported indicators, used for state and local information and improvement	• Percentage of teachers who are experienced and qualified in their assignment • Access to curricular materials and adequate facilities • Science test scores • Expulsion rates
State-supported indicators, used for local information and improvement	• Tools for measuring literacy progress in grades k-2
Locally selected indicators, used for local information and improvement	• School climate surveys (may eventually be state supported or state reported) • Parent engagement[b] • Implementation of state standards[b] • Other district-determined measures (e.g., the CORE districts' indicators of SEL and high school readiness)

[a] Indicators were proposed by the State Board of Education as of March 2017 and are subject to revision. Some indicators will not be available for immediate use but will be phased in when data become available. Others, such as science test scores or expulsion rates, are among the "8 state priorities" and will be reported, although they are not currently a part of the dashboard.

[b] Schools will have local flexibility regarding which measure they choose, but a summary of the state-supported indicators must be reported to the state on the school's dashboard.

Source: California Accountability Model & School Dashboard, 2017, California Department of Education. http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/.

Choosing Indicators and Their Place in an Accountability System

The way SEL is measured and incorporated into accountability and improvement systems has important implications for what happens in schools. The last years of accountability policy have reinforced the truth of the adage, "What gets measured gets done." Inclusion in an accountability system can signal the importance of an outcome, thereby drawing resources and attention. These indicators may also provide data that guide administrators' and teachers' priorities when deciding where to focus their instruction, interventions, or professional development.

Educators' schoolwide engagement with data can be a valuable process. The act of analyzing survey data or conducting gap analyses can draw teachers' attention to issues that had been pushed to the side by competing priorities. One researcher describes using school-level SEL and school climate survey data with teachers in

> The way SEL is measured and incorporated into accountability and improvement systems has important implications for what happens in schools.

a high-need school in California to open a cycle of inquiry and experimentation in teachers' practice. According to the researcher, "During debrief sessions, teachers attributed the lower results in the areas of Respect and Safety to organizational and curricular barriers they had identified in earlier conversations: lack of time, lack of shared behavior expectations, and absence of explicit SEL instruction. At this point in the research, and based on the school's needs, teachers decided to focus their action planning on incorporating students' social and emotional needs in their teaching. … As teachers continued implementing the SEL standards, they observed positive changes in their students and their classrooms, which deepened their commitment to the whole child."[29]

Yet using data for accountability, even locally, can have unintended consequences, whether the data are used to determine interventions in schools or simply publicly reported. The more any measure is used for decision making that can have negative consequences (perceived or actual), the more likely it is to be misunderstood or distorted—an effect sometimes referred to as Campbell's law.[30] To this end, what gets measured, why, how, and for what purpose are of critical importance. When choosing an indicator or assessment, policymakers might consider the following questions:[31]

1. **What does the indicator measure, and how likely is it that data are actionable and can lead to meaningful improvement?** Many indicators of SEL or school climate measure aspects of a person's skills, habits, and mindsets or a school's environment, which are typically called "constructs." An indicator has strong construct validity if it approximates well the idea or notion it purports to measure. Data are meaningful if they help identify specific levels of performance or perception, and actionable if educators are in a position to make relevant changes as a result. Schools should be held accountable for outcomes that they can reasonably affect, and the data an indicator provides should clearly identify an area for improvement—or at least point to an aspect of school functioning that merits deeper investigation. The highest leverage indicators measure outcomes that can be influenced by school policies or practices and for which research-backed policies or practices are known and available. To lead to meaningful improvement, schools, districts, or the state should be willing to allocate time, staff, and resources to address the identified needs.

   > Data are meaningful if they help identify specific levels of performance or perception, and actionable if educators are in a position to make relevant changes as a result.

2. **For what use was the measure designed, and how might data be distorted if attached to "high stakes"?** Researchers note that the validity of an assessment depends not just on the assessment itself but also its intended use, since measures that are valid for one purpose may not be valid for another.[32] Surveys designed for a one-on-one setting with a counselor, for example, might not produce valid data when administered en masse to all the students in a school; likewise, an interview protocol designed for diagnostic purposes might generate less useful responses if attached to high-stakes consequences. Attaching consequences, such as state intervention or even just public scrutiny, may affect the degree to which individuals try to "fake" or "game" a measure, which can render it invalid.

3. **Does the measure generate consistent, reliable data?** A measure should be reliable, meaning that the results are consistent under similar circumstances. It should minimize "reference bias" based on race, gender, and other factors that might influence how a person reports. If used to evaluate progress over time, the measure must be validated for this purpose. To be used for reporting, a measure should also provide data that are comparable across students or schools, depending on the unit of analysis. One consideration for comparability is whether the students' different frames of reference might harm our ability to compare across schools.[33] For example, students used to greater supports for their learning might be more critical of a condition in their school than students used to a lower standard, thus rendering a comparable rating objectively unequal.

4. **Does the measure meaningfully differentiate between schools and subgroups?** If data are used to compare across schools or groups of students, especially for federal accountability purposes, there must be sufficient variability in the range of scores an indicator produces to place schools in different categories. Indicators that do not meet this requirement may be publicly reported but not used to rank schools against one another. Any indicator to be used for federally required purposes—i.e., a "fifth indicator"—must also be able to be disaggregated by student subgroup.

We take these questions into account when determining where indicators of SEL, school climate, and related outcomes belong in an accountability system. We believe, however, that where an indicator belongs in an accountability system depends greatly upon its purpose as well as the local context. Some measures could fit in multiple tiers, depending on whether certain practices or measures are already widely used in a given state, and whether data are available and actionable in the state system. For example, some states use performance assessments or school quality reviews statewide (both of which could provide information about SEL competencies or supports), while in others, these may be practices used in some localities or not at all. In addition, a state might use an indicator locally or just for reporting purposes for a period of time before it decides whether to use the indicator in the federal or state accountability and improvement system.

There are several sources of data that states and districts could use to measure SEL, school climate, and related outcomes, including surveys, observations of students and teachers, school quality reviews that look at practices within schools, and administrative data such as absenteeism and suspension rates (see Figure 2). In the following sections, we discuss these measures in light of the four questions above, and how those considerations might affect their place in an accountability system.

Figure 2
Sources of Data Related to SEL and School Climate

Surveys of		Observations of
• Students		• Student behavior
• Teachers	**Sources of data**	• Teacher practices
• Parents		
Administrative data		**School quality reviews**
• Attendance		• Examinations of school
• Suspension		practices by educators and
• Grades and coursework		other stakeholders
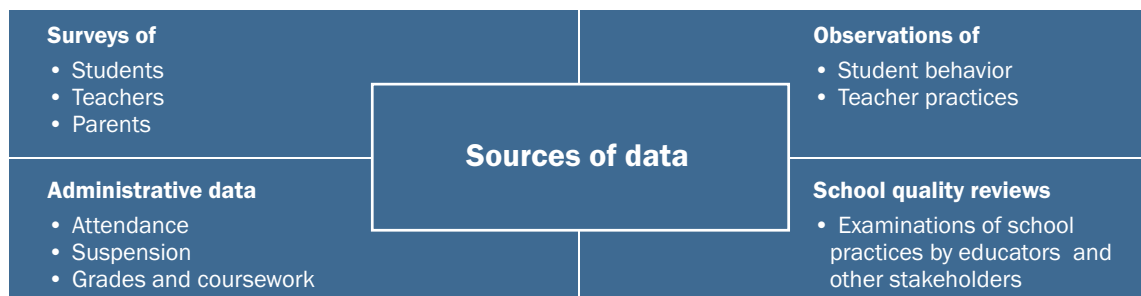
In Table 6, we identify a series of potential indicators and offer suggestions as to where they might fit in a system of indicators for accountability and improvement, depending on state values, data, and readiness. We discuss these suggestions further below for each of the following categories:

- Measures of students' social-emotional skills, habits, and mindsets
- Measures of school climate and how schools support students' social and emotional learning
- Measures of student outcomes related to school climate and supports

Table 6
Where Measures of SEL and School Climate Might Fit in an Accountability System

	Federal indicators, used for federal and state accountability	State-reported indicators, used for state and local information and improvement	State-supported indicators, used for local information and improvement	Locally selected indicators, used for local information and improvement
Students' social-emotional competencies				
Student surveys of their own social-emotional competencies		*	x	x
Teachers' observations of students' social-emotional competencies			x	x
Performance assessments of students' social-emotional competencies			x	x
School climate and supports for SEL				
Student surveys of school climate, learning opportunities, and support for SEL	x	x	x	x
Teacher and/or parent surveys of school climate and conditions		x	x	x
Observations of teacher practices			x	x
School quality reviews examining school practices		x	x	x
SEL implementation rubrics			x	x
Student outcomes related to school climate and supports				
Suspension rates	x	x	x	x
Chronic absenteeism rates	x	x	x	x

* A state may choose to implement a statewide survey of school climate and learning supports that includes questions about students' social-emotional competencies. We recommend that data on these constructs be used for local information, and not for state accountability.

