Condition **of** Education
IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Toward a More Comprehensive Vision of Student Learning

Overview

These days the words "education reform" conjure up an array of associations—from high-stakes assessments to online learning to high school redesign. The school improvement landscape is particularly crowded in Massachusetts, where the era of new investments and attention to student outcomes has been in high gear for almost three decades. The state's public schools have experienced significant improvement over that period, with Massachusetts' students performing, on average, above their peers nationally.[1] And, as one might expect in a time of rapid innovation, public dialogue about education in the Commonwealth has grown dense with ideas, approaches, and philosophies.

While increased attention on student learning is desirable, the flurry of activity poses a challenge for those seeking to make informed decisions about the best steps the state should take moving forward. For that reason, the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy endeavors to look beyond current debates to examine broader patterns in the state's public schools and recommend areas for action that are well supported by research and data. Through our original research and review of the research of others, we seek to build a more coherent vision of a public education that can guide shared efforts and put every child in Massachusetts on a path to college, careers, and life success.

The Condition of Education initiative is a pivotal piece of how the Rennie Center delivers on its mission. This annual series gives state leaders a clear, concise view of student progress across the state, while pointing to areas where greater investment and strategic expansion of effective practices can bring us closer to achieving the state's vision of strong, equitable outcomes for all students.

From Data to Action

In 2013, we presented our first *Condition of Education Data Report*, tracking 25 state-level indicators of school performance from the preschool years through transitions into college and the workforce. Last year, we revisited the same data points, presenting them along with the first *Condition of Education Action Guide*, which asked: What do these data suggest about the actions leaders can take at the state, district, and school level to prepare every young person for success in college, careers and life? The enclosed report is its sequel, as we look once again at the same set of indicators and ask where the state can make a substantial difference in student learning going forward.

The reform priorities featured in this report are, as always, supported by research and grounded in data. In addition, we highlight sample approaches in Massachusetts that, while relatively new, show potential for scalability. The research and ideas presented are further guided by two underlying principles:

1. Education encompasses more than academic learning.
2. Schools should not—and cannot—work in isolation.

This year, as we looked at promising practices across the state and the patterns in the most current student outcomes, a clear theme emerged: Massachusetts can do much more—across age groups—to address social-emotional learning needs that are both a precursor to and inextricable element of student's academic success.

The Critical Importance of Social-Emotional Learning

In an era of standard-based reform, the bulk of our attention and investments to date have been squarely focused on academic outcomes—a necessary but insufficient focus. An increasing—and convincing—body of evidence points to the value of attending to other facets of student development that both contribute to stronger academic performance and to broader measures of long-term success. When schools and their partners address "social-emotional" competencies, such as self-regulation and interpersonal communication, in addition to skills more traditionally associated with academics, they do a better job at both preparing students for the realities of college and adulthood and helping them master core academic content.[2]

While there are many definitions of social-emotional learning, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides one of the most clear and comprehensive: "social-emotional learning is 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." CASEL outlines five inter-related sets of competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Numerous studies find that young people who master such competencies are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and more likely to succeed in school, college, and career environments.[3]

Students of all abilities and backgrounds benefit from opportunities to develop their social-emotional skills. Researchers have found an average return of $11 for every $1 invested in school-based social-emotional programming with proven outcomes for students. These im-

pacts cut across demographics and include reductions in childhood aggression and risky behavior, lower levels of depression and anxiety, and increases in attendance and academic performance.[4] These findings do not point toward a reduced focus on academics; rather, we see that when schools thoughtfully combine a rigorous academic program with social-emotional supports tailored to students' developmental needs, they do a better job at helping students access rich academic content and set a foundation for long-term success.

Social-emotional learning is especially needed today, when schools are being asked to address more diverse student learning needs than ever before. Across Massachusetts, districts are experiencing an increase in the percentage of students who have special needs, are English language learners, live in poverty, and come from marginalized racial groups. Districts also report dramatic increases in the number of students who display behaviors linked to severe anxiety, emotional trauma, and poor self-control. Massachusetts educators are responsible for the success of all of these children, but often have limited access to models and training that would help them effectively address this range of social-emotional learning needs within the context of their assigned curricula.

A number of promising reform activities, including several highlighted in the 2015 *Condition of Education Action Guide*, emphasize partnerships between schools and community-based organizations to supplement a broader range of student learning needs. As we look at current patterns in student performance and consider where, as a state, we have the greatest opportunity to improve outcomes, social-emotional learning emerges as a clear priority. This year's *Condition of Education Action Guide* highlights a number of promising partnerships attempting to address this priority.

Toward a Common Frame for Action

Social-emotional learning happens across settings and throughout a child's life. A thoughtful statewide approach to supporting students' social-emotional development, therefore, requires attention to multiple tiers of the system. In this report, we explore the critical role social-emotional learning plays at several stages of the schooling pipeline, noting where the state has made progress and how Massachusetts leaders can support a more comprehensive and research-based vision for social-emotional learning for all educators, students, and their families. We then offer four recommended areas for action.

- **Priority One:** Set a social-emotional foundation in early childhood
- **Priority Two:** Build comprehensive K-12 systems of social-emotional support
- **Priority Three:** Promote skills for college and career success
- **Priority Four:** Equip educators to foster social-emotional wellbeing

Setting a Social-Emotional Foundation in Early Childhood

Why Social-Emotional Learning Matters in the Early Years

Of all stages in the schooling spectrum, early education is perhaps where social-emotional approaches have their strongest roots. Well-designed early education programs build social-emotional learning into the core of instruction, treating children's interpersonal and emotional development as a core part of their mission. Such programs attend to two important tiers of social-emotional development.

