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MEMORANDUM

TO: Participants of the RISE Collaborative on SEAL & Workforce

FR: The Ronald Reagan Institute

DA: February 11, 2020

RE: SEAL Collaborative Recap

The second RISE Collaborative, “The Case for Social Emotional Academic Learning: Workforce Success” convened local and nationwide thought leaders and practitioners. With 33 guests from Ohio, Washington, D.C., Seattle, Kentucky, California, and more - some new to the Collaborative and others returning - we engaged experts in thoughtful discourse throughout the day. We learned about new models and best practices, identified new partnerships, and built shared understandings on how best to educate the whole child and prepare them not only with the hard skills, but also the soft skills to succeed in the workforce.

First, we had celebrated success stories in Columbus, our host city, during our discussion, “Grounded in Place.” **Ms. Laura Kohler**, President of the Ohio State Board of Education, welcomed the Reagan Institute and RISE Collaborative participants to Columbus and introduced the first expert discussants of the day. Her colleague, **Dr. Wendy Grove**, who serves as Director of the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness at the Board, took the floor to discuss the Board’s work in social emotional academic learning (SEAL). She shared that Ohio’s mission is that each child is prepared and empowered, and they employ ten strategies to achieve this mission. One of these strategies is to work with parents, caregivers, and community partners to help schools meet the needs of the whole [child](#).

According to Dr. Grove, SEAL is not a brand new development in the state of Ohio. Early learning has had social emotional learning (SEL) standards in Birth-K since 2013 and in K-Grade 3 since 2015. In Summer 2016, they received a grant from CASEL for technical assistance to examine the need for SEAL standards for up to Grade 12. So, while Ohio is still in the process of implementing standards for all grades, the state’s educators understand the importance of SEAL. Dr. Grove reported that 95% of OH educators are motivated to learn about social and emotional competence, 98% believe that student success is related to SEL competency, and 85% see opportunities to integrate SEL into their instruction. This is because Ohio educators know SEL is important - SEL skills are linked with increasing economic mobility in young people and there is a growing demand for jobs requiring those skills. However, only 24% are confident in what SEL competence looks like in students. She identifies this as a gap that needs to be filled.

RISE

COLLABORATIVES

Next, **Dr. David James**, Superintendent of Akron Public Schools (APS) in Ohio, presented on the work that his district is doing to advance social emotional competencies. He noted that the process begins with understanding barriers to student success, including behavior and discipline issues, social emotional issues, trauma, health and nutrition, and more. The goal of APS is to overcome barriers through partnership, including the [Akron After School Program](#) and Wheels for Education, that provide after-school tutoring, recreational activities, and other programming at 28 elementary school sites. Akron Public Schools is known for its [I Promise School](#), founded by former NBA player LeBron James to tackle those barriers to success and meet the needs of Ohio's kids.

The I Promise School, operated by APS and supported by the LeBron James Family Foundation, exercises a lottery concept among its lowest scoring students. In addition to having an extended school day, year-round calendar, and 20:1 student/teacher ratio, it employs a problem-based learning approach that includes trauma support and wraparound supports located on-site. Early results of the I Promise School showed that over 90% of students met or exceeded their expected growth on NWEA MAP math and reading assessments. Additionally, I Promise School students have exceeded the district attendance rate at 95.47%. Dr. James concluded his presentation by sharing APS's "Portrait of a Graduate," defined by the ideal skills and characteristics to be ready for college, career, and life. Strong habits of mind, social skills, real world skills, and contributing to society are among the components of an ideal APS graduate.

Dr. Jacqueline Jodl, Special Assistant to the Dean & Associate Professor at the University of Virginia Curry School of Education and Human Development, presented on "SEAL in Practice." Specifically, she expanded on how to bridge research and practice of SEAL, which consisted of degrees of implementation as well as policy as a barrier, such as punitive evaluations for teachers. She then spoke on the whole child framework. According to the Learning Policy Institute, the whole child framework has six facets. These facets are physical and health development, identity development, cognitive development, and academic development, mental health and well-being, and social and emotional development. Learning settings that support young people's comprehensive growth often focus on three elements: teaching social, emotional, and cognitive skills; exercising these skills as they learn academic content and in their interaction with peers and adults; and having equitable access to learning environments that are safe and feature meaningful relationships.

