



Student Social and Emotional Development and Accountability: Perspective of Teachers

National Network of State Teachers of the Year

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We at the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) are most pleased to share with you the latest in our series of Research Reports.

In this report, we focus on measures of social and emotional learning and their efficacy in educator evaluation. Using multiple approaches – literature review and three focus group panels – we examined what the field says about these measures and well as what expert teachers – State and National Teachers of the Year and Finalists for State Teacher of the Year think.

I worked for twelve years at Educational Testing Service in the area of performance based assessment across a continuum of educator practice. One of the first maxims that I learned was: ‘...not everything that is important can be measured and not everything that can be measured is important.’ A second was ‘...we must not use assessment measures for purposes for which they have not been developed or validated.’

I also had the privilege of working with a team of expert research scientists, including Dr. Richard Roberts, to examine the efficacy of assessing social and emotional characteristics and their malleability in educators. So, this study is of particular interest to me.

Can we actually measure social and emotional characteristics, and, are they malleable? In other words, can we teach things like empathy, caring, persistence? Should we include measures of these characteristics in teachers as part of consequential evaluation? As expert educators, we deeply desire accountability measures. We want those measures to be grounded in research and to be valid, reliable, and fair.

Working with our study partners, EducationCounsel on the policy side and Research Triangle Institute on the science end, we are eager to share our results. We found the following key points:

- Current research shows that social emotional skills can help students achieve successful school outcomes and that teachers can play a fairly sizable role in developing students’ social emotional skills.
- Teachers in our focus groups agreed with much of the current research that social emotional development is critical and teachers and schools, through classroom-based and extracurricular activities, do contribute to students’ social emotional development.
- Teachers in our focus groups agreed that professional development around social emotional development would be helpful and states should place focus there, but many questioned the feasibility of doing so given the current emphasis on cognitive development (i.e. test score performance).
- Teachers in our focus groups questioned whether they currently had sufficient resources or supports to devote time to social emotional learning.
- Teachers in our focus groups thought that reports about students’ social emotional learning could be helpful, but they were highly skeptical of using social emotional development in teacher evaluation systems.

At NNSTOY, we believe that educators should always be at the table when education policy is being crafted, debated, or modified. As professionals, we know the most about what is likely to directly impact students and the work in the classroom, both positively and negatively. We are excited to share this paper with you and look forward to working with you in bringing the voice of educators to the policy process.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine Bassett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katherine Bassett, Chief Executive Officer, NNSTOY

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Our Partners

Our partner in this work, EducationCounsel, specifically Ms. Bethany Little, for her commitment to learning what a group of outstanding educators thought about this important topic. Their guidance, policy expertise, and assistance with the work overall was invaluable, as was their overall collaboration.

Our science partner in this work, Research Triangle Institute (RTI). Dr. Elizabeth Glennie, Dr. Jeffrey Rosen, and Ms. Lisa McCaskill were outstanding partners, providing scientific expertise and a commitment to working side-by-side with NNSTOY teacher researchers.

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Our Reviewers

We sincerely thank the following for making the time to conduct an external review of this report: Dr. Hunter Gehlbach of the University of California, Santa Barbara; and Dr. Laura Goe of Educational Testing Service gave graciously of their time and expertise to strengthening this work.

The Focus Group Participants

Finally, we could not have asked for a more prepared and committed set of educators with whom to do this work. Each focus group participant brought deep thoughtfulness about these issues as well as direct experience in working with measures of social emotional learning. Each gave generously of their time in thinking seriously about the issues considered and we are extremely grateful to them.

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Introduction

Researchers and practitioners are learning more and more about the importance of inter- and intra-personal (often called “social and emotional”) competencies and their impact on student success both in and out of school. Inter- and intra-personal competencies include attitudes and behaviors that affect how students reflect on and apply their learning (intra-personal) and skills needed to relate to and manage relationships with others (inter-personal).² These are known in the field by many different terms, including social and emotional, 21st century skills, deeper learning, non-academic, non-cognitive, and soft skills, that are overlapping frameworks of competencies and skills beyond academics that students need for success. For example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies specific categories of social emotional competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Others in the field see a different, fundamental set of components that help students succeed, including connectedness, motivation, and self-regulation (Gelbach, 2015).