- **Readiness to learn:** When young children learn how to self-regulate, engage productively in learning activities, and interact positively with others, they have the foundation they need to function in school and continue developing the social-emotional competencies they will need throughout their lives.[5] Further, positive social-emotional skills foster a sense of enjoyment and motivation related to learning.[6] Studies have found that preschool gains in competencies like social problem-solving and conflict resolution predict school engagement and reading achievement through kindergarten and into first grade.[7] Meanwhile, young children who do not develop appropriate social-emotional competencies participate measurably less in the classroom and are less likely to feel accepted by teachers and peers.[8]

- **Family engagement:** Children find their motivation to learn through their relationships with adults.[9] Effective early education programs work to create a continuity of learning experiences by establishing shared responsibility for student learning and success.[10] Family involvement can promote positive student attitudes toward school, improved behavior, and higher self-esteem, which are strongly associated with academic engagement.[11]

Consistency and collaboration are critical; early educators are better able to support children and communicate with families when they have clear, consistent rules and routines regarding social-emotional behaviors, as well as opportunities for families and staff to reflect and plan together.[12] Fostering authentic family partnerships requires relational trust, cultural sensitivity, and a belief that all families—regardless of education level and socioeconomic status—can contribute to children's learning.[13]

A Moment for Action

Massachusetts has built an important foundation for supporting the implementation of effective social-emotional learning practices in early childhood programs.

- **Learning standards:** Over the past few years, a team of state leaders, educators, and advocates participated in the National Governors' Association Early Learning Academy, helping to shape a comprehensive birth-through-grade-three policy agenda that includes essential competencies and foundational experiences across five developmental domains, including social-emotional learning. In 2015, the Board of the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) approved a new set of statewide social and emotional learning standards for preschool and kindergarten, which were developed with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) and informed by the National Governors' Association recommendations.

- **Assessments:** ESE currently requires programs that receive funding for full-day kindergarten to assess incoming students on several domains. Programs participating in the Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA) can choose among a number of assessments that include some measurement of social-emotional skills. In 2015, the majority of kindergarten students were assessed with the MKEA; plans for broader rollout remains uncertain.
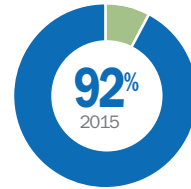
⟩⟩⟩ Where We Are Now: Key Indicators

All indicator data cited in this box can be found in the Rennie Center's 2016 Condition of Education Data Report.

Massachusetts continues to expand access to high-quality early education—a critical factor in ensuring the state's youngest students develop the social-emotional skills they need to succeed in school and beyond. However, more work remains to ensure universal access, to create stronger links between social-emotional learning and other curriculum priorities in early childhood, and to assess and monitor students' acquisition of these important foundational skills.

67%
2015
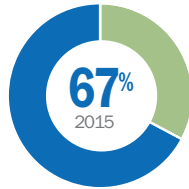
Children aged 0-5 eligible for a subsidy and enrolled in **high-quality early education** programs
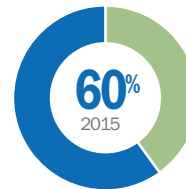
EARLY EDUCATION ACCESS: Currently, 67 percent of children receiving EEC subsidies attend programs that self-assess at level two or above on the Quality Rating Indicator System (QRIS).
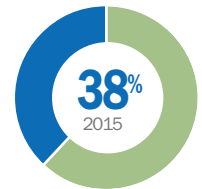
EARLY READING: Last year, 60 percent of third graders scored proficient or advanced on the English language arts MCAS, the state's first standardized measurement of achievement; only 38 percent of high needs students met the same bar, suggesting that the state still has significant work to do in the preschool and early elementary years.[14]

92%
2015

Students attending **full-day kindergarten**

STUDENTS ATTENDING FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN: Participation in full-day kindergarten continues to increase, with 92 percent of kindergarten students participating in full-day programs in 2015. Full-day kindergarten programming provides an opportunity for educators to work with the Commonwealth's youngest learners on critical social-emotional skills.

60%
2015
all students

38%
2015
high needs students[A]

Students scoring proficient or advanced on the **3rd grade English language arts MCAS**

Next-Tier Measures: Available indicators for early education are limited and do not yet measure social-emotional factors directly. The state can support more comprehensive assessments of early childhood learning by adopting tools like as the Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs, which uses observation and teacher reported data to assess the learning environment, and the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment or Minnesota Preschool Affect Checklist, which assess children's social-emotional competence and growth.

A. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defines "high needs" students as those belonging to at least one of the following subgroups: eligible for free/reduced lunch, students with disabilities, English language learners, and former English language learners.

Expand Effective Social-Emotional Learning Models in Early Childhood

The recently approved state standards for preschool and kindergarten are an important step toward defining and systematizing expectations of social-emotional learning for young children. The standards offer a jumping off point for decision makers at every level—state, district, school, and classroom—to bringing effective practices to scale in early childhood programs across the state. Several additional actions would help the spread of effective social-emotional learning practices for the state's youngest learners.

1. **Assess for readiness.** Early educators need comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive screening and assessment tools to monitor the development of young children's social-emotional skills. Such assessments should be low-stakes and integrated into curricula, allowing teachers to observe children's behavior as they learn and interact, and use the data to inform next steps in instruction. Quality assessments would also help educators identify early risk factors, reducing barriers to achievement.

The good news is that such assessments exist. The state made important strides by establishing MKEA requirements for districts receiving funding for full-day kindergarten programs; new social-emotional screening requirements may be introduced into the QRIS. As EEC and ESE move forward in aligning preschool and K-12 standards, a natural next step will be for both departments to recommend and support implementation of quality, embedded assessment options across all programs serving young children.

