SECONDARY EDITION

Strengthening Coherence Across Initiatives:

A Whole-Child Lens in Secondary

Center for Whole-Child Education

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Center for Whole-Child Education

The Center for Whole-Child Education, built on the work of Turnaround for Children, is a part of Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. The Center advances key insights from educator practice, scientific research, and student experience so that together we can create equitable learning environments.

Learn more at WholeChildASU.org.

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About This Report

This publication is a project of the Center for Whole-Child Education, part of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. The Center advances key insights from educator practice, scientific research, and student experience so that together we can create equitable learning environments where young people's full potential is unlocked.

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This publication would not have been possible without the many organizations who offered their perspectives, experience and brilliance on whole-child practices within state initiatives. They include: Anaheim Union High School District, Career Ladders Project, Community Schools Learning Exchange, Orange County Department of Education, Linked Learning Alliance, Oakland Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Sacramento County Office of Education. Please see the appendix for a list of the people who contributed.

We are grateful to the Learning Policy Institute for their partnership in the development of this report. Furthermore, we gratefully acknowledge the work of the *Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action* and *Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design* authors and co-authors, including Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, Laura E. Hernández, Abby Schachner, and Sara Plasencia, for their contributions and for the design of the *Science of Learning and Development Design Principles for Schools Self-Assessment Tool,* which serves as the basis for the structure of this work.

We also express gratitude to Dr. Pamela Cantor, and to Dr. Christina Theokas and Elizabeth Tijerina, for their co-authorship of the two aforementioned publications at Turnaround for Children, as the Center for Whole-Child Education was then known.

This report was co-authored by Katie Brackenridge, Gretchen Livesey, Laura Sikes, and Jeremy Koren.

Contents

Introduction

In February 2024, the Center for Whole-Child Education released a report, _Strengthening Coherence Across Initiatives: A Whole-Child Lens,_ focused on TK-12 education initiatives. The report was designed to help educators, education leaders and state leaders recognize the coherence across the multiple initiatives being implemented across California. The report found that all the initiatives are working to create positive, equitable learning experiences in which each and every young person can learn and grow, and they are using complementary and coherent whole-child practices to get there. The challenge is helping educators understand the connections across their work so that they can focus on creating opportunities and supports for all students to thrive.

This supplementary edition is focused on secondary education, specifically looking at the initiatives that impact high school educators and students. While focused on high school, many of the findings in here would also apply to middle schools. This version – as well as the initiatives it examines - addresses the unique developmental needs and opportunities that come with adolescence.[1] Adolescence – like early childhood - is characterized by remarkable brain development.

> **"During adolescence, our brains are becoming faster and more streamlined, eliminating connections that we don't use much while keeping and strengthening the connections we use more frequently. New connections form and strengthen based on our discoveries and experiences as we explore our worlds."**
>
> UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent

It is critically important that young people in this dynamic period experience relationship-based, experience-rich learning environments where they develop their sense of identity and agency, build resilience, and explore their creativity and curiosity among other essential skills and mindsets.[2] As they explore these skills and mindsets, adolescents also carry a heightened understanding of justice and

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[1] UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent defines adolescence as the period between ages 10 and 25.
[2] See the Building Blocks for Learning framework from Turnaround for Children (now the the Center for Whole-Child Education).

equity, and an increasing desire to be meaningfully engaged and contributing to the broader world. In short, adolescents are looking to experience holistic learning and skill development.

In this report, we have identified the whole-child practices that are embedded in four initiatives that are being implemented in high schools across California:
- Dual Enrollment
- College and Career Pathways
- Community Schools
- Social Emotional Learning

This report found complementary whole-child practices across the initiatives that could be leveraged for a comprehensive whole-child approach. It also reveals several gaps in supports. Because secondary education has historically been more focused on delivering academic content built upon an assumption that foundational mindsets, skills and habits have already been mastered by adolescents, it is not surprising to find these gaps. A focus on developing the whole learner, however, is clearly essential as adolescents strive to succeed in high school and meet the demands of post-secondary studies and the workforce.

Project Purpose

As a result of this project, we hope that educators, education leaders and state policymakers will:
1. Recognize the shared and complementary whole-child practices across the initiatives and therefore feel less overwhelmed and more aligned around their work, and
2. Invest in strengthening whole-child practices, knowing that the science of learning and development clearly defines these practices as critically important to adolescent development.

This project **is not** about...
- Putting one framework at the top.
- Just a technical crosswalk.
- Evaluating initiatives against one other.

This project **is** about...
- Noticing the common threads of whole-child practice through your work.
- Aligning your efforts around a whole-child purpose so that initiatives are mutually reinforcing.
- Building on existing assets and continuously working on areas for improvement.

How to Use This Resource

Throughout this resource, look for the icon below.

This icon prompts thinking through a **whole-child lens**. The full infographic can be found on p. 10.

What Does "Whole-Child" Mean?

Grounded in the science of learning and development, whole-child practices create learning conditions in which young people build essential cognitive, social and emotional skills and mindsets, develop their identities and self-worth, and overcome barriers to healthy development, learning and thriving.

These practices are particularly powerful in responding to the unique needs of adolescents. As neural pathways in their brains are pruned and strengthened, young people are increasingly taking charge of their own learning and development, looking for meaningful connections, relevant learning opportunities and skills that help them pursue their passions and goals. In this phase, adults work alongside adolescents providing resources and support for their journey, thoughtfully removing scaffolds as students become increasingly independent.

For the purpose of this work, we have chosen to use the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design [3] to describe the foundational components and practices of whole-child education.

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[3] *Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design* are a component of *Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action*, a joint publication of Learning Policy Institute (LPI), Turnaround for Children (now the Center for Whole-Child Education at ASU's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College), and the Forum for Youth Investment), in association with the Science of Learning and Development Alliance. Visit https://k12.designprinciples.org/.

These principles – along with specific examples of practices - are described below. We chose these principles because they were collaboratively created, are widely known, and have played a role in the development of initiatives in California.

Simply put, using a whole-child lens means looking at our initiatives, systems, structures, and practices with a set of guiding questions, pushing us to think about how we are supporting students' holistic development and learning through our work.

Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design
(Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children, 2021)
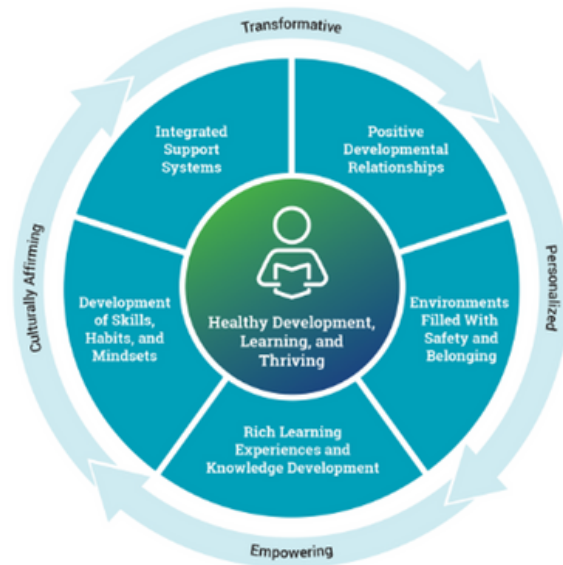
- **Whole-Child Purpose:** In what ways is this work focused on students' healthy development, learning and thriving?

- **Relationships:** In what ways is this work fostering trust, connection and belonging?

- **Environments:** In what ways is this work creating environments that are physically, emotionally and identity safe, supportive, and inclusive?

- **Learning Experiences:** In what ways is this work providing meaningful, engaging, and challenging learning experiences?

- **Skills, Habits, and Mindsets:** In what ways is this work developing students' social, emotional, and cognitive skills, habits, and mindsets?

- **Integrated Supports:** In what ways is this work using school and community resources to address students' strengths and needs?

[See the following page for the full Whole-Child Lens infographic.]

A Whole-Child Lens

Use these guiding questions to reflect on initiatives, systems, structures and practices in your work.

How do they address the needs of the whole learner?

Whole-Child Purpose

In what ways is this work focused on students' healthy development, learning and thriving?

