

Expanding Our Definition of Student Success: A Five-Year Plan For Assessing Social-Emotional Skills to Drive Student Growth

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ABSTRACT

We are constantly learning more about the skills that support positive outcomes for students and about how we can assess these skills reliably. Compelling longitudinal research has emerged demonstrating that social-emotional (SE) skills – such as self-regulation and social competence – support students' success in college, career, and life.

ESSA provides an opportunity to build a richer accountability system that values student SE development and advances our knowledge of SE measures that can be used to capture and drive student growth.

- We propose a five-year plan to:
- engage key stakeholders in articulating the broad range of skills they value;
 - field test existing measures of SE skills and validate their use as growth measures;
 - work with educators to identify how these measures can support school improvement efforts;
 - decide whether to include these measures in an accountability system or use them solely in a formative context.

This approach builds upon the innovative work of the CORE Districts while also providing an opportunity to answer some of the open questions about how SE measures can be used most effectively to support student growth.

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Background

The CORE Districts (CORE) are a group of nine California school districts that represent 1,500 schools and serve over one million students. Superintendents from six of these districts joined together in 2013 to design a holistic system of accountability and continuous improvement that defines school performance in terms of student academic outcomes, student social-emotional (SE) skills, and school climate / culture (CC). This system was approved by the US Department of Education through a No Child Left Behind waiver granted in August 2013.

CORE's multi-metric accountability index, the School Quality Improvement Index (or SQII), is comprised of 60% academic data and 40% SE/CC data. Survey-based measures of SE skills count for 8% of the total SQII, and survey-based measures of CC count for another 8%. Observable data that serve as proxies for SE and CC (including chronic absenteeism, suspension / expulsion rates, and ELL re-designation rates) make up the remaining 24% of the SE/CC domain. (See figure 1)

The CORE Districts piloted, field tested, and rolled out this new system over the course of three years. They conducted extensive research on the survey-based SE measures, including a field test with 450,000 participating students in 2015. Analyses of the field test data conducted by Professor Marty West of the Harvard Center for Education Policy Research show strong evidence that both student self-report and teacher report measures of students' SE skills are significantly associated with academic and behavioral measures that we know matter for student success. (See figure 2 below for student self-report results.) All of the SE scales used also demonstrate strong internal reliability (i.e. Cronbach's alpha of .7 and above), both overall and across subgroups.

Figure 1. CORE's School Quality Improvement Index (SQII)

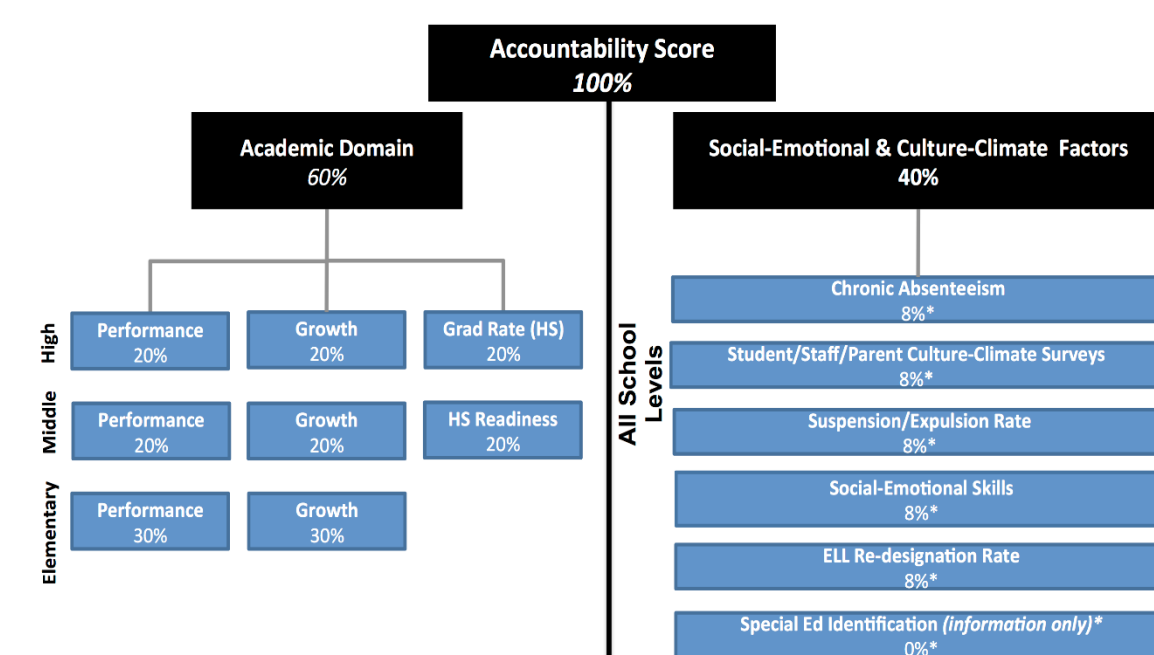
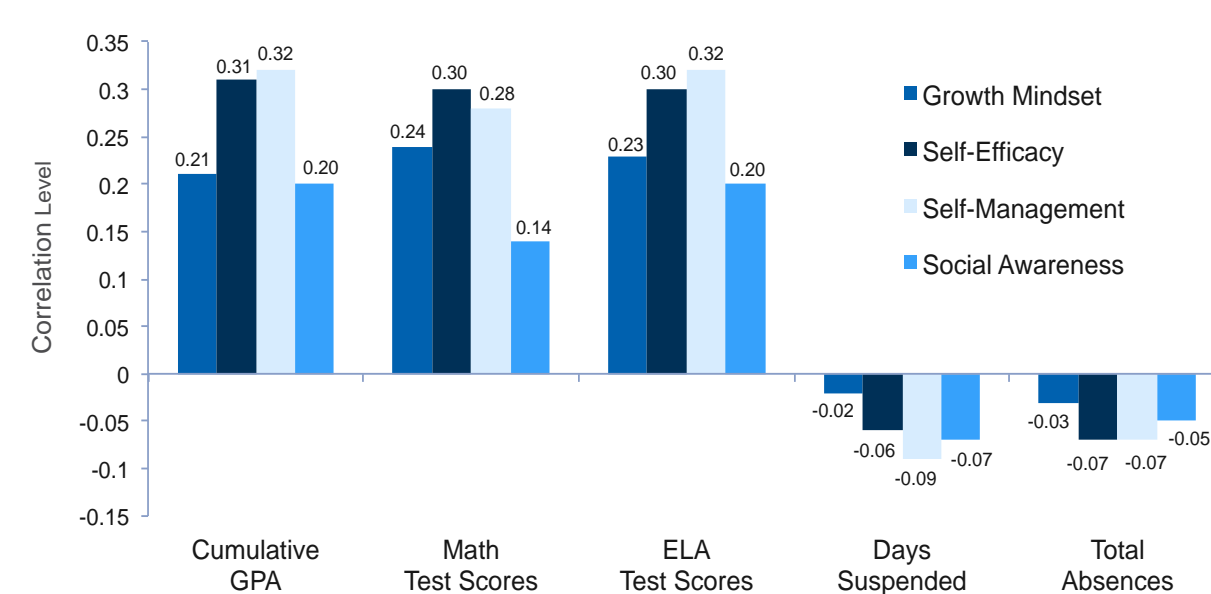


