



# Using Social-Emotional Learning Data in the CORE Districts: Lessons Learned

*For years, student test scores drove much of the conversation about school quality and student learning. But new state plans under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) show that policymakers are using a broader set of measures to assess school quality. In addition to math and reading performance, many states will also look at core subjects such as science, as well as nonacademic indicators such as student perceptions of school culture and student engagement. As state and local leaders begin implementing their ESSA plans, learning from others in the field who have already begun using nonacademic measures will be valuable. This resource provides a framework for states and districts to better understand the CORE Districts' work measuring and reporting on nonacademic indicators over the past five years.*

The shifting perspective on school quality is not happening just among policymakers: 82 percent of Americans say it is highly important for schools to help students develop interpersonal skills such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems.<sup>1</sup> And 91 percent of families are interested in knowing about their child's social-emotional learning (SEL).<sup>2</sup>

What is less obvious, however, is how to accurately measure and assess these skills, especially ones that fall into the category of SEL. However, places such as California's CORE Districts provide examples to learn from so states can better understand how they might approach this work.

"[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."

—*Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)*

## SCHOOL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INDEX

The CORE Districts' **School Quality Improvement Index** is what the CORE Districts use to assess school quality and includes both academic and nonacademic indicators.

**Academic indicators** (60 percent of a district's score) include measures such as proficiency, growth, graduation rate, and high school readiness (middle school only). **Nonacademic indicators** (40 percent of a district's score) include measures such as chronic absenteeism, suspension/expulsion rate, social-emotional skills, and English language learner redesignation rate, among others.

"The CORE Districts have designed a rigorous accountability structure ... [that] recognizes the **importance of factors beyond academic preparedness** [and] values **multiple measures of student success** in the social/emotional domain, as well as the **critical importance of a school and district's culture** and climate."

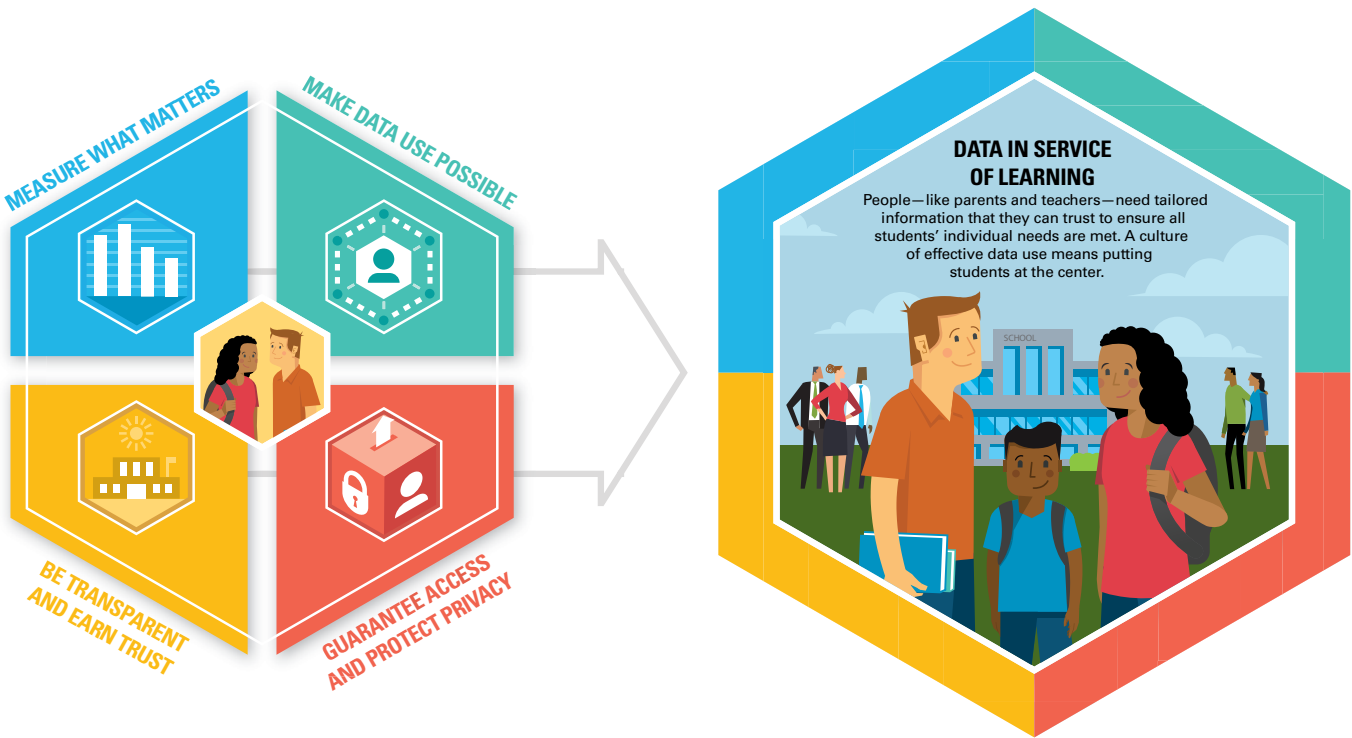
—*CORE District No Child Left Behind waiver language*



