Expanding the Definition of Student Success:

A Case Study of the CORE Districts

A Case Study by

SARA BARTOLINO KRACHMAN
REBECCA ARNOLD
& ROBERT LAROCCA

v1.0 September 2016

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the district leaders, educators, policymakers, funders, and other colleagues who generously contributed their time, insight, and knowledge to this paper.

We also gratefully acknowledge the many colleagues who reviewed early drafts of this report and provided thoughtful and comprehensive feedback, which informed and improved the final product. We appreciate the members of the CORE Districts and Transforming Education teams, whose input strengthened the paper's clarity and structure. Finally, we thank the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation for their support of this case study.

About Our Working Papers

Transforming Education is pleased to issue a series of working papers that are meant to distill information of value to educators, policymakers, and others in the field of Mindsets, Essential Skills, & Habits (MESH) in a form that can be readily updated as knowledge continues to emerge and be refined. Our working papers summarize the current state of knowledge and evidence about which skills matter for success in school, college, career, and life; how we can responsibly measure and build those skills; and which supports are needed for districts and schools to implement best practices. Because the MESH field is constantly evolving, we expect to revise our working papers periodically. Moreover, we hope educators, researchers, and policymakers will share additional research and effective practices related to MESH skill development.

If you have feedback on this working paper or want to share your own approach to incorporating MESH in your district or school, please e-mail press@transformingeducation.org.

> We have known for a long time that academic performance is one of many factors that make a great school, but CORE districts are now serving as a model for how we can actually measure these factors and look more holistically at school outcomes. Working together, educators have created an Index that captures more information that matters, and it has great potential to help schools and districts meet the needs of our students.[1]

RAMON CORTINES
Former Superintendent
Los Angeles Unified School District

> It's a flashlight, not a hammer. The school districts participating in the development and use of the Index have chosen to shine a brighter, wider light on the needs of all students and on their own educational strategies and practices. They are not seeking to avoid accountability, but rather to create a better, more comprehensive system to inform and guide the efforts of schools to improve learning opportunities for students.[2]

MICHAEL HANSON
Superintendent
Fresno Unified School District

> [The CORE Districts' multi-metric Index]… provides actionable places for school leaders and communities to focus their improvement work… The Index helps us to learn from schools that are succeeding, as well as to better understand both academic and culture-climate and social-emotional factors among schools that may be in need of intervention and support.[3]

RICHARD CARRANZA
Former Superintendent
San Francisco Unified School District

Introduction

States across the country are beginning to consider the opportunities that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents to expand their definition of student success. As state leaders engage a diverse group of stakeholders and consider how to act on research about the broad range of factors that prepare students for college, career, and life, the CORE Districts offer one example of how the new flexibility of ESSA can support a more holistic vision of student success and school quality.

The CORE Districts—representing Los Angeles, Long Beach, Santa Ana, Garden Grove, Fresno, San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento unified districts—have a six-year history of collaboration to innovate, implement, and scale strategies that improve outcomes for over one million students. Through a No Child Left Behind waiver granted in 2013, the CORE Districts have implemented a holistic system of accountability and continuous improvement that focuses on students' social-emotional skills and school climate/culture alongside academic outcomes.[4] A deep commitment to peer learning and mutual accountability amongst educators serves as the bedrock of the system, reflecting the district leaders' shared belief that accountability should be linked to meaningful capacity building and motivated by educators' intrinsic desire to help students succeed.

This case study provides an overview of the CORE Districts' groundbreaking data system and the ways in which this system has been operationalized in practice. We will look in depth at how social-emotional competencies—a key component of the system—were prioritized and assessed. We will conclude with lessons learned about the CORE Districts' innovative system that can inform other next-generation assessment and continuous improvement efforts, including those catalyzed by ESSA.

Embedded throughout the case study are links to select tools that states and districts may use to learn from, adapt, or replicate components of the CORE Districts' approach. In providing these simple tools, we seek to provide insight into individual pieces of the complex, multi-year undertaking of the CORE Districts and to highlight key elements that may translate to other education systems. It is important to note that the CORE Districts were able to take on this ambitious body of work in part because they partnered with researchers, funders, and technical assistance providers in areas ranging from assessment to continuous improvement methodology. With the benefit of these additional resources and through deep collaboration with educators, district leaders, and external partners, the CORE Districts have built a compelling example of what is possible when we expand our definition of student success to include a broad range of factors that help students thrive not only in school, but also in life.

TOOL 1

Ready To Be Counted: The Research Case for Education Policy Action on Non-Cognitive Skills

This tool, created and published by TransformEd, synthesizes a compelling body of research showing that social-emotional skills have a significant impact on students' academic, career, and life outcomes. Click here to download the tool.

I. Introduction: Development of the CORE Districts' No Child Left Behind Waiver and Overview of the School Quality Improvement System

History of the CORE Districts

The roots of the CORE Districts are grounded in the California Collaborative on District Reform—established in 2006 to create a network of education reformers committed to learning from each other by sharing best practices—and in the Urban Education Dialogue (UED), a group of urban superintendents who met regularly to share challenges they faced, discuss programs that were buildings solutions, and provide important peer feedback.[5] Several superintendents who participated in these groups collaborated with other stakeholders from across the state to design a federal Race to the Top (phase II) application for California.[6] While the application was unsuccessful, the participating superintendents decided to join together to build upon the principles of district collaboration to propel innovation. In 2010, ten districts went on to form the CORE Districts under the auspices of California Education Partners (Ed Partners), which was founded by Rick Miller, Phil Halperin, and Natasha Hoehn.[7] The original CORE districts were Clovis, Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Sanger, and Santa Ana. Between 2010 and 2014, the CORE districts collaborated on a number of joint projects such as the development of performance assessments and the rollout of the Common Core. Based on their shared vision of collaboration that improves student outcomes and governance that enables flexibility, innovation, and dissemination of best practices, the CORE districts decided to jointly submit a No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver application as a consortium of districts.

Developing the No Child Left Behind Waiver

In response to criticism about NCLB's stringent requirements, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) began allowing states to submit applications to waive select provisions of NCLB by demonstrating a robust, state-created accountability plan to "improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction."[8] As of 2015, there were 43 states that had waivers approved by USED.

In 2013, Rick Miller, the CORE Districts' Executive Director, and Michelle Steagall, the CORE Districts' Chief Academic Officer, led the effort to develop an NCLB waiver application[9] with the original CORE districts. The CORE Districts Board, which is comprised of the districts' superintendents, helped make critical decisions about the content of the waiver. The CORE Districts wanted to pursue a vastly different type of accountability system that analyzed districts' performance across a range of measures that encompassed the whole child, rather than solely looking at standardized test scores and graduation rates.

In particular, the CORE Districts wanted to incorporate social-emotional (SE) skills and school culture/climate (CC), alongside academics in a holistic index of school quality. They prioritized SE skills because of: 1) the research demonstrating that these skills were key to students' academic, career, and life success;[10] 2) the benefits that Oakland and Sacramento had seen in implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) in their districts; and 3) the CORE districts' common recognition that these skills were an important element that was missing from their existing data dashboards given their belief in measuring what matters.

Ultimately, the approach that the CORE Districts proposed in their waiver application was novel both in the metrics it used and in the underlying values it embodied. The following excerpt from the CORE Districts' waiver application cover letter highlights these values:

"With this waiver request, the participating districts do not seek to escape from accountability. Instead, they seek a waiver to [create] a new system with a higher level of shared responsibility and accountability and are ready to be held to a more comprehensive and higher standard on a range of measures that collectively are superior indicators of students' college and career readiness, and more effective drivers of change."[12]

The CORE Districts' School Quality Improvement System

In August 2013, USED approved the the CORE Districts' NCLB waiver application, authorizing their innovative School Quality Improvement System (SQIS). The key tenets of the SQIS are captured in its four "foundational goals:"

1. College and career ready expectations for all students. This indicates a commitment to equity through high expectations for all students.
2. A focus on collective responsibility, accountability, and action that emphasizes capacity-building over accountability.
3. The development of intrinsic motivation for change through differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for schools.
4. Focused capacity-building for effective instruction and leadership.[13]

The first principle indicates support of high standards for all students, coupled with a strong commitment to eliminate disparity and disproportionality across subgroups of students. Rather than the CORE Districts issuing mandates on how to do this, the individual districts make their own instructional and programming decisions, which exemplifies the CORE Districts' commitment to balancing system coherence with district autonomy. The second and third principles focus on developing a holistic measurement system (explained below) in which all educators assume collective responsibility for all students' success, rather than employing the type of punitive and compliance-oriented accountability that operates in so many education systems. Pursuant to the fourth principle, capacity building for schools and districts occurs by pairing higher- and lower-performing schools in school pairings or communities of practice (see pp. 21-22 for more detail) to engage in continuous improvement. Moreover, the CORE Districts offer professional development, tools, research, convenings to support educators and district leaders in sharing best practices and lessons learned.