Relationships

In what ways is this work fostering trust, connection and belonging?

Environments

In what ways is this work creating spaces that are physically, emotionally and identity safe, supportive and inclusive?

Learning Experiences

In what ways is this work providing meaningful, engaging and challenging learning experiences?

Skills, Habits, and Mindsets

In what ways is this work developing students' social, emotional and cognitive skills, habits and mindsets?

Integrated Supports

In what ways is this work integrating school and community resources to address students' strengths and needs?

Center for Whole-Child Education

ASU Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
Arizona State University

Secondary Initiatives Through A Whole-Child Lens

For this secondary report we focused on identifying the whole-child practices that are embedded in four initiatives that are frequently implemented in high schools, and spoke with organizations that are involved in leading these initiatives across California.

Initiative:	Organization:
College and Career Pathways	Linked Learning Alliance
Community Schools	Community Schools Learning Exchange (+ input from Orange County Department of Education)
Dual Enrollment	Career Ladders Project
Social Emotional Learning (SEL)	Sacramento County Office of Education

In choosing these initiatives, we know that we left out important and widely-used educational strategies and systems, like Universal Design for Learning and Restorative Practices, among others. *[Note: The TK-12 edition of this report includes Expanded Learning, Multi-Tiered System of Support and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports.]*

However, through the example of these four initiatives, we hope to illustrate that any initiative could be looked at through a whole-child lens. In an hour or less, one could use the SoLD Design Principles for Schools Self-Assessment Tool to consider how any initiative or strategy aligns with whole-child practices. An adapted version of this tool was completed by initiative partners for this project.

Whole-Child Purpose

In what ways is this work focused on students' healthy development, learning and thriving?

A whole-child purpose moves away from the factory model of education – one that focuses on delivering content to students along a pre-determined path of skills and knowledge. Instead, it offers a more flexible and dynamic approach that responds to students in their context and provides opportunities to build the knowledge, skills and mindsets that are relevant to them and valued in their broader community.

This approach strives to dismantle traditionally inequitable systems and practices that too often ignore, fail to serve, or harm students based on their culture, race, language, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. Instead, a whole-child purpose embraces a holistic understanding of young people as unique individuals within a social, political and physical context in order to support each and every student's healthy development, learning and thriving.

When asked how their initiatives support the whole child, each organization described a set of strategies, structures and systems intentionally designed to promote students' holistic healthy development, learning and thriving. These statements of whole-child purpose highlight how the initiatives are complementary, consistent and coherent approaches.

College and Career Pathways

Linked Learning Alliance: "All College and Career Pathways through the Linked Learning Alliance have in common the integration of four key components: rigorous academics aligned to admissions requirements for state colleges and universities; career technical education that delivers concrete knowledge and skills through a carefully structured sequence of courses within a local industry sector; work-based learning that aligns to the career pathway and provides students with exposure to real-world workplaces through a continuum of career exposure, and career experiences such as job shadowing, apprenticeships, and internships; and comprehensive support services including counseling and supplemental instruction to address individual needs."

Community Schools

Community Schools Learning Exchange (CSLX): "A community school is a place, a set of relationships, and an underlying structure that organizes community resources and voices around student success, recognizing that school is only one part of learning. By keeping students at the center, the community school strategy transforms what we often think of as traditional 'school' into a more welcoming and supportive place where educators, community members, families and students work in partnership to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development."

Dual Enrollment

Career Ladders Project: "Dual enrollment programs offer college courses to high school students (on high school campuses, in afterschool program venues, on community college campuses, etc.) so that students can begin to earn college credit while still in high school. Dual enrollment courses not only provide early college credit to students, especially to first generation college hopefuls and accelerate student progress along pathways, but also support high schools to offer a wider variety of specialized courses so that students can robustly explore possible career pathways."
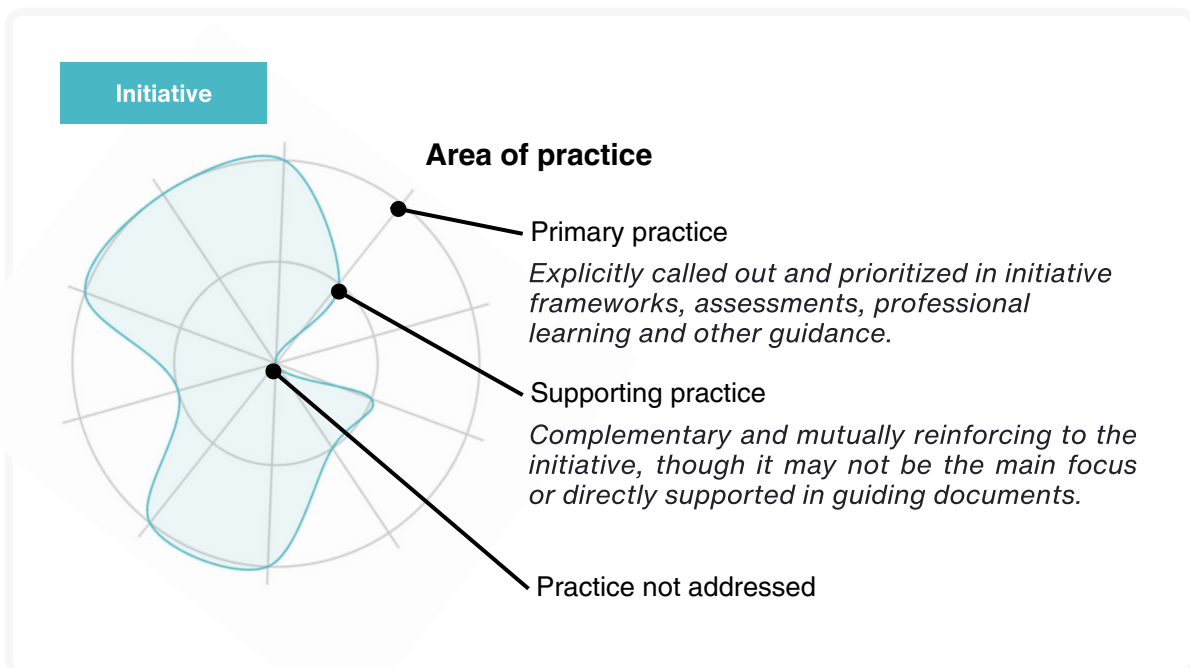
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE): "Social emotional learning is a critical part of whole-child education, as it supports the development of social-emotional skills and conditions that are necessary for all students to access equitable, high quality academic engagement and success."

Cohesive, Mutually Reinforcing Practices

In this section, we provide examples of specific whole-child practices and how they show up in California education initiatives. Staff from the organizations that lead California initiatives filled out an adapted version of the SoLD Design Principles for Schools Self-Assessment Tool, identifying which whole-child practices are **primary**, **supporting** or **not addressed** by their initiative, based on evidence in their guiding documents. You can find a list of organizations and individuals who completed the assessment and the guiding documents they referenced in the Appendix.

The following data visualizations represent the degree to which whole-child practices show up in each initiative, as either a "primary" or "supporting" practice.

Initiative

Area of practice

Primary practice
Explicitly called out and prioritized in initiative frameworks, assessments, professional learning and other guidance.

Supporting practice
Complementary and mutually reinforcing to the initiative, though it may not be the main focus or directly supported in guiding documents.

Practice not addressed

The whole-child lens highlights where there are consistent whole-child practices across the districts, schools and classrooms that are implementing these initiatives with fidelity. It also reveals gaps in whole-child practices, offering an opportunity to strengthen guidance in those areas with the goal of creating positive conditions for learning that are consistent with the science of adolescent development.