2. **Spread strong instructional practice.** Districts and individual programs can learn from the effective social-emotional learning practices of peers across the state. EEC can play a role by curating professional development offerings, implementation tools, and documented best practices through a centralized resource hub. In particular, programs can benefit from tools and examples that help them assess emerging skills, model those skills, create supportive learning environments, and modify teaching to address different learning styles and stages.

3. **Support greater family collaboration.** Families and early educators alike need opportunities to learn how to foster children's social-emotional learning. Early education programs would benefit from professional development that models effective family engagement, including strong communication practices and approaches to supporting social-emotional development in the home.

4. **Create more seamless, sustainable funding.** Currently, early education programs depend on a patchwork of public and private sources, each with its own restrictions, and many of the community-based initiatives that support the social-emotional development of young children rely on temporary grants. Bringing forth a more comprehensive notion of early childhood education—including effective implementation of social-emotional learning practices at scale in the early education sector—will require a state budget that supports early education in a manner more akin to K-12 Chapter 70 support.

New Bedford: A Community-Wide Effort in Birth to Grade 3

The New Bedford Birth to Grade 3 Alignment Partnership is an unprecedented alliance of educators and community agencies with a stake in early childhood. Created with a seed grant from EEC, the partnership's primary objective is to improve early education access, while creating a network of support for parents and educators. As many as 26 percent of New Bedford children currently enter kindergarten without any preschool or formal child care experience, an issue that has a huge ripple effect for individual students and the system.

Convened by the district, the partnership includes public preschool educators, community-based providers, and representatives from public housing, mental health, the libraries, arts organizations, and others. Initial conversations with preschool providers and local survey data revealed a common concern with social-emotional skills and needs.

Promising Practices

The New Bedford partners meet monthly and have made important strides in several areas.

- **Focus on literacy and social-emotional skills:** Building on a previously existing early reading campaign, the partners have adopted the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning's pyramid model for supporting social-emotional competence in young children via tiered, holistic supports.

- **Shared professional development:** Through a common professional development series, educators across settings have explored the same set of promising strategies for teaching early literacy and social-emotional skills. Educators working in the public schools and private preschool programs are collaborating to implement key Massachusetts standards for early learning.

- **Parent engagement:** A thirteen-month calendar provides parents with advice, literacy tips, and parenting strategies leading up to the kindergarten transition. Parents of children from birth to age three can access additional support through home visits, parenting classes, and service referrals.

- **Shared data:** A new kindergarten transition tool will compile individual student data on early literacy, number sense, and social-emotional skills. The universal tool will allow every preschool provider to communicate baseline data with the district prior to the kindergarten transition.

The New Bedford partnership is still new and has yet to be rigorously evaluated, but one important outcome is already apparent. Where distrust among sectors had been common, participants have noted a cultural shift, with partners finding creative ways to link services and agendas. As the EEC grant expires at the end of this year, the partners are looking at ways to remain connected and reach more young children at this critical early stage.

Building Comprehensive K-12 Systems of Social-Emotional Support

Creating Conditions for Student Success

Social-emotional learning doesn't stop when children enter kindergarten. In fact, educators across the grade spectrum can learn from the example set in early childhood programs by developing proactive systems that increase student engagement and set the stage for success in college and beyond.[15] Nurturing social-emotional development is a school-wide process, requiring contributions from many. Here, we outline three core components of a comprehensive approach to social-emotional learning.

- **School climate.** A positive school climate ensures the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical safety of all members. Research links school climate factors to increased academic achievement, student motivation, group cohesion and trust, and personal development, and to decreases in aggression and other negative behaviors.[16] Peers are an important influence on school culture, one that can be harnessed to set a productive tone and ensure safety.[17] In fact, research finds that peer group interventions yield better outcomes than interventions aimed at training adults to support students.[18] In schools that implement a "caring majority" approach—engaging at least 85 percent of students as champions of a positive school climate—students experience fewer instances of bullying and other negative events.[19]

- **Curriculum focus.** A comprehensive social-emotional learning program explicitly teaches the academic and behavioral skills that are necessary to long-term success.[20] Mastery of the Common Core State Standards also depends on many of the same foundational skills, such as problem-solving.[21] Teachers can build students' competence in these skills through direct instruction, modeling, and by integrating skills into daily routines and classroom management.[22] When teachers design learning tasks in which students can practice self-regulation and other important skills, they develop greater insight into individual students' emerging strengths and remaining needs, information that can guide ongoing instruction.[23]

- **Relationships.** Teachers reinforce a positive school climate and contribute to students' wellbeing when they use social-emotional constructs to develop stronger classroom relationships[24] A welcoming and safe class routine helps ensure every learner is valued, while minimizing feelings of intimidation or alienation and allowing students the freedom to make responsible decisions.[25] Positive student-teacher relationships help teachers gain a deeper understanding of students' strengths and needs, which in turn influences students' social adjustment and academic competence.[26] To establish and sustain strong classroom relationships, educators must be able to regulate their own emotions and approach students, from a wide range of backgrounds, with cultural sensitivity and competence, a process that requires continuous education.[27]

A Moment for Action

Through several recent legislative commitments, Massachusetts has established important requirements related to school climate and social-emotional support for public school students.

- **An Act Relative to Children's Mental Health** (2008) addresses access to child mental health services by facilitating the coordination of services with schools.

- **An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools** (2010) provides regulations for school leaders to address school bullying, and the follow-up act of the same name passed in 2014 expands on the prior legislation with prevention and intervention plans.

- **Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force** (2011) proposed a statewide infrastructure, with action steps, to assist schools in creating safe learning environments and addressing behavioral health barriers to learning.

- **An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School** (2012), also known as Chapter 222, requires schools and districts to consider alternatives to expulsion with intentions of promoting more positive behavior and school climate.