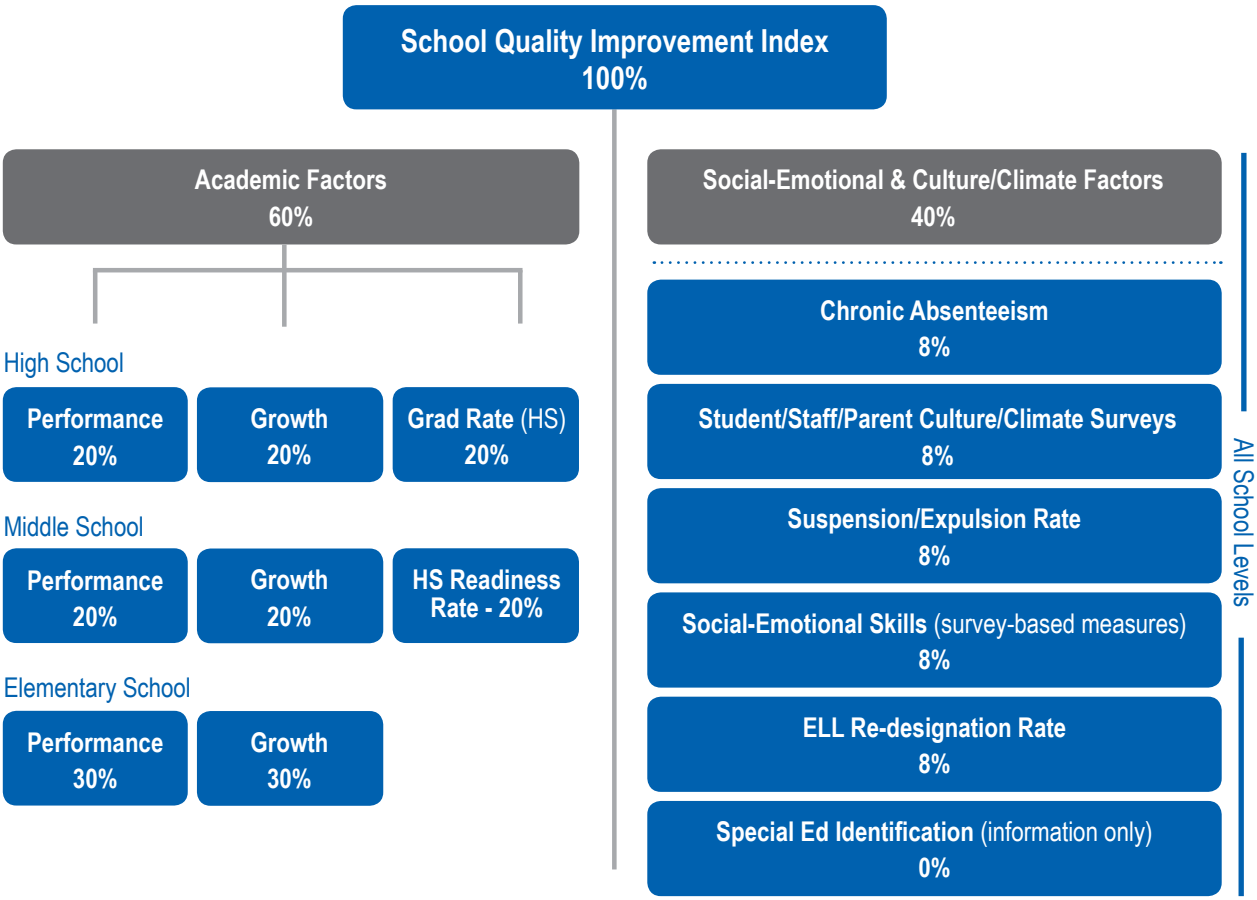
School Quality Improvement Index

The CORE Districts' School Quality Improvement Index ("SQII" or "Index") is a key component of the School Quality Improvement System ("SQIS"). While the SQIS refers to the full system of accountability and continuous improvement (including capacity building structures like the school pairings and communities of practice), the Index is the quantitative formula used to assess school quality. The Index includes measures of academic performance, social-emotional (SE) competencies, and culture/climate (CC) in a holistic measure of student success and school quality.

The Index was rolled out in several phases over the course of 3 years (2013-16; see Appendix 2 for the full rollout timeline). The diagram above shows the full index once its rollout was complete. Academics account for 60% of the Index, while social-emotional and school culture/climate factors account for 40%.[14] (See Figure 1 and Box III for a detailed description of each component of the Index.)

The decisions that the districts made regarding weighting allocations and methods for calculating particular indicators reflect the core values undergirding their system. For example, to prioritize the elimination of

FIGURE 1 The CORE Districts' accountability system incorporates academic, SEL, and culture/climate measures



disparity and disproportionality between subgroups,[15] the CORE Districts decreased the "n size," which is the minimum number of students in a subgroup for which they will report data. Instead of 100 students—the "n size" that many school districts use—the CORE districts report data on all subgroups with 20 or more students. This ensures that a greater number of students are included in the conversation when the CORE districts reflect on student outcomes, while also balancing concern for student privacy. Similarly, to prioritize their commitment to continuous improvement, the CORE Districts have committed to revising the weighting of different variables over time based on feedback from participating stakeholders and new developments in research.

TOOL II **Guiding Questions Regarding Accountability and Continuous Improvement System Values**

This tool outlines guiding questions that can help clarify and articulate the values you seek to uphold while designing an accountability and continuous improvement system. Click here to download the tool.

Selecting Social-Emotional Competencies to Measure

While the CORE Districts committed in their waiver to measure students' social-emotional development, they did not identify the specific social-emotional competencies or assessments they would use. Accordingly, one of the first steps after the waiver's approval was to prioritize an initial set of social-emotional competencies and identify promising measures for each. In November 2013, the CORE Districts convened social-emotional learning (SEL) experts and representatives from each of the CORE districts, including superintendents, directors of student support, directors of social-emotional learning, and directors of special education. The SEL experts in attendance were from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the John W. Gardner Center for Youth at Stanford, and TransformEd. TransformEd recommended selecting specific social-emotional competencies based on the extent to which each competency was meaningful, measureable, and malleable (see Box I below for more information on the "3Ms"). Additionally, the CORE Districts prioritized identifying at least one intrapersonal skill and one interpersonal skill in their initial set of SE competencies. This ensured that there was a broad array of competencies that would yield complementary data.

BOX I TransformEd's 3M's Filter

TransformEd proposed three key criteria for selecting social-emotional competencies: they needed to be meaningful, measureable, and malleable (or meet the "3M's test").[16]

MEANINGFUL indicates that a particular competency is predictive of important academic, career, and life outcomes.

MEASUREABLE indicates that the competency can be measured reliably through a valid assessment that is feasible to administer at scale in schools.

MALLEABLE indicates that there is research showing that the competency can be developed in a school setting.

TOOL III The 3Ms Framework

This tool can help clarify which social-emotional skills you may want to prioritize in your state or district based on the existing body of research. Click here to download the tool.

Ultimately, district representatives and SEL content experts used a voting process to prioritize specific SE and CC competencies for inclusion in the SQII. Through this process, four SE competencies were prioritized: growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness. (See Box II on the next page for definitions of the competencies.) The CORE Districts acknowledge that this is not a comprehensive set of SE competencies; rather they believe that it is a reasonable starting point that passes the "3Ms Test" and includes a mix of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. The CORE Districts may choose to refine this set of skills over time as further research emerges. For example, collaborative problem solving was almost incorporated into the initial set of competencies, but the CORE Districts elected to wait until the PISA 2015 test had

piloted new performance-based measures of this competency before considering it for inclusion in the SQII in future years.

TOOL IV **Social-Emotional Competencies Selection Process**

This tool describes a process that can be used with a diverse group of stakeholders to select and prioritize a limited number of social-emotional competencies for your state or district to focus on. Click here to download the tool.

BOX II **Definitions of the Four Social-Emotional Competencies Prioritized by the CORE Districts**

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.[17]

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 motivation, behavior, and environment.[18]

SELF-MANAGEMENT: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, delaying gratification, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals.[19]

SOCIAL AWARENESS: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.[20]

While the process of selecting competencies included stakeholders from within each district, the primary decision-makers were SEL content experts and district-level staff. Unfortunately, the CORE Districts were unable to conduct a more comprehensive stakeholder engagement process for the competency selection component of the waiver due to the time constraints in place: the CORE Districts received approval in August 2013 and had to administer social-emotional surveys just a few months later in order to pilot the measures before rolling them out district-wide. That said, the initial development of the waiver–including the idea of measuring SE skills as part of the SQII–incorporated feedback from key stakeholder groups such as teachers, principals, community members, and parents. The CORE Districts have continued to engage these stakeholders throughout the implementation of the waiver. If other districts or states undergo a similar process, they should consider building in additional time to incorporate ample input from teachers, principals, parents, community members, and employers into the decision-making process (e.g., through surveys, focus groups, and community meetings, etc.). Doing so builds broader buy-in and ensures that the competencies selected are responsive to community needs and values.