[The following descriptions of each principle are adapted from the Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action and the Center for Whole-Child Education's Toolbox.]
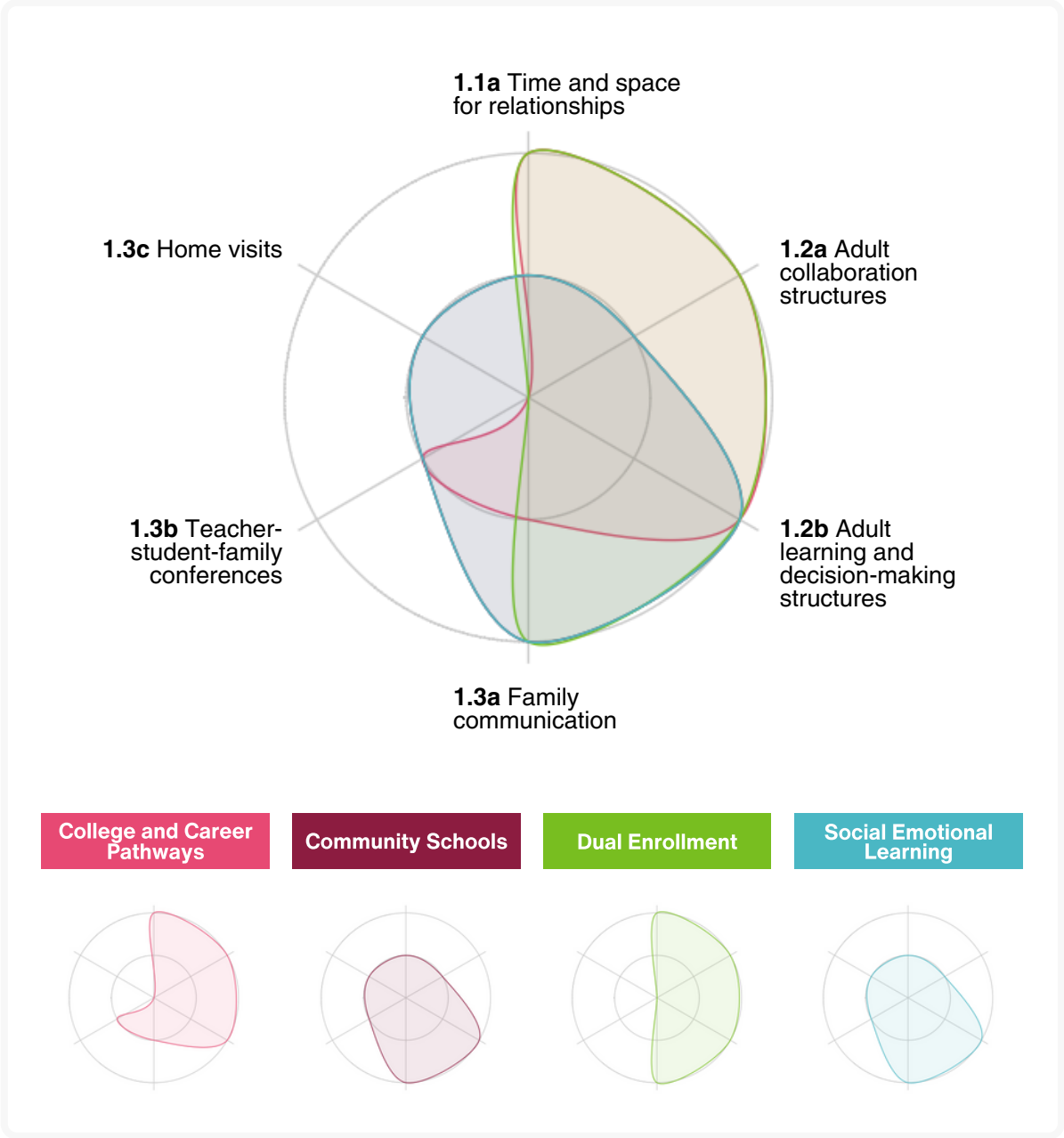
Positive Developmental Relationships

🔍 In what ways is this work fostering trust, connection and belonging?

Common across initiatives is a focus on positive developmental relationships for students and adults. This focus is grounded in the science of learning and development, which describes how relationships build strong brain architecture, providing critical avenues to learning and growth. Beyond "being nice," intentional developmental relationships can fundamentally change the way a young person develops, directly facilitating social, emotional and cognitive growth and empowering students as active agents, rather than passive recipients, in the learning process. Trusting relationships also buffer the negative impact of chronic stress through the release of the hormone oxytocin. Oxytocin protects children, at the cellular level, from the damaging effects of the stress hormone, cortisol.

In high schools that center relationships, staff are genuinely curious about their students' interests, experiences and perspectives, and leverage this information to create projects and content that are relevant, meaningful and engaging. In addition to their classroom teachers, students also have opportunities to learn from people and organizations in the broader community. This approach is different than the historical design of U.S. TK-12 school systems that have perpetuated deep structural racism, depersonalized settings, implicit bias and uneven power dynamics, which continue to marginalize people of color, English language learners, neurodivergent students and others from historically resilient communities. Intentionally engaging students as learners, valuing their assets and experiences and seeking understanding across lines of difference can support schools in redesigning for equity.

Through the self-assessment, the four initiative leads identified the ways in which their initiatives support strong relationships with and among students, educators, counselors and families.

Relationships Across Initiatives:

1.1a Time and space for relationships

1.3c Home visits

1.2a Adult collaboration structures

1.3b Teacher-student-family conferences

1.2b Adult learning and decision-making structures

1.3a Family communication

College and Career Pathways

Community Schools

Dual Enrollment

Social Emotional Learning

This data reveals that all the initiatives are supporting relationships. Career Pathways leaders talk about the essential role of the advisor or counselor who gives students opportunities to learn and dream, and also to plan for the immediate goals after high school graduation. Similarly, in Dual Enrollment, the relationship support is often between counselors and students, both from the high school and college and career settings. Relationship building between college-level instructors and students is not a clearly articulated expectation. This dynamic is reinforced in the Field Perspectives (below). The Dual

Enrollment Manager from Oakland Unified School District talks about intentional relationship building structures and strategies that exist between counselors and students. However, she noted that college-level instructors are often not accustomed to working with high school students. Here is an interesting opportunity to consider adding supports and structures that would strengthen relationship-based pedagogy in Dual Enrollment, not to mention in universities.

Environments Filled With Safety and Belonging

In what ways is this work creating spaces that are physically, emotionally and identity safe, supportive and inclusive?
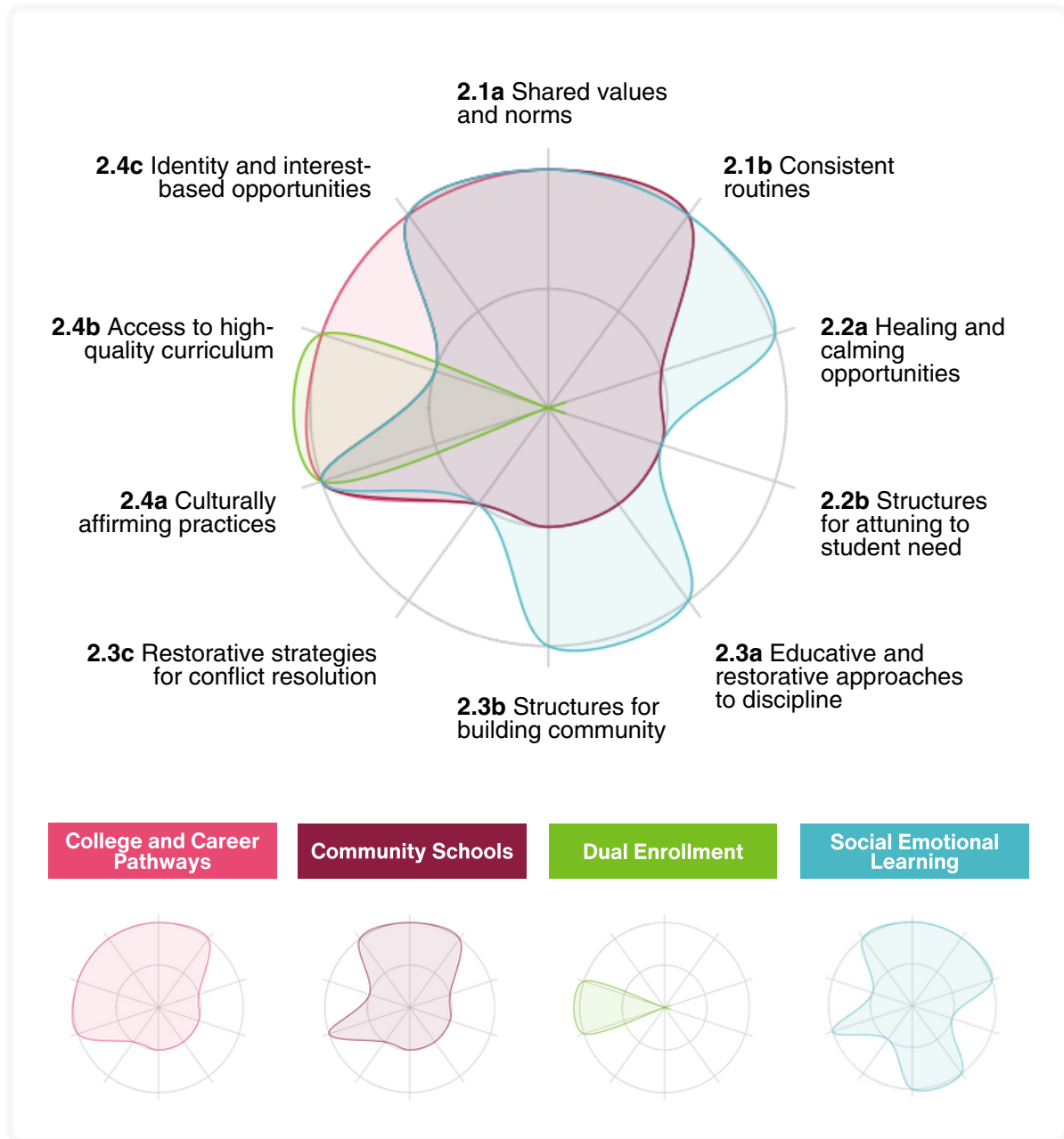
A supportive school environment is physically, emotionally, and identity safe, while creating a strong sense of belonging. A true sense of safety and belonging requires a shared, authentic commitment to giving power and voice to all community members – students, staff, caregivers, etc. – practicing inclusion even when it is difficult.