- **An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools** (2014) offers guidance to school leaders on integrating and aligning initiatives that promote behavioral health in schools, including those that support social-emotional learning and trauma sensitivity.

Additionally, ESE has created a recommended blueprint for districts to help them coordinate and align services to address students' academic and social-emotional wellbeing. The Massachusetts Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) differentiates learning tasks to address a range of student strengths, needs, and learning styles and to identify those in need of services or screening.

>>> Where We Are Now: Key Indicators

All indicator data cited in this box can be found in the Rennie Center's 2016 Condition of Education Data Report.

Student engagement is one of the most important predictors of academic success and is deeply connected to social-emotional development.[28] Tracking indicators of student engagement—including risk factors like school mobility and absenteeism—can help schools and districts apply interventions more strategically, keeping more students on track for graduation and long-term success.

9%
2015
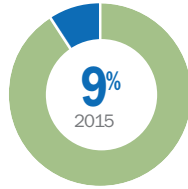
Students **transferring into or out of a school** during the school year

13%
2015
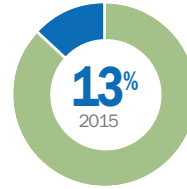
Students **absent from school** 10% or more of days enrolled

ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS: A focus on social-emotional learning may be particularly important for students whose connections to school are most tenuous. Currently, 9 percent of Commonwealth students transfer schools at least once in a given year, and 13 percent are absent 18 or more times in a year.

86%
2014
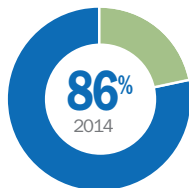
Students **graduating from high school** in four years

72%
2014
all students
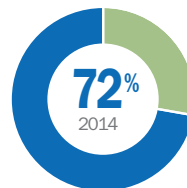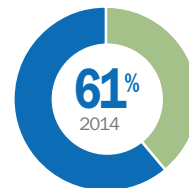
61%
2014
high needs students[B]

STEM Students **completing MassCore coursework**

ON-TRACK OUTCOMES: In the most recent graduation cohort, 86 percent of students completed high school in four years; 72 percent of high school seniors satisfied MassCore requirements, a measure of college readiness, although only 61 percent of high need students had done the same.

Next-Tier Measures: The indicators discussed above are a jumping off point for identifying challenges facing Commonwealth students. Districts and schools would benefit from assessments that capture key social-emotional competencies, such as the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), which originated in the early education sector and can be used to screen and monitor development of social-emotional competencies through the eighth grade. The DESSA can be completed by families, teachers, or staff in partner agencies; the DESSA-mini uses eight-item behavior rating scales for quick progress checks.

B. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defines "high needs" students as those belonging to at least one of the following subgroups: eligible for free/reduced lunch, students with disabilities, English language learners, and former English language learners.

ACTION TWO

Establish More Comprehensive and Consistent Social-Emotional Support

While the MTSS and recent legislation are steps in the right direction, these largely unfunded and disconnected guidelines have been implemented unevenly across the state. Ensuring more proactive and comprehensive social-emotional support for students statewide will require a coordinated vision as well as dedicated resources and attention.

1. **Provide protocols and guidance to districts.** The tiered service model of MTSS and many of the instructional principles it outlines offer a strong framework for organizing social-emotional learning schoolwide. Districts and schools can build on the MTSS to design comprehensive service models that develop students' academic and behavioral competencies through multiple layers of support, tailored to the needs of particular students and student populations. Districts will need guidance in implementing such supports and in creating capacity among teachers and school leaders to lead this work.

2. **Support use of a broader set of student data.** In the past several years, Commonwealth schools have become proficient users of

academic data to guide improvement in instruction, but few schools are versed in using data to monitor students' social-emotional progress. ESE has disseminated several tools that can be used to track social-emotional skills, including the Survey of Academic Youth Outcomes developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Massachusetts educators will need additional guidance from the state to effectively use data from these tools and other commonly available assessments in districts and schools.

Newton: A Comprehensive Social-Emotional Response

Over the past three years, the Newton Public Schools has ramped up its social-emotional focus by training teachers and administrators in social-emotional learning practices to best support all learners in the district. Among the factors that prompted a closer look at students' emotional health and safety, the district experienced three student suicides in the 2012 school year. In 2014, Newton received a five-year federal School Climate Transformation grant from the state to take the social-emotional effort districtwide, establishing a centralized department of Social Emotional Learning that places the initiative on par with other academic priorities. To date, the district has also adopted a Response to Intervention tiered student support model which includes a focus on social-emotional skills and has launched a Responsive School Initiative in 11 elementary schools and four middle schools.

Promising Practices

Newton does not approach social-emotional learning as an add-on program; rather, it's part of how schools organize their work and is regarded as a prerequisite for students' academic success. Several features deserve highlighting:

- **Schoolwide consistency:** Every school has or is developing a positive behavior plan, which defines the social-emotional practices to be implemented across all grades and classrooms and includes intervention protocols for students in need of additional support.

- **Integrated practice:** Professional development focuses on helping teachers to blend research-based social-emotional practices with the content they already teach.

- **Community partnership:** School teams work closely with youth-serving organizations and health and human service agencies to provide holistic supports; community partners are often included in educator professional development, and parents are receiving training.

- **Comprehensive data:** Educators use a variety of data, including on social-emotional competencies, to evaluate students' skills, identify students in need of intervention, monitor progress, and evaluate equity in discipline practices.

A comprehensive social-emotional strategy like Newton's can be challenging to implement, especially in a large district with competing demands, but the district has maintained the priority placed on social-emotional learning. Newton is already seeing promising outcomes, including reductions in absences, suspensions, and discipline and special education referrals. Student surveys show improved perceptions of connectedness and safety as well, and teachers have been enthusiastic, viewing the initiative as a way to help children fulfill their learning potential.