Overview of All Index Indicators

The four SE competencies described above make up one part of the holistic SQII. The other indicators included in the SQII are described in more detail in Box III.

BOX III Description of All Index Components

Social-emotional & culture/climate

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: The percent of students who have an attendance rate at or below 90% within a given school year.

CULTURE/CLIMATE SURVEYS: Results from surveys of students (grades 4-12), teachers, and parents that include questions about a climate of support for academic learning; sense of belonging and school connectedness; knowledge and perceived fairness of discipline rules and norms; and safety.

SUSPENSION/EXPULSION RATES: The percent of students who are suspended and/or expelled at least once in a given school year.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS: Student self-report surveys in grades 4-12 that measure growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness. (Some districts also use teacher reports on students' SE competencies, though these do not currently factor into the districts' Index score.)

ELL RE-DESIGNATION RATES: This measure captures the percentage of students who move from English language learner status to "fluent English proficient" status, rather than becoming "long-term English learners."

Special education identification (information only) Identifies subgroups that are overrepresented in special education (when the overrepresentation is statistically significant with 99% confidence).

Academics

PERFORMANCE: The percent of students at grade level for English/language arts and mathematics, based on Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test scores.[21]

GROWTH:[22] For the purposes of the Index, the CORE Districts Growth model will be designed to look at the extent to which schools have helped students move from point A to point B relative to students who started the school year in a similar place (e.g., in terms of prior achievement and potentially in terms of observable demographics like English Learner status or free and reduced price lunch status). For more details on how the CORE Districts plan to measure growth, please see their full metric definition.

HIGH SCHOOL READINESS:[23] The percent of all 8th grade students who meet the following criteria: 1) 8th grade GPA of 2.5 or higher; 2) attendance of 96% or higher; 3) no final course grades of D or F in ELA or math; and 4) were not suspended in 8th grade.[24]

GRADUATION: The 4-year cohort graduation rate, which considers how many students graduate compared with the number of students enrolled in the school (accounting for students who transfer into and out of the school). 5- and 6-year cohort graduation rates are also included in the Index results.

II. Moving from Competencies to Measures

This section explains the process the CORE Districts used to select, pilot and field test measures of the SE and CC competencies prioritized for inclusion in the Index.

Selecting the Social-Emotional Measures

Once the SE competencies of growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness were prioritized (see pp. 8), TransformEd conducted a scan of the field to identify the most promising measures for each competency, using the following set of criteria:

Evidence-based: The measures needed to demonstrate emerging evidence of validity and reliability (further evidence would be gathered through the CORE Districts' own pilot and field test). They must also have "face validity" for educators, meaning that educators believe the scales measure what they intend to measure.

Free to administer: To ensure the financial sustainability of the CORE Districts' system, the measures needed to be free to use. In order to secure free measures, TransformEd went directly to the leading SEL researchers to obtain permission to use the SE measures they had developed. (See Figure 2 on next page outlining each competency and the associated researcher's measures.) While this process was time-consuming, it was preferable to going through third party assessment providers that would charge a per student or per school licensing fee for the measures every year.

Practical to administer: The measures needed to be simple to administer to students in grades 4 and up, with as little administrative burden as possible. Districts asked that there be both online and paper-based options for administering the measures given the limitations of districts' technology infrastructure at the time. Further, the districts asked that the measures be feasible to administer in conjunction with existing survey administration efforts to minimize the burden of administering a separate assessment.

Parsimonious: The assessments needed to use the fewest number of items possible to get valid, reliable results. This principle was responsive to concerns about "over testing" students, and to teachers' and administrators' desire to protect instructional time. The CORE Districts aimed for students to be able to complete SE survey items in approximately 10 minutes and CC items in 10 minutes, which made it possible for students to complete the full survey within one class period. There was a clear recognition that using proxies like attendance, grades, and discipline rates could round out the picture of students' SE skills without overburdening students through lengthy assessments.

Strengths-based: The CORE Districts had a preference for questions framed in a positive manner whenever possible (unless research showed that particular negatively-phrased scale was more valid or reliable). An example of a positively-framed item is: "I can earn an A in my classes." Whereas, the following is an example of a negatively-framed item: "My intelligence is something that I can't change very much."

Given these criteria, TransformEd spoke with leading experts in SE assessment—including Lisa Blackwell, Clancy Blair, Eduardo Briceño, Celene Domitrovich, Angela Duckworth, Carol Dweck, Camille Farrington, Greg Walton, Roger Weissberg, and David Yeager—and curated the best available measures based on the criteria outlined above. (See Figure 2 for the primary source of each measure.)

Once TransformEd had identified potential measures based on the input of multiple researchers, district staff members vetted the measures and provided feedback. Ultimately, the CORE Districts Board approved the final set of measures in December 2013, requesting that the measures be piloted with a small group of schools in spring 2014 and field tested with all schools in spring 2015 before being formally included in the SQII.

TOOL V **Panorama Education's Assessment Design Checklist**

Using a research-backed approach, this tool can help you improve an existing survey design instrument or select a new one. Click here to download the tool.

FIGURE 2 Key Experts Consulted

	Student Self Report (Grades 5-12)	Teacher Report (Grades K-12)	Key Experts Consulted
Self-Management	✓	✓	Angela Duckworth (University of Pennsylvania) Clancy Blair (New York University)
Social Awareness	✓	✓	CASEL American Institutes of Research
Self-Efficacy	✓		Camille Farrington (Consortium on Chicago School Research - CCSR)
Growth Mindset	✓		Camille Farrington (CCSR) Carol Dweck (Stanford University)

Pilot Testing

The CORE Districts conducted a pilot test of the SE measures in spring 2014, collecting approximately 9,000 student self-reports and 1,000 teacher reports. During this pilot, two different forms of the student self-report surveys and teacher surveys were randomly assigned to participants. For each competency, one of the forms used the original measure developed by a contributing researcher and the other form provided a modified version developed in partnership with Dr. Hunter Gehlbach to reflect emerging best practices in survey design (e.g., removing double-barreled items, translating statements into questions, etc.).

The CORE Districts, TransformEd, and researchers at Harvard's Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) compared the two forms of each measure to identify the more promising form based on the following criteria: 1) validity, including correlations with validating scales and correlations with external variables; and 2) internal reliability. The scales that performed the best across these two criteria were then tested at much greater scale during the 2015 field test.

BOX IV Mitigating the risk of biases inherent in surveys

Prior to implementing the pilot test, the CORE Districts were concerned about addressing three major issues regarding bias in survey administration: reference bias, social desirability bias, and stereotype threat. The CORE Districts were thoughtful in implementing a variety of approaches to mitigate these concerns. Current data analyses show no clear evidence that these issues impacted the results of the survey.[25]

REFERENCE BIAS refers to the tendency for individuals' survey responses to be influenced by the context in which the survey is administered. Experts in reference bias point out that the culture of a school might influence a students' frame of reference, which may in turn cause the student to interpret a survey scale differently than students from other schools.[26] For example, students attending a school that heavily emphasizes self-management might develop higher internal standards for self-management. Such students might then rate themselves lower on a self-reported measure of self-management than students in a school that does not emphasize this competency.[27]

To mitigate concerns about reference bias, the CORE Districts partnered with ETS to pilot anchoring vignettes, a technique that uses brief descriptions of sample students who exhibit varying levels of the target competency as a tool for norming students' responses to ensure comparability. Ultimately, the analyses conducted by Harvard CEPR showed that using anchoring vignettes did not improve the quality of the survey data. One possible interpretation of this finding is that the school cultures vis-à-vis the relevant SE competencies were not dramatically different from one another, so students taking the surveys at different schools had relatively similar frames of reference. This interpretation is supported by additional findings from Professor Marty West and the Harvard CEPR team. Ultimately, the CORE Districts decided not to use anchoring vignettes during the 2014-15 field test because the participating districts felt that any potential research benefit to including them was outweighed by the practical goal of minimizing testing time.

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY BIAS refers to the tendency for individuals' survey responses to be influenced by social pressures.[28] For example, if a survey asks how often a student is polite to adults, the student may answer "almost all the time," even if the response of "almost never" more accurately reflects her behavior because she knows that it is socially desirable to be polite to adults. The CORE Districts' attempt to mitigate this issue in two ways: 1) by explicitly stating that students' survey responses will remain confidential and will not influence grades or other assessments of the students' performance; and 2) by asking the adults who proctor survey administration to stand at the back of the classroom instead of circulating around the classroom so that students feel they can complete their survey without being judged by a teacher or other adult.

STEREOTYPE THREAT refers to the tendency for individuals' survey responses to be influenced by the respondents' perception of how people in their group (e.g., racial, ethnic, or socio-economic class) are believed by others to perform in that competency area.[29] According to the research on stereotype threat, students who are asked to report their gender or ethnicity before completing an assessment are more likely to perform in a manner consistent with their perception of how people in their particular group are believed by others to perform. For example, when female students were asked to report their gender before taking a math test, they performed worse on that test than their peers with similar levels of math skill.[30] The CORE Districts address this concern by including demographic questions only at the end of the survey or by removing all demographic questions from the survey and using a bar code as a confidential student identifier.