In the following section, we describe these measures in greater depth, and explain where we believe they belong in an accountability and improvement system.

Measures of Social-Emotional Competencies

In light of the research on the importance of social and emotional development on student success, there is great interest in measuring these competencies to inform instruction at the classroom, school, or district level. Assessments can measure many aspects of social-emotional competence, including habits, such as showing up to class prepared; mindsets, such as thinking positively about oneself and others; and skills, such as the ability to collaborate, resolve conflicts constructively, and make responsible decisions. In this section and in the appendix, we describe several types of measures:

- Student surveys reporting their self-perceptions of their social-emotional competencies
- Teacher reports of students' social-emotional skills (surveys, observational tools, and report cards)
- Performance assessments:
  - Computer-based assessments of students' social-emotional competencies
  - Demonstration of social-emotional competencies during curriculum-embedded assessments as rated by the student, teacher, and/or peers

Students' Perceptions of Their Own Social-Emotional Competencies

Surveys that assess students' social and emotional competencies measure a student's perceived strengths or difficulties within certain domains, such as self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Self-report surveys are the most common measure of students' social and emotional competencies, because they can be completed relatively quickly and inexpensively. These surveys ask students to rate their own level of development on a certain skill, state the frequency with which they exhibit certain behaviors, or describe how they think—for example, whether they believe their intelligence is fixed.

Several districts now conduct SEL surveys, including California's CORE districts, which report results by school and grade level, as do several of CASEL's Collaborating Districts and a growing number of schools.[34] Given that individual students have a limited picture of their own strengths and areas for growth and how these compare to those of other students, some districts augment self-reports with teacher and/or parent reports of each student's skills and development.[35]

There are several measures that assess students' social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets, although each covers a different set of constructs (see Figure 1 for examples of constructs and related survey items). Among these measures, some surveys show promising signs of producing reliable, valid evidence of students' social-emotional competencies, at least for students in 5th grade and above. These surveys most commonly ask students how strongly they agree or disagree with certain statements on a scale of 1–5.[36] The student survey from Washoe County School District in Nevada, for example, asks students how difficult, on a scale of very easy to very difficult, it is for them to

- know what their strengths are (self-awareness),
- get through something even when they feel frustrated (self-management),
- learn from people with different opinions (social awareness), and
- respect a classmate's opinions during a disagreement (relationship skills).[37]

Appendix 1 offers a complete list of the items on this survey.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) provides an overview of the various measures available by age group and construct measured in its tool suite, Ready to Assess.[38] CASEL and the Raikes Foundation have also curated a smaller set of vetted tools for elementary schools[39] and middle schools.[40] However, not all surveys deemed "valid and reliable" are necessarily appropriate for all purposes (such as informing classroom-level practices or school-level interventions), and measures must thus be chosen carefully for their intended purpose. For use across an entire school or classroom, surveys should be strengths based, meaning that they are framed in the positive and focus on typical age-appropriate behavior, while surveys used to screen students for services might instead focus on the frequency of problem behavior. See Appendix 2 for a sample of survey tools that might be appropriate for schoolwide use.

Teacher Reports of Students' Social-Emotional Competencies

Teachers can add a valuable perspective on students' social and emotional development, since they sometimes have an insight into what students themselves cannot see, such as their levels of social awareness and responsible decision making. Tools range from short surveys to observations of performance on a task accompanied by a scoring rubric. Two of the CORE districts, Fresno and Santa Ana, piloted a teacher report option to complement their student SEL surveys of self-management and social awareness. A study conducted by researchers at Harvard University found moderate to strong correlation between the student and teacher reports, and suggested that such reports might provide complementary information about students' competencies that could inform school- or grade-level planning for curriculum or program development.[41]

> Teachers can add a valuable perspective on students' social and emotional development, since they sometimes have an insight into what students themselves cannot see.

Teacher surveys or observations tend to be the most common measure of social-emotional competencies for younger students. In preschool and the elementary grades, teachers are frequently asked to report on students' social interactions and self-management through surveys. Some surveys are designed to refer students for special services, while others are strengths based (focusing on age-appropriate rather than maladaptive behavior) and can provide useful information about all students. One widely used survey tool is the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), wherein teachers report the extent to which students demonstrate certain competencies. The DESSA-Mini is a condensed eight-question survey intended for teachers' diagnostic purposes—a time-efficient tool that teachers can use to monitor progress.[42] Formative assessments may also be done informally, such as through playground observations or structured conversations with students.[43]

Teachers may also be asked to evaluate students' social and emotional competencies on report cards as a way of facilitating dialogue with students and their families regarding the students' development. For example, students at East Palo Alto Academy in East Palo Alto, CA, are assessed on elements of personal and social responsibility in every assignment and class over all four years of high school as part of a Five Habits rubric, which also assesses creativity, critical and creative thinking, and applications of knowledge.[44] KIPP charter schools provide students with direct feedback through their Character Growth Card, designed to show growth over time on constructs

including growth mindset, self-control, grit, social intelligence, and curiosity.[45] San Francisco, New Brunswick, NJ, and some Rhode Island districts also have teachers comment on report cards about students' social and emotional development.[46]
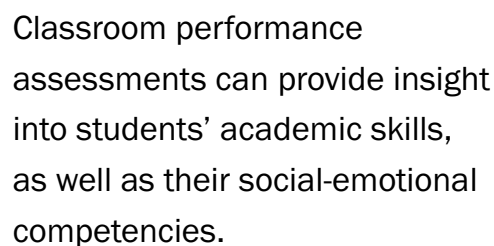
Performance Assessments

Computer-Based Tools

New technologies are currently being developed that test various aspects of students' social-emotional competencies. Examples include a program that tests self-control based on how much time the child chooses to do math problems versus play video games, a simulation that tests students' ability to communicate and problem solve through interactions with an avatar, and games that test elementary school students' executive functioning. These technologies are still emerging, so there is limited evidence of their reliability and validity. However, they may eventually provide situational data at a lower cost than other kinds of observational assessments.[47]

Another interesting new area is passive measurement. As students do more of their work online, schools may be able to find out if they are choosing hard problems, showing self-control (i.e., not checking email or messages, but working on studying), and more. These measures can be anonymous and aggregated up to the school level without violating privacy, thereby giving rich, real-time data that teachers might be able to act on without inconveniencing students or teachers.

Curriculum-Embedded Performance Assessments

Classroom performance assessments, such as building a model with peers or conducting an investigation and writing a research report, can provide insight into students' academic skills, as well as their social-emotional competencies, from self-management and perseverance to collaboration. New Hampshire is currently investing in a multidistrict performance assessment pilot—intended to scale to the state as a whole—that largely replaces standardized

> Classroom performance assessments can provide insight into students' academic skills, as well as their social-emotional competencies.

tests with performance tasks. Some of these tasks include a rubric that evaluates students' noncognitive skills in addition to their academic mastery.[48]

In many performance assessment systems, tasks and rubrics are designed to measure collaboration. As a student completes a group project, for example, the teacher, student, and his or her peers might rate the student's cooperation skills or the extent to which he or she stayed on task. In some countries that routinely use performance assessments in the examination system, like Australia and Singapore, each student completes a daily research journal about what he or she did individually and in a group, which addresses how they organized themselves, cooperated with others, addressed and overcame obstacles, and more. This is evaluated along with the product of the work.[49] This kind of assessment may provide valuable practice and feedback for students and can encourage instructional strategies that support student development in these areas, particularly if these assessments are embedded into regular classroom practice.[50]

Measures of Students' Social-Emotional Competencies in an Accountability System

Earlier we asked four questions to help policymakers decide where measures belong in an accountability system: What does the indicator measure, and how likely is it that data are actionable and can lead to meaningful improvement? For what use was the measure designed, and how might data be distorted if attached to "high-stakes" consequences? Does the indicator generate valid, reliable data? Does it meaningfully differentiate between schools and subgroups? Using these questions as a guide, we reach the following conclusions about using measures of social-emotional competencies in an accountability and continuous improvement system.

Measures of students' social-emotional competencies may provide, at least for some constructs, useful information for districts and schools to inform their practice at the school level.

Assessments of students' social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets can provide useful information about students' personal strengths and areas for growth. Student surveys, when aggregated to the classroom, school, or district level, might be used to shed light on areas that need improvement, such as self-control among kindergarteners or social awareness among middle schoolers. This information might guide program, curriculum, or professional development investments. When measured at multiple points over time (and only some measures are sensitive enough to do this), these assessments can also provide evidence of whether initiatives to improve students' social and emotional competencies are working, allowing for smarter school-level decision making. A district or school might use these data to identify areas in which multiple schools are struggling.

> Assessments of students' social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets can provide useful information about students' personal strengths and areas for growth.

Teacher observation of students in class, computer-based tools, and student-, peer-, and teacher feedback on curriculum-embedded performance assessments can be useful tools at the classroom level, providing data that allow staff to tailor their whole-class instruction. The data can also encourage reflection and open conversations between teachers, students, and parents about the skills, mindsets, and habits students need to learn. When embedded in day-to-day feedback and reflection, they create an ongoing focus on SEL.