Social and emotional competencies and skills help students succeed in school. In fact, researchers have documented significant academic gains for students who participate in social and emotional learning programs in which they can strengthen their social and emotional skills (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Skills such as growth mindset (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007), sense of belonging (Allen, Kern, & Vella-Broderick, 2016a; Allen, Vella-Broderick, & Walters, 2016b), and grit (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) have been shown to correlate to student grades, scores on achievement tests, attendance and other academic outcomes.

Given the influence that social and emotional skills have on student academic outcomes, some policymakers are considering using measures of these skills to assess the performance of teachers and schools. In some states and localities, student perceptions of their social and emotional development are being considered for high-stakes accountability purposes, with incentives and consequences for schools based upon scores on these measures.

This paper uses both a systematic review of research on these competencies and skills as well as focus groups with National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) teachers to examine whether measures of social and emotional learning are appropriate for use in accountability systems. Specifically, we consider the following topics:

1. the role of teachers and schools in fostering social and emotional competencies and skills,
2. the use of data about social and emotional competencies and skills, and
3. perceptions about the appropriate use of measures of social and emotional development in accountability systems.

For the first two questions, we examined the academic studies that have addressed it, and then discussed the questions with teachers in our focus groups. For the third question, we described policies for including these measures in accountability systems and researcher opinions about doing so, and then discussed the question with teacher in our focus group.

2 Pellegrino J. W., Hilton M. L. (2012). Education for life and work: Developing transferable knowledge and skills in the 21st century. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

Methods

To permit in-depth investigation, we focused the review of research on three skills that have recently received a great deal of attention from researchers, policy-makers, and educators, as well as the media: grit, growth mindset, and sense of belonging. Grit is defined as the tendency to sustain interest in, passion for, and effort toward long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Growth mindset is the extent to which students believe that their intelligence can improve with effort, rather than being fixed by factors outside of their control (Dweck, 2006). Sense of belonging is most commonly defined as the extent to which students feel accepted, respected, valued, and included in their school environments (Allen et al., 2016a; Allen et al., 2016b; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Grit, growth mindset, and sense of belonging are, at their core, a combination of social, motivational, and self-regulation skills.

In the review of research, we searched for recent academic articles citing grit, growth mindset or sense of belonging in the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycINFO, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar databases. Prominent education blogs and news outlets, such as Education Week, yielded general news articles or posts featuring leading researchers in these areas, such as Duckworth, Yeager, Walton, and Dweck. To investigate the way that states and localities are incorporating measures of these skills into accountability systems, we examined web sites of state departments of education, collected news articles and data from blogs that indicated state interest in social and emotional learning, and obtained research reports from educational councils and foundations, such as the National Council on Teaching Quality and the Great Schools Partnership.

The review of research sought evidence of the importance of these skills for students' success in school. To understand teachers' perspectives on social and emotional learning and accountability, we conducted focus groups with 28 NNSTOY teachers during the week of January 30, 2017. Through the literature review, we identified states and districts in which data were being collected about student social and emotional learning and recruited NNSTOY teachers from those areas.³ Each participant in the focus group had experience in using results from data about student social and emotional learning. There were three separate focus groups, each of which met via videoconference for about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

By conducting focus groups with teachers, we obtained their views about how they believe they can influence these skills and how schools should use data about them. To capture the full range of teacher experiences with and their impressions of social and emotional learning, we did not limit the discussion to grit, growth mindset, and sense of belonging.. Teachers were invited to discuss their strategies for developing any social emotional competencies and skills and the extent to which they and their schools used data to learn about students' social and emotional development.

Appendix A contains the focus group protocol. Before conducting the focus groups, we administered a brief survey to participants asking them about the characteristics of their schools. Most of the participants were experienced teachers; only two had fewer than 11 years of experience. Half of the participants worked in suburban schools, while a quarter of them worked in urban schools, and a quarter worked in rural schools. About half of the participants taught at the secondary school level, and fewer than 20 percent were in schools with more than 1,500 students. One

3 We recruited NNSTOY teachers from the following states: Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, North Carolina, New York, Rhode Island, Utah, and Washington.

quarter of them taught in schools where at least two thirds of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Appendix B presents additional details on the characteristics of the sample.