Pilot Test Results

Upon completion of the pilot test, researchers at Harvard CEPR analyzed the correlation of each survey form with students' GPA, suspension, absences, and standardized test scores. The scales from each form that demonstrated the strongest correlations with other student outcomes (e.g., grades, attendance, etc.) and met internal reliability standards were selected for use in the large-scale field test conducted in 2014-2015.[31]

After completing the pilot study, the participating districts received reports of the SE survey data, which they used to inform their understanding of the connection between students' SE skills and other student outcomes such as grades, test scores, and attendance. The participating districts also offered feedback to the CORE Districts and TransformEd about the survey administration process. For example, they suggested combining the social-emotional and culture-climate items into a single survey, which the CORE Districts did for the 2014-15 field test.

TOOL VI **Measuring MESH**

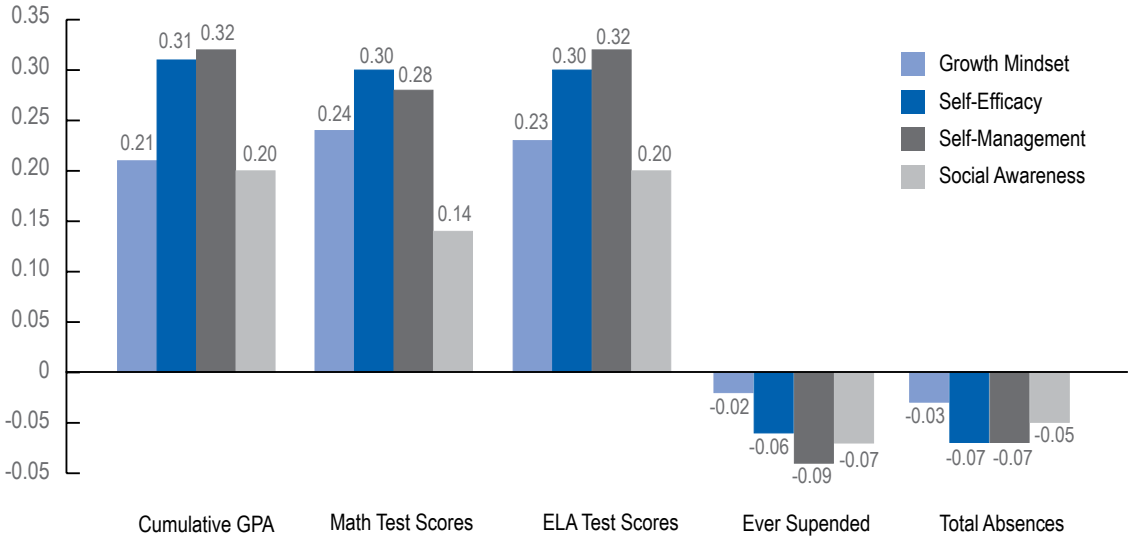
This guide, created by TransformingEd in partnership with the CORE Districts, provides you with a curated set of survey-based MESH measures used in the CORE districts, along with detailed information on the reliability and validity of those measures. Click here to download the tool.

Field Test Results

The CORE Districts ran a full-scale field test of the refined SE and CC student survey measures in spring 2015 with 1,500 schools. As Figure 3 shows, student ratings on each of the measures correlate in the expected direction with other academic and behavioral outcomes. For example, students' self-efficacy ratings correlate positively with GPA and standardized math and ELA scores (with a correlation of approximately 0.3). They correlate negatively with the number of days a student was suspended as well as the total number of days s/he was absent (with a correlation of approximately -0.06). These correlations are all statistically significant.[32] In other words, students with stronger SE skills tend to have stronger grades and test scores, and they are less likely to be absent or suspended throughout the school year.

Additionally, data analyses conducted by Harvard CEPR showed no clear evidence of reference bias. Specifically, the relationship between students' SE self-ratings and other student outcomes (e.g., GPA and standardized test rating) across all schools was compared to the relationship between self-ratings and other outcomes among students attending the same school. Finding that the relationship is consistently stronger within a school would suggest the existence of reference bias. On the other hand, finding that the overall relationship between SE skills and other student outcomes is stronger than the within-school relationship provides evidence that reference bias may not be a significant concern in this dataset. Researchers at Harvard CEPR found the latter: the relationship between SE self-ratings and ELA test scores across the four competencies is consistently stronger for the overall analysis compared to the within-school analysis. These correlations are all statistically significant, and similar patterns were found with GPA and mathematics test scores.[33] (See Box IV on mitigating the risk of biases inherent in surveys for more information.)

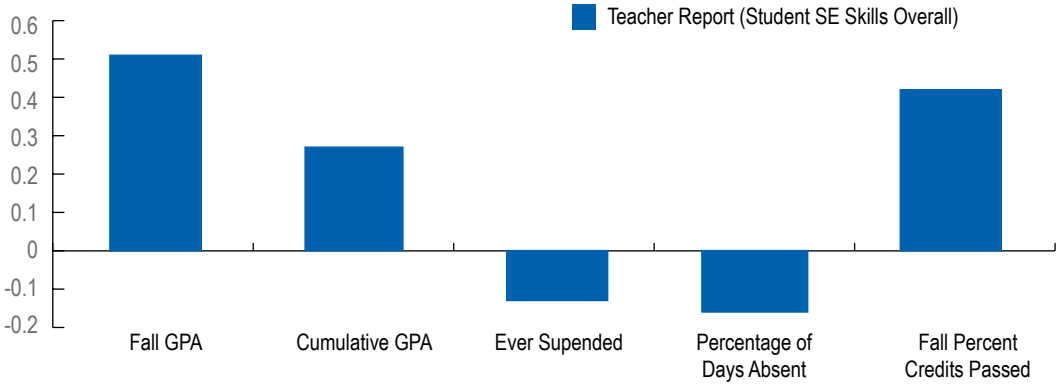
FIGURE 3 Correlation of Student Self-Reports (Grades 4-12) with Academic and Behavioral Outcomes[34]



If the student self-report measures are accurately assessing students' SE skills, they should also be positively correlated with teachers' perceptions of those same skills. To test this, two of the CORE districts (Fresno and Santa Ana) chose to collect teacher ratings of students' SE skills as a complement to student self-reports. As Figure 4 shows, teacher ratings of students' SE competencies correlate in the expected direction with student outcomes of interest, including grades, number of courses passed, attendance, and suspensions. All of the correlations are statistically significant. These findings suggest that because students and teachers have overlapping but distinct perspectives of students' skills, it may be useful to use both teacher and student reports in order to help triangulate students' skills with greater accuracy. (See Measuring MESH for more information about the validity and reliability of both student self-reports and teacher ratings of students' SE competencies.)

While some CORE districts continue to use teacher ratings of students' SE competencies in addition to student self-ratings, the teacher ratings are not currently included in the SQII because some districts found teacher

FIGURE 4 Correlation of Teacher Reports with Students' Academic and Behavioral Outcomes[35]



ratings impractical to administer at scale. In some districts, teacher ratings of students' SE competencies were subject to the collective bargaining process; other districts viewed rating students' competencies as part of the everyday responsibilities of educators. In some cases, districts offered a stipend to teachers that participated in a pilot of the SE rating process or enabled teachers to use existing professional development time to complete the surveys. All participating districts capped the number of students that each teacher rated at the secondary level to minimize the burden on educators. The CORE Districts continue to support interested districts to purse both student self-report and teacher ratings of students. One promising development is the integration of SE ratings with existing student report cards.

BOX V Multiple Perspectives on the Use of Measures

Some researchers are skeptical of the use of survey-based measures for high-stakes accountability purposes because they argue that the measures could be subject to reference bias, that there may be incentives to "game" survey responses, and that the measures may not enable adequate differentiation in schools' performance.[36] Nonetheless, analyses from the CORE Districts' pilot and field test demonstrate that these measures hold promise as one component of a holistic and formative system like the one the CORE Districts have created. Specifically, the Harvard CEPR team found strong evidence that the measures were related to other outcomes that matter for students and that they provided supplemental information that helped the participating districts meaningfully differentiate between the performance of individual schools.[37]

Further, it is important to note that there are several contextual factors that mitigated the CORE Districts' concerns about including SE measures in their accountability and continuous improvement system. First, the CORE Districts use relatively low weighting for SE measures, with SE surveys accounting for just 8 points of the 100-point Index. Second, the "consequence" for schools that perform poorly on the overall index is that they are paired with higher-performing schools that provide mentorship and support to build their capacity (which is strikingly different than accountability systems that impose punitive sanctions). And finally, the CORE Districts conducted a pilot and field test of the measures, collected feedback from the districts regarding implementation, and has stayed abreast of developments in the measurement field in order to continuously improve upon the measures and administration protocols.[38]

As other states and districts consider whether and how to measure SE skills, TransformEd recommends using the data for formative purposes (e.g., as part of a needs assessment to support school improvement efforts) and engaging a variety of stakeholders in exploring other uses over time. See our ESSA policy brief for further details.[39] There is also emerging research on next generation assessments (e.g., performance tasks and game-based assessments) that may mitigate some of the potential flaws of survey-based measures discussed above (see Box IV for more information). As these next generation measures evolve over time, the CORE Districts may eventually use them to complement or replace existing survey-based SE measures.

