

Figure 1: The National Commission on Social, Emotional & Academic Development, The Aspen Institute

“Supporting students’ comprehensive development requires leveraging partners beyond the schoolhouse—including families; community organizations; employers; faith-based institutions; colleges and universities; health, mental health, and social services; and other public agencies. Ensuring that all students have equitable access to safe and supportive learning environments also requires that policymakers at all levels ensure that resources are used equitably and efficiently, and can be flexible enough to support the needs of individual children and youth.” – From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope

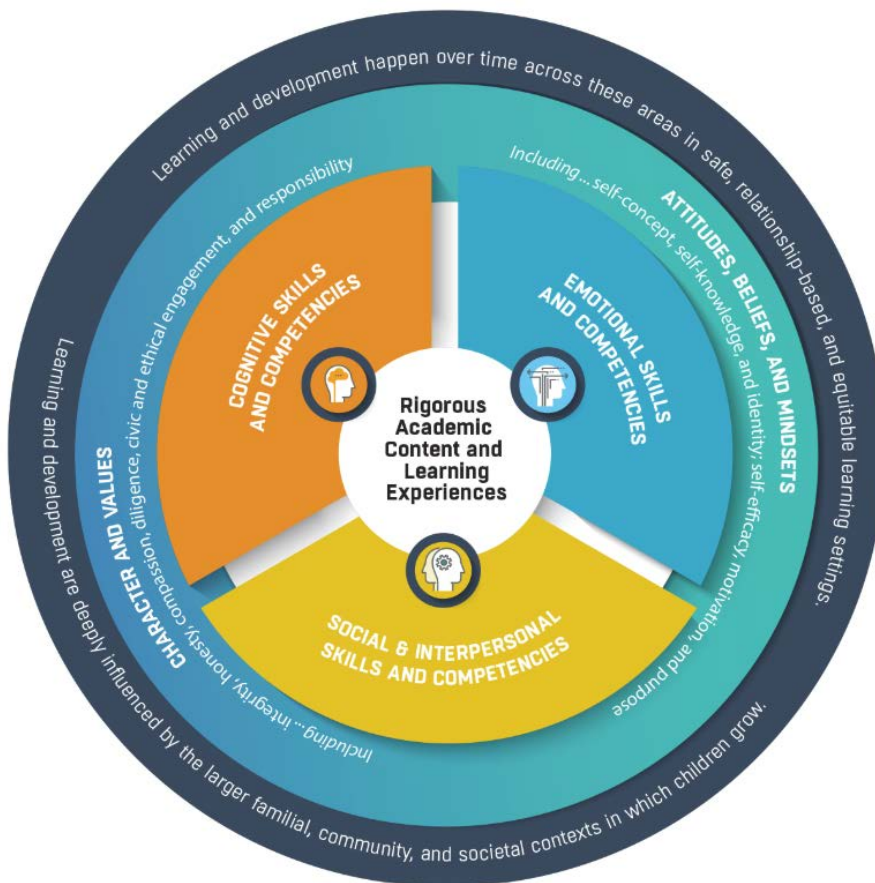
Ideas of Note for Youth Development Professionals

Students and families are at the center

As we work to think about changes in policy and practice to support students’ social, emotional and academic development (SEAD) it can be easy to focus on the policy-makers, influencers, and implementers as those who “make change happen”. Yet the SEAD Commission clearly shows that the core of this work, and where its work matters most, is with students and their families. We must authentically engage young people and their families and remember they too are change agents. At the same time, youth development professionals must consider how to support all students in having access to high quality learning settings in school and the community.

Youth development sits alongside a diverse group of community partners

When we consider the learning opportunities for young people in the community, youth development professionals have a clear role to play. And so too do local employers, health and social services, and faith-based and civic organizations. As schools look to the community for partnership, we must be prepared to work collaboratively not just with the PreK-12 system, but with all of the community-based groups that can provide learning and skill building opportunities for young people. Youth development professionals need to be prepared to clearly articulate the value we add and continually seek opportunities to take action on the Commission’s fifth recommendation to “align resources and leverage partners in the community to address the whole child.”