Grit, Growth Mindset, Sense of Belonging and Student Success

Much research has examined the ways that grit, growth mindset, and sense of belonging can benefit students and the ways in which teachers and schools can influence these skills. One early study of grit's relationship to academic achievement found that "grittier" adolescents had higher grade point averages (GPAs) (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). More recent studies continue to show the positive impacts of grit on student outcomes including attendance, behavior, and test score gains between the 4th and 8th grades (West et al., 2016).

However, some have questioned how much grit contributes to explaining academic performance independently of other social and emotional skills. A study of secondary school students in the United Kingdom found that grit contributed very little to grades on the General Certificate of Secondary Education exams once analyses accounted for other characteristics, such as conscientiousness. Additional results from this study suggested that teachers may not have much influence over improvement on this skill (Rimfield, Kovas, Dale, & Plomin, 2016).

Similarly, a study of high school students in the U.S. showed that grit did not predict academic outcomes such as rule-violating behavior, academic recognitions, honors, and GPA, but conscientiousness and emotion regulation did (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014). Grit did not add much value to understanding student performance when analyses accounted for other social emotional skills. A recent meta-analysis concluded that grit exhibited only very modest relationships with academic performance and those relationships did not compare favorably with other predictors of academic outcomes, such as study habits and skills (Credé, Tynan & Harms, 2016).

Growth mindset, or a belief among students that they can grow their intellectual capacity, appears to be a strong predictor of academic achievement for elementary and secondary students. Key experimental intervention studies have shown that a growth mindset predicts improvements in math over time. In one study, seventh-grade students whose math scores were in decline received weekly information sessions on how the brain develops and grows with use. Students who received that information stabilized their declining math grades while those who did not continued their decline (Blackwell et al., 2007). Another study of math performance found that female and ethnic minority students who were encouraged to view intelligence as something that could be increased with additional mental work earned significantly higher scores on standardized math tests than study subjects not exposed to the intervention (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003). Growth mindset was positively correlated with attendance, behavior, and math and reading test score gains between the 4th and 8th grades (West et al., 2016). A review of the research on resilience and academic performance reported that students who believed that intellectual abilities could be developed (as opposed to being fixed qualities) tended to show higher achievement across challenging school transitions (e.g., the transition from middle to high school) and greater course completion rates in advanced math courses (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Sense of belonging in school refers to the extent to which students feel accepted and valued in school. Some research has found positive effects of school belonging on important academic outcomes. For example, a greater sense of belonging in school has been shown to relate to improved

grades and academic competencies (Pittman & Richmond, 2007), higher levels of academic motivation (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013), and lower levels of negative academic behaviors such as absenteeism, dropping out, truancy, and academic misconduct (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012). In general, research shows that students who feel a greater sense of belonging perform better on a range of academic performance measures (Wang & Holcombe, 2010), and that a sense of belonging may help some students more than others. Members of historically disadvantaged groups in math or science programs, such as ethnic minorities and females, may worry more about belonging, thus increasing their academic stress, which can ultimately lead to poorer academic outcomes (Yeager, Walton & Cohen, 2013).

The role of teachers and schools in fostering social and emotional competencies and skills

If social and emotional skills are malleable, then they should be influenced by interventions such as teaching. A growing body of research examines the influence that teachers can have on social and emotional skills in students. Studies have had mixed results. For grit, some researchers continue to encourage further research examining its malleability (Duckworth & Gross, 2014), but others have questioned both its importance for academic achievement (Credé et al., 2016) and its malleability (Rimfield et al., 2016). For growth mindset, there is a solid research base suggesting that it can be changed, even by relatively small interventions. A review of interventions targeting students' beliefs about their potential for growth and sense of belonging in school showed that students receiving these interventions improved on outcomes like math achievement and overall GPA (Yeager & Walton, 2011). Sense of belonging in school appears to be influenced by many factors that occur outside the school setting, such as emotional stability, parental support, and peer support. The in-school factors include teacher support and environmental/school safety. Importantly, elements of teaching have been shown to be among the stronger influences on sense of belonging in school (Allen et al., 2016a), but the sense of belonging develops due to factors both within and outside the control of teachers and schools.

Consistently, researchers have found that teachers are the most important in-school factor in producing improved student achievement (Kane & Staiger, 2012). Beyond direct instruction, teachers can influence the social and emotional development of their students in many ways. For example, when students perceive a caring, enthusiastic, supportive, and available teacher, their sense of belonging in school improves (Allen et al., 2016a; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012). When teachers challenge students to think more rigorously by striving to understand concepts and to explain their reasoning, students' growth mindset increases (Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, & Friedlander, 2015). Teachers can have significant influence over student behaviors, such as absences, that tend to affect academic outcomes (Ladd & Sorenson, 2014).