ISSUES OF MEASUREMENT

Boston Summer Learning: Tracking Social-Emotional Outcomes

The Boston Summer Learning Project, co-managed by the Boston Public Schools and Boston After School & Beyond (BASB), seeks to build skills associated with college and career success by expanding access to quality summer learning. A national leader in summer learning, the citywide effort takes a comprehensive approach to addressing—and assessing—students' social-emotional learning needs. This is an important innovation, as the assessment of social-emotional skills is a very new area and remains an obstacle to implementation for many otherwise promising models. Boston is one of only a few districts that have taken steps to assess students' social-emotional learning.

In 2015, 50 schools and 16 community organizations participated in the Boston Summer Learning Project, providing engaging, community-based learning experiences to almost 1,000 students.

Summer Learning Project sites share several features:

- Certified academic teachers and enrichment staff co-deliver a full day of academic and enrichment programming connected by an essential question.
- Common goals and grade-level standards guide learning, while allowing flexibility to innovate and provide hands-on learning experiences unique to each setting.
- Programs emphasize four sets of social-emotional skills associated with college and career success, including: perseverance, critical thinking, relationships, and self-regulation.

A Measurement Focus

A critical piece of the Summer Learning Project is common measurement and evaluation. Partners use a suite of assessment and observational tools to gather detailed data on student outcomes and program quality, with a strong focus on social-emotional factors throughout. The evaluation system allows individual programs to track and compare their progress—both over time and benchmarked to peer organizations—on four types of measures:

- **Participation:** Programs track enrollment, attendance, and demographics, while a common database helps city leaders understand who is being served and where there are gaps.
- **Program quality:** A third-party observation tool, developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), provides feedback on program organization and structure, as well as factors related to student engagement, skill building, and adult-/student-student interactions.
- **Student experience and growth:** The Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes, another NIOST tool, provides staff and youth perspectives on students' experiences and their growth in academic and social-emotional domains.
- **Social-emotional skills and wellbeing:** The Holistic Student Assessment, developed by the Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency (PEAR), is a student survey that assesses individual social-emotional strengths and needs.

Together, the evaluation tools provide richer data than community programs could access on their own and easy-to use reports make the feedback manageable. Programs then can use the data to inform program improvement and show their impact to partner schools and funders.

An additional 63 summer programs voluntarily use the same measurement tools as the Summer Learning Project. BASB convenes the entire network of 79 summer sites—also known as the Boston Summer Learning Community—regularly throughout the year to reflect on findings, share best practices, and explore strategies for addressing common challenges. Participants appreciate these peer-to-peer connections, the targeted professional learning, and the data-informed focus on continuous improvement.

Since the introduction of the evaluation system, programs have seen participating students' outcomes improve significantly in mathematics, reading, and all five social-emotional skills measured by the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes. Students also report significant growth on nine skills measured by the Holistic Student Assessment.

Promote Skills for College and Career Success

Preparation for Life

College is not the final destination for young people, nor is a single, static workplace. Today, more and more career paths require education beyond high school, and the typical adult makes multiple career transitions over a lifetime. Preparing students for the contemporary economy means equipping them with transferable skills that will allow them to learn and adapt across their adult lives.[29]

In recent surveys, Massachusetts employers report that they cannot find job applicants with the training and social skills necessary for entry-level, career-path positions.[30] This trend, coupled with high levels of college remediation, poor college persistence and completion rates, and underemployment of high school and college graduates, points to a need for more robust skill development in the K-12 years.[31]

The latest research on college and career success identifies a crucial set of social-emotional competencies—such as the abilities to set and achieve goals, self-motivate, monitor progress, seek help, and persist through challenges—that strongly predict achievement beyond high school.[32] These are the same social-emotional skills developed in early childhood, applied in increasingly sophisticated ways as youth progress through their schooling. By continuing to build social-emotional competencies throughout the high school years, Massachusetts can prepare more students to flourish in an increasingly dynamic postsecondary environment.[33] Research points to two principles that can guide our efforts in the secondary years.

- **Personalized learning.** Educators can help students develop many of these critical skills by creating safe, well-managed learning environments that foster positive decision-making and allow for personalized learning.[34] A robust body of research suggests that personalization, defined as school structures and practices that nurture stronger, more individualized relationships between teachers and students, may help students achieve greater success on a range of measures.[35] While there is less evidence about the specific approaches to personalization that produce these positive results, one practice that shows promise is the use of individualized learning plans. These student-directed tools help students connect current efforts to future goals by mapping their plans for academic, personal/social growth, and career development, and connecting those plans to their interests, needs, and long-term goals.

- **Skill development across settings.** When high school students have opportunities to work and learn in out-of-school settings—including community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, and local businesses—they can apply social-emotional skills in meaningful, real-world contexts, while developing relationships and social capital that support their long-term goals.[36] Preparing young people for the future should involve contributions from all of these sectors. If schools and community partners work together to reinforce social-emotional development across settings and through targeted supports, youth are more likely to develop the robust set of skills they need for college and careers.[37]

Defining College and Career Readiness

In 2013, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education jointly approved a new definition of college and career readiness, which includes three domains: workplace readiness, academic knowledge and skills, and personal/social development.

A Moment for Action

Social-emotional learning has garnered greater attention in Massachusetts as education leaders and practitioners seek innovative ways to increase student progress and proficiency across the education pipeline. The new statewide definition of college and career readiness places social-emotional development front and center—highlighting its importance for all students, whatever their postsecondary plans. However, the next step is supporting and resourcing districts so that they can best determine how to integrate social-emotional learning into their college and career preparation curricula. Massachusetts has several promising models that could be leveraged to provide many more students with experiences that build the range of skills associated with college and career success.