For high school students, a positive school environment means having respectful, bi-directional communication with adults. This might result, for example, in students having a voice in school culture and governance and a choice of activities to express their interests and perspectives. It also requires mechanisms for supporting and repairing relationships, instead of only discipline and punitive consequences, when challenges inevitably arise (e.g., using co-regulatory and restorative practices). As all voices are invited into the conversation, it is especially important that those with power are aware of how their identities and relative institutional positions affect their role in creating a supportive school environment.

Supportive environments are especially important for students who are already on "high alert" for danger, due to chronic stress or trauma. The predictability and consistency of a supportive school environment allows a hyperactive stress response system to categorize the pattern of experiences as non-threatening, thus allowing the nervous system to stay out of "fight, flight, or freeze" mode and in an open, engaging, and learning mode.

Creating an environment filled with safety and belonging requires intentional structures and strategies, many of which these California initiatives identified as primary or supporting practices.

Environments Across Initiatives:

2.1a Shared values and norms

2.4c Identity and interest-based opportunities

2.1b Consistent routines

2.4b Access to high-quality curriculum

2.2a Healing and calming opportunities

2.4a Culturally affirming practices

2.2b Structures for attuning to student need

2.3c Restorative strategies for conflict resolution

2.3a Educative and restorative approaches to discipline

2.3b Structures for building community

| College and Career Pathways | Community Schools | Dual Enrollment | Social Emotional Learning |

Dual Enrollment guidelines provide minimal information about creating supportive learning environments. One explanation is that Dual Enrollment as an initiative does not address schoolwide practices which means that some of these areas – educative and restorative approaches to discipline, restorative strategies for conflict resolution – may be happening in schools beyond the purview of Dual Enrollment. Here is an area where the interaction of different efforts or initiatives on a school site complement each other to provide holistic supports. A high school, for example, with strong SEL practices and

and Community Schools' infrastructure in addition to a Dual Enrollment program would likely have structures and systems in place to provide a supportive learning environment for students.

At the same time, it is important to note that Dual Enrollment guidelines provide little information about pedagogy in the classroom, although there are multiple mentions of culturally affirming practices. As described in the relationships section, this gap is in part because college-level instructors – and sometimes high school teachers – are focused on delivering content, not the process or environment for learning. Based on the science of adolescent brain development, it would be important to explore this gap further.

Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development

🔍 In what ways is this work providing meaningful, engaging and challenging learning experiences?
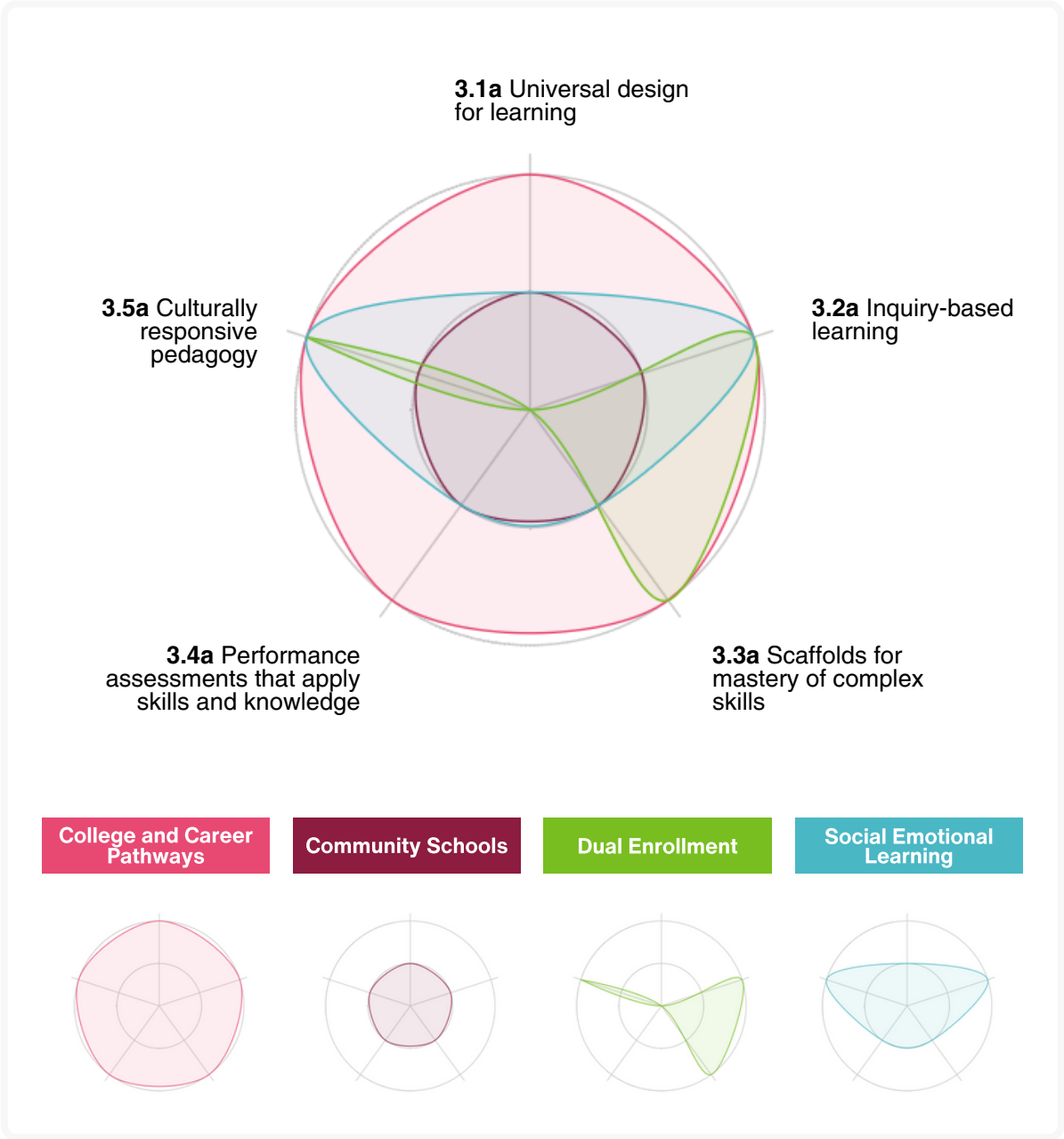
The four initiatives also identified specifically how their approaches support rich learning experiences. The science of learning and development demonstrates that young people are motivated when tasks are relevant to their lives, pique their curiosity, and are well scaffolded so that success is possible.