A growing body of research is providing estimates on how much influence teachers have on social and emotional development. Research has found substantial variation in teacher contributions to students' grit, growth mindset, and effort suggesting that some teachers are more effective than others in improving these skills in students (Kraft & Grace, 2016). A study examining the extent to which teachers influenced students' approaches to learning, interpersonal skills, and self-control found that kindergarten teachers had larger effects on their students' behavioral skills than on their academic skills (Jennings & DiPrete, 2010). Upper-elementary teachers had large effects on

self-reported measures of students' self-efficacy in math, and on classroom happiness and behavior. Teachers described by students as emotionally supportive tended to have students with higher math self-efficacy and better classroom behaviors (Blazar & Kraft, 2016).

Focus groups – teacher's role in social and emotional development

In focus groups, teachers discussed the role of teachers and schools in developing students' social and emotional skills. Participants identified many ways in which they and the school setting could help students cultivate these skills. Many teachers in the focus groups said that within the classroom, practices such as cooperative learning and coaching can help students succeed in school. School-wide character education programs can create opportunities to embed social emotional learning in the classroom. One teacher described a program at her school. "We focus on building positive relationships with students. At the high school level, they have student-voice teams. They

"We focus on building positive relationships with students. At the high school level, they have student-voice teams. They deal with different platforms and speak from that students' platform on issues taking place in school and classrooms."

deal with different platforms and speak from that students' platform on issues taking place in school and classrooms." Two respondents mentioned that permitting students to re-do assignments, quizzes, or tests could help them develop persistence in their learning. A few teachers observed that flexibility in the school schedule would help, because students could meet in small groups with teachers or counselors, and students could connect with each other.

Many focus group participants noted that extracurricular activities provide another mechanism for schools to foster students' social and emotional skills. In these activities, students develop supportive relationships with other students, teachers, and other adults. A few respondents believed that service projects help students work together to develop these skills, and

one teacher mentioned Girls on the Run as a positive program. Another believed that before- or after-school wellness programs help. Some teachers mentioned helpful connections outside the school and described community outreach through volunteers, social workers, or community programs, such as the Second Step program.

Ultimately, these teachers believed that by developing strong relationships with students, they can help them strengthen social and emotional skills. Numerous teachers thought that teachers need to model effective social and emotional practices themselves. When teachers demonstrate these skills, students can learn by interacting with teachers. Student-teacher relationships provide a foundation for helping students develop social and emotional skills.

Many teachers in these focus groups described how they had taken the initiative to cultivate student relationships, through activities such as having lunch with students, asking about their needs, and spending a little of bit of class time having students share their learning goals and needs.

However, teachers identified challenges within schools to helping students develop social and emotional skills. Many teachers

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mentioned that policy emphasis on academic exams means that teachers do not have time to spend on their students' social emotional learning. Some teachers noted that they do not control their schedules and cannot choose to set aside time for activities that might foster students' social and emotional learning. One high school teacher said it was risky to take class time away from academic content to address social emotional learning, and others mentioned challenges in the school schedule. Teachers must work with federal, local, or state initiatives that they did not choose or develop. Responding to many new initiatives, which may have competing demands, can lead to a feeling of "initiative overload."

Many respondents raised concerns about whether teachers have resources and supports to help students with social and emotional learning. Some focus group participants noted that some students may need more help than a teacher can or should provide, such as someone who needs the help of a mental health professional. Teachers need to know where they can get help in these circumstances. Even in circumstances that are within the teacher's direct influence, a few focus group participants said that it is important to be sensitive to students' specific needs. Students living in poverty, of various racial/ethnic groups, with disabilities, or with a variety of family challenges may have differing social emotional learning needs. Teachers may not know how to relate to the challenges some students face. Some teachers may be afraid of making a difficult situation worse by saying or doing the wrong thing.

A few mentioned that professional development in this area could help strengthen their ability to help students develop social and emotional skills. However, one commented that the professional development she received on social and emotional learning treated it as a standalone unit and did not highlight ways to integrate social and emotional learning into regular classroom activities. Two focus group participants mentioned that some teachers may think their job should focus exclusively on students mastering content, and that they have not been trained to help students develop these skills. Another noted that when social emotional learning is offered as one option among many workshops or seminars, not all teachers choose to participate in this strand of the professional development.

