



# What City Year is learning about the power of integrating social, emotional and academic development in public schools

A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS AND POLICYMAKERS



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# Introduction



**The purpose of this guide is to provide practitioners and policymakers with practices, tools and recommendations for integrating social, emotional and academic approaches to support improved student and school outcomes. City Year is hopeful that the contents of this guide will prove particularly useful as school leaders and educators prepare to welcome students back to school following extended closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The efforts by the [National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development](#) and the [SoLD Alliance](#) confirm that social, emotional and academic skill development are inextricably linked, and that social and emotional factors interact with neural processes to shape learning experiences and outcomes.<sup>1</sup> While there is a growing understanding that an integrated approach to social, emotional and academic development provides the best path for students graduating from high school to be prepared for postsecondary and adult success, meaningful integration of these aspects of learning is not always as easy to implement in classrooms and schools.

Through this guide, City Year hopes to share some lessons learned from more than a decade of partnering with educators, schools and communities to support student success in schools that serve communities affected by systemic inequities, along with research and evaluation of our work—including a recent study conducted by the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University on City Year’s approach to strengthening students’ social, emotional and academic development. Just as we have learned from other guides and publications on this topic, such as The Aspen Institute’s [Integrating Social, Emotional, and Academic Development \(SEAD\): An Action Guide for School Leadership Teams](#), it is City Year’s hope that this guide proves useful to anyone seeking to support improved outcomes in schools by harnessing an integrated social-emotional and academic approach to supporting student learning, which will be more important than ever before when students return to in-person schooling.

Founded in 1988, City Year strives to advance educational equity by recruiting teams of diverse young adults to serve full time as AmeriCorps members in public schools across the country. City Year partners with high schools with low graduation rates and the middle and elementary schools that feed into them. In 2019-2020, 3,000 [City Year AmeriCorps members](#) are serving in 350 public schools in 29 U.S. cities. Approximately 90% of students in our partner schools qualify for free or reduced lunch status and are students of color.

In partnership with students, educators and schools, City Year aims to help create conditions where students can develop the skills and mindsets to thrive and succeed. City Year accomplishes this through two interwoven strategies.

First, City Year recruits teams of diverse young adults across the country to serve in public schools full time as AmeriCorps members implementing our integrated, holistic approach—[Whole School Whole Child](#) (WSWC). WSWC is [research-based](#) and is continuously informed by what we are learning from the on-the-ground service of our AmeriCorps members. City Year AmeriCorps members form developmental relationships with students, and through these relationships, support student growth in social, emotional and academic skills.<sup>2</sup> AmeriCorps members also collaborate with teachers to provide whole class support and partner with school principals to implement schoolwide initiatives to improve conditions for learning.

Second, building upon the full-time service of AmeriCorps members, City Year collaborates with our network of partner schools and districts to design, implement and spread promising practices. Some of the ways in which we do this include our design work and partnership with a public charter school, [Compass Academy](#) in Denver; our [Network for School Improvement](#), which convenes schools in different cities across the country to test solutions for improving on-track performance using continuous improvement practices; and our [District Learning Network](#), which brings together leaders from large urban districts to address shared problems of practice.

As City Year continues to learn and innovate alongside our school and district partners, we seek to share practices and contribute to a broader conversation about how best to support students and ensure equitable access to high-quality opportunities for all. We invite you to share your feedback with us as we continue to learn in this work, together.

1 Immordino-Yang, M.H., Darling-Hammond, L., & Krone, C. (2018). The Brain Basis for Integrated Social, Emotional, and Academic Development: How Emotions and Social Relationships Drive Learning. Aspen Institute: National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development; Immordino-Yang, M.H., Darling-Hammond, L., & Krone, C. (2019). Nurturing Nature: How Brain Development Is Inherently Social and Emotional, and What This Means for Education. *Educational Psychologist*, 54:3, 185-204.

2 According to the Search Institute, developmental relationships are “trustworthy, purposeful relationships that help young people discover who they are, cultivate the abilities needed for them to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them.”