- **Early College Designs** incorporate credit-bearing college coursework into the high school experience to help more students, particularly those who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education, to graduate from high school and go on to complete a credential with high

value in the labor market. A national study of early college schools found that students in those schools are significantly more likely than their peers to graduate, enroll in college, and earn a degree.[38] Massachusetts has introduced early college designs of varying intensity levels across the Commonwealth. Many of these models prioritize student self-reflection and skill assessment, utilizing campus resources and supplementary supports to help students build the social-emotional skills they need to thrive on a college campus.

■ **Work-based learning** provides opportunities to build college and career skills through internships, jobs, and other real-world experiences. Many Massachusetts high schools participating in Connecting Activities, ESE's statewide school-to-career initiative, have leveraged partnerships with local employers to design such experiences, and uses a work-based learning plan to help students track their experiences and skill development. Meanwhile, the state's nearly 80 Career Vocational Technical Education schools and programs incorporate a variety of career-focused opportunities into the high school experience, including industry-certified training programs and apprenticeships, which are designed to support a successful transition to college and the labor market.

■ **Youth development professionals** have been helping young people build social-emotional skills, like personal responsibility and self-efficacy, for decades. Massachusetts is home to hundreds of non-profit organizations that are steeped in social-emotional education. Individual organizations have different approaches, developing focal skills through community service, work-based learning, experiential learning, and other models. Many organizations provide counseling and interventions as well. In districts, like Boston and Salem, where youth development organizations have formed cross-sector partnerships with high schools, institutions of higher education, and local employers, they bring important expertise and capacity to the table, helping to ensure that postsecondary transition models are more personalized and more comprehensive.

>>> # Where We Are Now: Key Indicators

All indicator data cited in this box can be found in the Rennie Center's 2016 Condition of Education Data Report.

Social-emotional learning contributes to academic performance, engagement with learning, and strengthened relationships, all factors that promote success in college and the workforce.[39] An increased focus on social-emotional development in the secondary-to-postsecondary transition years, therefore, could help address the Commonwealth's ongoing challenges with postsecondary enrollment and completion.
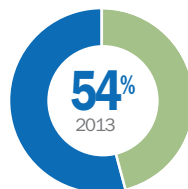
32%
2014
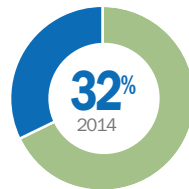
Students enrolled in **developmental (remedial) courses** in college

COLLEGE READINESS: In 2015, 32 percent of newly enrolled college students in Massachusetts public colleges were required to take developmental (remedial) courses, a strong indication that they were not prepared for college-level coursework.
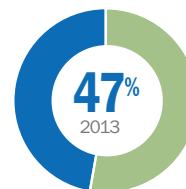
61%
2013
UMass
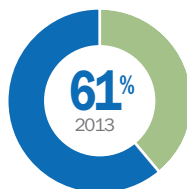
54%
2013
state universities

Students **graduating from UMass and state universities** within six years

47%
2013

Community college students earning degree/certificate, 30+ credits, or transferring to four-year institution in six years

COLLEGE COMPLETION: According to the latest reports, 61 percent of students who enroll in the UMass system and 54 percent enrolled in state universities graduate within six years; 47 percent of community college students earn a degree or certificate, accumulate 30+ credits, or transfer to four-year institutions in the same timeframe.

Next-Tier Measures: Current data reveal gaps in college preparedness, but Commonwealth schools would benefit from measures that go further, assessing the social-emotional competencies associated with college and career success. For example, the Survey of Academic Youth Outcomes can be used by teachers, out-of-school educators, and students themselves to track observable behaviors aligned with key social-emotional competencies.

Expand Personalized Pathways to College and Career Readiness Statewide

The state's definition of college and career readiness provides important clarity and a helpful framework to guide efforts across schools and providers. The Commonwealth also has a number of strong program models in place that show promise in building the core social-emotional skills that are a foundation for college and career readiness. It is time to bring these effective models to scale through strategic, well-aligned partnerships between schools, employers, and postsecondary institutions. A comprehensive system of partnerships can support fluid movement through K-12 and into college and career pathways. Four priorities should guide this effort.

1. **Integrate social-emotional skills across grade levels.** Currently, there is strong focus on social-emotional learning in the state's early childhood programs, with secondary educators scrambling to catch up prior to the postsecondary transition. For students to acquire the full range of skills they need for success in college and careers, they need opportunities to practice social-emotional skills across their school experience. The state can approach this challenge strategically, vertically integrating social-emotional skills into curriculum standards from preschool to grade 12. These skills can support rigorous academic learning at every stage, while positioning students for long-term success.

2. **Assess toward mastery of social-emotional skills.** Fostering students' social-emotional growth requires educators to assess and track the development of important skills that are often unarticulated in traditional assessment models. The state and individual districts should explore assessment models that include social-emotional skills and consider, in particular, competency-based approaches that would allow for a more individualized and comprehensive method of tracking each student's' movement toward mastery of the full array of skills necessary for postsecondary success.

3. **Monitor skills across settings.** The state can support a more seamless learning experience by helping schools and out-of-school providers find natural connections among the academic, workplace, and personal/social skills young people need to succeed. In particular, the work-based learning plans introduced through Connecting Activities and a relatively new ESE-approved Individualized Learning Plan have potential to support skill alignment across varied learning experiences. The state can do more to support consistent use of these tools in schools and community settings.