The use of data about social and emotional competencies and skills

Given that teachers may be able to foster students' social emotional development, which can then impact students' academic performance, some states and districts are collecting data about measures of student's social emotional skills. School systems get information about these attributes through the local use of student self-report surveys that assess student perceptions of their own development, their teachers, and the school climate. A widely-used student survey called the Tripod has been administered in school districts such as Pittsburgh, Memphis, and Denver to provide teachers both diagnostic and professional development information. According to the developers of Tripod (see <http://tripoded.com/teachers/>), teachers can gain insights from student perceptions of instructional practice, including a better understanding of what students are experiencing, identification of areas of strength and opportunities to improve, and ways to increase student engagement in academic activities. This information can assist teachers in tracking their own progress over time.

Based on evidence linking student perceptions of teaching practice to improved academic outcomes (Kane & Staiger, 2012), some states and districts are taking steps to incorporate student surveys into accountability systems. For example, Alabama includes student surveys in its teacher

4 The CORE districts are the 8 largest districts in California: Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Santa Ana Unified.

evaluation process, basing 10 percent of teacher evaluation scores on these surveys. In Connecticut, student survey results account for 5 percent of a teacher's evaluation score. Other states, like Hawaii and New York, have made student surveys an important part of teacher rating systems. In terms of using measures of social-emotional growth in school accountability systems, the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) districts of California⁴ are further along than most. These districts are currently allotting 8 percent of school accountability ratings to social emotional learning measures, as well as another 8 percent to climate and culture surveys of parents, teachers, and school staff.

Focus groups – the use of data about social and emotional competencies and skills

In the focus groups, teachers discussed using data about students' social and emotional learning. Everyone who participated in the focus groups had seen results from data about student social and emotional learning. In most cases, data were collected from students, but some teachers noted that information was also collected from teachers, school staff, and parents. Some of the surveys were designed to assess students' social and emotional skills. Two teachers mentioned the Tripod survey, another cited a survey about growth mindset, and a fourth described a survey about connectedness, or sense of school belonging. Most teachers described surveys that do not measure students' social and emotional skills, but instead measure assets needed to build those skills, such as students' relationships with teachers, parents, and other trusted adults. Two teachers in the focus groups reported administering their own student surveys so that they could understand how best to respond to and support their students.

For the most part, focus group respondents who were given reports about student social and emotional learning received aggregate data about their schools or classrooms. Students, as well as teachers, sometimes received aggregate results about the school climate. In some cases, results were used for professional development activities and goal setting, or to connect students with community services.

The use of measures of social and emotional development in accountability systems

Some research has suggested that social and emotional measures might be included in accountability systems, and researchers and policymakers debate whether doing so is appropriate. A recent analysis of social emotional skills in the California CORE Districts noted a strong correlation between students' average social emotional skill ratings and their schools' scores on math and reading examinations, as well as student grade point averages. Lower ratings were correlated with higher school suspensions and absenteeism in middle school (West et al., 2016). Though only correlational, these results have encouraged the California CORE districts to move forward with including social emotional learning measures in school accountability reporting. In the coming years, the CORE districts will include growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness measures in school-level reporting.⁵

While the CORE districts and others move forward, serious concerns have been raised about methods used to measure these attributes. Currently, social and emotional learning attributes are measured primarily using self-reports. Duckworth and Yeager (2015) are cautious about the use of such approach-

5 <http://coredistricts.org/our-work/social-emotional-learning/>.

Even proponents of the use of student surveys have urged caution. For example, Ronald Ferguson and other developers of the Tripod survey encourage its use as a tool for professional learning, but not as a punitive measure.

es for several reasons. For example, measurements of social emotional skills may suffer from reference bias when a student responds based on comparisons with others, rather than on an objective measure. Survey respondents may also provide the answer they believe is socially desirable rather than an honest answer.

Even proponents of the use of student surveys have urged caution. For example, Ronald Ferguson and other developers of the Tripod survey encourage its use as a tool for professional learning, but not as a punitive measure:

Tripod has encouraged the use of surveys to promote professional learning. Tripod can enhance teacher evaluation systems by providing an additional perspective, but we always want the major focus to remain instructional improvement.