If any of these measures are adopted at the local level, educators must be properly equipped to use instructional and school organizational strategies to help improve student learning and growth. Although some SEL interventions have a proven track record, there is not always a clear path showing educators how to help students develop discrete skills, particularly for certain constructs (e.g., grit)[51] or certain grade levels (e.g., high schools, where less is known about effective SEL practices than in the earlier grades).[52] Leaving teachers to figure out the interventions on their own may in some cases be counterproductive, warns Carol Dweck, a researcher who popularized the idea of growth mindset. Her message is to wait until research provides a clear directive before creating homegrown interventions.[53]

It is important to recognize that schools are not fully in control of students' social-emotional outcomes, although they do play an important role in fostering SEL.

Although data can provide insight into areas for improvement, educators do not have as much control over social-emotional outcomes as they do over, say, students' multiplication skills. Students' social and emotional development is affected by many factors, both in school and out. Students experiencing adversity cope with many demands beyond those at school, and this can affect their social and emotional development. Educators should be accountable for supporting students by providing an environment conducive to SEL, but it may not be appropriate to hold schools accountable for social-emotional outcomes in the same way as for academic outcomes.

Measures that show growth may be an alternative to measures of students' social-emotional competencies at a point in time, but these have their own concerns. Students' social-emotional skills, mindsets, and habits are never "mastered" like multiplication, but rather develop over time—and in some cases, ebb and flow from childhood to adolescence to adulthood.[54] One's ability to empathize, control one's impulses, or delay gratification may develop over time, while some competencies, such as grit, may not be expected to systematically increase. Furthermore, if a measure is to be used for formative purposes in the classroom by measuring growth over time, it must be sensitive to small changes in children's abilities and attitudes. Few measures provide the level of accuracy needed for pre- and post-testing.

Researchers and practitioners have also expressed concern that data generated by the measurement of students' social-emotional competencies, if aggregated statewide, may have the unintended consequence of labeling groups of under-supported students as deficient or socially underdeveloped. To make sense of the results of SEL assessments, one must consider the local context and the multiple and layered demands that many students face. Student and teacher responses to surveys, for example, may be affected by the social and emotional supports students receive and their feelings about themselves and their environments. Ratings on report cards might be influenced by cultural norms. Performance on curriculum-embedded tasks might be affected by how engaging and supportive the classroom environment is. Identifying students as either having or not having particular social-emotional competencies without a more nuanced understanding of the context can reaffirm deficit mindsets and implicit biases held by educators and community members.

> Identifying students as either having or not having particular social-emotional competencies without a more nuanced understanding of the context can reaffirm deficit mindsets and implicit biases.

Current measures of SEL are not designed for cross-school comparison or high-stakes accountability.

Measures of students' social and emotional competencies are less developed than other measures being considered for accountability systems, such as school climate surveys or suspension rates. While researchers are developing new and improved measures, the indicators that are currently most amenable to large-scale administration are student surveys.[55]

Teacher observations and ratings of students' social-emotional competencies on curriculum-embedded performance assessments are not yet widely used and are still being evaluated for their reliability and comparability. For this reason, teacher observation ratings might be best used to facilitate conversations between students, teachers, and families. Computer-based tasks may be more feasible at scale in the future, but are not yet developed enough to be considered for widespread adoption.

> Although there are new, promising surveys of students' social-emotional competencies, few were designed for school- or district-wide use, let alone for cross-school comparison within an accountability system.

Although there are new, promising surveys of students' social-emotional competencies, few were designed for school- or district-wide use, let alone for cross-school comparison within an accountability system.[56] When it comes to comparing across students, classrooms, or schools, reference bias is a particularly pressing concern, since students are not necessarily the best judges of their own strengths and weaknesses.

Researchers Angela Duckworth and David Yeager call out potential limitations of questionnaires for assessing personal qualities.[57] In particular, they question whether respondents will

- read or interpret survey questions in a way that differs from researchers' intent;
- lack insight or information needed to answer a question accurately, preventing them from being astute or accurate reporters;
- provide responses that are insensitive to short-term changes, preventing scores from reflecting subtle changes over short periods of time;
- have different frames of reference from other respondents (i.e., implicit standards when making judgments); and
- "fake" results, providing answers that are socially desirable but not accurate.

The likelihood of creating incentives for gaming a measure with results that are socially desirable or that otherwise undermine accuracy increases when the measure is used for high-stakes purposes. When measures are used for informational purposes only, these risks are fewer.

Furthermore, the more students learn about issues related to SEL, the more self-aware and self-critical they may become, which could depress survey scores even when a school has increased learning. For example, students may be more likely to say that bullying "frequently occurs" at their school after learning about the many forms that bullying can take. Given these concerns, we recommend against using measures of students' social-emotional competencies in an accountability system, at least for now.

Some, but not all, of these concerns apply to surveys of school climate as well as students' social-emotional competencies, as will be discussed in the following section. For example, some schools have been using school climate surveys for decades, and some of these surveys have been well evaluated for their measurement properties. Most of these surveys do not attempt to measure students' competencies, which Yeager and Duckworth note are more difficult to measure reliably, and are instead assessing school and teaching practices that support social and emotional learning.

Measures of students' social-emotional competencies are thus best suited for local use to promote continuous improvement, rather than state- or federal-level accountability.

Given that the measures of social-emotional skills, habits, and mindsets reviewed here are relatively new and were not designed for cross-school comparison, and that outcomes are not fully under educators' control, we conclude that they are not well suited for federal or state accountability systems. This is especially true if the indicator triggers intervention or is otherwise attached to high stakes. Instead, these measures may be best used as state-supported or locally adopted measures to inform teaching, learning, and school improvement, as has been done in Austin, TX; Cleveland, OH; and Washoe County, NV, as described in this report.[58] A state may choose to implement an SEL survey statewide to encourage a focus on SEL, especially if these questions are embedded in a survey whose focus is school climate and learning supports. However, we recommend that data on students' social-emotional competence be used for local, rather than state, information, and not be compared across schools.

> Measures of social-emotional skills, habits, and mindsets may be best used as state-supported or locally adopted measures to inform teaching, learning, and school improvement.

When using any of these measures for continuous improvement, it is important that teachers are trained and have a common understanding of developmental benchmarks, as measures of SEL competencies can be useful for supporting instruction and facilitating conversations between teachers, students, and parents.[59] However, these assessments are time consuming and have the potential to reinforce teachers' biases if teachers' reports are significantly influenced by subgroup stereotypes. The decision to assess SEL should thus be made carefully.

Organizations such as CASEL offer many useful lessons about how to approach the measurement and development of social-emotional competencies at the local level. CASEL has produced useful practitioner guides to effective SEL programs, both for the preschool/elementary grades and middle/high schools.[60] CASEL's website will soon host examples of practices and materials from its Collaborating Districts Initiatives. CASEL has also convened a work group with leading researchers and school districts to establish practical social-emotional competence measures, and may soon be able to provide more guidance about the current state of measures. Transforming Education's website also offers several useful tools and guides, such as one that offers examples from the CORE districts.[61]

In the vignette below, we chart one district's journey toward integration of social-emotional competency data with school practices as a lever for positive change. Washoe County School District, a diverse district that encompasses the city of Reno, NV, is making sure that school leaders, staff, and students understand and use results from SEL assessments.

Ensuring that Survey Data Do Not Just Sit on a Shelf: Spotlight on Washoe County School District

Washoe County, NV, is part of CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative working on building strong SEL practices throughout the district. With the help of a federal grant, it has developed a robust survey of students' social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets, such as self-awareness and responsible decision making (see Appendix 1), and school climate. It analyzes this survey data along with its Early Warning Indicator, which identifies students as at-risk based on their grades, attendance, and suspensions. The district uses these data to build the case for SEL, connecting the dots between students' social-emotional competencies and school climate, as measured by surveys and outcomes such as attendance—as well as to inform staff practices in the school and classroom.

Despite focused efforts on SEL at the district level, some students and teachers did not know what was being done with the results, and thus were unsure whether the surveys were worth their time. Laura Davidson, Director of Research and Evaluation, explained, "We started doing focus groups with students about the school climate survey and these SEL measures we were developing, and a lot of them were saying, 'It's the fourth year I've taken the survey, I've never seen the results, why should I put any more time or effort into it it if I don't see anything change at my school?' … That was a real 'aha' moment for us that we need to do a better job."

The SEL and accountability teams at Washoe County School District believe that surveys of students' own social-emotional competencies are a valid and important measure that can be used to guide instruction, provided that students take them seriously. As a result, Washoe decided to focus on training its SEL lead teams, composed of school staff, on how to debrief survey data with teachers, staff, and, most importantly, students. These debriefs dig into what might be causing trends in the data, as well as what to do about them.