COGNITIVE

Including the ability to:

- Focus and pay attention
- Set goals
- Plan and organize
- Persevere
- Problem solve



SOCIAL & INTERPERSONAL

Including the ability to:

- Navigate social situations
- Resolve conflicts
- Demonstrate respect toward others
- Cooperate and work on a team
- Self-advocate and demonstrate agency



EMOTIONAL

Including the ability to:

- Recognize and manage one's emotions
- Understand the emotions and perspectives of others
- Demonstrate empathy
- Cope with frustration and stress

Figure 2: The National Commission on Social, Emotional & Academic Development, The Aspen Institute

“More than two decades of research across a wide range of disciplines—psychology, social science, brain science—demonstrates that learning depends on deep connections across a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits. These generally fall into three broad categories: (1) skills and competencies; (2) attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets; and (3) character and values.” – From *A Nation at Risk* to *A Nation at Hope*

Ideas of Note for Youth Development Professionals

Learning happens over time, in multiple settings

The work of the Social, Emotional and Academic Development (SEAD) Commission took a broad view of social and emotional learning by focusing on the contexts in which character, values, attitudes, and beliefs build up over time. Further, the SEAD Commission boldly acknowledged that learning happens over time and in multiple settings. With this lens, youth development professionals have the opportunity to communicate the many roles we play in helping young people build toward a broad set of competencies.

Cognitive skills, like social and emotional skills, are built in multiple settings

The SEAD Commission defines the three areas of skill and competencies as social, emotional and cognitive. The move from *academic* to *cognitive* signals an embrace of the notion that young people build higher order cognitive skills not just in an academic context, but across multiple learning environments. Youth development professionals can leverage this to help demonstrate and share the ways in which youth development programs and other informal learning opportunities are places where young people can build critical thinking, problem solving, and other skills in addition to social and emotional skills.

Comparison to other frameworks

Consider how this framing from the SEAD Commission connects with the work of the 2015 CCSR Report, *Foundations for Young Adult Success*. How can the two be used together to reinforce and strengthen your organization’s work?

The Practice Base for How Learning Happens

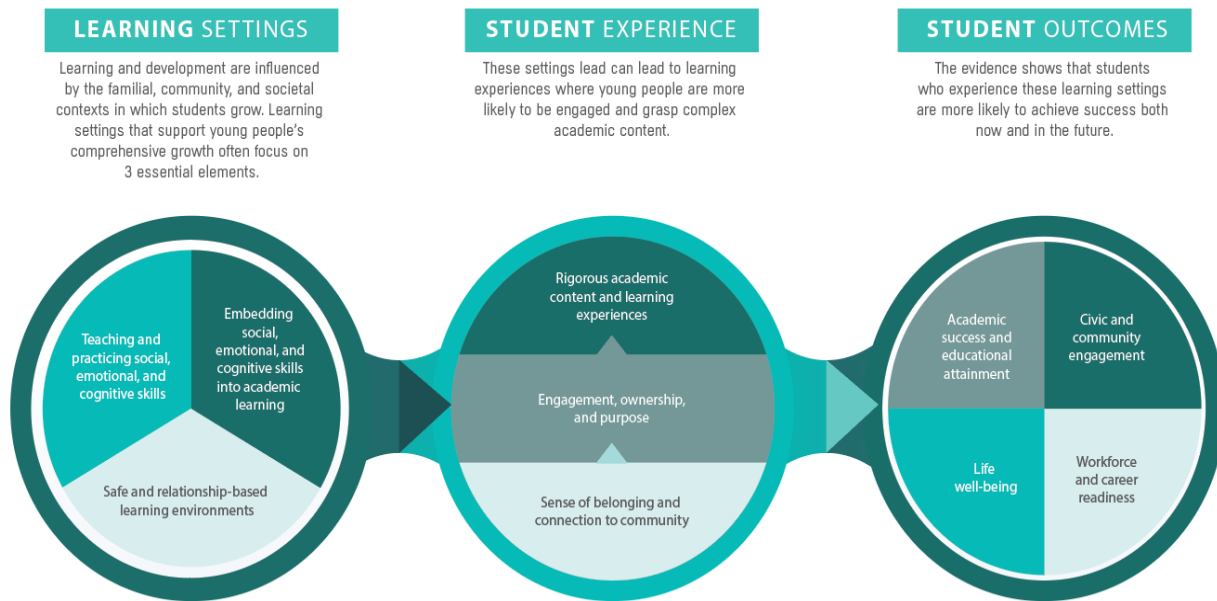


Figure 3: The National Commission on Social, Emotional & Academic Development, The Aspen Institute

