

# Learning Is Social, Emotional, and Academic

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Across the country, momentum is building for schools and communities to help young people develop the social, emotional, and academic skills that evidence shows are needed for success in school and in life. There's a deepening recognition that skills such as responsibility and problem-solving, empathy and service, self-control and persistence, all form a solid foundation for academic achievement and personal growth.

Today, we're launching a new blog to explore the growing conversation around what it takes to support young people's learning and growth.

*Learning Is Social and Emotional*, hosted by the [Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#), will highlight the successes and setbacks schools and communities face as they work to nurture and teach the whole student.

Just over a year ago, the National Commission launched a conversation about how students learn and develop. The Commission is listening to diverse voices from across the nation—teachers and principals, superintendents and policymakers, scholars and program developers, business leaders and parents, young people and community leaders, philanthropists and social advocates—to understand what really works, how schools and communities are innovating, and what is needed to boost our capacity to reach children with the best available practices to optimize their learning.

The response has been almost overwhelming. Communities from Tacoma,

Washington to Atlanta, Georgia and from Cleveland, Ohio to Austin, Texas are intentionally building students' social and emotional skills alongside—and as a part of—their academic knowledge. Scholars have issued [consensus statements](#) affirming that the latest science unequivocally shows that major domains of human development—social, emotional, and academic—are deeply intertwined in the brain and behavior, and that all are central to learning. Panels of parents and youth have released [Calls to Action](#) about what they want from their schools. And the powerful common sense of thousands of people who care about our children affirms the same insight: Learning is social, emotional, *and* academic.

Families, educators, and young people intuitively understand how factors such as a deep-felt desire to learn and a sense of social belonging can directly impact students' connection with the content being taught. Reflect on a time when you or a child you care about learned something—how to write a convincing persuasive essay, use spatial reasoning to build a Lego model, combine precision and power to hit a home run, work with a partner to dissect a frog in science class, or communicate ideas through music. When learning happens, people are using skills such as the ability to focus their attention, persevere with effort, and listen to and engage with others. We learn in relationships and when relationships have that optimal balance of trust and challenge, we learn optimally.

When our instructional practices and school environments intentionally reflect what we know about how students learn, they are more likely to grasp difficult academic content and concepts and reach their potential.

In the months ahead, the Commission will look for the perspectives of all stakeholders to develop recommendations in research, practice, and policy that it will share later this year. We hope the recommendations will be the first step in a broader, long-term commitment to practices in schools and

communities that connect social, emotional, and academic development for all students.

In the meantime, we want to dig deeper and engage more people to further explore how schools and communities can put this vision into practice to enhance learning for all students.

**This is where you and our new blog come in.**

*Learning is Social and Emotional* will feature voices from across the country discussing how learning happens, what it looks like in schools and communities, and the challenges all of us face to do this right. The blog will bring together many of the educators and experts we've heard from over the past year to discuss their work—some on a regular basis as they conduct more research or implement new policies and practices. Our fellow Commissioners will provide periodic commentary on the evolving conversation.

We also want to invite you to contribute to this conversation. Whether you write a post, comment on something you read, or come back regularly as a reader, here are just a few questions we want to explore with you:

- What can we do to make sure all of our students feel safe and welcome in their schools?
- What can schools and communities do to create inspiring and challenging learning opportunities for all students that address social, emotional, and academic skills simultaneously? Do you know of examples already in action?
- How can we support educators to model these skills and foster them in their students?
- What can we learn from the communities, districts, and schools that have prioritized this work?
- How can schools partner with families and community organizations,

## knowing that schools can't do this work alone?

This blog is meant to start a meaningful and wide-reaching conversation about how to create learning environments that support and educate the whole student. By providing a forum for sharing ideas, acknowledging challenges, and building community, we hope this blog will bring us one step closer as a nation to giving all students the learning opportunities they need to succeed in school today, and in their work, family life, and communities tomorrow.

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