



LIFT OFF:

How Kansas is
Redesigning its
Schools for Tomorrow



KANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

MISSION

To prepare Kansas students for lifelong success through rigorous, quality academic instruction, career training and character development according to each student's gifts and talents.

VISION

Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

MOTTO

Kansans Can

SUCCESS DEFINED

A successful Kansas high school graduate has the

- Academic preparation,
- Cognitive preparation,
- Technical skills,
- Employability skills and
- Civic engagement

to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation.

OUTCOMES

- Social-emotional growth measured locally
- Kindergarten readiness
- Individual Plan of Study focused on career interest
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary success

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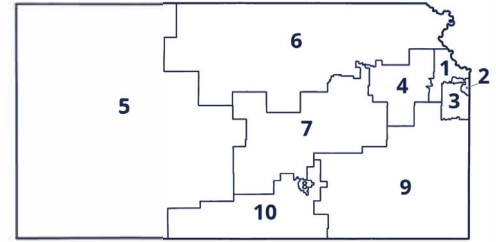


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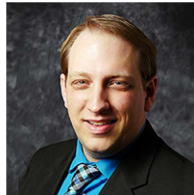
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INTRODUCTION

The Challenge of Preparing Students for Success in the Complex and Rapidly Changing World

The future for today's students is complex and rapidly changing as the advancement of technology is connecting people and systems around the globe in new and unforeseen ways. As automation rolls out and routine task-oriented jobs are disappearing, the skills that are needed for success have been altered in significant ways. There is an increasing awareness of a need to create schools that meet the needs of today's students and equip them with the academic and social-emotional skills that are critical for success in work, life and citizenship.

Much of the current research indicates that there is a need for schools to transform their approach in order to do the work of preparing today's students for their futures. There is a growing consensus that American students lack not only the academic skills, but the "soft skills" necessary for success. The soft-skills deficit is problematic because graduates are not prepared to face the most common and difficult challenges in the workplace, such as the ability to collaborate and act as conscientious team members. These findings have implications for American competitiveness in the global economy as most states are predicted to not have enough qualified graduates to fill future job needs.

Given these findings, education systems across the United States have been searching for solutions to improve and transform student outcomes. But how do these school transformations take place within education systems that have been traditionally slow to change?

This report will highlight one impressive example of how a state is innovating to transform its schools to address these skills gaps and prepare its students to meet their potential and achieve success. The approach undertaken by Kansas contains important lessons for other systems seeking to implement wide-scale change that includes committed stakeholders and is conducted in a bipartisan fashion.



Students at Liberal High School talk about what they have learned in classes that help them operate the school's store. The school's store offers students an opportunity to learn about business, marketing and more.



I have students who have found hope when it comes to their education and an overall sense of accomplishment and empowerment when it comes to their ability to learn. A day does not go by that I do not have a student stop me to celebrate an academic success—something I rarely, if ever, experienced in education before this year.