# Overview of research conducted by the Everyone Graduates Center



City Year's work is informed by research about how students learn and what all children need to thrive, and seeks to ensure that students strengthen the skills essential for success in and out of school. City Year regularly engages in evaluations and research for continuous learning and improvement to strengthen our practices and to inform broader systemic change efforts. As part of our commitment to learning from research, in August 2018, City Year received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to collaborate with the Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) to examine the connections between social-emotional skills and academic performance and achievement of students in City Year partner schools during the 2017-2018 school year. This study is one of the first in the field of education to examine the correlation of social-emotional and academic skills through a large scale, multi-city, multi-grade dataset focused exclusively on systemically under-resourced schools.

The dataset includes information on 38,131 students<sup>3</sup> in grades three through ten across 326 schools in 28 cities across 20 states. Dosage (the amount of time spent with an AmeriCorps member), academic (course grades and achievement test scores), attendance, and social-emotional learning (as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)) data are all included in the analysis.<sup>4</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS

### There is a strong connection between social-emotional skill development and academic performance.

The analysis identified statistically significant and consistent relationships between students' social-emotional skills—as recorded by the DESSA—and their academic outcomes across grade levels three to ten, with an enhanced relationship found in the ninth grade.

### Implementing holistic approaches is related to stronger student performance.

The analysis also revealed that the more time spent with City Year AmeriCorps members on English Language Arts (ELA) and math, the better the student performance in that subject and the higher student attendance rates. Similarly, the analysis found that the more hours students spent working with an AmeriCorps member, the better the students' social-emotional outcomes. This shows that intentional holistic efforts can have multiple benefits and can impact academics, attendance and social emotional outcomes. **The full report, "Connecting Social-Emotional Development, Academic Achievement, and On-Track Outcomes: A Multi-District Study of Grades 3 to 10 Students Supported by City Year AmeriCorps Members" can be found [here](https://apertureed.com/dessa/).**

<sup>3</sup> The data used for this analysis is not disaggregated by subpopulations, including students with learning differences.

<sup>4</sup> Developed by the Devereux Center for Resilient Children, the DESSA is "a standardized, strength-based behavior observational rating scale completed by AmeriCorps members to measure student social-emotional competence. Grounded in resilience theory and directly aligned to the CASEL framework, the DESSA is commonly used to inform the delivery of social-emotional learning at tier 1 or tier 2 as well as measuring the results of that delivery." (<https://apertureed.com/dessa/>)

# From research to practice

## How City Year is connecting these findings to practice

City Year's experience in classrooms and schools, along with our work to partner with schools and districts to develop and spread innovative practices that improve whole school outcomes, offers a unique lens through which to understand EGC's findings and apply them in practice.



### HOW CITY YEAR WORKS IN SCHOOLS

City Year works closely with the school principal and teachers to deliver a suite of interconnected services that cost-effectively and efficiently improve student, classroom and whole school outcomes.

-  One-on-one and small group instruction in English and math with embedded social-emotional supports
-  Use of data to monitor student progress and better meet student needs
-  Additional capacity in the classroom, supporting classroom routines and providing and enabling differentiated instruction



-  Extended-day activities: afterschool programming, homework assistance, enrichment curricula and civic projects that build and serve community
-  Small group social-emotional skill building sessions
-  Whole school activities that improve conditions for learning, engage families and inspire civic engagement

The findings from EGC's analysis powerfully support the value of **an integrated approach to social, emotional and academic development**. This outcome implies that City Year's focus on practices that cultivate a learning environment in which students have strong relationships, feel trust and have a sense of belonging—foundational elements to developing social, emotional and academic skills—is critical. The research also underscores the malleability of social-emotional skills; such skills can be learned, and students can build upon and acquire new skills within a single academic year.<sup>5</sup>

5 Science of Learning and Development Alliance (2019) How the Science of Learning and Development Can Transform Education: Initial Findings (Retrieved from [https://5bde8401-9b54-4c2c-8a0c-569fc1789664.filesusr.com/ugd/eb0b6a\\_57d3dc6d458b466e8962c2cc09f756bf.pdf](https://5bde8401-9b54-4c2c-8a0c-569fc1789664.filesusr.com/ugd/eb0b6a_57d3dc6d458b466e8962c2cc09f756bf.pdf))

## Trust and belonging: essential elements to ensuring social, emotional and academic development

The Everyone Graduates Center’s key findings underscore the value of a holistic, integrated approach to improving student outcomes.