Schools should provide meaningful, culturally connected work within and across core disciplines (including the arts, music, and physical education) that builds on students' prior knowledge and experience and helps students discover what they can achieve. Particularly at the high school level, learning that is applied to authentic tasks and collaborative projects engages higher-order skills of analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, and problem-solving and allows knowledge to be remembered and used in new situations. High school students also benefit from having the flexibility to choose their learning pathways, based on their needs, interests and aspirations.

Students' expectations for success influence their willingness to engage in learning. These expectations depend on whether they perceive the task as doable and adequately supported as well as whether they have confidence in their abilities and hold a growth mindset.

Initiative leads identified the types of practices that students are experiencing in rich learning environments.

Learning Experiences Across Initiatives:

3.1a Universal design for learning

3.2a Inquiry-based learning

3.3a Scaffolds for mastery of complex skills

3.4a Performance assessments that apply skills and knowledge

3.5a Culturally responsive pedagogy

College and Career Pathways

Community Schools

Dual Enrollment

Social Emotional Learning

Here we see strong alignment across all initiatives, particularly with College and Career Pathways and Dual Enrollment that are specifically designed to offer learning experiences that respond to students' interests and motivations. In fact, Dual Enrollment programs can serve as an engagement - or re-engagement - strategy for high school students as they have the opportunity to take a wider array of coursework that may feel more relevant to their interests. For students who may not have been considered "college material," participation and success in actual college courses can help students see

themselves as college students. Where there are gaps, we see opportunities to provide guidance that shifts instructional practice to deepen students' learning.
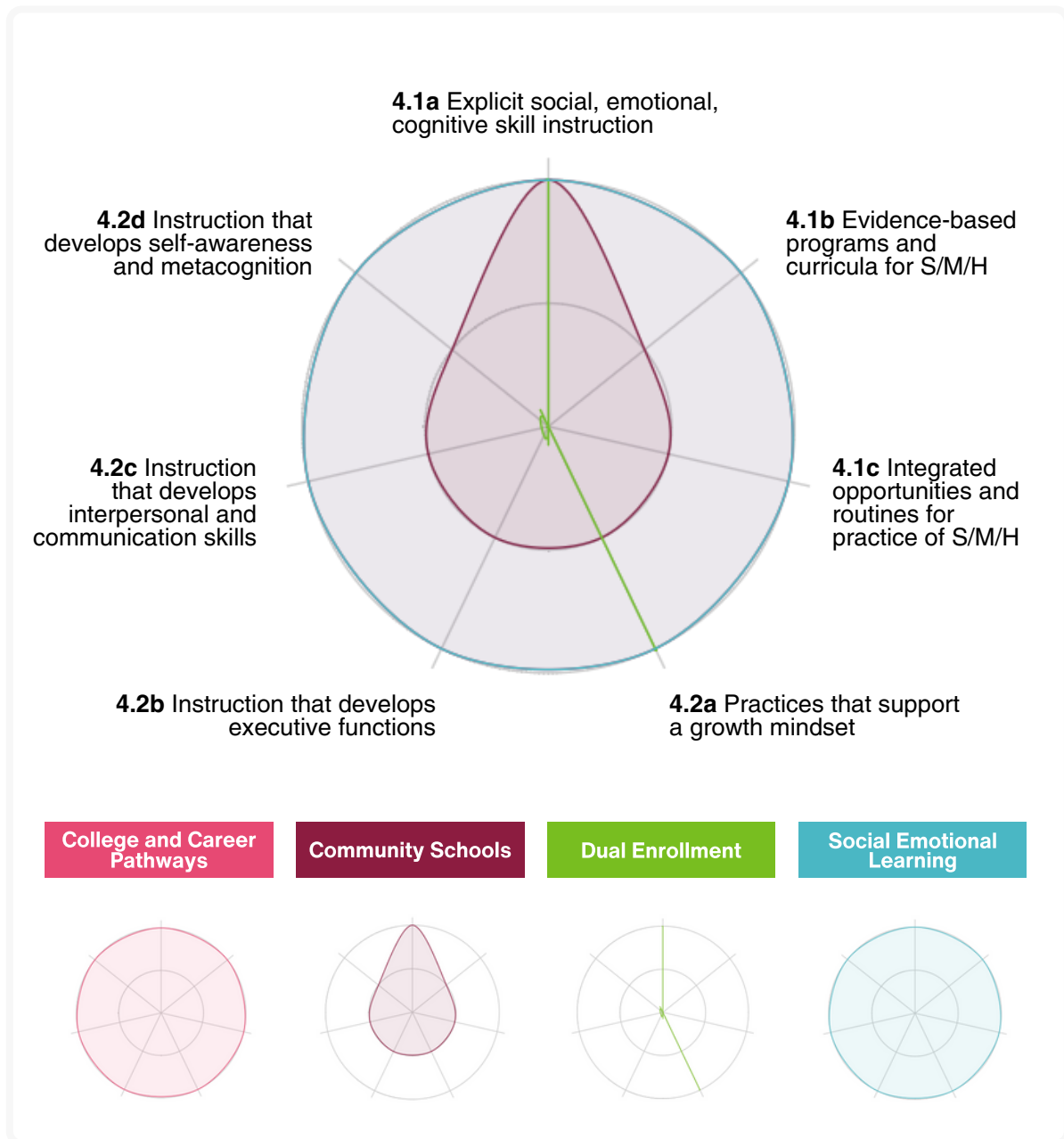
Development of Skills, Habits, and Mindsets

In what ways is this work developing students' social, emotional, and cognitive skills, habits, and mindsets?

In the brain, students are building anatomically cross-wired and functionally interconnected neural networks that facilitate skills like self-regulation while also helping them think, learn and remember content knowledge. In adolescence, the brain goes through a particularly active period of remodeling in which neural pathways are pruned as young people develop specific interests and passions, and in which the formation of myelin speeds up communication across the neural pathways between different parts of the brain (Siegel, 2014). In schools, this means that educators and students working together can make significant advances when learning is driven by a holistic understanding of students' unique skills, habits, mindsets, interests and goals.

The skills and mindsets demonstrated by the adults in a young person's context serve as a model through which students acquire their own skills and mindsets. For example, a group of educators who consistently embody a growth mindset, demonstrate strong stress management, and take a productive approach to conflict facilitate the development of such skills and mindsets in students.

Three of four California initiatives intentionally support the development of skills, habits and mindsets through the following examples of practices.

Skills, Habits, and Mindsets Across Initiatives:

4.1a Explicit social, emotional, cognitive skill instruction

4.2d Instruction that develops self-awareness and metacognition

4.1b Evidence-based programs and curricula for S/M/H

4.2c Instruction that develops interpersonal and communication skills

4.1c Integrated opportunities and routines for practice of S/M/H

4.2b Instruction that develops executive functions

4.2a Practices that support a growth mindset

| College and Career Pathways | Community Schools | Dual Enrollment | Social Emotional Learning |

Here again is a place where the interaction between initiatives is important and helpful. With strong SEL practices and Community Schools' infrastructure, high school students would likely be receiving intentional supports around the development of knowledge, skills and mindsets. Dual Enrollment and College and Career Pathways Programs sometimes work together, allowing students to take college-level courses within the supportive infrastructure of a Career Pathway.