Selecting the School Culture/Climate Measures

The CORE Districts embarked on a similar process to select the CC survey scales as they did with the SE scales. Initially, the districts participated in a prioritization exercise to select the set of CC domains for the surveys. There was a set of principles that guided this selection that was analogous to the principles for the SE process. The CC measures needed to be: evidence-based (including meaningful, measurable, and "actionable"); free; aligned with other surveys given by the districts; feasible to complete within 10-20 minutes; and applicable to students in grades 4 and above.

The John W. Gardner Center at Stanford conducted an inventory of the CC scales the CORE districts were already using and a scan of the field to determine which CC measures were available to assess the CC domains that the CORE Districts prioritized (see Box VI for more information about the domains). Ultimate-

ly the CORE Districts' CC measures incorporated components from the California Healthy Kids Survey developed by WestEd, which many of the CORE districts were already administering for grant-reporting purposes. They also included several items on parent engagement from Los Angeles Unified School District's student experience survey. The CC component of the SQII includes student, teacher, and parent surveys on the domains described in Box VI.[40]

BOX VI Definitions of the Culture/Climate Domains

The culture-climate survey items cover four broad domains: teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, safety, and school-community engagement.[41]

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Research indicates that a positive school climate creates an optimal environment for learning. For example, studies have shown that teacher practices that promote active student engagement in the learning process contribute to students' academic achievement.[42]

Within this area of focus, the CORE Districts are specifically measuring **climate of support for academic learning**, defined as follows:

Students and teachers feel that there is a climate conducive to learning and that teachers use supportive practices, such as encouragement and constructive feedback; varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; support for risk-taking and independent thinking; an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention to support differentiated learning.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Teachers' social interactions with students directly affect students' behavioral and emotional engagement in the classroom and provide an "optimal foundation for social, emotional, and academic learning," especially for middle school and high school students. Also, when students perceive teacher-student and student-peer social supports, these perceptions are positively associated with self-esteem and academic grades.[43]

Within this area of focus, the CORE Districts are specifically measuring **sense of belonging/school connectedness**, defined as follows:

A positive sense of being accepted, valued, and included by others (teacher and peers) in all school settings. Students and parents report feeling welcome at the school.

SAFETY

Feeling safe in school is positively associated with students' academic learning and healthy youth development. Conversely, research indicates that schools that lack clear and supportive behavioral norms are more likely to experience violence, peer victimization, punitive disciplinary actions, higher levels of absenteeism, and reduced academic achievement.

Within this area of focus, the CORE Districts are specifically measuring:

Sense of safety: Students and adults report feeling safe from verbal abuse, teasing, or social exclusion at and around school.

Knowledge and Fairness of Discipline, Rules and Norms: The school has clearly communicated rules and expectations about student and adult behavior, especially regarding physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment, and teasing. These rules and expectations are clearly and consistently enforced.

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Researchers at the Chicago School Research Consortium have found that schools with high relational trust (such as positive social relationships, both among educators and between educators, families, and community members) are more likely to make changes that improve student achievement. They found that positive school-community and school-family relationships helped to reinforce teacher capacity and promoted a safe and respectful learning climate.[44] Within this area of focus, the CORE Districts are specifically measuring school-community engagement through a set of survey items that families respond to.

While the SE measures were piloted in a small subset of schools in 2013-14, the CORE district superintendents felt that their districts were ready for a full-scale field test of the CC measures that year because they had been using a similar set of measures in prior years, primarily through the California Healthy Kids Survey. In 2014-15, the CORE Districts recommended several changes to the CC scales based on findings from the field test. These changes were intended to complement other Index components, remove repetitive items, align with California's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) requirements, ensure appropriate measurement of all stakeholder groups (students, staff, and parents), and improve the validity and reliability of the measures. Finally, the SE and CC measures were combined into a single survey in most districts to streamline the administration process and minimize the amount of instructional time taken up by the surveys.

III. Supporting School Practice Change and Capacity Building

There are a variety of mechanisms through which the CORE Districts support districts in changing school practice and building educators' capacity: offering professional learning opportunities, hosting convenings, offering resources, providing an online platform for information-sharing, and facilitating school pairings and communities of practice for more intensive support to schools. The data from the SQII informs each of these efforts.

Data Sources

The CORE Districts receive a range of data through Index Reports containing all of the SQII indicators and through individual school reports on SE and CC. To support the effective use of these data, the CORE Districts use a "Ladder of Inquiry" tool:

TOOL VII **Ladder of Inquiry**

This tool supports district and school leaders in guiding teachers through a data inquiry process to identify relevant data points, make inferences based on the data, select actions to take based on their inferences, and test the impact of those actions through a cycle of continuous improvement. Click here to download the tool.

TransformEd and the CORE Districts also developed a companion guide to instructional practices that can support students' SE development and cultivate a positive school culture/climate:

TOOL VIII **Resources and Sample Strategies for Social-Emotional Learning and School Culture/Climate**

This tool compiles strategies that educators can use to support students' social-emotional development and improve school culture/climate. Click here to download the tool.

Index Reports

The CORE Districts have developed comprehensive Index Reports for each school. Actual reports are available at http://coredistricts.org/indexreports/ and a sample report is included below. As the sample below shows, Index Reports were designed to be user-friendly for those without specialized expertise in data. The report enables a user to view all of the SQII indicators, including three-year trends and comparisons with other schools and districts. The fall 2016 reports (using data from spring 2016) will include growth measures in ELA and math as well as data from the social-emotional and culture-climate surveys.

FIGURE 5 Sample Index Report

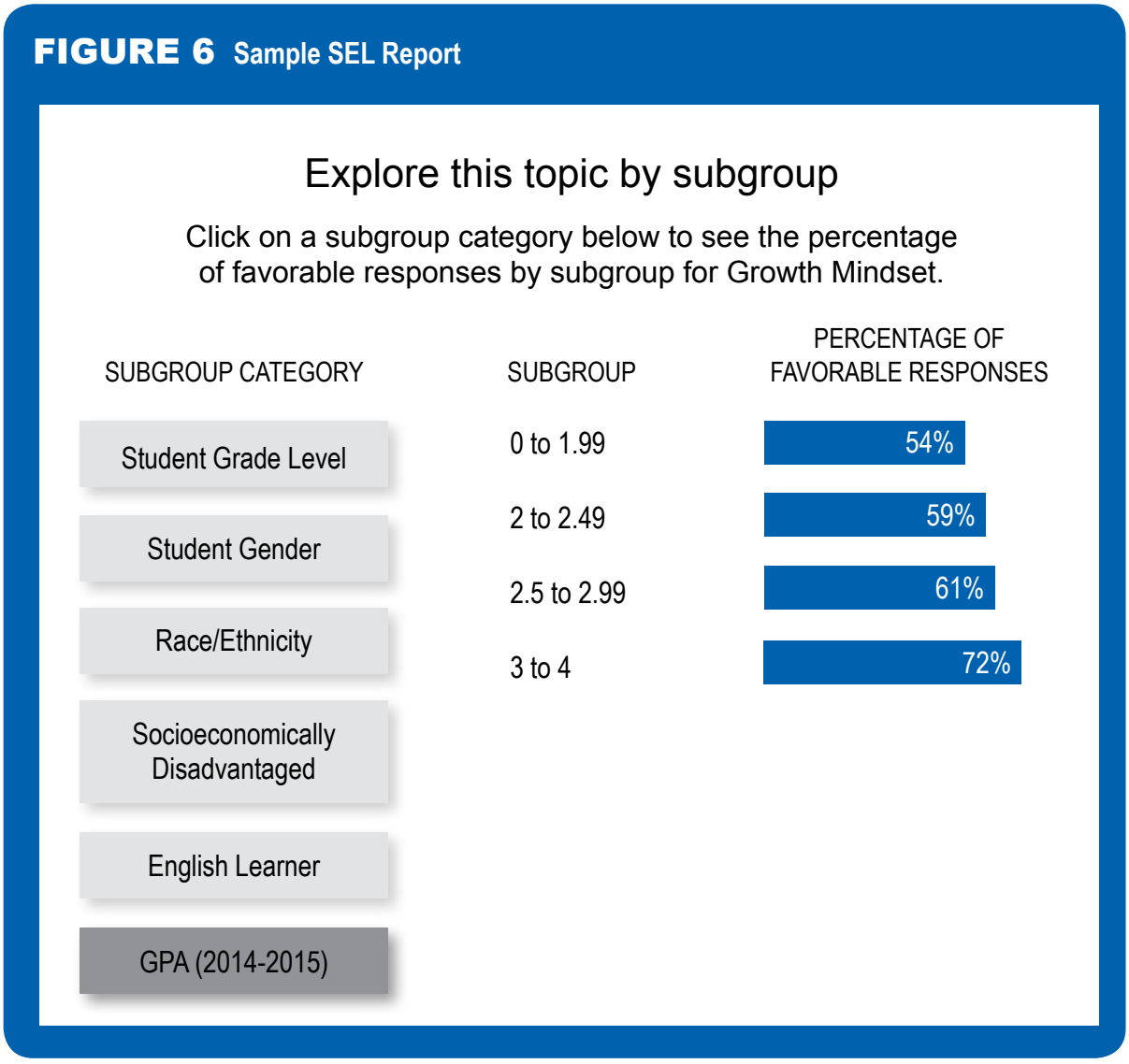
Survey Reports

Several districts receive detailed summaries of the SE and CC data from their survey administration partner, Panorama Education (see sample reports in Figure 6),[45] while other districts self-administer the surveys and create their own reports. Districts are able to disaggregate their data by item, competency, school, and subgroup. This enables the CORE Districts to determine which schools may need additional supports and identify opportunities to eliminate disparity and disproportionality between subgroups.