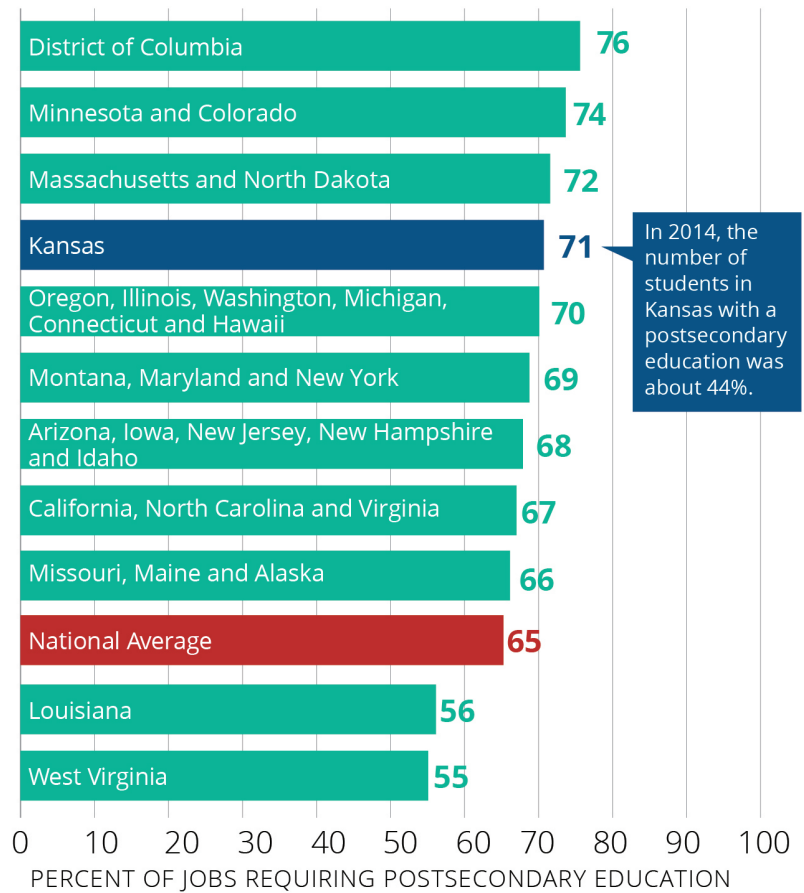


— Curtis Nightingale, Principal and Pilot, Bennington Junior-Senior High School (Mercury 7 Cohort)

Introduction to the Kansas State Department of Education and its Leadership

In November 2014, Dr. Randy Watson was named the new Commissioner of Education for the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). As he started in this role, the Kansas State Board of Education directed Watson to take a hard look at the current education system and how it was performing. Watson was startled by the findings from a 2013 Georgetown University study,¹ which found that almost all U.S. states are not on target to produce the number of graduates needed to fill jobs. Of particular importance, the study projected that in 2020, 71% of jobs in Kansas will require postsecondary education. However, in 2014, the number of students in Kansas with a postsecondary education was about 44%, representing a 27% gap in Kansas.

FIGURE 1:
By 2020, 65 percent of jobs in the nation will require postsecondary education



In 2014, the number of students in Kansas with a postsecondary education was about 44%.

All other states fall at the national average (Vermont, Georgia, South Dakota, Florida and Wyoming), except for Nebraska and Rhode Island that share Kansas' 71%.

¹ Recovery, Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2020, Georgetown University June 2013

The worrisome implications of these findings meant that the state was not producing enough graduates to adequately support the future Kansas workforce. The findings on this topic in the Georgetown study were a major impetus for Kansas to begin its work on redesigning Kansas public education.



Small-group instruction in an alternative setting at Meadowlark Elementary School, Liberal USD 480.

The KSDE team decided to dig further into the research literature to gain a better understanding of what was needed to set students up for success in their lives. They reviewed several studies that pointed to an emerging consensus from both community groups and businesses on the importance of “soft skills.” In fact, this research dates back to 1918 with a study from Charles Mann conducted for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching on a Study of Engineering Education, which concluded that 85% of job success comes from having strong soft skills, and only 15% of job success comes from hard skills such as content knowledge. More recent research, such as the

"Building Tomorrow's Talent: Collaboration Can Close Emerging Gap 2019" study conducted by Bloomberg and Workday, sets forth compelling data for why it is essential to improve our education around key soft skills such as collaboration and consciousness.

With this new understanding of shifting educational priorities and the need to fill the impending gap of well-prepared job candidates for the future of Kansas, the KSDE team worked to create a strategy to engage in the hard work of education redesign.



Field Kindley High School in Coffeyville has a project-based learning facility where students can earn credits in multiple areas using a curriculum adapted to individual student interests. Coffeyville USD 445 is part of the Kansans Can School Redesign Mercury 7 phase.

Kansas Takes Action to Identify Community and Business Needs

Faced with the compelling research, Watson and the state board needed to think creatively about the imperative to meet workforce needs for “soft skills,” such as solving unfamiliar problems and collaborating with diverse colleagues. They decided an important starting point was to get community input from stakeholders across the vast state of Kansas. Watson, board members and Deputy Commissioner Dr. Brad Neuenswander traveled the state and had 20 community and seven business-focused forums, gathering input from communities — asking three simple questions:

- What are the skills, attributes and abilities of a young successful Kansan?
- What is K-12’s role in developing this successful Kansan, and how would we measure success?
- What is higher education’s role in developing this successful Kansan, and how would we measure success?