The question, however, is to what degree these supports are reaching into Dual Enrollment classrooms. The initiative lead for Dual Enrollment noted that some courses, particularly in technical education, are explicit about the development of work habits and skills. She also noted that this is an area of growing interest for the people who organize and implement Dual Enrollment programs. In the guiding documents, there are references to adolescent brain development that show awareness of the need and opportunity to be supporting high school students more holistically (Career Ladders Project, 2024). Dual Enrollment guidance also provides the example of college success courses that introduce students to the skills, habits and mindsets needed to succeed in college-level courses. This type of support is particularly important for first generation students.
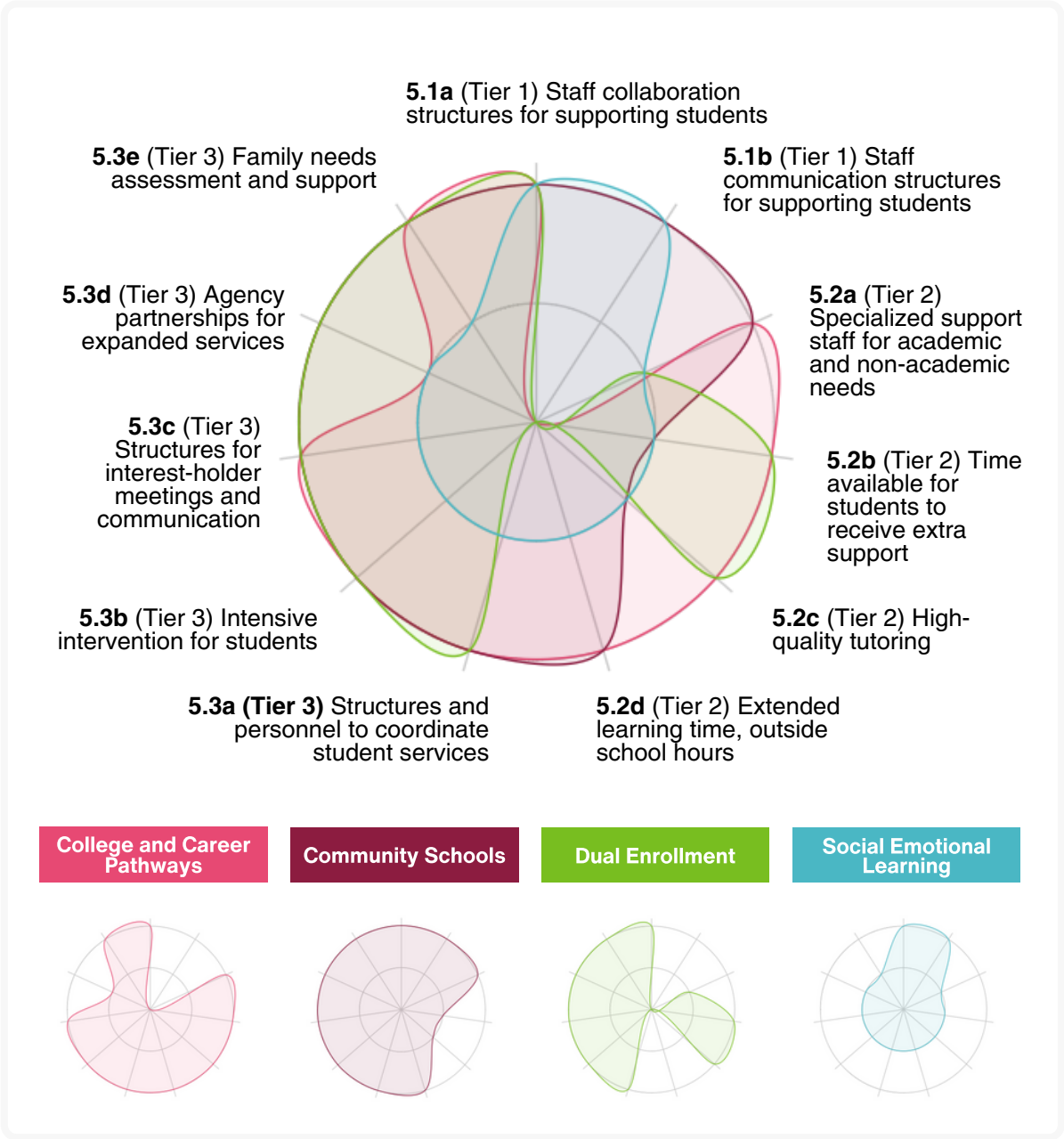
Integrated Support Systems

🔍 In what ways is this work using school and community resources to address students' strengths and needs?

The science of learning and development tells us that each student is on their own unique developmental pathway. Students reach their full potential when they have access to intervention and enrichment that matches their jagged learning profiles and collectively supports their social, emotional and academic growth. When students face challenges, which all of them will, those challenges need to be addressed without stigma or shame in order to successfully support their learning and growth. In all schools, and particularly in secondary schools, students should have an active part in identifying their own and the school community's needs and assets, informing the design and delivery of programs and services, assessing their effectiveness, and advising on improvements to the system of support.

To achieve this personalized approach, well-designed systems weave together school and community resources for physical and mental health, social services, and expanded learning time, integrating these practices into day-to-day schooling so that students' needs are readily identified and met holistically, without bureaucratic delays. They also ensure that practitioners have a shared developmental approach to thinking about students with an asset-based lens.

All four initiatives provide integrated supports to address the unique developmental profiles of students, including the following types of structures and systems.

Integrated Supports Across Initiatives:

5.1a (Tier 1) Staff collaboration structures for supporting students

5.3e (Tier 3) Family needs assessment and support

5.1b (Tier 1) Staff communication structures for supporting students

5.3d (Tier 3) Agency partnerships for expanded services

5.2a (Tier 2) Specialized support staff for academic and non-academic needs

5.3c (Tier 3) Structures for interest-holder meetings and communication

5.2b (Tier 2) Time available for students to receive extra support

5.3b (Tier 3) Intensive intervention for students

5.2c (Tier 2) High-quality tutoring

5.3a (Tier 3) Structures and personnel to coordinate student services

5.2d (Tier 2) Extended learning time, outside school hours

College and Career Pathways	Community Schools	Dual Enrollment	Social Emotional Learning

There is strong alignment around this whole-child practice, with all the initiatives sharing a commitment to supporting the varied needs of young people through high school.

Perspectives From the Field

To deepen our understanding of how whole-child practices actually show up in the field, we talked to practitioners about their experiences. These practitioners were recommended by the organizations that completed the self-assessments because of the practitioner's experience and expertise in implementing specific initiatives. We heard amazing examples of whole-child work in action in all of these school districts.

We also discovered how these experienced practitioners are blending initiatives together in pursuit of a strong, shared vision, and employing a variety of strategies to help staff connect their work around that vision.

The following profiles describe specifically how that is happening in these forward-thinking school districts:

- Anaheim Union High School District
- Los Angeles Unified School District
- Oakland Unified School District

Anaheim Union High School District

This interview was conducted with Dr. Jaron Fried, Education Service Assistant Superintendent; Robert Saldivar, Executive Director of Educational Services; Diana Fujimoto, Coordinator of Professional Learning; and Carlos Hernandez, Director of Community Schools, Family and Community Engagement. The intended focus of this interview was around Community Schools.

The Anaheim Union High School District is located in Orange County, California. It has 8 junior high schools, 8 comprehensive high schools, one 7-12 academy and 3 alternative education schools, serving 28,404 students.

How is Community Schools whole-child work?

Anaheim puts thriving students at the center of its Community Schools work with a firmly assets-based approach that is based on trust and collaboration with all interest-holders. The district is always thinking about sustainability, leveraging the Community Schools framework to unite other initiatives and using grant funds to build staff capacity through professional learning.

Anaheim is focusing on strengthening classroom-level interactions between teachers and students because "this is where students spend the majority of their time." Learning is made relevant through student voice, not just about what's happening in the classroom but also about what's happening beyond the school walls, encouraging students to bring in issues from their community and training teachers to be flexible and responsive to students' interests. Anaheim is also intentional about building what they call "21st Century Skills – the 5 C's of Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, and Character/Compassion," which directly ties to the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design's component of developing skills, habits and mindsets.

Anaheim teachers approach academics by providing rich learning experiences and supporting knowledge development. To do this, Anaheim allows space for teachers to be creative and take risks – "to break away from the test mantra." They also encourage relationship-building, asking teachers to "know students' names, know their assets, know their needs, know their story." They encourage staff to be "teachers of students, not teachers of stuff." Anaheim further expands community connections through career technical pathways and dual enrollment opportunities that combine technical skills with "soft" skills, youth voice and purpose that are critical to student engagement.