TOOL IX The Power of Data

This tool demonstrates how you interpret and use data that emerges from survey-based assessments of social-emotional skills and school culture/climate. Click here to download the tool.

FIGURE 6 Sample SEL Report



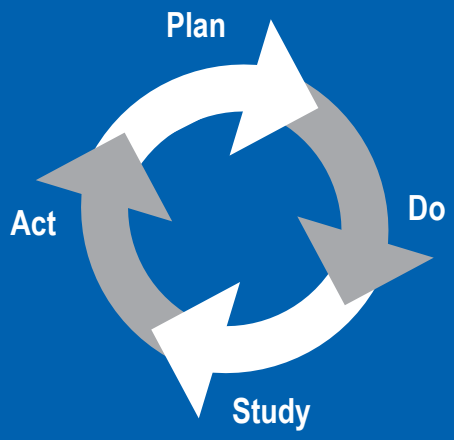
Intensive school support and capacity building

The CORE Districts' SQIS was inspired by the work of Michael Fullan, whose research emphasizes the importance of educators' intrinsic motivation to help all students succeed. As such, the SQIS focuses on providing supports to build schools' capacity rather than attaching punitive consequences to the Index results.[46] All schools and districts receive support from the CORE Districts in the form of professional learning resources such as performance assessment tools for ELA and Math, and targeted peer learning opportunities related to school districts' areas of interest. In addition, the CORE Districts designed a system of more intensive support and capacity building for "priority" schools through school pairings and for "focus" schools through communities of practice. (See Appendix C for more information about the CORE Districts' criteria for identifying priority and focus schools.)

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are formed with "focus" schools that have achievement gaps, low graduation rates, low overall performance, or low academic performance by one or more subgroups. Communities of practice usually operate within a single district and serve as an opportunity for a community of educators to focus on a common challenge using the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) approach—a model of rapid-cycle continuous improvement.

BOX VII Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Approach



PLAN: Define the "problem of practice" or issue the group is attempting to address. Learn about ways to address the problem of practice, determine which intervention or strategy to test, and decide which data will be used to determine the efficacy of the intervention.

DO: Test the intervention or strategy.

STUDY: Collect and examine evidence about the efficacy of the intervention or strategy.

ACT: Based on the data and learning, decide on the next steps: e.g., repeat the intervention, explore a different intervention, etc.

Each "focus" school develops a two-year plan of action based on its own needs assessment and student data analysis. The interventions associated with the PDSA process occur three times per year. The participants in the communities of practice document teaching approaches, interventions attempted, and trainings provided for teachers and staff. They consider this information alongside output from the SQII and other school

data to analyze which actions supported school improvement and which did not. The key learnings are then reported to each school's Site Council, which considers this information in conjunction with the school improvement plan.[47] While the Site Council is involved in the process, receiving updates on the progress of each community of practice, the district is responsible for determining whether the community of practice is helping to improve the school's outcomes in specific areas of need. the CORE Districts' role is to provide the data, tools, and resources to inform the planning efforts as well as professional development and a learning community for facilitators of the communities of practice. In a survey of community of practice participants from 2014-2015, approximately 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped their school improve.[48]

TOOL X **Professional Learning Communities Rubric**

This tool serves as an implementation rubric to help you identify where you are in the process of developing a professional learning community. Click here to download the tool.

School Pairing

Schools that have been identified as "priority" schools due to low performance and/or low graduation rates are paired with high performing "reward" schools, which share best practices and provide technical assistance.[49] The school pairing supports an ethic of peer accountability, rather than more traditional punitive or "top-down" accountability. The CORE Districts believe that pairings should be valuable to both participating schools, not just the lower-performing school. Data from a 2014-2015 survey of school pairing participants supports this notion: nearly 80% of "reward" schools and nearly 70% of "focus" or "priority" schools agreed or strongly agreed that participating in the program helped their school to improve.[50]

School pairs engage in peer learning by focusing on one or more metrics from the SQII that align with the priority school's needs assessment. Low-performing schools that have received funds through a School Improvement Grant (SIG) continue their work to implement the school improvement plan they outlined during the SIG process.[51] Schools without an existing school improvement plan work with their school-pairing partner to develop a plan of action using the Seven Turnaround Principles contained in the waiver application. The pairs may employ strategies such as school visits, joint PSDA cycles, coaching, or professional learning communities. Additionally, the pairs have a great deal of flexibility to use innovative approaches beyond those listed here, provided they develop a promising plan for school improvement.

The CORE Districts' role in supporting school pairings have been to identify schools in each of three categories (reward, priority, and focus) and to use the data to match schools with one another. While the improvement process is primarily led by each district, the CORE Districts also provide administrative support and professional development through Pairing Institutes, which focus on sharing continuous improvement strategies, developing initial plans for the pairings, setting norms, and building relationships between schools. When the waiver was first approved in 2013, the CORE Districts paired schools based solely on achievement and graduation data because the SE and CC data had not yet been collected systematically. That said, school pairs were able to use the SE and CC data from the pilot and field test to inform their improvement efforts.

IV. Areas for Continued Exploration

With the passage of ESSA in late 2015, the CORE Districts' waiver expired in August 2016. The next phase of collective work for the districts is just beginning to emerge, and the CORE Districts opened up their data-sharing collaborative, inviting other districts and charter networks in California to join. By participating in the data-sharing collaborative, districts will have access to the full range of indicators and benchmarks that are included in the SQII. Participating districts will also participate in cross-district convenings twice per year to share lessons learned and address common challenges.[52] There are also a number of key steps that the CORE Districts have begun to explore related to the existing SQIS and the development of students' SE competencies. These next steps, outlined below, may be instructive for other states or districts that choose to build upon the Core Districts' work.

Evaluating the Impact of SEL Practices and the SQII Overall:

The CORE Districts' 1,600 schools are already employing a range of interventions, instructional approaches, and curricula to build students' SE skills. For example, individual CORE districts have:

- Provided professional development for educators using TransformEd's growth-mindset toolkit and self-management toolkit, as well as a variety of other resources.
- Created a developmentally appropriate scope and sequence for improving academic habits, motivation, SE skills, well-being, and school CC.
- Developed a rubric for identifying observable markers of effective instructional practices to build SE skills.
- Begun mapping the intersections between SE skills and the Common Core State Standards to clarify how academics and SEL can be integrated seamlessly in the classroom. Added SE skills to student report cards to ensure that students, teachers, and parents are having regular conversations about students' SE development.

TOOL XI **Sample Report Card – San Francisco Unified School District**

This tool provides you with a concrete example of how one school district has incorporated SE skills into a student report card. Click here to download the tool.

The CORE Districts have entered into a partnership with Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), a research center at Stanford that will support the districts in identifying promising practices to support students' SE development.[53] Using the common SE measures, PACE will identify "bright spots" across the 1,600 CORE Districts' schools, or schools that demonstrate particularly strong SE outcomes for students. The PACE team will then conduct site visits and interviews to determine what specific practices or approaches may be driving these strong SE outcomes. Armed with this information and the peer learning infrastruc-

ture provided by the CORE Districts, the districts can work to bring the most effective approaches to scale, offering a range of potential options based on students' particular SE strengths and needs. Through their partnership with Stanford PACE, the CORE Districts also aim to develop the relationships, data systems, and infrastructure to support a robust research agenda that will include evaluating the impact of the CORE Districts' accountability model and comparing the CORE Districts model to other accountability frameworks in California.

Continuing to Engage in Cross-District Learning around SEL:

To foster more direct connections with teachers and district staff, TransformEd and the CORE Districts are piloting a year-long Social-Emotional Learning Fellowship for district staff members. SEL Fellows remain full-time district employees while also playing a leadership role in shaping SEL-related work across the CORE districts. Each fellow actively gathers input from educators in his/her district to refine the CORE Districts' SEL-related survey administration, data reporting, and practice improvement work. For example, Fellows identify needs in their own districts, help plan and facilitate CORE district-wide trainings related to SEL, and develop tools that can support their colleagues in other CORE districts. The CORE Districts Staff and SEL Fellows are also exploring whether the Networked Improvement Community (NIC) model might be an effective way to support districts in drawing upon the SE data collected within and beyond the Index to develop, test, and refine interventions that improve students' SE skills.