Figure 2. Validity of Student Self-Report on SE Skills



What We Know

SE skills matter: A compelling body of longitudinal research shows that SE skills – such as self-regulation and social competence – support students' success in college, career, and life.

Teachers value these skills: 93% of teachers agree that SE skills are important, and 95% believe they are teachable.

Both student self-report and teacher report measures provide important information: both types of measures are predictive of students' academic and behavioral outcomes. Each provides unique and complementary information that cannot be gleaned from the other.

Schools are already working to build these skills: 88% of teachers say they're already using some practice, program, or intervention to help students develop SE skills

Some existing interventions have been shown to be effective; others have not: A 2011 meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs showed that these programs led to improvements in SE skills and yielded an average gain of 11 percentile points in academic achievement. However, a 2010 RCT conducted by IES concluded that seven comprehensive SEL programs had no discernable impact on SE skills or academic achievement.

Most schools have no data on whether their efforts are working: Few districts and no states have adopted common measures of SE skills, which means that educators don't have the data they need to understand whether the supports they're currently offering to students are effectively helping students develop SE skills.

What We Don't Know

How survey-based measures will behave under conditions of accountability: As with any survey-based measure, SE measures may be susceptible to faking or gaming, especially if used in a high-stakes setting. So far, these measures have not been tested in a high-stakes accountability setting: CORE's full accountability index was slated to take effect in 2016, but the recent passage of ESSA means that CORE may not have an opportunity to use these measures for accountability purposes.

Whether students interpret survey items in ways that are meaningfully different from one another: With any survey-based measure, there is a risk that students will interpret the same item through different frames of reference. This issue, called "reference bias" could reduce the comparability of the survey data. While reference bias has not emerged as an issue in the CORE data to date, further testing is needed to assess whether it will impact data gathered in future years.

How best to develop SE skills: Research is still emerging on the most effective ways to support students' SE development. Many approaches are currently in use in classrooms across the country, but few of those have been rigorously validated.

Proposal

Building on the innovative work of the CORE Districts and acknowledging the unknowns that remain, MA could include in its ESSA proposal a plan to pilot survey-based SE measures, gather feedback from educators on how valuable the resulting data are, and then decide whether to incorporate these measures into an accountability system.

To do this, MA would need to select another indicator to fulfill the "additional indicator of school success or school quality" required under ESSA. If SE measures prove promising, the state would then amend its accountability system in future years to formally incorporate SE measures as an additional, complementary indicator in a multi-metric accountability system.

Sample Timeline

2016-17:

- Fall / Winter: stakeholder engagement to identify the competencies that students, parents, educators, employers, and community members care most about
- Spring: a subset of districts field test student self-report and teacher report measures of students' social-emotional skills

2017-18:

- Summer: research partners confirm the validity, reliability, and comparability of the resulting data
- Fall: participating schools receive results of the spring 2017 survey and hold data inquiry sessions to articulate key themes and identify how the data might be used for school improvement purposes
- Spring: participating schools administer student self-report and teacher report measures of students' SE skills

2018-19:

- Summer: research partners explore multiple approaches to using SE data as part of a growth measure
- Fall: participating schools receive results of spring 2018 surveys and growth measures. DESE holds engagement sessions to gauge interest in including SE performance and/or growth measures as part of school accountability system.
- Spring: All schools participate in dry run of student self-report and teacher report measures of students' SE skills.

2019-20:

- Summer: research partners further validate measures and look for any evidence of intentional gaming
- Fall: All schools receive results of spring 2019 surveys and information on how those surveys would have impacted their school accountability scores if the spring 2019 results had "counted."
- Spring: All schools administer student self-report and teacher report SE measures as part of the formal school accountability system:

2020-21:

- Summer: research partners further validate measures and look for any evidence of intentional gaming
- Fall: all schools receive accountability scores that incorporate data from Spring 2020 SE surveys