Anaheim is intentional about taking a systemic approach that is not dependent on one or a few people. Scaling and sustainability come through structures like reflective learning walks for both teachers and parents/guardians, capstone projects, professional learning and community-wide meetings that are built into the fabric of the district - "the way we do business."

> **"If it's not connecting to our goals, then why are we doing it?"**
>
> Leaders at Anaheim Union High School District

Through these and other structures, the Anaheim community consistently comes back to its purpose.

How do you create coherence among initiatives?

With 15 years of experience building their current system, Anaheim staff had some clear words of advice:

Make the focus the focus. Anaheim has a strong shared vision, mission and values that are integrated into all aspects of the district's work. District leadership is deeply intentional and highly inclusive about who is involved in creating the vision, mission and values with processes that engage students, parents, teachers, other staff and community partners in envisioning the profile of a successful learner and the environments that lead to that profile. The vision, mission, values show up at every meeting in order to ensure that they are focused on why they are doing the things they are doing.

Create clear structures and strategies. Anaheim staff backwards maps from the vision, mission and values to the structures and strategies that will help them get there. This includes frameworks that are well known to everyone in the school community – like the 5 C's - which create common language across school sites and initiatives so that people are able to connect the dots for themselves.

Be intentional, even if it feels like you are going slowly. Anaheim has been working on its whole-child approach for 15 years and acknowledges that it still has work to do. Staff have taken the time to include the broader community in decision-making and planning. Together, they have paused to identify what's working and what's not working in order to steadily improve.

In Anaheim, it's not about which initiative is doing what. It's about the shared pursuit of a whole-child purpose through all of its efforts.

Los Angeles Unified School District

This interview was conducted with Esther Dabagyan, Career Technical Education-Linked Learning Administrator.

The Los Angeles Unified School District has 1,438 schools, serving 538,295 students.

How is College and Career Pathways whole-child work?

In Los Angeles Unified School District, Esther Dabagyan spoke from her experience as principal of the STEM Academy of Hollywood. She spoke about how the different principles within the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design are interconnected in the implementation of College and Career Pathways. Positive developmental relationships, for example, aren't necessarily explicitly called out as part of College and Career Pathways but they are embedded in supportive environments and integrated support systems which are explicitly part of the College and Career Pathways model. Adults work in teams to welcome and support students right from the moment they walk in the door of the summer bridge program. This approach creates a sense of belonging that is grounded in relationships among staff and with students.

The other two principles – rich learning experiences and the development of skills, habits, and mindsets – are very much related to portfolio assessment, senior defense and interdisciplinary career-themed projects. These approaches have real life relevance, teaching and reinforcing skills that can be applied in the workplace or in college. Staff backwards map from the senior defense to the learning outcomes to the individual instructional assignments. "We're explicitly teaching to what we want the seniors to show during their senior defense." Along the way, the "soft," "hard" and academic skills are introduced and practiced when students are doing interdisciplinary projects that are relevant to students' grade levels and the career theme.

Equity is a core part of the approach. Students aren't tracked and there are no separate honors courses. At first this can be challenging for staff, but with enough professional development, teachers feel empowered to be successful.

> *"It leads to amazing, heterogeneous grouping that you don't get at most schools, and that's the key to unlocking a rich learning experience."*
>
> Esther Dabagyan, Los Angeles Unified School District

How do you create coherence among initiatives?

Dabagyan explained the importance of approaching every school as an individual entity and of having a clear process for change that starts with the "why." She believes in bringing together teams of people at school sites, and using intentional, documented processes that include clear expectations. This approach takes time. "You can't just have a meeting with 200 people and say, 'Okay, this is what you're going to do. Good luck! Have fun! I'll see you in a couple of months and see how it's going.' You have to meet with individual schools and use a document that you come back to time and time again on a regular basis. All of this has to be framed with the 'Why.' Why are you telling schools to do this work?"

As a principal, Dabagyan always asked her team how new work is coherent with what is already happening. The answers to these questions determined what the team would do next in terms of implementation.

> *"How does this work fit in our existing practice? Is it going to replace something that's currently not working? Or is it going to enhance something that is already implemented and is working really well?"*
>
> Esther Dabagyan, Los Angeles Unified School District

"I think one of the most important things about serving the whole child is to understand that one size does not fit all. Yes, there are best practices, but there are a million ways to implement those best practices, and not every best practice fits every child, nor every school. With a giant district like LAUSD, it's very important to keep that in mind."

Oakland Unified School District

This interview was conducted with Leslie Hsu Freeman, Manager, Dual Enrollment.

The Oakland Unified School District serves 45,741 students at 106 schools, including 17 high schools.

How is Dual Enrollment whole-child work?

Dual Enrollment fills a gap in the content that most high schools can offer, including coursework, for example, in technology, environmental science, psychology, the arts, and business, that relate to students' stated college and career interests. This variety broadens the choices students have and gives them access to coursework that is motivating, rigorous and relevant to their individual interests and passions. Through the process, they become connected to post-secondary college and career options and receive tangible credits to apply towards their college degrees. Students who take one or more Dual Enrollment classes are 20 percent more likely to go to college.

In addition to the content and credits, students in Dual Enrollment practice the skills and mindsets they'll need in college and the workplace – i.e., agency, relationship skills, self-awareness, resilience – with scaffolded support from counselors. Some students struggle, for example, with advocating for themselves. Counselors help them understand how to communicate with college faculty, including when and how to ask for help if they are struggling. Counselors also work closely with college faculty – some of whom may not be attuned to the particular needs of adolescents – to smooth the divide between college-level expectations and students' reality. This communication creates a wraparound support system for students so that they experience safety and belonging.

Counseling starts early in Dual Enrollment programs so that counselors know their students well and can help them set goals and make choices towards those goals. Particularly for first generation college students, Dual Enrollment gives them the information and support they may not have otherwise.

> **"Students know that this is an opportunity they can take advantage of as early as 9th grade. They can envision themselves – 'I'm a college student.' This gives them the agency to enroll and do well."**
>
> Leslie Hsu Freeman, Oakland Unified School District

How do you create coherence among initiatives?

The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) Superintendent has been a big champion of Dual Enrollment. It is integrated in the district's Strategic Plan with district investments to support it. In many cases, College and Career Pathways and Dual Enrollment operate in tandem with students in a pathway attending college classes through the Dual Enrollment system. Hsu Freeman acknowledges that OUSD has many urgent priorities and limited staff capacity, so it is challenging to actualize coherence and alignment. "If we were in a 5-chapter book about coherence, we'd probably be in Chapter 3. There's not overall coherence, but schools have worked really hard to create conditions for alignment and make it work in their own context."

The school site principal is a key player with a huge job who needs to have a team of people, a vision and district support in order to facilitate coherence at the site level.

> *"Who are my players, my people? How can I position them to support the work? How does this work roll into the bigger picture strategy to move the outcomes forward?"*
>
> Leslie Hsu Freeman, Oakland Unified School District

In her role at the district office, Hsu Freeman is focused on making decisions and putting together resources that remove challenges and make coherent implementation possible.

Key Actions for Coherence

The process of gathering this information has yielded some critical discoveries about what works in developing and sustaining a coherent approach. This advice comes largely from successful strategies being implemented in county offices, districts and schools across the state. **Much of it is about clear communication, thoughtful implementation and inclusive collaboration focused on a shared whole-child purpose.**

DO: Revisit your school/district vision statement with your interest-holders.

As described above by our field partners, the heart of whole-child work is having a clearly articulated "North Star" that the school community can refer to as it makes decisions, sets priorities and takes action. How explicit is your school or district vision about your whole-child purpose?

Consider bringing together a group of interest-holders to discuss:
- In what ways is our vision consistent with our whole-child purpose?
- What would make this commitment clearer or explicit?
- What steps should we take to update our vision? Who should be involved?
- How do we actively use our vision statement in our broader school community?

DON'T: Assume everyone knows your vision statement if they haven't engaged with it.

DO: Communicate coherence.