In 2013, the **CORE Districts** (then consisting of 10 districts from across California) received a No Child Left Behind waiver that allowed them to use their own rigorous accountability system instead of California's.<sup>3</sup> The CORE Districts' new accountability and reporting system used a pioneering approach to understanding school and district performance by looking at a variety of indicators focused on the "whole child," not just singular data points such as test scores.<sup>4</sup> Central to this approach was the inclusion of SEL competencies, which meant that for the first time, participating districts and schools would be accountable for both the academic and the nonacademic outcomes of their students.

To better understand how the CORE Districts approached this groundbreaking work, the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) conducted an analysis through the lens of its **Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students**, using first-person interviews and existing case studies of the CORE Districts. DQC's Priorities articulate how policymakers and leaders at all levels can transform education data from a tool of compliance to one that empowers people and fuels continuous improvement. Exploring the CORE Districts' work through these Priorities can help inform states and districts as they consider how to measure and report on SEL.

### Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students



## MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Be clear about what students must achieve and have the data to ensure that all students are on track to succeed.



What a state or district chooses to measure and track is a statement about what it values. The CORE Districts' inclusion of SEL indicators in their accountability system was a clear signal of the shared belief that these skills are important and should be part of school and district performance evaluations. CORE leaders also knew,

however, that to have support for this innovative approach, the new indicators had to be seen as legitimate. Therefore, CORE leaders spent extensive time researching and learning about how to choose the strongest SEL indicators.

Informed by intentional partnerships with researchers and SEL experts, the CORE Districts focused on identifying social-emotional competencies that passed the “3Ms Test,” meaning they have the following characteristics:

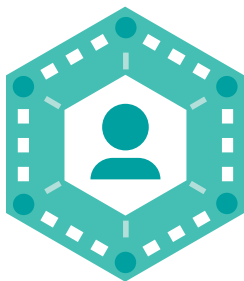
1. **Meaningful:** are predictive of important student outcomes
2. **Measurable:** can be reliably measured with a valid assessment
3. **Malleable:** can be taught or developed in school<sup>5</sup>

Given that the CORE Districts were the first to include these kinds of measures in their accountability system, this evidence-based approach was essential to making sure that the data collected was valued and trustworthy. The intentional partnerships CORE leaders built with key research partners also leveraged the power and scale of the new accountability system, helping leaders understand and evaluate the system itself and providing the field with much-needed data to explore the broader implications of this work.

The CORE Districts **Measured What Matters** by designing an accountability system that reflected the needs and priorities of district leaders and by choosing research-based indicators that teachers and leaders could trust. In doing this, the CORE Districts created a data system that not only helps people answer critical questions about student learning but also fuels a culture of growth and continuous improvement.

## MAKE DATA USE POSSIBLE

Provide teachers and leaders the flexibility, training, and support they need to answer their questions and take action.



CORE leaders prioritized people throughout the process of developing and implementing the new measures. They understood that collecting this new data was only one piece of the work and ensuring that people understood and used the information would be key to making this effort successful. CORE leaders also

knew that a one-size-fits-all approach was not the answer, so they worked to find a balance between providing centralized support to districts and letting them maintain their autonomy and do what worked best for their communities.

CORE leaders provided centralized support in the following ways:

- creating professional development opportunities for lower-performing schools and districts through partnerships with higher-performing schools and districts to encourage peer-to-peer learning and best-practice sharing

- offering and leading trainings for districts on high-demand issues and topics
- providing a survey (the tool used to assess SEL competencies in the classroom) with standardized instructions to maintain consistency in survey administration

CORE leaders created space for autonomy in the following ways:

- providing guidance and norms, not mandates, around how leaders might share and talk about their school or district data
- giving districts flexibility by allowing them to use an existing survey instrument if they preferred

CORE leaders **Made Data Use Possible** by providing needed capacity building and training around the new data system while also recognizing the importance of giving districts the autonomy to collect and use the data in ways that worked for their specific contexts. These efforts remain a priority for CORE leaders as they continue to explore how best to support teachers and school leaders around effectively using this data to continuously improve their practice.

## BE TRANSPARENT AND EARN TRUST

Ensure that every community understands how its schools and students are doing, why data is valuable, and how it is protected and used.



From the inception of this work, CORE leaders engaged district leaders and staff in ongoing and purposeful ways. First, they convened representatives from across districts, including superintendents and data leads, to help choose the SEL indicators for the accountability system. These meetings were essential to helping district leadership

understand what the new indicators meant, how that data might be collected, and why it would be valuable to their work with students.