For example, recent survey data showed that students scored themselves poorly on managing and expressing their emotions (self-management and relationship skills), which some thought might be connected to behaviors that led to suspensions. In a student data summit, students noted that teachers don't actually teach them how to express themselves in the way that they teach how to get along with others. In their strategic plans, many schools in the district began addressing this aspect of SEL, focusing on investments in SEL curriculum and professional development.

Student data summits have been a success in the district, and district leaders believe they have led to greater student engagement and empowerment. The district's student voice coordinator is currently working with WestEd on a toolkit for student engagement strategies like this one.

Source: Interview with Ben Hayes, Chief Accountability Officer, and Laura Davidson, Director of Research and Evaluation, Washoe County School District, on October 18, 2016.

Measures of School Climate and Supports for SEL

A positive school climate, in which students are safe, engaged, and supported, is a foundation for social, emotional, and academic development. Measures of school climate can shine a light on schoolwide practices and culture that affect students, staff, and community members, and help identify and address challenges of particular subgroups, such as students of color or students with special needs. The way a school supports a positive climate and students' SEL can be measured with the following tools, discussed in this section:

- School climate surveys completed by students, teachers, and parents
- Observation of classroom practices
- Observation of school and district practices, including
  - school quality reviews and
  - diagnostic tools, such as an SEL implementation rubric

> Measures of school climate can shine a light on schoolwide practices and culture that affect students, staff, and community members.

School Climate Surveys

Surveys completed by students, parents, and staff are a common measure of school climate. Although climate surveys can cover a wide range of topics, many measure perceptions of school or classroom safety, supports for teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and physical environment (see Table 4). They can also measure levels of staff collaboration, working conditions, and leadership—key predictors of teacher turnover and thus student success.[62] School climate surveys are currently used in several accountability systems, such as those in Chicago, New York City, California's CORE districts, and Alberta, Canada. Many states have administered student health surveys for years, since surveys were required under the federal Title IV Safe and Drug-Free Communities Program, and many health surveys address aspects of school climate.[63]

As with surveys of SEL, school climate surveys vary widely in the constructs that they measure. Although there are several important aspects of school climate, most surveys limit themselves to five to 10 constructs to keep the survey length manageable. Each construct is measured by several questions, called a "scale."[64] Most ask respondents how strongly they agree or disagree with statements on a five-point scale.[65] The California Healthy Kids School Climate Module, for example, asks students and staff their level of agreement with statements such as:

- This school is a supportive and inviting place for students to learn (academic expectations).
- At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who really cares about me (relationships).
- Teachers give students a chance to take part in classroom discussions or activities (opportunities for meaningful participation).
- I feel like I am part of this school (connectedness).
- This school helps students solve conflicts with one another (school supports for SEL).

These kinds of items measure how students feel about the environment and provide information about school practices that may enable SEL. For example, the questions above reveal whether the school proactively teaches conflict resolution and whether teachers support the kind of participation that can provide an opportunity for learning communication and collaboration skills. See Appendix 3 for more examples of survey items by construct.

Several surveys have been developed and widely used over the past decades; as a result, a number of school climate surveys have been shown to be valid and reliable when implemented at scale (see Appendix 4 for examples). There are also promising signs that survey results are related to academic and other measures in accountability systems.

> A number of school climate surveys have been shown to be valid and reliable when implemented at scale.

In general, researchers have found that students' responses to questions about classroom or school practices are relatively reliable across students and across moments in time—and may be more reliable than responses to questions about students' states of mind or traits. Although surveys of school climate raise some concerns common to all surveys in the context of accountability, such as reference bias and gaming, these surveys differ in a key way from surveys of students' social-emotional competencies. Research shows, for example, that students are reliable judges of teacher effectiveness—their ratings of teachers are in fact more predictive of student achievement than are teachers' or principals' ratings.[66] Studies conducted with the Tripod survey show that student surveys predict achievement more reliably than several other methods, including classroom observation, and they are reliable predictors of achievement across grade levels. Measures of student-teacher relationships, an aspect of school climate, are particularly predictive of student success.[67]

Some surveys have been evaluated for their ability to meet ESSA's requirement of meaningful differentiation among schools. Forthcoming research from Tripod provides evidence that its 7Cs survey, which examines student engagement, supports for learning, and other elements of school climate, explains a significant amount of variation between schools, indicating that it could be used for cross-school comparison.[68] Emerging evidence from the CORE districts confirms that their culture/climate survey distinguishes between schools as well, and that results "illuminate dimensions of student achievement that go beyond traditional indicators."[69] The researchers suggest that distinctions between schools are most reliable when only a few categories are used (such as below average, average, and above average) rather than comparing schools at more fine-grained levels of performance, such as the 1–10 scale CORE uses for other indicators.

Many districts and schools also have a practice of publicly posting their results on their websites (see Appendix 5 for an example of how results are posted in Alberta, Canada). There are various issues that must be taken into account when constructing a good survey, from the number of items that measure a particular construct to how the items are arrayed on a page. Panorama Education has a useful checklist for reviewing survey item quality.[70]

The U.S. Department of Education has curated an extensive list of school climate surveys that it deems to be reliable and valid in its School Climate Survey Compendia, providing references to external validation.[71] Many of these studies show a close link between a positive school climate and

students' academic progress, among other indicators.[72] Appendix 4 includes a short list of these surveys that states might consider using.

In addition to surveying students, there are compelling reasons to survey teachers about school climate. Research shows that the way teachers perceive a school's climate—the working conditions and supports put in place for them, their trust in leadership, and collaboration with one another— matters tremendously for teacher retention, especially in schools with low-income, diverse student bodies.[73] These factors, in turn, affect student achievement. Teacher-specific constructs may be measured by items that examine whether

- teachers have time available to collaborate with their colleagues;
- teachers have been given learning opportunities to strengthen their practice, including teaching of social-emotional skills, habits, and mindsets; and
- the faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.

While student surveys of school climate that include evidence of social-emotional supports and learning opportunities may be used as part of the federal accountability system, surveys of teachers and parents cannot because they cannot be disaggregated by student subgroups. However, teacher and parent surveys can be part of the state reporting system that provides regular data to districts and schools for information and improvement, and/or they can be selected and used for a range of local purposes.

Observation of Teaching Practices

One part of school climate that directly affects students' SEL is the teaching practices that staff put in place to support students. Research has shown that the quality of student-teacher interactions—the language teachers use, their body language, the kinds of curriculum and activities they develop, and the kinds of questions they ask—directly affects students' success on a variety of measures.[74] These interactions might therefore become an explicit part of teacher observations conducted by coaches or administrators, giving teachers direct feedback that they can use to improve their practice. Structured observations of teaching practices, though not suited for accountability purposes, could be a tool states provide to local schools or districts to inform local planning.

> Research has shown that the quality of student-teacher interactions directly affects students' success on a variety of measures.

The Center for Great Teachers and Leaders has identified 10 teacher practices that support SEL, which many good teachers engage in already but could be areas that schools choose to explicitly develop and support.[75] The 10 strategies are:

1. Student-centered discipline
2. Teacher language that encourages student effort and work
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. Meaningful and challenging work and high expectations for all students
10. Instruction on SEL that includes modeling, practicing, feedback, and coaching

Several rubrics used for teacher observation include a component that measures the way teacher practices support students' SEL, including the practices listed above. Some of these rubrics, such as Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Danielson's Framework, and the Marzano Protocol, have been validated and provide reliable data.[76] Each is used in many contexts: CLASS, for example, is used by a majority of states to assess teaching in early learning programs. These rubrics can be extremely valuable for educators to identify areas of strength and need. If rubrics include social-emotional supports, their use will help to develop SEL practices over time.

Observations of School and District Practices

Observations of school and district practices can also be used as part of a reporting system at the state or local levels, for diagnostic and improvement purposes. Although not suitable for school identification, these can be tied to the accountability system because they provide useful information for intervention and improvement for schools that have already been identified, as well as for other schools.

School Quality Reviews

One promising tool for local improvement (the results of which are sometimes reported across a jurisdiction) is the school quality review (SQR), a formal process for evaluating and supporting teaching and learning that can be used to identify schools' areas of strength and need. A review of school quality brings together three critical elements: (1) robust quantitative and qualitative data from observations and interviews; (2) educational experts who help with needs assessments and partner with

> Findings from the SQR provide educators and administrators with actionable information to prioritize areas for improvement, develop school improvement plans, and build local capacity.

schools to address students' needs; and (3) peer reviewers from across the state to bring in multiple perspectives and ideas during the review.[77] Findings from the SQR provide educators and administrators with actionable information to prioritize areas for improvement, develop school improvement plans, and build local capacity.

Several states, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, have been using this approach for schools identified as in need of improvement under NCLB.[78] Vermont is also piloting a statewide SQR, which may be included in its state accountability system. Vermont's SQR consists of an annual snapshot review and an in-depth integrated field review, which occurs once every three years. During the integrated field review, educators observe classrooms, review student work, and conduct panel discussions and

interviews with parents, students, and staff to assess a school's quality.[79] Such vehicles could examine how schools are supporting students' social and emotional learning opportunities, as well as whether they provide a safe school climate that is socially and emotionally supportive.