Dr. Jodl contributed to the "A Nation at Hope" report published by The Aspen Institute, which had three recommendations for the implementation of SEAL. First, create child- and youth-centered learning environments that are physically and emotionally safe, respect all cultures and serve people equitably, and foster meaningful relationships between adults and youth. Second, develop social and emotional cognitive

RISE

COLLABORATIVES

skills and competencies in all young people. Lastly, provide regular opportunities throughout the day to integrate these skills and competencies with academic content. This lends to the student experience of having a sense of belonging, engagement and purpose, and rigorous learning experiences. The outcomes of these settings and experiences combined consist of life well-being, civic community engagement, academic success, and career readiness.

During lunch, **Dr. Tia Kim** and **Mr. Jordan Posamentier** from Committee for Children led the conversation on “Building the 22nd Century Workforce.” They started their presentation with an interactive group discussion on what the workforce of the future looks like. If automation (AKA robots) does not manage to take over entirely, our nation’s young people will need to be equipped with the appropriate skills to succeed in the workplace. SEAL is integral to work because all work is mediated through relationships and all relationships are mediated through personal and social contexts. Tia and Jordan discussed the five major CASEL SEL competencies - self-management, social awareness, self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. They argued that if we think about the qualities of a good employee, they can fall into many of these SEL competencies (e.g. getting to work on time, self-confidence, creative thinking, getting along with co-workers, etc.). Of course, there are gaps in this train of thought. For example, if one person excels in relationship skills, they might be more lacking in self-management because they are distracted by socializing.

Then, Tia and Jordan facilitated small- and large-group discussions on this theory, asking participants to share their thoughts on which competencies they thought was important for workforce readiness and how we can develop programs to address that competency. One table shared that they identified “self-management” as the most important SEL competency for workforce readiness from an employer perspective because it means your employee is more likely to arrive at work on time and stay focused. However, others contended that relationship skills or social awareness are the most important because it is imperative for colleagues to be able to get along, or work together even if they do not necessarily get along. Even though most Departments of Education are making the connection between SEAL and workforce readiness, state legislatures are not. They posed the question to the group: How can we influence the disconnects and gaps in policy to address what you think is the most important SEL competency?

After lunch, **Mr. Ross Wiener**, Executive Director of the Education & Society Program at The Aspen Institute, spoke to the group on “Equitable School Climate.” He said there is a huge disconnect in schooling as it currently exists - it prioritizes old industrial workforce over the future of work. Further, students are rewarded for memorizing discrete bits of knowledge when they should be doing more meaningful work earlier in their academic careers such as having to plan a project over time or

RISE

COLLABORATIVES

collaborating with others. They should also be rewarded based on principles like civics and character instead of only hard skills. Mr. Wiener contended that there has been a disruptive change in the economy, so students need to be adaptive. Part of adaptability is agency - being an actor that changes circumstances, rather than being acted upon by circumstances in the world. School has an influence on this and it is related to social and emotional development. Mr. Wiener explained that the The American Enterprise Institute recently conducted research on the importance of social capital, the results of which found that we focus too much on skill development rather than the practice of those skills. Approximately half of jobs are filled by personal connections, so the relationship management aspect of social and emotional learning is imperative in not only maintaining a job, but obtaining one.

The next presentation, titled “The Rebuttal,” was facilitated by **Ms. Janet Tran**, Director of Learning and Leadership at the Ronald Reagan Institute. She surveyed the group using the audience polling platform Mentimeter in order to rank individuals’ agreement with various statements often posed by critics of SEAL. The group had a discussion around which statements they agreed and disagreed on, and how we can effectively close the gaps on those disagreements. For example, the vast majority of participants agreed on the statement that, “There is substantial scientific evidence and research to make SEAL a priority.” However, the group was much more pessimistic on the statement, “There is currently quality instructional support to implement SEAL well in schools,” scoring an average 2.1 favoring “Strongly Disagree.”

Finally, **Ms. Angela Rogensues** of Playworks Michigan gave the closing thoughts for the day. She focused on the workforce side of the SEAL conversation, emphasizing the importance of terminology and using common language that everyone can understand. Before pairing students with potential employers, she said, we must vet that employer to see if they actually know the proper terminology and create an environment of trust. There needs to be trust among teachers and parents and students, and if trust is lacking, there will be a major gap. As there was a lack of business leaders in attendance that day, Ms. Rogensues suggested having more present at our RISE 2020 convening in June 2020. This will lend to a more robust, balanced conversation on SEAL and workforce readiness.

Overall, the conversations that took place during the Collaborative steeped in learning and understanding. Event participants asked for time to learn about new models, meet new potential partners, and gain shared understandings on critical topics. The Ronald Reagan Institute looks forward to hearing from our second RISE Collaborative guests regarding ideas for next steps and what action should follow.