From these community and business forums, the KSDE team received feedback from more than 2,000 Kansans.

KSDE conducted a qualitative analysis of the data in partnership with a research team at Kansas State University. From this extensive analysis, five major themes emerged around what Kansans wanted for their graduates: to increase their academic, cognitive, technical, employability and civic engagement skills. The KSDE team took these emerging themes back to the communities they had convened earlier to check that they “got it right” and truly understood what Kansans wanted from their K-12 public education system. This “check-in” helped build community support and buy-in because stakeholders across all political persuasions felt heard and that their input was being valued and reflected in the transformation work that was about to commence.

Several of the key findings were somewhat surprising, but did align well with the national research they had reviewed.

- The No. 1 factor that individuals pointed to around achieving success was not academic skills. The **data overwhelmingly pointed** to concern among all stakeholders about the lack of **social-emotional and employability skills** among students.
- A strong **perception** existed among Kansans that **the world has changed the way we interact** and creates a need for a whole different skill set that our students don’t have these days.
- **Conscientiousness** was identified as the most important characteristic among community and business leaders. **Perseverance** was often mentioned as another key skill students lack.



Dighton Elementary School students use project-based learning in one of their classes.

The Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) felt a sense of urgency to transform the way Kansas was delivering education in order to better prepare students for success. They set a vision to guide this work, ***Kansas leads the world in the success of each student***, and announced the five key areas which would be the focus of the project: social-emotional growth, kindergarten readiness, Individual Plans of Study (IPS), high school graduation and postsecondary success. To achieve this vision, KSBE set a bold goal to have all Kansas schools involved in redesign efforts by 2026. The board and state leadership team turned the five themes over to the internal department staff, and from there, the team developed a strategic plan for the work. During the course of one year, a path forward emerged, and in 2016, they announced the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. The redesign project would provide schools with professional development, resources and support to envision the student experience in these areas. They also defined the profile of a successful graduate

A successful Kansas high school graduate has the academic preparation, cognitive preparation, technical skills, employability skills and civic engagement to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry-recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation.

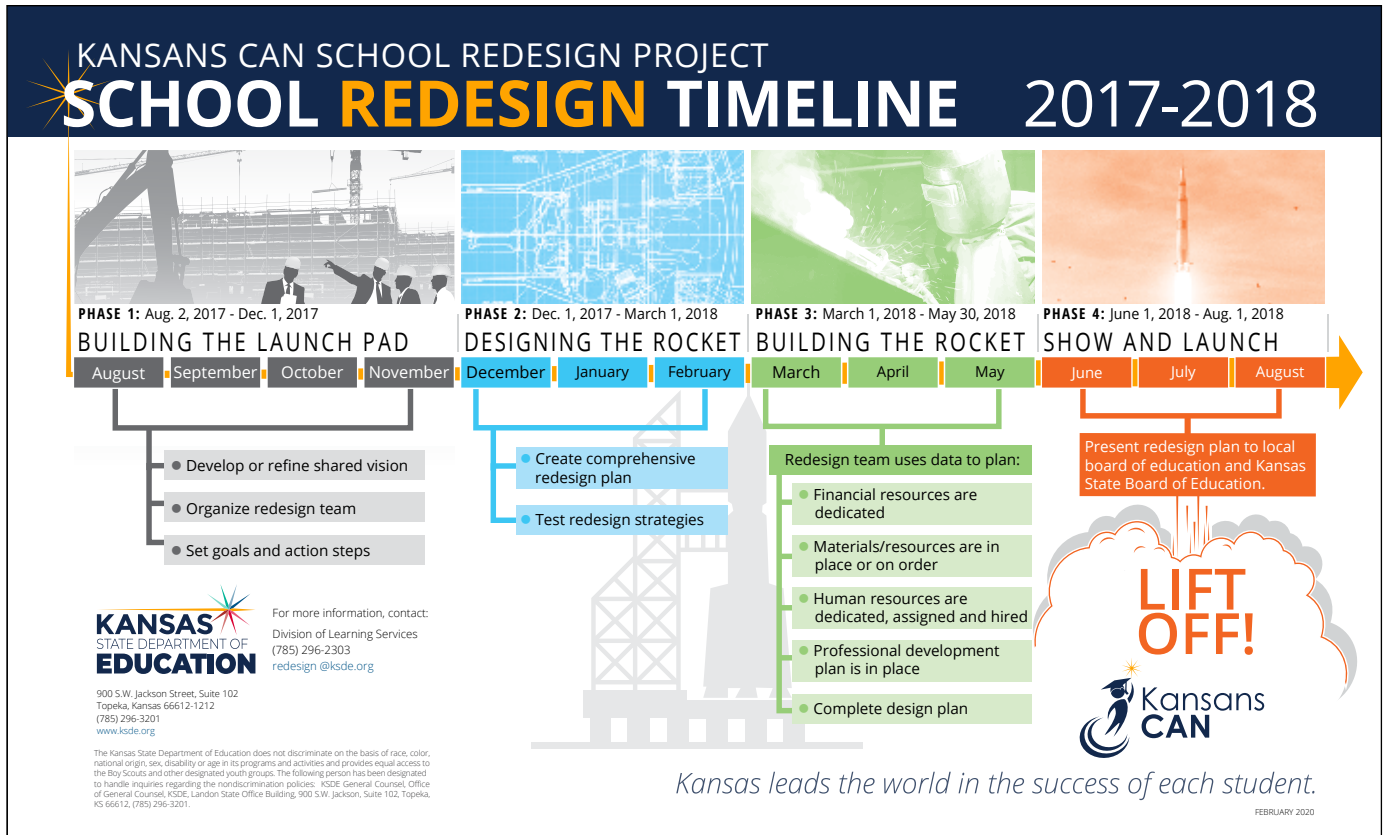
Kansas Provides a Transformed Education Experience to Better Prepare Students for Today's World