Both the CORE districts and New York City include SQR data in their assessment of schools. Data from the New York City SQR on rigor of instruction, collaborative teachers, and a supportive environment are aggregated with survey data to form an overall measure of school climate and quality. Data gathered in this review include many aspects related to school climate and SEL. The first construct on the rubric, for example, is that the school "maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults," one component of which is having structures and relationships in place that foster SEL.[80]

SEL Implementation Rubric

For schools or districts that are seeking to improve school climate and the teaching of SEL competencies, states can provide tools to assist the process. As one example, AIR and CASEL have developed an SEL implementation rubric to assess implementation of district-wide practices that support SEL, which they have been using since 2012 in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative.[81] The rubric is a process indicator, designed to monitor activities, highlight areas of growth, and set priorities rather than assess outcomes. Practices tracked on the implementation rubric include holding a steering committee, weekly instruction of SEL lessons, parent education on SEL, integration of SEL strategies with instruction, and regular meetings of SEL facilitators with coaches and principals. A condensed version of the rubric is also available for schools.[82]

District staff, with the support of an external consultant from CASEL, rate schools on the extent to which they have implemented practices on a scale of 1 to 4 based on data collected in interviews and document review. This implementation rubric is used alongside student and staff survey data presented on a dashboard, student test scores, and other student outcome data such as chronic absenteeism, suspension, and expulsion rates to gauge districts' progress since they began focusing on SEL.[83] Anchorage, AK, one of CASEL's collaborating districts, has used the dashboard in its SEL trainings for principals and administrators, helping them plan how they will integrate SEL into their school plans.[84]

In Texas, the Austin Independent School District (AISD), another of CASEL's collaborating districts, has been utilizing several of the measures described thus far to support SEL, including the SEL implementation rubric, teacher observations by coaches, teacher reports of students' social-emotional competencies on report cards, and more. "SEL in Action: The Austin Story" (page 29) describes how Austin has put in place structures to support SEL throughout the district.

Measures of School Climate and Supports for SEL in an Accountability System

Using the four questions posed earlier regarding an indicator's validity, reliability, comparability, and the purpose for which it was designed, we reach the following conclusions about using measures of school climate in accountability and continuous improvement systems.

Measures of school climate and practices can provide actionable information that may be used for federal accountability and state or local reporting purposes, depending on a state's context and readiness.

Measures of school climate and learning opportunities—including learning conditions, practices, and supports for SEL—may be more appropriate for an accountability system than measures of students' individual social-emotional competencies, because school climate is an area that can be influenced by school staff. Research shows that school climate is affected by factors that can be improved through administrator and teacher training, feedback, and support for things such as student-adult interactions.[85]

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Institute for Educational Sciences, and the U.S. Department of Education all recommend strategies to improve school climate as a lever for school change.[86] These strategies include the incorporation of structural elements (such as advisory periods) to the school day, counseling services, or a designated time for SEL curriculum.[87] Evidence suggests that improvements in climate may translate into gains in student achievement and other positive outcomes.[88]

> Evidence suggests that improvements in climate may translate into gains in student achievement and other positive outcomes.

Some school climate surveys provide reliable, comparable data that, if implemented well, could produce meaningful information for an accountability system. Of the measures of school climate and supports for SEL discussed in this paper, including school quality reviews and observations of teaching practices, climate surveys are the most appropriate for a state accountability system under ESSA. Some student surveys of school climate appear to meet ESSA's requirements for validity, reliability, comparability, and the ability to disaggregate across student subgroups.

Teacher and parent surveys likely cannot be used for federal identification of schools under ESSA, since data must be disaggregated by student race and ethnicity, as well as other student groups (English Learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students).[89] States can, however, report data from these surveys in a statewide reporting system for state or local accountability or information, and/or they can choose to support schools by offering survey tools and technical assistance. States may also support schools with action planning if difficult issues surface in survey results.

If school climate surveys are to be used for cross-school comparison, survey tools should be especially well vetted and carefully administered.

Even surveys that have a track record of validity and reliability may be subject to reference bias. Students at schools that do a good job promoting positive behavior and school practices, for example, might hold themselves to higher standards than students at other schools and therefore rate similar events or conditions more harshly. Designers of well-validated surveys will have evaluated this possibility and designed questions to minimize different interpretations to the greatest extent possible. Some researchers are also concerned that if survey results appear to have high-stakes consequences, they might be gamed, with teachers or administrators encouraging respondents to answer in a particular way if they felt that would benefit the school. This is always a greater problem for any tool attached to high-stakes consequences, particularly if those potential consequences are negative.

In an accountability system that is focused on continuous improvement and uses multiple measures of success, however, these may be acceptable risks, given the benefits of focusing attention on school climate and supports for learning. The risks may be reduced where states have a practice of using school climate surveys already, give them an appropriate weight in their accountability or reporting systems, and use the results productively for improvement.

To avoid manipulation of results, it is essential that proper safeguards be put in place during survey administration. Examples of safeguards include ensuring privacy by taking surveys on a secure online platform, having a neutral person monitor administration, and making sure that surveys are anonymous. Survey administrators should also make it clear to respondents that school data will be reported in aggregate, and no individual student or teacher will be identified.[90] If the survey is to be used for federal accountability purposes, the data must be able to be disaggregated by student characteristics, which means there must be a link from the student to the survey through a bar code or ID on the survey form, ensuring the student's characteristics can be recorded. At that point, however, the student's identification must be disassociated from the survey so that it can remain anonymous.

Other measures of support for SEL—including teacher observation and observation of school and district practices—are useful tools that are best used for planning at the local level. These measures do not meet ESSA's requirements for federal reporting. They are also not good candidates, for the most part, for state reporting, although they provide educators and administrators with data for school improvement. Most teacher observations, as they relate specifically to SEL, are not designed to be aggregated at the school level, but rather allow teachers to reflect on their practice. Similarly, AIR and CASEL's SEL implementation rubric is designed as a process indicator rather than as a formal evaluation. The state could, however, promote the use of these measures by providing measurement tools and supporting their use, as well as the professional development that may help educators respond to what they learn.

School quality reviews may also be best used at the local level to highlight schools' areas of strength and needs for improvement. In some contexts, however, they might be publicly reported at the state or district level, as has been done in New York City's accountability system and as is being considered in Vermont. In both cases, the SQR ratings actually feed into the statewide or citywide reporting system, along with other indicators, including survey data about school climate and learning opportunities. The qualitative data from the review are also publicly available. These are cases where careful work has been done over several years to build a system that gives a holistic picture of what students experience and have the opportunity to learn.

> School quality reviews may be used at the local level to highlight schools' areas of strength and needs for improvement.

Finally, school quality reviews—or other observational and survey tools that include information on school climate and SEL supports—might be used as a diagnostic tool for schools that have been identified for comprehensive or targeted intervention, to help guide the actions and investments that can support strong improvement strategies.

SEL in Action: The Austin Story

By Meria Joel Carstarphen
Superintendent, Austin Independent School District, 2009–2014

Austin Independent School District has embraced the philosophy that SEL programming must be implemented by way of four components: explicit SEL skills instruction, integration of SEL in content lessons, integration of SEL skill practice during instruction in all content areas, and modeling of skills and competencies by adults in a supportive, positive climate and culture. District, state, and national standards and policies are also necessary for SEL to be sustained in a systemic manner.

District Implementation
AISD has been a part of CASEL Collaborating Districts Initiative since late fall 2010. AISD schools are organized into vertical teams, in which a high school and the middle and elementary schools that feed into the high school form a professional learning community. Principals are accustomed to working together in vertical teams on initiatives and plans for improvement.

In the first year, implementation focused on having classroom teachers use specific curriculum, including Second Step in elementary and middle schools and School Connect in high schools for explicit SEL instruction, as well as improving climate and culture by training adults on their own SEL skills. For the second year of implementation for a vertical team, emphasis has been on integration of SEL into instructional methods and content, while maintaining explicit skill instruction. Classroom teachers provide explicit lessons to enhance the integration of skills throughout the school day.

Professional Learning
In Austin, each vertical team has an assigned SEL coach from the district's SEL Department to train and support teachers and other school personnel. In Year 1 of implementation, this support focused on classroom teachers; in Year 2 the focus has expanded to include cafeteria monitors and other support personnel. The plan is for vertical teams to have a dedicated coach for at least three years of intensive support. The AISD SEL Department also has provided information and training on SEL for members of the AISD Board of Trustees. As implementation continues, it is clear that the district must continue training for all support staff in the district, as well as parents. The goal, and something that parents have requested, is to provide parent training that is aligned with student learning.

The American Institutes for Research is assisting the district with the development of measurement tools, which will be used to gather data for CASEL and for the district-level analysis of the program's effectiveness.