Research makes clear that cultivating trust and belonging in learning environments—something that City Year AmeriCorps members seek to do through their relationship building with students and a range of classroom and school activities—is critical to the development of social, emotional and academic skills.<sup>6</sup> Though the EGC analysis does not directly address the elements of trust and belonging in affecting improved student outcomes, City Year’s approach and the implied connection between trust and belonging and social, emotional and academic development (SEAD) suggest that additional research would be useful to verify and validate that connection.<sup>7</sup>

### HOW CITY YEAR SUPPORTS THE FORMATION OF TRUST AND BELONGING

City Year AmeriCorps members use a holistic approach that integrates academic and social-emotional (SEAD) skill development, and places authentic relationship building at the center of the practice. There is an equal emphasis on social-emotional mindset and skill development, and a balance between the creation of an overall learning environment (with an understanding that environments are constantly evolving) and the progress of individual students.

City Year uses PEAR’s Clover Model to understand students’ developmental capabilities and needs over time and how those are revisited as students grow older and have new experiences. This ongoing process, as students grow and learn more about who they are as learners and as people, increases academic progress, especially when in a positive learning environment. When students are viewed as individuals who matter and possess different strengths, learning preferences and skills, instruction and assessment can be adjusted to build on those strengths and meet their needs. As students gain access to durable academic and social-emotional skills, they feel confident in their ability to move to the next skill level and progress.



<sup>6</sup> Stafford-Brizard, K.B. (2016) Turnaround for Children Building Blocks for Learning: A Framework for Comprehensive Student Development. (Retrieved from <http://www.turnaroundusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Turnaround-for-Children-Building-Blocks-for-Learningx-2.pdf>); The PEAR Institute: Partnerships in Education and Resilience Clover Model (<https://www.thepearinstitute.org/clover-model>)

<sup>7</sup> <http://mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/What-We-Know-About-Belonging.pdf>

## Practices that support social-emotional skill development

City Year has found several practices to be particularly effective in improving certain social-emotional skills, including one-on-one and small-group time with students; high-quality tutoring support; relationship building; near-peer mentorship; and an emphasis on developing trust and belonging within the learning environment. Leveraging the power of relationships between students and adults (including City Year AmeriCorps members) along with using research-based frameworks and tools such as [PEAR's Clover Model](#), [Turnaround for Children's Building Blocks](#), and [Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework](#), can help support the development of social-emotional skills, and ensure that schools are places where students feel a sense of trust and belonging. Research confirms that students are more likely to come to school and be engaged when they feel a sense of belonging and when they know that they, and their ideas, matter.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, City Year has found the inclusion of student voice to be critical in helping students to develop agency, identity and durable skills. Hearing directly from students through self-reported tools like the [Holistic Student Assessment \(HSA\)](#) and [PERTS's Engagement Project](#) injects the student experience into adult decision-making, providing an enhanced understanding of how to structure the learning environment to support relationship building and academic and social-emotional skill-building.

### CITY YEAR'S APPROACH

City Year facilitates experiences for AmeriCorps members and students rooted in an asset-based, developmental approach and a long-held City Year value: our belief in the power of young people. This value supports a commitment to “tap the civic power of young people to achieve transformational change” in the communities we serve. Being asset-based and developmental as we do this work in schools means applying a consistently positive lens that considers each young person’s developmental journey and strengths, and positions them as assets for growth and learning.

City Year’s impact managers, who are full-time staff members who oversee teams of AmeriCorps members in schools, apply this youth development approach to lead AmeriCorps members. They do so with the intention to model tone and practices that support a growth mindset and positive learning environment that AmeriCorps members can apply to their work with students. Concrete practices that enable this approach include:

Hour One: A start-of-year opening meeting to center on service, mindset and expectations to prepare AmeriCorps members to support student growth and strengthen their own practice

City Year Learning Environments: Highlights elements of a successful learning environment and recommendations for using the Clover framework to design resiliency-informed spaces for AmeriCorps members and students

City Year also collaborates with Playworks to incorporate games and techniques to foster a practitioner mindset of building strong relationships with students and creating a sense of community on school teams, capitalizing on individual and group energy and engagement, and empowering students to reflect and learn continuously.