“We’re still stuck in a paradigm that views social and emotional development and mastery of academic content as competing priorities. To create learning environments that support the whole student, educators will need a coherent plan that is supported by policy and research and that fosters the comprehensive development of young people.” – From a Nation at Risk to A Nation at Hope

Ideas of Note for Youth Development Professionals

Success is more than just academic

The Social, Emotional and Academic Development (SEAD) Commission’s first recommendation focuses on the need to “create a vision that broadens the definition of student success to include the whole child.” In this demonstration of how learning happens, the SEAD Commission came to the consensus on one such definition with student success being inclusive of academics, well-being, engagement and workforce readiness. When we work to change the odds so that all young people are ready for college, career, and life, we must work across settings to ensure there are learning settings and experiences that build toward the full range of skills and competencies young people will need to be successful.

Youth development theory of action is reinforced

A wide range of leading thought partners and researchers in the youth development field have outlined that we must first focus on learning settings, program environments, and/or developmental settings to ensure that young people have the opportunity for connections, relationships, and skill building in order to achieve positive outcomes. The 2002 National Research Council Report, *Community Programs that Promote Youth Development*; Durlak and Weissberg’s 2007 definition of SAFE¹; and the QuEST² model from the Forum’s Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality all serve as examples of this emphasis on shaping the environment to promote positive outcomes for kids. Through the SEAD Commission’s consensus on this theory of action of how learning happens, the foundation is now in place for cross sector conversations about how it is operationalized and what it looks like in different settings, and how we can more effectively communicate and align across sectors.

Learning settings are defined by more than just content

The commission has affirmed the idea that the quality of learning settings is defined by more than just the content. The National Research Council report outlined this with the features of positive developmental settings emphasis on

¹ Sequenced, active, focused, and explicit

² Quality – Engagement – Skills– Transfer

relationships, safety, family engagement, and more. The Youth Program Quality Assessment similarly frames program quality as being inclusive of instruction, content, and context. The quality of a learning setting is more than just pouring content and knowledge in to students' heads, it is an environment that leads to a collection of experiences that best allow young people to grasp and apply complex content. Now, with this alignment to widely used frameworks, the door has been opened for youth development professionals to share with educators and professionals from other sectors how we work to shape learning settings that include these three essential elements. From there, we can engage in cross-sector collaboration first to take action on the commission's second recommendation that we "transform learning settings so they are safe and supportive for all young people" and then to more broadly establish shared definitions of quality.

Student experiences matter

The SEAD commission reinforces what youth development professionals using tools such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment from the Forum's Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality have been acting upon – the quality of learning settings can be observed and impacts the experiences young people have. Youth development professionals now have language that can be used to explain to others how and why we think about, prioritize, and even measure youth experiences. From there, we can engage in conversations about how understanding student experience (created within positive learning settings) can drive cross-sector continuous improvement efforts.

Where and When Learning Happens

Expanding our understanding of all the places and times young people grow and learn