Climate and Culture
District staff also support schools as they implement programs and strategies for improving the climate and culture of the school. While the explicit instructional resource used in classrooms is standard across school levels, the work that is being done with climate and culture varies across campuses. District coaches must have the capacity and flexibility to work within various systems to demonstrate to schools how the adult actions and attitudes impact student attitudes and achievement.

SEL Curriculum
Texas has developed standards for SEL only in pre-k, so the AISD team has written standards for k-12 based on the standards of Illinois and Anchorage. These standards are being implemented while integrating SEL into the written curriculum for all academic areas. The AISD Board of Trustees has approved a resolution of support for the district work with CASEL, and SEL is promoted as a board priority. While written standards and the Board resolution demonstrate support for SEL in Austin, having standards adopted at the state level would reinforce this support. AISD believes that the implementation of SEL programs that are explicit as well as integrated into academics and pedagogy within positive school settings is critical for the success of students in any path they pursue beyond high school graduation.
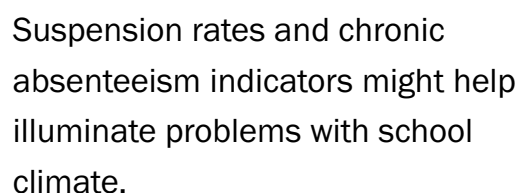
Source: Excerpts from Jones, S. and Bouffard, S. (2012). Social emotional learning in schools—from programs to strategies. *Social Policy Report, 26*(4): 1-33.

Measures of Student Outcomes Related to School Climate and Supports

Some indicators can be considered indirect outcomes of aspects of school climate and of social-emotional skills, habits, or mindsets. In this section we discuss two such indicators, suspension rates and chronic absenteeism.

A negative school climate is one of several reasons why students might be absent or suspended from school. Engagement in class and other factors related to school climate can make a difference in whether students attend school and how they behave.[91] Suspension rates and chronic absenteeism indicators might help illuminate problems with school conditions. At

> Suspension rates and chronic absenteeism indicators might help illuminate problems with school climate.

both the school and individual student level, these indicators can help educators identify and address concerns early, serving both accountability and improvement purposes. Both chronic absenteeism and suspension rates meet ESSA's requirements for the "fifth indicator," and some states already use these indicators in their accountability systems. Alternatively, they can be considered as factors to be reported in a statewide data system or dashboard.

Suspension Rates in an Accountability System

All states already collect data on suspension and expulsion rates, which they report to the federal government. Suspension rates may be measured as the percentage of students suspended at least once, and year-to-year changes in schools' suspension rates may be tracked as well. California, for example, will measure both status and year-to-year change in suspension rates, with different standards for elementary, middle, and high schools, given that students of different ages are suspended at different rates.[92] This may eventually be combined with a survey measure of school climate.

States could consider including suspension rates in their state and federal accountability systems, because these rates provide actionable information about school climate and attention to social and emotional learning opportunities.

Suspension and expulsion rates may be seen as indicators of school conditions, student treatment, and schools' efforts to teach social-emotional competencies like self-regulation and conflict resolution. Overly punitive disciplinary policies that exclude students from school rather than teaching them how to interact, resolve conflicts productively, and become part of the school community are at odds with social and emotional teaching and learning, and lead to a less welcoming school environment.

Evidence suggests that removing students from school for disciplinary purposes exacerbates disengagement and low achievement, and sharply increases the likelihood that students will drop out of school.[93] Suspension policies also exacerbate achievement gaps, because students of color are suspended out of school at higher rates than their white peers for similar offenses.[94] The more time students spend out of the classroom, the further behind they fall academically and the more

their sense of connection to the school wanes. This distance promotes disengaged behaviors, such as truancy, chronic absenteeism, and antisocial behavior, which in turn contribute to the widening opportunity gap.[95]

Suspension rates may be a particularly effective indicator to track statewide because, unlike some other indicators, they are a factor over which schools can exert direct control. Research suggests that tracking suspension and expulsion data disaggregated by student subgroups can help highlight racially disparate practices and promote positive behavioral interventions to improve student engagement and academic success.[96] Data can be used to reexamine school discipline policies, implement positive behavior systems, and provide clearer expectations and training for staff on how to build a culture of positive behavior. California has made suspension rates a measure of school climate in its state accountability system, resulting in lower suspension rates and more widespread efforts to implement SEL strategies and restorative discipline practices.[97]

> Tracking suspension and expulsion data disaggregated by student subgroups can help highlight racially disparate practices and promote positive behavioral interventions to improve student engagement and academic success.

One concern with using suspension rates as an indicator is the potential unintended consequence of schools reducing their use of suspensions without a plan for how to deal with students who commit infractions, or a plan to manage students' behavior more positively. While there has been a recent downward trend in suspensions due to efforts to spotlight disparities in disciplinary practices, and there are clearly school success stories, some schools have found that they do not have new tools in place when they remove their old ones. Another concern is that a lack of uniform reporting policies might cause schools to report declines in suspension rates that are more semantics than reality—for example, by sending students to a detention room where they receive no instruction, rather than giving an out-of-school suspension.[98]

On page 32, we describe how educators and district leaders in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) focused on improving school climate and increasing students' and teachers' social-emotional skills as a strategy for improving student outcomes. Instead of taking a punitive stance toward student behavior, the district focused on prevention. It transformed its in-school suspension program into a restorative instructional program in which school personnel help students understand and manage their emotions, make better decisions, and build relationships with peers and teachers.

How Cleveland Used Social and Emotional Learning to Transform School Climate and Discipline

Cleveland Metropolitan School District is a large urban district struggling to meet the needs of an economically and ethnically diverse community with a 48% youth poverty rate. It is the second largest district in Ohio, serving more than 40,000 students, nearly 68% of whom are students of color, and 100% of whom qualify for free/reduced-price lunches.

In October 2007, the former Superintendent called for heightened security measures in response to a shooting at one of the district's 26 high schools. One component of his school safety strategy was a comprehensive evaluation of the conditions for learning, including the status of SEL, in district schools. The evaluation findings listed eight contributing factors to poor school climate and student misbehavior, resulting in unsafe learning environments, including harsh and inconsistent approaches to discipline, poor adult supervision, and a lack of social and emotional role modeling by school staff. In response, CMSD launched its Human Ware initiative in August 2008, in partnership with American Institutes for Research, focused on increasing the safety of the district's students.

Despite significant financial constraints in the past 5 years, the district continues to prioritize this work, adding CASEL as one of their key partners to help implement SEL programming systemically throughout the district. CASEL consultants provide technical assistance, coaching and training to district administrators and school leaders on planning, implementation, standards and assessment, and communication.

One of district's ten strategies to create a positive, safe, and supportive climate is to monitor students' behavior and intervene at the first sign of difficulties by strengthening social and emotional competencies to prevent future misbehaviors and providing focused and sustained support to those students who have persistent problems. This strategy is markedly different from the prior disciplinary procedure that focused exclusively on punishment. CMSD has transformed its in-school suspension program into a restorative instructional program called The Planning Center. Here, center aides help students learn to understand and manage their emotions, improve behavior, make responsible decisions at school and at home, and build relationships with their peers and teachers. Students use Ripple Effect, a software program that allows them to virtually simulate potential conflicts and evaluate the consequences of various responses. CMSD has also implemented Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, an evidence-based SEL program, in all its elementary schools.

Six years after the Superintendent's call to action and 5 years since the SEL initiative began, CMSD has seen several positive student behavioral outcomes including reductions in incidents of disobedient and disruptive behavior (from 132 to 74), fighting and violence (from 55 to 36), harassment and intimidation (from 13 to 6), and serious bodily injury (from 13 to 6). Additionally, the average number of reported suspendable behavioral incidents per school declined from 233.1 to 132.4, and out-of-school suspensions decreased districtwide by 58.8%. The current chief executive officer of CMSD, who has been with the district since 2007 and experienced the tremendous growth in SEL programming, insists that we should not forget to "look at the important ongoing needs for social and emotional wellness of children and adults in our communities" when trying to make our schools a safer and more supportive place.

Source: Excerpt from Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M., & Hariharan, A. (2013). *The missing piece: A national teacher survey on how social and emotional learning can empower children and transform schools.* Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/the-missing-piece.pdf.

Chronic Absenteeism in an Accountability System

Chronic absenteeism is an indirect measure of student treatment, school climate, and social-emotional competencies. Along with out-of-school factors such as illness, family obligations such as caring for siblings, and housing instability, chronic absenteeism may signal a weak relationship between the school and home, which reduces the chance that schools will identify reasons for absence that could be addressed.[99] Among the reasons students choose to miss school are disengagement from class, lack of academic success without a sense of resilience or a growth mindset to propel effort, and bullying—all issues that can be addressed by attention to SEL.[100]

Chronic absenteeism is typically calculated as the percentage of students missing 10% or more of school days. All states collect and report data on "average daily attendance," the percentage of students in attendance divided by total enrollment on an individual school day. Chronic absence calculations are based on the same data, but single out students with excessive absence. While a school may have high average attendance, it may also have a substantial number of children who are frequently absent. Chronic absence affects about 13% of children throughout the nation, about half of whom are concentrated in a small number of districts.[101]

Chronic absence determinations may be made at the end of the year to see whether a student has missed a certain number of days of school. A more timely measure, however, would calculate on a rolling basis throughout the school year whether a student has missed 10% of the days he or she had been enrolled, thereby providing an early warning and helping to identify transient students who change schools frequently.