<sup>8</sup> Bridgeland, John M.; Dilulio, John J., Jr.; Morison, Karen Burke (2006) *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (<https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/thesilentepidemic3-06final.pdf>); America's Promise Alliance (2014) *Don't Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation* (<https://www.americaspromise.org/report/dont-call-them-dropouts/>); Attendance Works (<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/strategies-for-school-sites/>)

## Practices, structures and frameworks to consider when seeking to integrate students' social-emotional and academic growth in your school

The results from "[Connecting Social-Emotional Development, Academic Achievement and On-Track Outcomes: A Multi-District Study of Grades 3 to 10 Students Supported by City Year AmeriCorps Members](#)," combined with what City Year has learned from its work with more than 300 schools across nearly 50 districts in the United States, provide insight into a broader set of practices that practitioners—including partner organizations, educators and district leaders—may consider as next steps to creating a more integrated approach to social, emotional and academic development in classrooms and schools.

These recommendations are presented below in three steps, which also include resources for further exploration. Where appropriate, examples of how City Year has implemented specific strategies and frameworks are highlighted.

### Step 1: Assessing and understanding the assets, needs and desired goals of your community

#### READINESS CONDITIONS TO BEGIN THE WORK

Before schools or districts can begin the work of supporting students' social, emotional and academic development more holistically, certain conditions must be in place. The school must have a commitment to and structures to enable regular progress monitoring, such as reliable access to student data (an Early Warning Response System is ideal); staff and partner commitment to adapt and innovate; and a sustained investment of time, tools, resources and funding. Unless these readiness conditions are met, the practices that follow are unlikely to be successful.

Potential Resources: [Determining Readiness for Social-Emotional and Academic Development](#); [The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning](#); [SEL Integration from Transforming Education](#)

#### PRACTICES TO CONSIDER

- Conduct asset mapping of capacity, including staff trained to support student well-being (e.g. Student Success Coaches) for students who require more consistent day-to-day social-emotional and academic support. This will allow for deeper understanding of whether additional capacity, such as the cost-effective resource of national service, might be needed to bring an integrated approach to social, emotional and academic development (SEAD) to life in your school. Resource: [Compass Academy Student Well-being Approach](#)

#### STUDENT SUCCESS COACHES

Student Success Coaches are AmeriCorps members who serve full time on diverse teams in systemically under-resourced schools, providing near-peer, research-based supports to students and supplemental capacity in classrooms. They collaborate with teachers to personalize the learning environment for students, while also developing skills themselves that are required for civic and workforce success.

- Build in intentional time at the beginning of the year for relationship development with students and to promote a strong sense of community. Resources: [Units of Belonging Strategy from Compass Academy](#); [SEARCH Institute's relationship-building materials](#); [City Year Power Tools](#)
- Enhance family and community understanding of the value of social-emotional and academic development. Resource: [Communications Tools from the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development](#); [Parent Teacher Home Visits Model](#)

- Co-create whole school and individual social-emotional and academic goals with students. Share goals and progress with all school staff and partners (AmeriCorps members, volunteers, afterschool staff, paraprofessionals) and families.
- Measure students' social-emotional status and development as well as the level of environmental challenge they face, such as implicit bias, food insecurity, homelessness, lack of sleep and/or exposure to violence. Resources: [Behavior and Social-Emotional Development Change Package developed for Network for School Improvement](#); [Devereux Students Strengths Assessment \(DESSA\)](#); [Holistic Student Assessment](#); [Measuring SEL](#)
- Assess your school climate at the beginning of and in the middle of the school year. Resources: [ED School Climate Surveys](#) and [PERTS Engagement Project](#)
- Track when, where and why disciplinary incidents occur. Look for patterns and track office referrals as well as suspensions. Resource: [Behavior and Social-Emotional Development Change Package developed for Network for School Improvement](#)
- Consider how you will integrate SEAD into all aspects of the school day, including afterschool. Resources: [National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development: A Practice Agenda in Support of How Learning Happens](#) and [Building Partnerships in Support of Where, When, & How Learning Happens](#)

## Step 2: Selecting and implementing an approach that's right for your school community

Selection should be based on the specific assets, needs and goals of your community identified in Step 1. The practices included in this section range from recommendations for increasing capacity to approaches to staff training, curriculum selection and providing research-based student supports.

