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Contact: Catherine Rauseo
w: (617) 354-0002 x. 8, c: (978) 502-1555
crauseo@renniecenter.org

Excellence through Social Emotional Learning Network Featured in Report from National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

(WASHINGTON, DC) January 15, 2019 – The Excellence through Social Emotional Learning (exSEL) Network is included as an exemplary approach to supporting students’ social, emotional, and academic development in a [report](#) released this week by a prestigious national commission.

The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development’s “[From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope](#)” asserts that our nation is at a turning point, understanding that social, emotional, and cognitive development underpins children’s academic learning. This breakthrough understanding about how people learn is fueling a growing movement to educate children as whole people, with social and emotional as well as academic needs, the report says.

“We know that academic skills are just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to success for students. Despite this knowledge, making SEL part of everyday learning is not easy. While many teachers work on these skills in their classroom, the education system is not yet set up to support widespread implementation of these practices. The exSEL Network aims to bridge this gap,” said Chad d’Entremont, Executive Director of the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy.

The exSEL Network brings 19 Massachusetts public school districts together to test ideas in support of whole-child development, build new strategies to implement social and emotional learning policies and practices, and share learnings related to these efforts. Bringing this group together gives the districts the opportunity to learn from one another, multiplying their expertise, knowledge, and resources. Each district will develop a unique plan to address the specific social-emotional needs of its students. The network is led by the [Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy](#), [Transforming Education](#) and the [exSEL Coalition](#), whose members include the [Massachusetts Association of School Committees](#), [Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents](#), [Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives](#), [Massachusetts School Administrators Association](#), and [Teachers21](#).

“A Nation at Hope” emphasizes that translating knowledge about how people learn into practice and helping students develop skills like collaboration, empathy, and perseverance requires systemic change. It offers specific actions in research, practice, and policy to fundamentally shift how we teach children, with the understanding that the social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of learning are mutually reinforcing rather than distinct.

The report recommends taking these key steps:

- Set a clear vision that broadens the definition of student success to prioritize the whole child.
- Transform learning settings so they are safe and supportive for all young people.
- Change instruction to teach students social, emotional, and cognitive skills; embed these skills in academics and school-wide practices.
- Build adult expertise in child development.
- Align resources and leverage partners in the community to address the whole child.

- Forge closer connections between research and practice to generate useful, actionable information for educators.

Nearly 100 organizations, including the Rennie Center, have signed on in support of the report's conclusions and recommendations as part of an ever-widening coalition committed to advancing the work. This groundswell of support that has surged over the course of the Commission's work, and now supports action across communities following its release, sets the report apart and offers promise for the movement to grow nationwide.

Drawing on input from more than 200 scientists, youth and parent groups, educators and policymakers, the report seeks to accelerate and strengthen efforts in local communities. These recommendations are especially pertinent as states and communities continue to leverage their increased authority on education policy under the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act*. The report includes specific strategies that schools, districts, and communities can pursue related to each recommendation and examples of places that are engaged in these efforts.

The report also outlines evidence that confirms that supporting students' social, emotional and academic development has a positive impact on their attendance, test scores, success in college and careers, and overall well-being. This approach also improves students' feelings about school and makes schools safer. More information is available at NationatHope.org.

The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy's mission is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice. As Massachusetts' preeminent voice in public education reform, we create open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. Through our staunch commitment to independent, non-partisan research and constructive conversations, we work to promote an education system that provides every child with the opportunity to be successful in school and in life. For more information, please visit www.renniecenter.org.

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