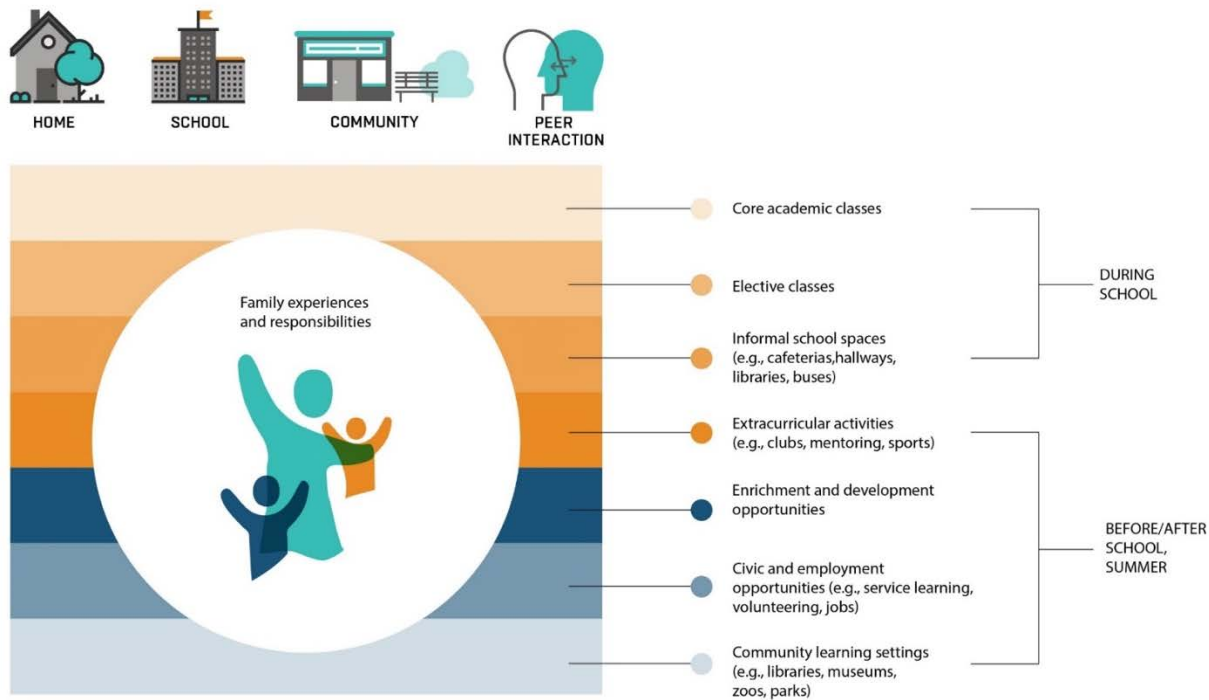


Figure 4: The National Commission on Social, Emotional & Academic Development, The Aspen Institute

“Expanding the definition of where adults should expect young people to find formal and informal opportunities that support them socially, emotionally, and academically invites families, educators, youth advocates, and policymakers to “name and see” the size of the opportunity gaps in their communities. Helping educators and youth development programs effectively partner to support whole-child development can increase their collective impact.” – From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope

Ideas of Note for Youth Development Professionals

Learning settings are more nuanced than “school” and “out-of-school” time

With a heightened understanding of how learning happens, the SEAD Commission noted that a traditional classification of “school” and “out-of-school” limits our ability to acknowledge and validate the multitude of opportunities for learning that exist at home, at school, and in the community. When we name the places where young people have learning opportunity, we also may acknowledge that all settings aren’t the same in terms of the ability for social, emotional, and academic learning to occur. Some learning settings have more room to acknowledge the relationship between social, emotional and cognitive skill building and content; some learning settings have more room for young people to practice these skills. Youth development professionals should be able to clearly articulate and share the ways in which they uniquely support skill building in informal learning settings.

Programs and people have the opportunity to connect with young people in more than one learning setting

The SEAD Commission highlights research that emphasizes the importance of SEAD being aligned across home, school, and community. Youth serving organizations regularly share that their work spans two or more of these contexts. An organization might connect with students during the day via electives classes or groups, they might offer programming out in the community, and they might work with students and their families in the home. With acknowledgement of this crossover youth development professionals can advocate for the role they can play in promoting and providing skill building opportunity in multiple contexts. Additionally, this crossover creates the opportunity for discussions of cross-training and bringing in the knowledge base and experiences of all parties. By sharing of best practices from one sector to another we can begin to collaboratively take action on the commission’s fourth recommendation to “build adult expertise in child development.”