We know that whole school social, emotional and academic development practices have the potential to benefit all students. Based on our innovation and design work at Compass Academy, a public charter school in Denver, and collaborative efforts with schools across the country through the Network for School Improvement, we have identified a number of systems, structures, tools, resources and instructional practices that enhance all students' social, emotional, and academic development, including culturally and linguistically diverse learners and students with learning disabilities. The practices and corresponding resources below are annotated (\*) to spotlight those that are particularly impactful for diverse learners.

### WHOLE SCHOOL PRACTICES TO CONSIDER:

- Organize your school in a developmentally appropriate way for the population you serve. One way to do this might be to adopt a holistic, asset-based approach to supporting student growth. Resources: [Clover Model](#), [CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#)
- Deploy AmeriCorps members as Student Success Coaches to support teachers in ensuring all students have access to developmental relationships and research-based supports designed to meet individual student needs and create positive, nurturing, culturally responsive, identity-safe, and instructionally rich learning environments.<sup>9</sup>
- Emphasize personalized approaches to student learning based on an understanding of student strengths and areas for growth as recorded by a measure of social-emotional development. In addition, practitioners should use a predictable and practical approach to instruction that is characterized by high expectations, individualization, growth mindset and positive disposition. Resources: [City Year Check In Check Out Resource](#); [PERTS Growth Mindset Toolkit](#); [City Year Resource on Setting Goals with DESSA](#)

<sup>9</sup> Science of Learning and Development Alliance (2019) How the Science of Learning and Development Can Transform Education: Initial Findings (Retrieved from [https://5bde8401-9b54-4c2c-8a0c-569fc1789664.filesusr.com/ugd/eb0b6a\\_57d3dc6d458b466e8962c2cc09f756bf.pdf](https://5bde8401-9b54-4c2c-8a0c-569fc1789664.filesusr.com/ugd/eb0b6a_57d3dc6d458b466e8962c2cc09f756bf.pdf))

- Provide staff training on social-emotional skill development, relationship building and trauma-informed practices that are integrated into teacher training, coaching and development. Resource: [City Year/Everyone Graduates Center Network for School Improvement Equitable Coaching Framework](#)
- Select curriculum and supports that align to social-emotional goals. Build and strengthen staff understanding on how curriculum aligns. Ensure that the curriculum tends to social, emotional and academic development and is aligned with the school mission and vision. Resources: [CASEL strategies and program guide](#); [Learner and Leader Framework used at Compass Academy](#)
- Encourage and incorporate student voice in creating and implementing school discipline policies and in-school culture initiatives. Conduct equity checks to ensure that opportunities to participate are available to all students. Resource: [Student Governance Approach at Compass Academy\\*](#)
- Implement a morning greeting or welcome activity, where every student and faculty member is greeted as they enter the school each morning. This activity creates an opportunity to foster positive school culture and climate while encouraging regular school attendance and promoting citizenship and positive behavior. Resource: [Overview of City Year Power Greeting](#)
- Organize affinity and shared interest groups for students to encourage community building and belonging (e.g. inclusivity leaders, student squads with shared interests, study teams, inclusivity clubs). Resource: [Behavior and Social-Emotional Development Change Package developed for Network for School Improvement\\*](#)

#### CLASSROOM PRACTICES TO CONSIDER:

- Link social, emotional and academic competencies to class content when possible. For example, in English Language Arts class, connect the process of writing in English to the social-emotional competency of positive risk-taking. Resource: [6th Grade Science Example](#) and [CASEL SEL 3 Signature Practices for the Classroom\\*](#)
- Encourage students to develop their own classroom norms and worktime expectations based on the social, emotional and academic competencies being taught.\*
- Implement Check In, Check Out interventions. This tool can be used to create a mutually agreed upon set of expectations for social-emotional skill expression; create non-verbal cues and signals with a student; teach explicit relaxation techniques; and create a process for students to take breaks and determine, in partnership with an educator, what breaks look like. Resource: [City Year Check In Check Out Resource](#)
- Create intentional spaces for competency development and reflection. Resource: [Growth Mindset Unit Plan for Morning Meeting Time\\*](#)

#### EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT THAT CAN BE ADAPTED FOR YOUR WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

##### COMPASS ACADEMY

At Compass Academy, a public charter school in Denver, students start out and close the day in small groups with a teacher (called “pack time”) where they can reflect on goals and their well-being, and dive deeper into social-emotional competencies together. Teachers design competency-focused lessons where students learn about, apply and reflect upon competencies like Goal Navigation, Communication and Self-Regulation. This time creates a deep sense of belonging and trust for all students in addition to providing students with the opportunity to explicitly focus on their social, emotional and academic development.