(<http://tripoded.com/districts-states>)

Focus groups – measures of social and emotional learning in accountability systems

Teachers in the focus groups did not mention being evaluated based on their students' social and emotional learning, although some knew of plans for their states or districts to do so. Some focus group members thought that if measures of student social and emotional skills were included in a school accountability system, such results could put a school's academic test scores in context, and could identify the kinds of professional development and community resources that would assist schools in helping their students. However, most participants expressed concern about the prospect of including information about students' social and emotional learning in an accountability system. Many

Many teachers described the importance of tailoring assistance to students based on their circumstances and challenges and expressed concern that putting this information into an accountability system would make it a formulaic one-size-fits-all approach.

teachers described the importance of tailoring assistance to students based on their circumstances and challenges and expressed concern that putting this information into an accountability system would make it a formulaic one-size-fits-all approach. This assistance needs to be sensitive to cultural differences among students. Teachers in the focus group wanted to act on information about students' social and emotional learning and were concerned that within an accountability system, they would not get data about their students until the end of the year, when it would be too late to help them.

Some teachers in focus groups questioned the validity of the measures of social and emotional learning. One noted that the findings about topics such as grit and growth mindset change over time. A state accountability system could not respond quickly to changes in what is known about these factors. Other teachers noted that students may not complete surveys accurately, particularly if they know that results will be used in the accountability system. If students do not trust the people collecting the data, they will not share openly. If schools do not collect data from students,

and instead use administrator classroom observations to measure student social emotional skills, administrators will not be able to capture much information in a short time.

No one in the focus groups thought that measurements of these skills should be used in teacher evaluations. Many teachers believed that incorporating social and emotional skills in an accountability system would hurt morale, particularly in high-needs schools. Because a high percentage of students in high-needs schools may be facing personal and family challenges, such as food insecurity, those students may have lower average scores than those in more advantaged schools, so this approach could be harmful to high-needs schools. It could also work against high-needs schools if

...it is not clear which skills have the greatest influence on students' success, which skills are the most malleable, or which interventions are the most effective.

community members who see these results think the school's problems are insurmountable.

Conclusion

Social and emotional learning includes a range of competencies, such as self-regulation, resilience, grit, mind-

sets, efficacy, and belonging. The materials we reviewed suggest that many social and emotional skills have important benefits to students, but pose challenges for data collection. Research suggests that social emotional skills can help students succeed in school, and that teachers and schools have a significant role to play in creating an environment that fosters the development of these competencies and skills. However, it is not clear which skills have the greatest influence on students' success, which skills are the most malleable, or which interventions are the most effective.

In focus groups with NNSTOY teachers, participants shared their experiences and identified ways that schools and teachers can help students. They also identified some of the challenges to fostering social and emotional skills for students of different ages from diverse backgrounds. Teachers in our focus groups thought that some kinds of professional development would help teachers, but research has not shown how much and what types of preparation and professional learning teachers need to accurately assess students' needs and implement strategies to address them. Participants believed that it is important to help students develop social and emotional skills, but that such help needs to be tailored to the needs of students. A uniform approach to working with students on social emotional learning will not be effective if it does not respect students' needs.

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In addition to focusing on evaluating teachers and schools on students' progress on social emotional learning, states should consider promoting professional growth opportunities for teachers in identifying and addressing students' social and emotional learning needs. Scholars have developed surveys that can give teachers diagnostic and professional development information. Some states and districts are using student surveys to collect data about students' social and emotional skills. Teachers in the focus groups thought that results from data collection and analysis could inform professional development decisions at the school and identify community resources that could help students.

Currently, using this information in an accountability system or for teacher evaluations is relatively rare. Some researchers who have pioneered the use of these concepts (Duckworth) and the instruments to measure social and emotional skills (Ferguson) have expressed caution about using these measures in this way. These tools were not designed for an accountability system, and student responses may not be valid or reliable in this setting. Teachers in our focus groups raised several concerns about using such information in an accountability system. They said that using a formulaic approach to collecting and reporting data would not be an effective way to help students with their specific needs. If teachers do not get information in a timely way, they cannot help their students. One teacher said, "Anytime this data can affect how I work with or connect with students, then it is useful. But when it is standardized for the sake of collecting data and we won't get data back for months, then it is not useful." They noted that bias can occur with self-reporting, and that students may not answer questions honestly if they know their answers will be used in an accountability system.