4. **Encourage greater collaboration across sectors.** Getting all students ready for success in college and the workplace will require continuous dialogue among schools, employers, colleges, and other institutions that support postsecondary transitions. Massachusetts has successfully incentivized such collaboration among schools and employers through grants to Workforce Investment Boards. State leaders should consider incentive models that would foster collaboration among a broader set of partners.

LEAP: Teaching Skills for College Success

LEAP for Education is a non-profit focused on improving college and career outcomes for low-income youth on the North Shore. LEAP began as an after-school program for middle school students, offering career exploration, technology and STEM activities, service learning, and other hands-on learning experiences—all infused with a social-emotional focus. Today, LEAP operates a range of skills-rich, in-school and out-of-school programs in Salem, Gloucester, and Peabody, focusing primarily on immigrant youth and those who will be the first in their families to attend college. LEAP's fastest-growing program is College Success, which supports 150 students per year to and through the college transition.

Each year, LEAP selects cohorts of 20 high school juniors from each community who are recommended by their guidance counselors, and those students commit to a multi-year program that includes the following:

- **Skills-focused curriculum:** The College Success curriculum, developed by LEAP staff, focuses heavily on social-emotional dimensions, beginning with students' self-exploration of their strengths, interests, and passions. Social service providers in partner organizations teach supplemental workshops on topics like stress management, time management, goal setting, and healthy relationships.

- **Career exploration:** Every student conducts a personality assessment to understand their work tendencies (e.g., taking risks, working as a team) and what motivates them most. They then explore careers that match these qualities and create a personalized career profile; it is an important program goal that each student can articulate an aspiration.

- **College preparation:** High school students meet with College Success counselors once a week during junior year and twice weekly senior year. They receive comprehensive college-prep services, including course advising, SAT preparation, college visits, assistance with college applications, financial aid and scholarship searches, and social service referrals. Counselors also meet frequently with parents so that they, too, understand the college process, address financial concerns, and can better support their children.

- **College transition support:** College Success counselors stay with students through college graduation. They check in weekly during freshman year and less frequently as students' progress provided that they are academically on track. Counselors help students select courses, learn to navigate college services and make responsible decisions, and resolve obstacles (academic, health or financial) that could impede their graduation. LEAP also works closely with local colleges to ensure smooth transitions.

To date, 100 percent of students who participated in the College Success program through their senior year have enrolled in a postsecondary institution within a year of high school graduation. LEAP staff are especially proud of the strong relationships counselors form with students; students frequently turn to LEAP first when they need counseling or more intensive services. Having a reliable source of support can make all the difference for students as they overcome a variety of challenges and continue toward a degree.

Equipping Educators to Foster Social-Emotional Wellbeing

A Precursor to Effective Teaching and School Leadership

Educators constantly model social-emotional skills to students through the ways in which they manage classroom and school interactions. To help educators foster positive relationships in the classroom and model the interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies students need to thrive as learners, schools must first work with staff to develop their own mastery of key social-emotional skills.[40] School leaders can also focus on creating a school culture that supports the social-emotional development of students and staff; however, leaders themselves often need expertise to guide training. Such supports can help in two ways.

- **Sharpening expertise:** Educators benefit from well-developed social-emotional skills when attempting to create a safe, cooperative environment where students develop positive social-emotional skills.[41] In a national study, teachers reported a lack of training on implementing social-emotional learning in their classroom.[42] Teacher preparation programs can equip licensure candidates with a deeper understanding of social-emotional constructs by integrating content from neuroscience, child developmental, and other relevant fields in pre-service coursework and by evaluating candidates on their knowledge and demonstration of key social-emotional skills and related interventions for diverse learners.[43] Similarly, administrative training and licensure programs can focus on sharpening the social-emotional skills of aspiring school leaders.

- **Improving retention:** A significant contributor to career longevity and satisfaction is educators' own social-emotional skills. Teachers face a challenging task in motivating and managing the work of diverse students to keep instruction moving fluidly and help students achieve expectations.[44] Teachers who have not been equipped with strong social-emotional abilities themselves often have difficulty managing classroom relationships and are more likely to experience exhaustion, stress, diminished perceptions of students, and decreased self-efficacy and job satisfaction.[45] In contrast, when schools attend to teachers' social-emotional skills and wellbeing, it provides a positive feedback loop that lessens stress and results in more innovative practice and a more positive climate for students.[46]

A Moment for Action

ESE has begun to lay the groundwork for greater attention to educators' social-emotional development with the recent addition of a social-emotional learning indicator to the Professional Standards for Teachers, which are used by teacher preparation programs to design their programs and determine eligibility for certification. To demonstrate competency on this indicator, new teacher candidates must employ a variety of strategies to assist students in developing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Several other indicators also touch on social-emotional skill development; for instance, an indicator, specifically related to classroom management, requires new teachers to establish and maintain effective routines and procedure to promote positive student behavior. Additionally, in order to be deemed proficient in addressing the needs of English language learners, teachers much show that they create and maintain a safe and collaborative learning environment that values diversity and motivates students to meet high standards of conduct, effort, and performance.

The state has not yet introduced social-emotional standards to guide the preparation and licensure of school leaders.

## >>> Where We Are Now: Key Indicators

All indicator data cited in this box can be found in the Rennie Center's 2016 Condition of Education Data Report.

The Commonwealth has begun to build social-emotional indicators into standards for educator licensure. Over time, creating stronger links to social-emotional development in teacher and administrator preparation and licensure practices will help ensure more educators are equipped with the skills they need to thrive and to produce strong outcomes for diverse learners. Currently, we have a few limited indicators on Massachusetts educators that could be linked to increasing capacity for social-emotional learning and implementation.