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**EXAMPLES , CONTINUED****ACROSS THE CITY YEAR NETWORK**

**Whole School Greeting:** In Whole School Greeting, AmeriCorps members collaborate with school staff to greet students and faculty as they enter the school building, often with an exuberance that sets the tone for the day and sends a clear message of joy and belonging.

**Morning Program:** AmeriCorps members collaborate with the school to conduct a morning assembly or program for all students that builds belonging, leadership, community and skills.

**Ongoing training for AmeriCorps members:** Throughout their service year, City Year AmeriCorps members receive valuable training and professional development to help support their work with students and further their own personal and career goals.

City Year AmeriCorps members receive ongoing coaching and feedback from City Year staff, as well as formal training sessions, guided reflection, peer learning and career support. Training and professional development topics include:

- Social, emotional and academic training curricula and assessments
- Leadership, communication and professional skills to be an effective team member and community leader
- Community context, civic knowledge, social justice and equity



### Step 3: Evaluating, reflecting and ensuring continuous improvement

#### PRACTICES TO CONSIDER:

- Incorporate evidence of belonging and trust into school meetings and approaches to supporting students, including the use of multi-tiered systems of support and early warning response systems (see below for more information).
- Form and track schoolwide goals through continuous improvement cycles where next steps and results are identified and tracked. Resources: [Quarter 1 Stepback at Compass Academy](#)
- Develop a system for tracking progress and growth of competencies (e.g. portfolios, reflection journals, a record of whole-class debriefs). Create structures that allow teachers and students to share their growth and experiences with social, emotional and academic development.
- Solicit teacher and student feedback consistently around program elements and use data to inform next steps. Use both self-report and observational tools. Resources: [Sample student survey](#); [sample teacher survey](#)
- Repeat cycle of continuous improvement after the evaluation stage, repeating the identifying, selecting and implementing stages. Resources: [Attendance Change Package](#); [Behavior/SEL Change Package](#); [Course Performance Change Package](#); [Video: What is Continuous Improvement?](#); [Video: How to Implement Continuous Improvement](#)

#### OVERVIEW OF EARLY WARNING RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Early warning systems use readily available data to alert teachers and administrators to students who demonstrate behaviors that research indicates put them at a higher risk of dropping out of school, and provide a process to use school teams and teacher insights to formulate appropriate responses at the most strategic level i.e. individual student, classroom, grade or school. A key benefit of early warning systems is that they help educators know what to look for amid the mountains of data about students. Early warning systems can be implemented at the middle and high school levels—even as early as sixth grade. Researchers from the Everyone Graduates Center found that more than 50% of students who drop out in Philadelphia could be identified in eighth grade using just three indicators: 1) failing mathematics in eighth grade, 2) failing English in eighth grade and 3) attending school less than 80% of the time. With appropriate monitoring and response systems, however, significant numbers of students can be kept on track to graduating from high school.

Source: [Everyone Graduates Center](#)

# Policy

# Recommendations



“Connecting Social-Emotional Development, Academic Achievement, and On-Track Outcomes: A Multi-District Study of Grades 3 to 10 Students Supported by City Year AmeriCorps Members,” by the Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education confirms what City Year has learned over the course of its three decades of youth development work and through its deep partnership with 350 schools nationwide: A holistic approach that nurtures students’ social, emotional and academic development is essential for student success. In addition, targeted, research-based interventions delivered by trained, caring adults can accelerate student acquisition of critical skills when done in collaboration with the dedicated administrators and educators working in our schools every day.

**City Year recommends adoption and implementation of the following policies to further support the development of learning environments that foster students’ social-emotional and academic success, which will be more important than ever before when students return to school following extended school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic:**

**Support strategies that foster a positive school culture in which every student feels safe, connected to, and engaged in school and has access to positive developmental relationships, as these factors are foundational to students’ social, emotional and academic development.**

Students are more likely to succeed when learning environments are safe, foster a sense of connectedness, which can be nurtured by developmental relationships, and recognize the interconnectedness of social, emotional and academic development.