Using measures of these skills in an accountability system may be detrimental. Many members of the community will not know how to understand the results, and may think that a school's problems are insurmountable. Further, although schools and teachers can help students develop these skills, much of student development is beyond the control of schools and teachers, as families and communities influence social and emotional learning. In general, the scores of schools with high-risk populations will differ from those of more advantaged schools. Using such information in an accountability system may particularly penalize teachers in high-needs settings. The teachers in our focus groups did believe that schools and teachers can influence the development of students' social and emotional learning and that they could learn from data about their students' skills. However, such information must be used in way that will ensure that schools and teachers get the resources needed to help students.

These tools were not designed for an accountability system, and student responses may not be valid or reliable in this setting.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

Consent

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this focus group with NNSTOY and RTI International, sponsored by the Raikes Foundation. We appreciate your willingness to participate.

The purpose of this group is to try and understand how your school collects data about students' social and emotional skills, and how administrators and teachers use that data. We want to learn your perspectives about these important factors facing teachers and students today. The information learned will be collected in a report, which will be shared on NNSTOY's website.

Your responses are critical to the success of this effort. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any question. Your decision to participate or not to participate will have no impact on your organization's relationship with NNSTOY. The purpose of this group is not to evaluate your particular school and your name will not be used in any reports.

Although the focus group will be recorded, your responses will remain anonymous.

Ground Rules

There are no right or wrong answers.

It's important to speak one at a time and to state your first name each time before speaking.

It's important that everyone participate.

It's okay to have differing points of view.

1. Please introduce yourselves. Tell us your name, the state in which you teach, the grades and subjects taught, and your years of experience teaching.
Before the call we shared a summary about nonacademic, or social and emotional, student skills - grit, sense of belonging, and growth mindset. Research shows these skills help students succeed in school. Some schools, districts, and states are collecting information about students' social and emotional skills through activities such as student surveys.
2. Does your school try to collect this type of information?
[If so] How does your school do this? How do they collect data? How often do they collect data?
3. Do you get the results of this information?
[If so] How do you use the information from it? [Probe . . . Do you get data about individual students or classroom-level data? Do you have opportunities for professional development opportunities aligned with the results? Does your school work with other agencies in the district to learn why students face challenges with nonacademic skills?]
4. What aspects of the school environment do you think might help students develop these nonacademic skills? [Probe – culture, policies]
5. In what ways do you think teachers can develop their students' nonacademic skills?

6. What challenges / obstacles do schools and teachers face in helping students develop these skills?

Some schools, districts, and states are planning to use information they collect about student social and emotional skills in their accountability systems.

7. Is your state/district doing / planning to do this?
8. Are there advantages to incorporating information about nonacademic skills into an accountability system?
9. Are there challenges to doing this?
10. What kinds of information about helping students develop their nonacademic skills would be helpful to you?

Appendix B: Characteristics of Focus Group Participants (N=28)

Table B1. Participants' Years of Teaching Experience

Number of Years Teaching	Percentage (Number) of Participants
<= 5	0
6–10	7% (2)
11–15	21% (6)
16+	72% (20)

Table B2. Participants with Schools in each Locale

Locale	Percentage (Number) of Participants
Rural	25% (7)
Suburban	50% (14)
Urban	25% (7)

Table B3. Participants by Grade Level of Students Taught

Grade level	Percentage (Number) of Participants
Elementary	29% (8)
Secondary	54% (15)
Other*	17% (5)

*Includes participants who are no longer teaching in individual classroom, but rather working with students and/or multiple teachers as instructional coaches, through higher education teacher preparation programs, or through state education agencies.

Table B4. Participants by School Size

Student Population	Percentage (Number) of Participants
< = 500	25% (7)
501–1,000	43% (12)
1,001–1,500	14% (4)
1,501–2,000	4% (1)
2,001+	4% (1)
Other*	10% (3)

*Participants serve district- or school-wide or at the state level

Table B5. Participants by School Percentage of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch

Percentage of Students Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	Percentage (Number) of Participants
< 33%	29% (8)
33–66%	39% (11)
67% +	25% (7)
Other*	7% (2)

*Participants are affiliated with or serve higher education or state education agencies.