The **Kansans Can School Redesign Project** is an ambitious initiative to introduce redesign structures in all of Kansas' public schools within a 10-year period. The project is branded with aspirational terminology reminiscent of the United States' mission to put a man on the moon. It commenced with a request for a cohort of districts, known as Mercury 7, to participate in a redesign process.

"It is important to note that a key factor in the success of this project is we asked for volunteer schools and districts," said Denise Kahler, KSDE Communications Director. "This was not a top-down mandate, but rather viewed as an opportunity for districts to shift their models."

In the first year, there were seven districts selected from 29 applicants to be part of the Mercury 7 cohort, with each district working to redesign one elementary and one secondary school. To be selected, a district had to demonstrate it had an 80% buy-in from staff (which is demonstrated by an actual vote in staff meetings) and approval from its local school board and the local teachers union. This approval goes a tremendous way in being able to launch a comprehensive redesign effort, Kahler said.

The next cohort of selected districts contained 21 of the 22 applicants who had applied to be part of Mercury 7 and became known as Gemini I. The timeline was aggressive for the Mercury 7 cohort, as the districts were given one year to plan and then were expected to launch their redesign the following school year.



Graphic timeline of the Kansas Can School Redesign Project for 2017-2018.

The Gemini I cohort was given the option of following the Mercury timeline or taking a second year to plan before launching. The districts were not provided any additional funds, but rather needed to determine how to use existing resources to develop a new way of delivering instruction with a mandate for the work to be teacher-led and not top-down.

The one essential resource provided by KSDE was professional development and coaching from its newly hired elementary redesign and secondary redesign specialists, Tamra Mitchell and Jay Scott. These experts worked closely with the districts and used design thinking to help districts create their exciting and innovative redesign plans. Both Mitchell and Scott met regularly face-to-face and virtually with the Mercury 7 and Gemini I district redesign teams to help create these redesign roadmaps. They also advised on the composition of these teams to ensure there was good representation across grades and subjects.

One aspect of the redesign process essential to gaining community support paralleled what Watson and the state board had done: Asking the community what it wanted to see. Mitchell helped districts develop their clear and compelling "Why do you want to redesign?" supporting schools as they engaged with their communities and asked families what their students needed. This work involved sharing ideas for collecting data. One such idea was to host a pizza night, where each community member or student was asked to write on a sticky note their answers to the following questions, "What do you wish we did differently? How should we change?" each district to develop a shared vision and goals with its local community and build engagement and understanding about the why.