CORE leaders continued to engage stakeholders throughout implementation by using a tiered roll-out and feedback process. After the SEL indicators were selected, new assessments were piloted in 18 schools across six districts for real user testing. Based on feedback from the pilot, CORE leaders continued to refine the survey and then conducted districtwide field tests, with almost half a million students participating. Each step included clear avenues for feedback, which gave the leadership time to work out challenges and ensure that people understood the new survey tool and indicators months before they would be held accountable to them.

The CORE Districts **Were Transparent and Earned Trust** by giving district leaders ownership of the process and creating meaningful opportunities for testing and feedback. A clear focus on transparency and trust building meant that stakeholders on the ground saw value in the work and committed to the new system.

### CORE'S SEL COMPETENCIES

- **Growth Mindset:** The belief that one's abilities can grow with effort. Students with a growth mindset see effort as necessary for success, embrace challenges, learn from criticism, and persist in the face of setbacks.
- **Self-Efficacy:** The belief in one's own ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and environment.
- **Self-Management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This competency includes managing stress, delaying gratification, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals.
- **Social Awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures; understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

## GUARANTEE ACCESS AND PROTECT PRIVACY

Provide teachers and parents timely information on their students and make sure it is kept safe.



For many states and local education agencies, individualizing access to data for teachers, parents, and students is the next step in ensuring that everyone involved in a child's education has the information they need to make decisions. As the CORE Districts continue to refine their processes for sharing data, they already have a strong foundation from which to build.

For example, teachers in some participating districts are already able to access their students' data from the SEL surveys through a partnership with Panorama Education (a service provider CORE

partners with to help administer the survey). Aggregate data is also available across all indicators in the School Quality Improvement Index through a data dashboard that all districts can access. The CORE Districts also engaged experts to ensure that all student data is appropriately de-identified as needed and that strong data privacy policies are in place to protect student information.

The CORE Districts **Guaranteed Access and Protected Privacy** by giving specific people appropriate role-based access to relevant data, while also maintaining critical privacy protections. The next step to advance work in this Priority will be to determine the best way to ensure that all parents and families can access information about their own students in real time so they can be strong and effective advocates.

## Lessons Learned

The CORE Districts' work and experience provide states and districts with a rich set of lessons learned to build from as they begin to tackle this work in their own communities. As leaders consider including new measures in their accountability and reporting systems, they should take the following steps:

- 1. Prioritize people.** Make sure that the individuals who will be responsible for implementing new assessments or using and interpreting new data are purposefully included throughout the development and implementation processes. Leaders can build a strong foundation of trust and support by engaging critical stakeholders, including families, from the beginning.
- 2. Focus on continuous improvement.** This work cannot be a one-time project. Leaders must be open to iteration and refinement as new tools and resources are developed and rolled out. Creating time and space for feedback not only builds trust but also helps ensure continued buy-in and support for the work. With the passage of ESSA, the CORE Districts' original accountability system has evolved into a robust data system that is focused on providing district leaders with useful data that fuels continuous improvement across all indicators.
- 3. Invest in partnerships.** This work would not have been possible without the critical input of subject matter experts from across the field. Leveraging the expertise of external partners helps ensure that policies are evidence based and meaningful. Partnerships can also help reduce some of the burden on district and state staff by providing additional support and guidance.

### RESOURCES

*Expanding the Definition of Student Success: A Case Study of the CORE Districts* (Transforming Education): An in-depth review and analysis of the CORE Districts' accountability system, featuring tools and templates to help leaders doing this work

*None of Us Are as Good as All of Us: Early Lessons from the CORE Districts* (American Institutes for Research): An in-depth analysis of the CORE Districts' early years

*Opportunities to Make Data Work for Students in the Every Student Succeeds Act* (DQC): An outline of the opportunities within ESSA to use data to examine what is working for students—and what is not—to meet states' education goals

*Time to Act 2017: Put Data in the Hands of People* (DQC): A summary of states' efforts to act on DQC's previously released Four Policy Priorities

## Endnotes

1. 2017 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools: <http://pdkpoll.org/results>.
2. Online survey conducted within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of DQC from April 7 to 20, 2017, among 1,212 parents of child(ren) ages 5–17, among which 1,135 are parents with child(ren) ages 5–17 who attend school.
3. The 10 districts were Clovis, Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Sanger, and Santa Ana.
4. *Expanding the Definition of Student Success: A Case Study of the CORE Districts*, Transforming Education (2006).
5. For more information on the 3Ms Test see Transforming Education's *Expanding the Definition of Student Success: A Case Study of the CORE Districts*.



The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to bring every part of the education community together to empower educators, families, and policymakers with quality information to make decisions that ensure that students excel. For more information, go to [www.dataqualitycampaign.org](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) (@EdDataCampaign).