- The federal government should maintain and increase funding for Title I school improvement funds, Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAE), and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, while also ensuring that federal funds to support school safety include a focus on developing a school culture in which students have access to developmental relationships, and feel physically and emotionally safe and connected to school.
- States should prioritize district activities in Title IV, Part A grant award applications that foster positive, safe and inclusive school cultures. For example, states could include related questions as criteria in state-designed local applications and needs assessments; incentivize activities through Title I funding and monitoring requirements to foster positive, safe and inclusive school cultures in school improvement plans for schools identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI); and adopt school climate standards or guidelines that both address students’ connectedness to school and sense of belonging, and foster positive developmental relationships among students and staff.
- Districts should include specific strategies to foster positive, safe and inclusive school cultures in Title IV, Part-A and -B grant applications and plans. This could include promoting positive developmental relationships for students with adults, ensuring integrated social, emotional and academic supports, and adopting restorative and inclusive disciplinary policies and practices. In addition, school improvement plans should include specific strategies to ensure positive, safe and inclusive school cultures.

## To help inform and provide targeted social, emotional and academic supports, increase the use of Early Warning Indicators (EWIs) to track attendance, behavior and course performance for individual students.

EWI systems are a critical mechanism for identifying students in need of additional academic, social or emotional support and targeting support to meet their individual needs.

- The federal government, through the U.S. Department of Education, can support these efforts by providing guidance and technical assistance for states and districts on the evidence base of EWI systems and how to establish and effectively implement them to target personalized supports to ensure students are on a path to success.
- States should include EWI systems in state-approved, evidence-based practices as part of their school improvement plans and incentivize its inclusion through Title I funding and monitoring.
- Districts should include needs assessments for Title I school improvement and for Title IV grant applications. The needs assessments should include: (1) data related to attendance, behavior and course performance in math and ELA and (2) the extent to which there is an EWI system in place to track individual student need and to target support accordingly.

## Expand opportunities for AmeriCorps members to serve as Student Success Coaches (SSCs) in schools designated as low performing, including and particularly in those identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI).

In too many places across the country, students do not have access to learning environments and resources they need to thrive, due to systemic inequities that disproportionately impact students of color and students growing up in low-income households. The Everyone Graduates Center research supports the value of diverse teams of highly trained AmeriCorps members serving full time in systemically under-resourced schools to support educators in helping to foster learning environments in which students can develop and strengthen the social, emotional academic skills and mindsets that are important in school and in life. These AmeriCorps members serving as Student Success Coaches can support the implementation of research-based services necessary for student success (including executing school improvement strategies) and provide direct support to students and assistance to educators, to help meet student needs. There are opportunities at the federal, state and local levels to think about how Student Success Coaches might accelerate broader school improvement efforts, such as those supported by Title I funding for school improvement and under Title IV, Part A grants. There is also opportunity to explore innovative partnerships between national service and education agencies at the state and federal levels.

In order to meet the significant need in high-need schools for SSCs and to ensure a robust partnership between national service and education systems, national service options should be designed and resourced to attract and retain enough diverse, talented individuals to meet the scale of need.

Federal funding for the AmeriCorps program and the National Service Trust Fund should be increased to support improved student academic and social-emotional outcomes.

### STUDENT SUCCESS COACHES

Student Success Coaches (SSCs) are AmeriCorps members who serve full time in diverse teams in schools designated as high need and/or low performing. SSCs provide near-peer, research-based supports to students and supplemental capacity in classrooms. They also collaborate with teachers to personalize the learning environment, while developing skills they need for civic and workforce success after their year of service.

## Engage in research on expanded definition of success and accountability metrics

There is broad consensus that student success in school, work and life depends on a wider array of competencies and skills than solely academic achievement, including a range of social and emotional competencies and skills. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and other funding streams, such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and National Science Foundation (NSF), should increase investment in research and development on measures that effectively capture students' social, emotional and academic development, including learning to learn (i.e. metacognition) and workforce skills such as communication and problem-solving. Investment should also be coordinated to increase the cohesiveness of the work.