This process, Mitchell said, allowed each district to develop their approach to each of five outcomes as it fit their community's needs.

After Mercury 7 and Gemini I's 28 districts were engaged in their plans and redesign launches, another 19 districts were selected the following year as part of the Gemini II cohort. Most recently in 2019-2020, another 19 districts joined the Apollo cohort. There are now 66 districts engaged in this work (21% of Kansas districts). As the number of districts grew, Mitchell and Scott needed to codify their support and figure out how to scale it because they could not possibly provide the same in-person support to this larger number of districts. The model which emerged was to work with regional educational service centers, where teams from multiple schools work with a team of trainers and coaches. To build this capacity, the KSDE team engaged Education Elements, a national education consulting firm, to train the regional trainers and organize and codify their materials in a way that would make sense and be more standardized, including adding common outcomes and activities. Taking this work to scale across the state has added challenges, but the support of Education Elements has been critical to building capacity and effective trainings.

As the state pursues its goal to engage all of its 286 districts in redesign work by 2026, the Kansans Can School Redesign Project offers a clear roadmap for KSDE.

"This roadmap allows the staff to understand their purpose and articulate it with the entire community of stakeholders," Kahler said.

The project gives K-12 educators and leaders the opportunity to focus on the whole student vs. focusing just on test scores.

Another positive aspect of this work is the bipartisan nature of these efforts.

"The best part is [that] this vision has unified our state," Kahler said. "It is not a Republican or Democrat issue. Everyone wants what is best for our children. Both sides of the aisle were excited about this."

In today's political climate, it is encouraging to see an important effort to improve students' educational experiences and skills be supported and engaged in from all political perspectives.

Impact And The Path Forward

Even though the original Mercury districts are only in their third year, Kansas is starting to see results. Bennington Junior-Senior High School has seen immediate gains that leaders attribute to redesign efforts. The school focused on mentoring, project-based learning and student-directed learning. Overall, data from coaching check-in conversations, breakout sessions from the annual state education conference and other qualitative data show the following in regards to outcomes thus far:

Many schools are seeing dramatic improvements in attendance data, including fewer tardies and better engagement with families of students who have been chronically absent. Behavior data is improving, proved by fewer suspensions and expulsions, and fewer incidents of extreme behaviors. Some elementary schools are seeing an increase in state assessment data and most

see increases in formative measures or screening data. Those who have not seen an increase in state assessment data are realizing there is work to do to align curriculum with standards and increase students' depth of knowledge. Throughout elementary and secondary schools, the focus on social-emotional growth is resulting in healthier, happier children and teachers. The recent Fall 2019 Redesign Building Culture Survey Results indicate some exciting outcomes. Over 90% of the nearly 2400 respondents agreed that their schools encourage and support risk-taking with new instructional strategies and that their school and district leadership empower teachers to share ownership in their redesign process.

Other Notable, Early Results

- David Brewer Elementary School in Leavenworth, Kansas, reports they have witnessed tremendous growth from both their students and staff. They have seen a significant decrease in behavior referrals and a huge increase in student engagement with more excitement around progressing toward individual learning goals. Partnerships within their school community have expanded through intentional project-based learning opportunities to bring local subject matter expertise into their classrooms. Their most positive outcome has been in the area of social-emotional growth, where they have sustained focus and energy toward the well-being and needs of their students.



Students at Dighton Elementary School, Dighton USD 482, work in small groups with their teacher.

- Dighton Elementary in Dighton, Kansas, has implemented project-based, personalized learning. In fourth-grade math, Dighton increased the percent of students scoring at level 4 on state assessments from zero to 11%; and in fifth grade, they increased from 14% to 20%. In English language arts, third grade increased the percent of students at level 4 from 6% to 21%.

- Beloit Elementary School in Beloit, Kansas, focused much of its redesign energy around social-emotional growth. The results are very positive. They have seen a drop in office referrals each year since implementation. This year, they are on track for the lowest number of office referrals they have seen in the past five years. Also, the number of positive office referrals is more than double the number of problem behavior referrals.