97%
2015
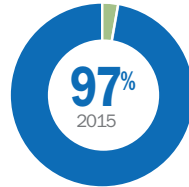
Teachers **licensed** in their teaching assignment[c]

TEACHER LICENSURE: In the 2014-15 school year, 97 percent of public school teachers were licensed in their teaching assignment.

93%
2014
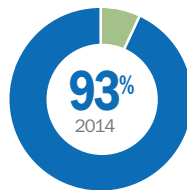
Teachers graduating from a Massachusetts preparation program **employed in schools for at least two years**

TEACHER RETENTION: According to 2015 data, 93 percent of teachers who completed a Massachusetts preparation program remain employed in schools for at least two years.

Next-Tier Measures: The state does not currently track the social-emotional capacity of its educators. A self-assessment tool developed by the American Institutes for Research may be a model worth exploring. The Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies tool helps teachers reflect on how well their teaching practices support students' social-emotional development and what competencies they have or need to support those practices.

C. This indicator is included in the *Condition of Education Action Guide* for the purpose of reporting on teacher licensure trends, relevant to social-emotional learning and educator capacity. This indicator is not part of the set of 25 state-level indicators reported on in the *Condition of Education Data Report.*

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles, 2014-15 Teacher Data Report.

ACTION FOUR

Enhance Supports for Educators' Social-Emotional Learning and Practice

While the state has put important guidelines in place to guide teacher preparation, there is more to be done to build the social-emotional capacity of both teachers and school administrators.

1. **Create an educator toolkit.** The state should develop a clearinghouse of resources and implementation tools that help teachers implement effective social-emotional learning practices in the classroom and help school leaders sharpen competencies among school staff. The toolkit should include guidance on integrating social-emotional practices for different grade levels and content areas.

2. **Enforce guidelines for teacher preparation.** Typically, pre-service teacher training focuses on classroom management as opposed to broader social-emotional principles.[47] The state should push approved providers to align their training with social-emotional priorities outlines in the Professional Standards for Teachers.

3. **Integrate social-emotional learning into professional development.** Besides early childhood practitioners, most educators receive little, if any, ongoing training in promoting social-emotional learning.[48] Districts and schools should integrate expectations and strategies related to social-emotional learning into ongoing professional development for both teachers and school leaders, and into the rules and norms for managing daily interactions schoolwide.

4. **Expand early educator training.** Although the field of early education tends to promote social-emotional learning more than other grade levels, individual educators working in private centers typically receive far less training than public school teachers. High-quality training in social-emotional methods should be extended to all early childhood educators across settings.

Chelsea: Cultivating a Growth Mindset Among Educators

In Chelsea, social-emotional learning has become a core piece of the district's professional development strategy. In order to improve outcomes for a high needs student population, district leaders are working to instill a growth mindset—the belief that persistent effort can produce better results—at all levels of the system, beginning with adults. While it's new work for Chelsea, research suggests that creating such a shift in perspective can help students manage stress, develop a positive future outlook, and achieve high standards.

Promising Practices

To cultivate a growth mindset among educators, Chelsea Public Schools has embedded social-emotional learning into several layers of professional support:

- **A classroom foundation:** Creating a healthy, growth-oriented culture for all students requires teachers to respond, in the moment, with language and strategies that support social-emotional development. The district's tiered student support model outlines these expectations across grade levels. Chelsea has also adopted the Agile Mind Intensified Algebra curriculum in secondary math, a program that explicitly addresses important social-emotional skills, like positive self-belief and persistence.

- **Baseline professional development:** In monthly sessions offered by the district, teachers learn how to implement trauma-sensitive practices in the classroom. Participants also explore strategies for fostering students' self-awareness, self-management skills, and healthy classroom relationships. All first-year teachers are required to attend the sessions, with many other teachers opting in.

- **Ongoing professional study:** The district is working towards incorporating techniques for introducing and reinforcing social-emotional strategies with students within its professional learning communities. As this model takes hold, teacher teams will preview new approaches together and come back to the group to reflect after trying them in the classroom.

- **Restorative justice:** Chelsea High School and a few middle schools have adopted a restorative justice approach to discipline, a model that is well aligned with a growth mindset, helping teachers and students to take responsibility for mistakes and then make amends.

While Chelsea's promising approach is consistent with research on building educator capacity, the system's leaders—who are practicing a growth mindset themselves—believe they have more work to do. Their next area of focus will be professional development for school leaders. Eventually, the district wants effective social-emotional strategies to be part of how everyone does their work.

Conclusion: Expanding Our Focus

Over the past few years, Massachusetts has introduced several efforts intended to address social-emotional needs in the public schools, including legislation that guides schools in their response to crises and bullying, a new social-emotional learning standard for K-12 teachers, and expanded partnerships with mental health and other agencies. While these are important steps, the connections among them are not always clear, and many lack fidelity of implementation.

Moving forward, the Commonwealth needs a more cohesive, integrated approach to addressing social-emotional learning, one that embeds these critical skills and support into the core of the student experience. This report outlines four priorities for action, all of which will require careful planning and sustained attention.

- **Priority One:** Set a social-emotional foundation in early childhood

- **Priority Two:** Build comprehensive K-12 systems of social-emotional support

- **Priority Three:** Promote skills for college and career success

- **Priority Four:** Equip educators to foster social-emotional wellbeing

The individual programs we have chosen to highlight offer promising approaches in each of these areas. These featured programs make social-emotional learning a core priority, while implementing innovative approaches to professional development, community partnerships, and assessment and evaluation to achieve a meaningful impact.

By replicating the best of these practices and expanding our overall focus beyond purely academic investments to the social-emotional learning that underpins academic success, Massachusetts can produce more positive, lasting outcomes for children across the state.

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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 about this report, please contact Chad d'Entremont, Executive Director, at cdentremont@renniecenter.org.

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