



Science of Adolescent Learning

Aligning Secondary Education Policy and Practice with Adolescent Learning and Development Research

Modern technological advances and a more interdisciplinary approach to research have increased the quality and quantity of knowledge about how students learn and develop, particularly during the adolescent years. As a result, secondary education now has greater access to research that can guide practitioners and policymakers in how best to improve learning outcomes and close achievement gaps for historically underserved students, primarily students of color and students from low-income families.

With a deep understanding of adolescent learning and development research, education policymakers and practitioners can implement secondary school improvement strategies based on science, rather than traditions. In turn, this alignment of policies, practices, and research will ensure that more students graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets necessary for success in college, a career, citizenship, and life.

Elevating Adolescent Learning and Development Research

The Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed) is expanding its role as the premier policy and practice organization advocating for secondary school reform through its Science of Adolescent Learning (SAL) initiative. Learning and development research shows that adolescence is a time of great opportunity and risk. This unique stage of human development, along with specific challenges faced by secondary schools, calls for direct attention and support to ensure that educators implement SAL-informed strategies.

The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) means that nearly 13,000 school districts will need to improve schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support under new state accountability systems. Consequently, policymakers and practitioners in these districts will need research-based strategies, particularly those aligned with SAL, to transform thousands of low-performing schools that serve students of color and students from low-income families at disproportionate rates. In addition, educators in secondary schools not identified for intervention can benefit from understanding SAL research as they work toward continuous improvement and innovation. This is a critical moment that offers increasing opportunities to align secondary education policy and practices with a comprehensive and interdisciplinary body of research.

To help education leaders leverage these opportunities, All4Ed's SAL initiative

- **translates** SAL research for policy and practice audiences to inform decisions related to school improvement and support effective implementation of evidence-based strategies;
- **communicates** translated SAL research to broad and targeted audiences using innovative multimedia formats, web-based and in-person workshops, and conference presentations; and
- **applies** substantiated SAL research to All4Ed's comprehensive school improvement initiatives, such as Future Ready Schools®, to guide local policy and practice recommendations as well as select technical coaching efforts.

For more information, visit all4ed.org/SAL.



All4Ed's SAL Initiative Scope of Impact

Developmental Stage—Which developmental stage is All4Ed's focus?

Adolescence

Infancy

Adulthood

Adolescence can be defined in a variety of ways due to biological, societal, familial, and cultural influences. All4Ed focuses on adolescent development as it relates to learning, particularly for historically underserved students, and defines adolescence as the years students attend middle and high school.

Research—What areas within the learning sciences does All4Ed cover?

Various

General

Specific

To promote a holistic understanding of adolescence, All4Ed focuses on all factors affecting adolescent development, including brain and cognitive development; health; social-emotional, sociocultural, and sociopolitical development; and environmental factors related to learning. All4Ed also elevates research on the impact of trauma on adolescent learning and development since historically underserved youth experience or witness traumatic events at disproportionate rates.

Systems of Impact—What areas does All4Ed seek to influence?

School Districts

Classroom

Community

School districts and secondary schools are the primary targeted areas for All4Ed's SAL initiative. All4Ed also supports state education agencies as well as effective school-community partnerships to the extent that schools and districts have the capacity to work with community-based organizations, such as mental health groups, juvenile justice systems, and research organizations, to increase opportunity for student learning and meet the needs of students and families.

Audience—Whom does All4Ed reach with its SAL initiative?

School and District Leaders

Broad Audience

Specific Audience

All4Ed develops resources for leaders in districts and schools with a significant proportion of historically underserved students. These resources help district and school leaders apply SAL research to school improvement decisions and communicate SAL findings to teachers, state-level education leaders, families, community leaders, and students to support effective implementation of those strategies.



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The Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed) is a Washington, DC-based national policy, practice, and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those underperforming and those historically underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. all4ed.org

Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action