States could consider including chronic absenteeism rates in their state and federal accountability systems, because these rates highlight important issues related to school exclusion.

School attendance is foundational to student success—if students aren't in school, they cannot be expected to gain academic skills. Studies have shown lower achievement for students who are chronically absent as early as kindergarten and found that patterns of chronic absence are established early in a student's career.[102] Studies from Baltimore and Chicago have found that starting in 6th grade, chronic absence is a strong predictor of dropping out of high school, and overly punitive school discipline policies may promote disengagement.[103]

Chronic absenteeism is a potentially high-leverage indicator because it can be systematically addressed and, among the indicators being considered for ESSA, is perhaps least likely to be affected by high-stakes measurement. One caveat to using chronic absenteeism as a measure of student engagement is that it is correlated with student poverty and mobility, factors that are often beyond a school's control.[104] The data can be useful, but they should be considered in context.

At the same time, a number of studies have found that chronic absenteeism can be substantially reduced by strengthening school relationships and communication with parents and students, addressing health and welfare concerns, and engaging students who are truant.[105] Successful strategies may include helping students with academic issues and supporting their development of productive mindsets,[106] addressing bullying in the school,[107] and improving the school climate generally.[108] Schools that have been successful in reducing chronic absences tend to address issues related to early chronic absences in the community through early intervention; they provide comprehensive supports to families rather than punitive action and sustain their focus on chronic absences over time.[109]

Conclusion: Next Steps for ESSA State Plans

Given the importance of social and emotional development, how might state policymakers draw attention to schools' support for SEL under ESSA? The following conclusions are suggested by our research:

1. **States should not use measures of individual students' social and emotional competencies for accountability purposes, at least for now. They can, however, support the use of these measures at the local level, to inform teaching, learning, and program investments.** These indicators can provide important information that identifies students' strengths and needs as they relate to SEL, which might be reported on an aggregate basis to inform school decisions about programs and supportive strategies. However, most surveys of social-emotional competencies are relatively new, were not designed for cross-school comparison, and may be particularly vulnerable to reference bias, because students are not always the best judges of their own level of competence. We therefore conclude that these measures are not currently appropriate for state accountability systems.

2. **States could consider including measures of school climate, supports for SEL, and related outcomes in their federal and state accountability systems.** These measures may be more appropriate for an accountability system than measures of students' individual social and emotional competencies because school climate and supports for SEL are areas that school staff can directly influence, and measurement tools tend to be more advanced.

   Student school climate surveys, suspension rates, and chronic absenteeism are indicators of school climate and supports for SEL that could be used as measures of school quality and student success under ESSA, providing a more comprehensive picture of school functioning. If used for statewide reporting, school climate surveys should be well validated and meet the criteria for comparative use described earlier. To reduce the chance of gaming, the data should be used mainly for improvement, rather than sanctions. However, states may opt to report these indicators annually without using them for federal accountability (i.e., to identify schools for intervention under the federal law).

   States could also consider including teacher and parent school climate survey data as state-reported indicators. These measures provide important insight into school functioning, despite not meeting ESSA's requirements for federal accountability.

3. **States could provide districts with well-validated tools for measuring SEL and school climate.** Well-designed and well-implemented measurements of SEL can help educators make strategic decisions about needed investments in student services, programs, and professional development.

   States that are not ready to use surveys statewide can provide survey instruments to schools and districts for measuring climate and social-emotional supports locally. This might be a set of survey options or a model state survey. The state might also recommend that districts use a small set of common survey items that could be added to the various surveys districts select.

The state might also support schools by providing well-vetted diagnostic tools and technical assistance. These tools may include protocols to observe and reflect on teacher and school practices, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a broader school quality review, or even a district-wide framework like the CASEL SEL rubric. What is most important is that the measures be locally relevant and accessible to school-level decision makers.

4. **State agencies and districts should provide schools with resources and technical assistance for school improvement as they encourage social and emotional learning.** Data alone will not drive school success. Staff need to be trained to analyze and act on the data they collect and to implement high-quality programs, professional development, and organizational changes that support students' social-emotional development. Not all states currently have this capacity, but several organizations described in this report can provide assistance.

   State-level support may include technical assistance for program development or the facilitation of peer learning networks, as well as funding for programs and professional development for administrators and teachers. ESSA provides various opportunities for funding school climate and supports for SEL, including the Safe and Healthy Students block grants, school improvement funding under Title I, and professional development for staff under Title II. If the state is not able to provide this support—or if research does not yet point to viable interventions for certain needs—policymakers should carefully consider whether it is worth investing educator and student time in assessing these aspects of climate or SEL.

   In addition to top-down support, states and districts should also conduct outreach to learn more about what is most important to families and community members. Social and emotional competencies are taught and learned in the home, in religious institutions, and in the community; thus a diverse array of stakeholders should be included so all parties can work together to support students' social and emotional development.

Until recently, SEL has often been placed on the sidelines, seen as a distraction from academics. Research suggests, however, that SEL and a positive school climate are the foundations for student success. States should encourage schools to support SEL in the context of new opportunities for accountability and continuous improvement under ESSA.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Washoe County School District Student Survey of Students' Social-Emotional Competencies: Constructs and Items

If you want to measure …	Ask, "How easy or difficult are these behaviors for you?" (Very difficult, difficult, easy, very easy)
Self-awareness	• Knowing what my strengths are • Knowing how to get better at things that are hard for me to do at school • Knowing when I am wrong about something • Knowing when I can't control something • Knowing when my feelings are making it hard for me to focus • Knowing the emotions I feel • Knowing the ways to make myself feel better when I'm sad • Noticing what my body does when I'm nervous • Knowing when my mood affects how I treat others • Knowing ways I calm myself down
Self-management	• Getting through something even when I feel frustrated • Being patient even when I am really excited • Staying calm when I feel stressed • Working on things even when I don't like them • Finishing tasks even if they are hard for me • Setting goals for myself • Reaching goals that I set for myself • Thinking through the steps it will take me to reach my goal • Doing my schoolwork even when I do not feel like it • Being prepared for tests • Working on assignments even when they are hard • Planning ahead so I can turn a project in on time • Finishing my schoolwork without reminders • Staying focused in class even when there are distractions
Social awareness	• Learning from people with different opinions than me • Knowing what people may be feeling by the look on their face • Knowing when someone needs help • Knowing how to get help when I'm having trouble with a classmate • Knowing how my actions impact my classmates
Relationship skills	• Respecting a classmate's opinions during a disagreement • Getting along with my classmates • Sharing what I am feeling with others • Talking to an adult when I have problems at school • Being welcoming to someone I don't usually eat lunch with • Getting along with my teachers
Responsible decision making	• Thinking about what might happen before making a decision • Knowing what is right or wrong • Thinking of different ways to solve a problem • Saying "no" to a friend who wants to break the rules • Helping to make my school a better place

Source: Washoe County School District. (2016). Climate survey district reports. Retrieved from http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/913.

Appendix 2: Survey Tools for Measuring Social and Emotional Competencies[110]

Survey	Respondent and grade level	Description	Constructs measured
CORE Districts SEL Survey	Student (5–12) Teacher, short form (5–12)	Piloted in 2014–15, this survey is administered to over 1 million students in California and is part of the CORE districts' accountability system.	Self-management Social awareness Growth mindset Self-efficacy
Developmental Assets Profile (DAP)	Student (6–12)	A widely used survey that can measure student growth over time on various social-emotional skills. The survey also covers constructs considered measures of school climate, such as connectedness, safety, and school supports.	Support Empowerment Boundaries and expectations Constructive uses of time Commitment to learning Positive values Social competencies Positive identity
Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)	Teacher (k–8)	This survey is a widely used strengths-based assessment. An eight-question "DESSA-Mini" is also available for classroom diagnostic purposes, as is a 36-question survey designed to complement the Second Step SEL curriculum.	Self-awareness Social awareness Self-management Relationship skills Decision making Goal-directed behavior Personal responsibility Optimistic thinking
Washoe County School District SEL Survey	Student (5–12)	This survey was developed by the district with the support of the American Institutes for Research, CASEL, and a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences. It is currently used throughout the state of Nevada.	Self-awareness Social awareness Self-management Relationship skills Responsible decision making

Sources: Haggerty, K. (2011). *Social-emotional learning assessment measures for middle school youth.* Seattle: University of Washington.; Transforming Education. (2016). Measuring MESH: Student and teacher surveys curated for the CORE districts; Boston. Washoe County School District. (2016). *Climate survey district reports.* Retrieved from http://www.washoeschools.net/Page/913.