Other Notable, Early Results (CONTINUED)

- One area that Westview Elementary School in Olathe, Kansas, has focused on is student goal setting, reflection and character development, which has shown positive returns in the decrease of negative student behaviors and positive academic gains.

Students communicated that in the past they didn't care at all about how they did on the MAP assessment. They said no one really cared, and it didn't matter.

Westview is working to change this mindset - and convince them that they do care and it does matter. MAP scores for 95% of students significantly increased from 2019 to 2020.



Students at Westview Elementary School, Olathe USD 233, listened to their teacher in a classroom with flexible seating. Olathe USD 233 is part of the Kansas Can School Redesign Mercury 7 phase.

- Beloit Junior-Senior High School, a Gemini I school, increased the number of students scoring in the top two levels of the state assessments by 8% from 2018 to 2019 in both math and English language arts.
- Roosevelt Middle School, Coffeyville USD 445, implemented a career readiness program where each student, by the time they move on to high school, would participate in at least one job shadow experience in the community, as well as one mock interview with local business professionals.
- Santa Fe Trail Middle School (SFTMS), Olathe USD 233, had a 99% daily attendance average and a 2.7% chronic absenteeism rate during the 2018-2019 school year, both improvements from the year prior. SFTMS also implemented five Exploration Days where students could choose interest-based breakout sessions and, on those days, had 100% attendance for a student body of about 750 students.
- Wellington High School, Wellington USD 353, went from about 30% of graduates meeting one of three district-identified college and career ready benchmarks in 2017-2018 to 40% in 2018-2019. The three possible benchmarks Wellington is tracking are: 1. Graduate with at least 15 hours of college credit; 2. Complete an internship prior to graduation; or 3. Earn an industry-recognized credential prior to graduation.

As more states are grappling with how to transform their education systems to meet the needs of today's complex world, Kansas' work offers some excellent guidance.

Key Takeaways for Other States

- It is critical to get input from all stakeholders. Many people have the idea that the old style of education still works since it worked for them. It is important to explain the changing needs of today's workforce.
- Many states are working on these types of redesign efforts. What is unique about Kansas is that it didn't solely focus on underperforming schools. The redesign work is open to any school across the state. Also unique to Kansas is that schools did not receive any additional state or federal funding, nor are they waived from any state statutes or federal requirements.
- If you are going to redesign schools, you also need to redesign how you engage and communicate with parents and the community. It is important to get community input into the redesign process.
- Moreover, it is critical to implement strategies for parents that enable them to experience the new models of learning their children are experiencing; we have to deepen the understanding of the "why" of the redesign. In this work, newsletters or focus group meetings often are not enough.
- Always keep in mind that "The Why is Greater than the What." Everyone wants to get involved in the what, but in order to get buy-in, you must be clear about the why. Informing your stakeholders that you are shifting to a more student-centered culture is crucial on the front end of the redesign.
- Help individuals understand that this work can take a long time and may involve dips in some metrics during implementation.
- This work has helped teachers reenergize their teaching. If you would like to see educators feeling more positive about their work, consider engaging them on redesign teams and seeking their input on their students.

The Kansans Can School Redesign Project is an exciting initiative to address the need to transform our education systems in today's world. It can be used as a roadmap for others who are strategizing on how to prepare all of America's students to reach their full potential and succeed in their lives and the jobs of tomorrow.

Resource Section

Kansans Can Supporting Documents:

Kansans Can School Redesign Project Website

<https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Fiscal-and-Administrative-Services/Communications-and-Recognition-Programs/Vision-Kansans-Can/School-Redesign>

Kansans Can School Redesign Project Districts

https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Communications/KC_School_Redesign/KC_School-Redesign-Districts-final.pdf

Research:

- Kaufmann Foundation Future of Learning Survey 2018
- The Soft Skills Disconnect (National Soft Skills Association)
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Charles Mann Research (1918)
- Building Tomorrow's Talent: Collaboration Can Close Emerging Skills Gap (Bloomberg and Workday 2019)
- Georgetown Study, Recovery Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020 (June 2013)
- National Association of Colleges and Employers 2018 Student and Employer Surveys
- From a Nation at Risk to a Nation of Hope (Aspen Institute 2019)
- CASEL research on benefits of SEL

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