As you think about what you're communicating, it helps to focus on some basic messages that are repeated and reinforced in every outreach. Here are some basic messages your interest-holders need to hear:
- The district or school has a clear whole-child vision.
- Your district or school community is pursuing practices that lead you towards that vision.
- These practices are embedded in all of the initiatives that the district/school is implementing.
- These initiatives complement and strengthen each other, all towards ensuring students are learning, growing and thriving.

DON'T: Bury your vision statement in a binder!

DO: Engage interest-holders in talking about each existing and new initiative.

The purpose of these conversations is for people to move beyond feeling overwhelmed by initiatives, and instead, to see how they work together and complement each other toward your whole-child vision. This is particularly true for the secondary initiatives, like Dual Enrollment, which on their own may not be fully aligned with whole-child design, but in combination with other efforts, offer an important resource to diversify and deepen students' learning experiences. The whole-child lens can be used as a grounding for discussion with staff, students, parents and community interest-holders. An important part of these conversations is helping people make connections to their own experiences and work.

DON'T: Impose a new initiative on your district/school community without letting people explore how it fits with their existing work and experience.

DO: Invest in relationships and supportive environments for adults in the system.

This shift will create the conditions for collaboration and creativity, moving people from a mindset of fear and compliance to one of inspiration and innovation. For Dual Enrollment, there is a significant opportunity to invest in the skills of college-level instructors, so they are better equipped to meet the holistic developmental needs of adolescents. With instructors often coming from higher education, this shift would require a change in expectations and a deeper relationship between staff from high schools and their college partners. The way adults work with each other and understand their role in the system is at the heart of transformation.

DON'T: Expect adults to change their mindset and actions without changes to the expectations and their environment.

DO: Unify your LCAP around your whole-child vision and the initiatives that support it.

The whole-child lens defines how your initiatives are supporting each other and your whole-child purpose through specific practices. Including language from the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design in your Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) activity descriptions will reinforce your vision and create more cohesion across your plan. This coherence will make the LCAP easier to understand and use as a guiding document and communication tool to your broader community.

DON'T: Write a long list of disconnected strategies and steps that are not clearly aligned to a larger purpose.

DO: Apply the whole-child lens to other initiatives.

The four initiatives that we examined are just examples of initiatives that your school/district may be implementing. The whole-child lens could be applied to any of those other initiatives. Use the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design and the specific practices in this tool to define and communicate how other initiatives - for example, Universal Design for Learning, Restorative Practices and many others - are part of your coherent and consistent drive toward your whole-child vision.

DON'T: Ask people to take on new initiatives that aren't explicitly connected to your whole-child purpose.

DO: Pursue continuous improvement.

Work with staff and families to understand what's working and what needs to be improved in the initiatives. This report highlights some areas for growth within the initiatives. The most experienced education leaders are humble about their progress, recognizing that gaps are opportunities for improvement and that finding success is an on-going journey. While it takes time, the process of assessing the quality and progress of your work has multiple benefits, including interest-holder engagement and professional learning along with improved services and supports for students and staff.

DON'T: Forget to ask people what they think, feel and know.

Key Actions for Coherence

What works in developing and sustaining a coherent approach? This advice comes largely from successful strategies being implemented in county offices, districts and schools across the state.

> **DO: Revisit your school/district vision statement with your interest-holders.**
> DON'T: Assume everyone knows your vision statement if they haven't engaged with it.

> **DO: Communicate coherence.**
> DON'T: Bury your vision statement in a binder.

> **DO: Engage interest-holders in talking about each existing and new initiative.**
> DON'T: Impose a new initiative on your district/school community without letting people explore how it fits with their existing work and experience.

> **DO: Invest in relationships and supportive environments for adults in the system.**
> DON'T: Expect adults to change their mindset and actions without changes to the expectations and their environment.

> **DO: Unify your LCAP around your whole-child vision and the initiatives that support it.**
> DON'T: Write a long list of disconnected strategies and steps that are not clearly aligned to a larger purpose.

> **DO: Apply the whole-child lens to other initiatives.**
> DON'T: Ask people to take on new initiatives that aren't explicitly connected to your whole-child purpose.

> **DO: Pursue continuous improvement.**
> DON'T: Forget to ask people what they think, feel and know.

Conclusions

Looking through a whole-child lens reveals that whole-child practices are embedded across California's education initiatives for secondary schools. The whole-child lens magnifies the ways in which the initiatives are complementary and mutually reinforcing. It also reveals the areas where practices that are consistent with the science of adolescent development could be strengthened. Having consistent and coherent whole-child practices is particularly important for adolescents, ensuring that they are connected, engaged and empowered during this period of rapid brain development.

This report allows educators to see the whole-child practices that are simultaneously supported by their intiatives. They can also know that if they want support in strengthening these practices, they can go to the initiatives to look for resources, guidance and tools. SEL, for example, offers strategies and tools that would help Dual Enrollment instructors improve their instructional practice. In this way, the initiatives are reinforcing each other, not adding "one more thing to the plate." As you read in the field perspectives, this integrated approach is already in place or in process in many districts and schools.

From both initiative leads and practitioners in the field, the message was clear: More important than allegiance to one initiative or the other is recognizing that the initiatives can work together toward a whole-child purpose, and making decisions that leverage them flexibly based on the strengths and needs of a particular school community.

Educators and education leaders can use a whole-child lens to point out shared purpose, vision, and goals, to understand the consistency across initiatives, to make decisions based on existing assets and community needs, and to collaborate on the implementation of a coherent set of supports - all leading toward the learning conditions where young people can thrive.

Appendix

Link | Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action

Link | SoLD Design Principles for Schools Self-Assesment Tool

Link | Center for Whole-Child Education's Toolbox of resources

List of Initiative Partners and Resources

The following organizations and individuals completed an adapted version of the SoLD Design Principles for Schools Self-Assessment Tool on behalf of the initiative that they are involved in managing at a statewide level. This chart also lists the resources they referenced in making their determination of whether a practice was primary, supporting or not addressed by the initiative.

Initiative Partners	Resources Referenced
College and Career Pathways	
Linked Learning Alliance Esther Soliman, *Vice President, Pathways Implementation*	• Getting Started with Linked Learning: A Guide for Pathways (LLA) • Linked Learning Gold Certification Standards (LLA) • Access and Equity in Linked Learning (LLA)
Community Schools	
Community Schools Learning Exchange Hayin Kimner, *Managing Director* Deanna Niehbur, *Director of Policy* Lara Kain, *Administrator, Community Schools, Orange County Department of Education*	• Framework for Community Schools - Community Schools Forward • CA Community Schools Framework • Community Schools Playbook - CA Partnership for the Future for Learning

Initiative Partners   Resources Referenced

Dual Enrollment	
Career Ladders Project Linda Collins, *Executive Director and Founder* Naomi Castro, *Chief Program Officer*	• Creating a Dual Enrollment Partnership: Strategies for Coordinators (CLP) • What is Dual Enrollment? A Brief Guide for Students and Families (EdTrustWest) • Dual Enrollment Conversation Guide: Questions Students and Families Should Ask (EdTrustWest) • Designing Professional Development for Dual Enrollment Instructors: Strategies for Coordinators (CLP) • The Dual Enrollment Playbook: A Guide to Equitable Acceleration for Students (CCRC) • Working with Adolescents: Strategies for Instructors (CLP) • Designing Professional Development for Dual Enrollment Instructors: Strategies for Coordinators (CLP) • The Dual Enrollment Landscape in California: A CLP Working Paper (CLP) • Supporting English-Language Learners: Strategies for Instructors (CLP) • *Framework: Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion (CLP, forthcoming)* • Student Voices: First Generation Dual Enrollment (CLP) • California Dual Enrollment Exemplar Award (CA Dept of Education, with CLP and others) • Dual Enrollment Grants RFA - California Department of Education
Social Emotional Learning (SEL)	
Sacramento County Office of Education Mai Xi Lee, *Social-Emotional Director*	• CASEL Framework • CASEL School Guide • CalHOPESEL.org • CDE T-SEL Competencies and Conditions • SEL Guiding Principles • SEL embedded Core documents • BELE Network

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