Appendix 3. California Healthy Kids School Climate Module: Constructs and Items

If you want to measure …	You might ask students and staff how much they agree or disagree with the following statements …
School support of social and emotional learning	• This school encourages students to feel responsible for how they act. • Students are often given rewards for being good. • Students are taught that they can control their own behavior. • This school encourages students to understand how others think and feel. • This school encourages students to care about how others feel. • Teachers here make it clear to students that bullying is not tolerated. • If another student was bullying me, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school. • Students tell teachers when other students are being bullied. • This school helps students solve conflicts with one another.
Caring adult relationships	At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult • who really cares about me. • who tells me when I do a good job. • who notices when I'm not there. • who always wants me to do my best. • who listens to me when I have something to say. • who believes that I will be a success.
Opportunities for meaningful participation	• I help decide things like class rules or activities. • Teachers give students a chance to take part in classroom discussions or activities.
Connectedness	• I feel close to people in this school. • I am happy to be at this school. • I feel like I am part of this school. • The teachers at this school treat students fairly. • I feel safe in my school.
Academic expectations	• This school is a supportive and inviting place for students to learn. • Teachers show how classroom lessons are helpful to students in real life. • Teachers give students a chance to take part in classroom discussions or activities. • This school promotes academic success for all students. • My classes are challenging. • Adults at school encourage me to work hard so I can be successful in college or at the job I choose. • My teachers work hard to help me with my schoolwork when I need it.
Trust and support among staff	• This school is a supportive and inviting place for staff to work. • This school promotes trust and collegiality among staff. • Adults have close professional relationships with one another. • Adults support and treat each other with respect. • Adults feel a responsibility to improve this school.

Source: *California Healthy Kids Survey: School Climate Module*. (2016). WestEd. Retrieved from http://chks.wested.org/

Appendix 4: School Climate Survey Tools[111]

Survey	Description	School climate constructs measured[112]
U.S. Department of Education School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) Developer: American Institutes for Research for the U.S. Department of Education	EDSCLS is a national survey that is free and offers results in real time for states, districts, and schools. The survey is linked to a school climate improvement resource package to help schools interpret data and facilitate school discussion.[113]	• Engagement (cultural and linguistic competence, relationships, school participation) • Safety (emotional safety, physical safety, bullying/cyberbullying) • Environment (physical environment, instructional environment, mental health, discipline)
California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (CalSCHLS) Developer: WestEd for California Department of Education	CalSCHLS includes a core set of survey items along with add-on modules for school climate, SEL, equity, cultural responsiveness, and the achievement gap.[114] It has been used widely across California since it became a requirement for Title IV Safe and Drug-Free Community Grants, and is currently administered by approximately 85% of districts in the state.[115]	• School connectedness • School supports (caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities for meaningful participation) • Violence, victimization, and perpetration • Peer supports (caring relationships, high expectations) • SEL (problem solving, self-efficacy, cooperation and communication, empathy, self-awareness)
The 5Essentials School Report Developer: UChicago Consortium on School Research	This survey measures the extent to which schools have effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, a supportive environment, and ambitious instruction. Schools in Chicago have administered a version of this survey for more than 15 years.[116] Schools may customize the survey.	• Academic engagement • Academic press • Peer support for academic achievement • Teacher personal attention • Schoolwide future orientation • Student sense of belonging • Safety • Incidence of disciplinary action • Relationships (student-teacher trust, teacher personal support) • Student classroom behavior • Culture
7Cs Survey Developer: Tripod Education Partners	Tripod's 7Cs survey is available for schools, districts, and states, with data calibrated at the national level. Tripod's surveys were chosen as a measure in the Gates Foundation's Measures of Teaching project. The survey has been used by more than 100,000 teachers since 2001, and is currently administered statewide in Hawaii.[117]	• Instructional climate • Climate of safety and respect[118]
Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) Developer: National School Climate Council	This survey provides school-level analysis with accompanying action planning worksheets and recommendations for school leaders. Schools can customize the tool by adding items. It is used in schools across the country.[119]	• Orderly school environment • Instructional leadership provided by administration • Positive learning environment • Parent and community involvement • Well-developed and implemented instruction • Expectations for students • Collaboration between administration, faculty, and students
Conditions for Learning Survey Developer: American Institutes for Research	This survey has a particular focus on school supports for learning, including SEL, as well as measuring the impact of school discipline reforms. It is conducted in schools across the nation and is used in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.[120]	• A safe and respectful climate • Challenge/high expectations • Student support • Social and emotional learning
School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI) Developer: Alliance for the Study of School Climate (ASSC)	The SCAI is designed as a school improvement tool. It uses an analytic trait scale format, in which respondents choose the statement that best answers the question, rather than the typical Likert scale. It has been used in over 600 schools and is available statewide in Michigan.[121]	• Physical appearance • Faculty relations • Student interactions • Leadership and decision making • Discipline and management environment • Learning, instruction, and assessment • Attitude and culture • Community relations

Source: Sources: U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). Safe and Supportive Learning: School Climate Survey Compendium. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium; ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS). (2016). https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls; Tripod. (n.d.). Districts and states. http://tripoded.com/districts-states/.

## Appendix 5: Sample From an Alberta School Climate Report Card

Report on Student Outcomes and School Climate
Alberta Elementary Survey 2014 (3217)
Senator Patrick Burns School Highlights

Social-Emotional Outcomes

Students with a positive sense of belonging

Students feel accepted and valued by their peers and by others at their school.

- 83% of students in this school had a high sense of belonging; the Canada norm for these grades is 84%.
- 80% of the girls and 86% of the boys in this school had a high sense of belonging. The Canada norm for girls is 85% and for boys is 84%.
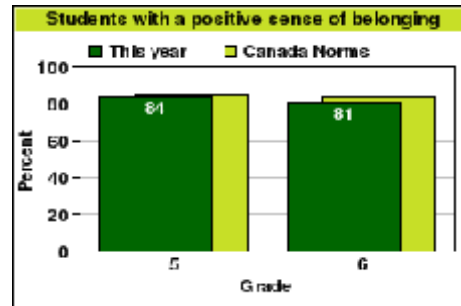
Students with positive relationships

Students have friends at school they can trust and who encourage them to make positive choices.

- In this school, 94% of students had positive relationships; the Canada norm for these grades is 81%.
- 93% of the girls and 96% of the boys in this school had positive relationships. The Canada norm for girls is 84% and for boys is 78%.
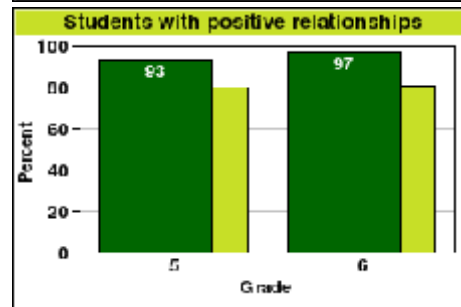
Students that value schooling outcomes

Students believe that education will benefit them personally and economically, and will have a strong bearing on their future.

- 96% of students in this school valued School Outcomes; the Canada norm for these grades is 96%.
- 95% of the girls and 96% of the boys in this school valued School Outcomes. The Canada norm for girls is 97% and for boys is 95%.
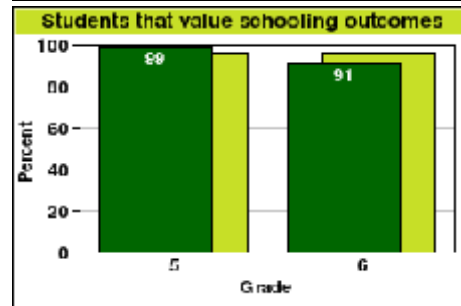
Source: The Learning Bar. (2014). *Report on student outcomes and school climate: Alberta Elementary Survey.* http://schools.cbe.ab.ca/b640/pdfs/events/Senator%20Patrick%20Burns%20School%20(9640)Alberta%20Elementary%20Survey%20201412014.pdf.

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90. Another way to report by student subgroups is to have students self-report their race, ethnicity, language status, etc. If students self-report demographic information, surveys do not have to be prepopulated with students' information; however, self-report is less reliable—particularly around areas like family income—and not always filled out. If students self-report their demographic information, these questions should be included toward the end of the survey, because research shows that students may answer questions differently when they think their responses will be linked to demographics or when they are reminded of their gender, race, or ethnicity. See https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/SCLS%20 UserGuide_final.pdf for privacy guidelines, as well as CORE district practices. Transforming Education. (2016). *Measuring MESH: Student and teacher surveys curated for the CORE districts.* Boston, MA.

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111. To be included in this table, surveys needed to be widely used, strengths-based, normed with a population of students without disabilities, administered in less than 20 minutes, include an online platform, and have strong evidence of validity and reliability. All surveys were included in the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Supportive Schools compendium, with the exception of the Tripod survey, which has also been externally validated.

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