Through conversations with district staff, principals, and teachers, the following opportunities for further cross-district learning have emerged:[54]

Building Collective Ownership: Because the research is complex and nuanced, it can be challenging to communicate succinctly what SE skills are and why they matter. One district administrator said, "District folks don't necessarily have a firm…understanding of SEL, and it is hard for us to communicate…how transformative [SEL] is for students." Staff members from multiple CORE districts have identified a need to develop more coherent messaging in order to articulate how SEL relates to other district priorities and to work towards a more collective sense of ownership for this work.

Integrating SEL and Academics: District staff members with expertise in SEL believe that SE skills must be fully integrated into academic content and instruction in order to meaningfully improve student outcomes. Interviewees suggested that this requires continued support that "must be integrated with professional development on instructional strategies in academic content." While standalone SEL programs can be helpful resources for educators, they sometimes contribute to the sense that SEL is separate from the academic work that schools do. At the district level, the false division of "academics" and "student supports" (which often exist as separate departments within the district) creates a structural barrier to integration of these two related areas.

Connecting Data to Instruction: Interviewees felt that the CORE Districts had done a great job of sharing information about the SQII, "especially the 40% that's non-academic," but indicated that more training and support could help connect the data to research and then to instructional strategies. For example, one principal said, "I have been using SE data from the district in our staff meetings to discuss what interventions would be helpful for students and to plan tier 1 and tier 2 interventions." Annual assessments and school-level data will likely be insufficient for improving practice. A supplemental, formative approach to measurement could include assessing students' SE skills regularly throughout the school year in a way that positively reinforces students who demonstrate social-emotional growth and provides more granular data for teachers to use in refining their practice over time.

Over the next several months, the CORE Districts will continue to explore and iterate on next steps in each of these various areas, as well as additional areas of interest or need that emerge.

V. Key Lessons from the CORE Districts' Approach

Reflecting on the CORE Districts' approach, there are several takeaways that can inform other states' and districts' efforts to use innovative measures at scale as part of an expanded definition of student success.

Explicitly articulate the key principles and non-negotiables up front.

For the CORE Districts, these principles were college and career ready expectations for all students; a focus on collective responsibility, accountability, and action that emphasizes capacity building over high-stakes accountability; the development of intrinsic motivation for change through differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for schools; and focused capacity-building for effective instruction and leadership. These were the guideposts that informed myriad decisions about implementation, the bedrock when challenges arose, and a clear signal to multiple stakeholders about the system's priorities.

District buy-in is critical when implementing an ambitious system.

The CORE districts' endorsement of the SQIS was crucial to its successful implementation. District buy-in stemmed from the fact that district leaders co-designed and opted into a novel approach to accountability and continuous improvement that reflected the districts' own beliefs and values. They also made joint decisions about indicators and system implementation through participation on the CORE Districts' Board of Directors and reaffirmed their commitment to the approach by signing on to waiver amendments to USED. District staff also had many opportunities to share input and feedback during the waiver implementation and to collaborate with each other in ways that supported professional growth as well as buy-in to the SQIS.

Prepare to iterate: No system of accountability and continuous improvement is perfect at the outset.

When designing complex accountability and continuous improvement systems, it is important to be clear that iterations to the model will happen over time based on trends that emerge from the data, feedback from stakeholders, and developments in research. Throughout the process of iterating, the key principles of the system must remain constant, providing educators and community members with a sense of coherent system design. This was evident in the CORE Districts' waiver amendments: changes were requested to individual components of the waiver (e.g., to the method of calculating different indicators), but the CORE Districts' key principles remained consistent.

A multi-stage roll out can make novel measurement approaches more manageable.

The CORE Districts tested and rolled out their new accountability system in several phases over the course of three years, making many changes along the way based on feedback from the districts. This process increased buy-in by giving the districts time to understand how each measure works and to participate in field testing before new measures were incorporated into the Index. Additionally, the phased rollout process allowed time for district staff to build cross-district relationships, connect with others who were wrestling with similar challenges, and develop new approaches for acting on the data once the system was fully implemented.

The work requires support from multiple partners.

In implementing the SQIS, the CORE Districts had support from a large number of different researchers, nonprofit organizations, funders, and stakeholders. These partners helped with a range of tasks: supporting the selection of SE and CC competencies, validating the SE measures, analyzing the SQII data, developing data reports for schools, providing professional development to participating districts, and evaluating the impact of the CORE Districts' system. Ultimately, the CORE Districts were able to harness the skills and perspectives of many partners to build a robust system that no single district would have been able to build alone.

Conclusion

There is growing interest from education leaders and policymakers in understanding the CORE Districts' SQIS because it provides an example of how we can think more expansively about the factors that support student success, which ESSA now enables all states to do. The CORE Districts' ability to implement a holistic system of accountability and continuous improvement has been possible because the participating districts chose to hold themselves to high standards on a broad range of indicators that they believe are crucial to all students' success. Together, the CORE districts have upheld a deep commitment to equity and a focus on using accountability as a "flashlight, not a hammer" choosing to "shine a brighter, wider light on the needs of all students and on their own educational strategies and practices" while constantly refining their own approach along the way.[55] In doing so, the CORE Districts provide a compelling example of what is possible when educators work together to create a system that reflects their deepest values and their firm commitment to preparing all students for college, career, and life.

For states and districts that are interested in learning more specifics about how the CORE Districts have implemented components of their approach, please see the resources attached to this case study.

Appendix A: the CORE Districts' Partners

Center for Education Policy Research, Harvard University

Education Analytics, Inc.

Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University

The Dick and Charlene Kabcenell Family Foundation

Panorama Education

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), Stanford University, University of California—Davis, and the University of Southern California

S.D. Bechtel, JR. Foundation, Stephen Bechtel Fund

Silver Giving Foundation

Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), Stanford University

Stuart Foundation

Transforming Education

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Versifit Technologies

Appendix B: The CORE Districts Timeline

The CORE Districts implemented the Index and its accompanying new assessments in a sequential manner over the course of three years. This timeline highlights the key activities in the academic and SE/CC domains.

School Year 2013–2014

August 2013 | USED approves the CORE Districts' NCLB waiver

Implementation

- Index includes academic performance only
- Social-emotional (SE) surveys piloted with ~9,000 students
- Culture-climate (CC) surveys in continued use via California Healthy Kids Survey process

School Year 2014–2015

September 2014 | USED designates the CORE Districts' waiver "high risk" due to teacher evaluation provisions an unfinished status of the CORE Index

Implementation

- Index includes all indicators except for academic growth and SE/CC surveys
- SE and CC measures field tested as a unified survey with ~450,000 students and ~70,000 teachers

School Year 2015–2016

September 2015	USED removes the CORE Districts' "high risk" waiver designations and approves the waiver for another year
December 2015	Every Student Succeeds Act becomes law
January 2016	The CORE Districts' invites other districts to join its data-sharing collaborative

Implementation

- Full Index implementation, including academic performance/growth & SE/CC surveys administered*
- Index reports released for CORE districts, excluding academic growth and SE/CC survey results
- Second administration of social-emotional/culture-climate surveys to all students grades 4-12 in CORE districts

School Year 2016–2017

Implementation

- Index reports will include all indicators

**Because California field-tested the SBAC assessment in 2013-2014 and did not have a statewide assessment, there was no baseline data to use to calculate growth measures in 2015. The CORE Districts will be able to release growth measures in fall*

Appendix C: The CORE Districts' School Identification Criteria

Given the recent passage of The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the expiration of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waivers on August 1, 2016, the school identification provisions will no longer remain in place. However, it is instructive to explore how the CORE Districts designed their system as a model that other states may want to replicate when designing their school intervention systems pursuant to ESSA.

Priority Schools[56]	Focus Schools[57]
PRIORITY: GRADUATION 1. Bottom 10% on SQII for graduation rates; AND 2. Graduation rate less than 60% in that year; AND 3. Graduation rate less than 60% in the last 2 out of 3 years.	**FOCUS: LOW ACHIEVING SUBGROUPS** 1. Bottom 10% on the SQII; AND 2. Level 1 in subgroup performance on ELA, Math, or graduation that year; AND 3. Lack of progress for the subgroup(s) or metric(s) for which there is concern
PRIORITY: BOTTOM FIVE PERCENTILE IN ELA/MATH 1. Bottom 10% on SQII; AND 2. Bottom 5th percentile ranking in ELA or Math that year; AND 3. Bottom 5th percentile ranking in ELA or Math in the last 2 out of 3 year.	**FOCUS: WITHIN SCHOOL GAPS** 1. Lowest 5% in achievement gaps (over the last three years)
	FOCUS: LOW GRADUATION 1. Graduation rate less than 60% that year; 2. Graduation rate less than 60% in the last 2 out of 3 years.

1. "CORE Districts Introduce New School Quality Improvement Index," CORE Districts. Press release, December 4, 2015, http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Updated_CORE-Rollout-News-Release.pdf

2. CORE Districts, "School Quality Improvement Index," p. 1, http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CORE_informationsheet_SQII.pdf

3. "CORE Districts Introduce New School Quality Improvement Index," CORE Districts. Press release, December 4, 2015, http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Updated_CORE-Rollout-News-Release.pdf

4. These districts that received the waiver were Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and Santa Ana.

5. For a more detailed history of how the CORE Districts came together, see Joel Knudson and Mark Garibaldi, "None of Us Are as Good As All of Us: Early Lessons from the CORE Districts," American Institutes for Research, August 2015, http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/CORE-Cross-District-Collaboration-Report-August-2015.pdf. See also California Collaborative on District Reform, http://www.cacollaborative.org/ and "Public/Private Partnership Celebrates 15 Years of Dialogue," Price Philanthropies, August 19, 2014, http://pricephilanthropies.org/tag/urban-education-dialogue/

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. U.S. Department of Education, "ESEA Flexibility," http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/index.html

9. They worked in conjunction with the Parthenon Group, now Parthenon-EY.

10. For more information on the longitudinal research base showing the impact of social-emotional competencies on students' outcomes, see Chris Gabrieli, Dana Ansel, and Sara Bartolino Krachman, "Ready to Be Counted: The Research Case for Education Policy Action on Non-Cognitive Skills," December 2015, http://www.transformingeducation.org/s/ReadytoBeCounted_Release.pdf

11. Oakland and Sacramento, two of the CORE districts, were part of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)'s Collaborating Districts Initiative, which aims to develop students' social-emotional skills through district-level systemic change. See http://www.casel.org/collaborating-districts/

12. Cover letter for ESEA Flexibility Request for Window 3 (CORE Districts waiver application), February 28, 2013 http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/freedom/local/flexibility/waiverletters2009/cacoreflexrequest22013.pdf

13. This language is from the CORE Districts waiver application at: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/cacorerenewalreq92415.pdf

14. The CORE Districts submitted a waiver amendment in 2015 that combined culture/climate factors (previously 20% of the index) with social-emotional skills (previously 20% of the index) into a single category worth 40% of the total index score. Several factors led to that decision: both components required the collection of survey data, and participating schools felt that the two components were closely related to one another.

15. The CORE Districts waiver application, February 28, 2013, p.38, http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/cacorerenewalreq92415.pdf

16. The CORE Districts use the terminology "meaningful, measurable, and actionable."

17. Carol Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (New York: Random House, 2006).

18. Albert Bandura, Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1997).

19. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, "Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies," http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies

20. Ibid.

21. Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a test designed to assess students' performance and mastery of the Common Core State Standards. For more information, see http://www.smarterbalanced.org/

22. These required a waiver amendment.

23. These required a waiver amendment.

24. For background about how the CORE Districts determined this measure, see Antwan Wilson, "How to Assess Whether Middel Schoolers Are Ready for High School," EdSource, September 15, 2015, http://edsource.org/2015/how-to-assess-whether-middle-schoolers-are-ready-for-high-school/86094

25. Martin R. West, "Should Non-Cognitive Skills be Included in School Accountability Systems? Preliminary Evidence from California's CORE Districts," Brookings Institution, March 17, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2016/03/17-non-cognitive-skills-school-accountability-california-core-west

26. See, e.g., Martin R. West, et al., "Promise and Paradox: Measuring Students' Non-Cognitive Skills and the Impact of Schooling," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, August 2015. The paper explores this paradoxical effect based on research that Transforming Education and its partners conducted in Boston schools.

27. Ibid.

28. See, e.g., Philip M. Podsakoff, Scott MacKenzie, and Jeong-Yeon Lee, "Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies." Journal of Applied Psychology 88, no.5 (2003): 879–903.

29. See, e.g., Steven J. Spencer, Claude M. Steele, and Diane M. Quinn, "Stereotype Threat and Women's Math Performance." Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 35, no. 1 (1999): 4–28.

30. Ibid.

31. Internal reliability is a measure of the degree to which items included in the test assess the same underlying construct. The general rule of thumb is that assessments must have reliability coefficients above 0.7 to be considered reliable.

32. See Martin R. West, "Should Non-Cognitive Skills be Included in School Accountability Systems? Preliminary Evidence from California's CORE Districts," Brookings Institution, March 17, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2016/03/17-non-cognitive-skills-school-accountability-california-core-west

33. All of the correlations reported were statistically significant at the .001 level, with the exception of the correlation between growth mindset and suspensions, which was significant at the .01 level.

34. Analyses conducted by Harvard University's Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) for the CORE Districts and Transforming Education.

35. Analyses conducted by Harvard's CEPR for the CORE Districts and Transforming Education. Teacher Report (Student SE Skills Overall) is a composite of teacher-rated self-management and teacher-rated social awareness (n = 71,060).

36. Angela L. Duckworth and David Scott Yeager, "Measurement Matters: Assessing Personal Qualities Other Than Cognitive Ability for Educational Purposes." Educational Researcher 44, no. 4 (May 13, 2015): 237–251.

37. For more information, see Martin R. West, "Should Non-Cognitive Skills be Included in School Accountability Systems? Preliminary Evidence from California's CORE Districts," Brookings Institution, March 17, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2016/03/17-non-cognitive-skills-school-accountability-california-core-west

38. See Sara Bartolino Krachman, "Let's Not Let Perfect Be the Enemy of Good: Measurement, MESH, and Continuous Improvement." Transforming Education, March 2, 2016, http://www.transformingeducation.org/blog/2016/3/2/lets-not-let-perfect-be-the-enemy-of-good-measurement-mesh-and-continuous-improvement

39. A forthcoming policy paper to be released by TransformEd will explore the policy implications of these measures in greater depth.

40. For these items developed by WestEd and CDE, see http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SE-CC-Domain-School-Culture-Climate-Surveys-updated-2.18.15.pdf

41. Ibid.

42. Amrit Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research." Review of Educational Research 83 (September 2013): 365–366, http://rer.sagepub.com/content/83/3/357.full.pdf+html.

43. See Amrit Thapa, et al., p.363-364. See also Higgins-D'Alessandro, A., & Sakwarawich, A. (2011, October). "Congruency and Determinants of Teacher and Student Views of School Culture." Paper presented at the Association for Moral Education Annual Conference, Nanjing, China. Reported in Review of Educational Research 83, p.364.

44. Anthony S. Bryk, et al., Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

45. These data reports are courtesy of Panorama Education.

46. See, e.g., Michael Fullan, "Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform," Center for Strategic Education, May 2011, http://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/13501655630.pdf

47. Per the California Education Code, School Site Councils are required to: a.) "Measure effectiveness of improvement strategies at the school. b.) Seek input from school advisory committees. c.) Reaffirm or revise school goals. d.) Revise improvement strategies and expenditures. e.) Recommend the approved single plan for student achievement (SPSA) to the governing board. f.) Monitor implementation of the SPSA." For more information, see http://pubs.cde.ca.gov/tcsii/ch9/sscldrshp.aspx

48. The CORE Districts' “School Quality Improvement System School Communities of Practice Program Feedback” (July 2015); number of respondents: 30.

49. Reward schools are those with high performance or high growth, and for each of these categories there is an absence of stagnant achievement gaps. Additionally, focus schools have the option of being part of a school pairing, rather than a community of practice, but only two schools chose to do so.

50. The CORE Districts' “School Quality Improvement System School Pairing Program Feedback” (July 2015); number of respondents: 27 reward schools; 20 focus/priority schools.

51. SIG funds are given to state education agencies for competitive grants to school districts that have low-performing schools. For more information about SIG, see http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html

52. For more information, see http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CORE-informationsheet.pdf

53. PACE is a research center that draws from Stanford University, the University of Southern California, and the University of California (Davis).

54. TransformEd and the CORE Districts recently conducted a limited set of semi-structured interviews with CORE district leaders, principals, and teachers to get a sense of how educators are making sense of the data on SE skills and where they need more support. Initial findings from these interviews are included here and will be refined further through additional focus groups and interviews.

55. Michael Hanson, Superintendent of the Fresno Unified School District, quoted in “School Quality Improvement Index,” p. 1, http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CORE-informationsheet.pdf

56. These definitions of school categories were slated to apply to the 2016–2017 school year. However, given the recent passage of ESSA and the expiration of waivers on August 1, 2016, these provisions will not be in place for 2016–2017. See https://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/cacorerenewalreq92415.pdf (pp. 121–124).

57. These definitions of school categories were slated to apply to the 2016–2017 school year. However, given the recent passage of ESSA and the expiration of waivers on August 1, 2016, these provisions will not be in place for 2016–2017. See https://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/cacorerenewalreq92415.pdf (pp.140–142).