PREFACE

THINK ABOUT A TIME when you were in middle school. Think about a time when you felt particularly safe and secure "in your own skin"—a time when you felt able to learn, to share what you were thinking and/or feelings, to be open about "feeling confused" and/or just not knowing something. And then remember another time when you were feeling shaky, insecure, afraid that you would be laughed at if you made a mistake. We can all remember painful moments when we did not feel safe and/or were not safe socially, emotionally, intellectually, physically. We know that feeling unsafe undermines children's ability to learn and that feeling or being unsafe as an ongoing experience undermines healthy development.[1]

But what does it mean to feel and be safe? Feeling and being safe are overlapping but different experiences. We can feel safe but, in fact, be in great danger. And vice versa. Most people are aware that safety refers to a range of experiences—social, emotional, and intellectual, as well as physical. Historically, educators have recognized physical dangers and fears about being physically hurt, but it is only in recent decades that practitioners and policy makers in countries around the world have begun to recognize and address social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of safety.

Over the last twenty years there has been an explosion of empirical research findings that underscore what many parents and teachers have known for decades: children learn best when we treat them as human beings with social, emotional, civic, and academic needs. We now know that there are a range of social, emotional, civic, and academic skills, knowledge, and dispositions that provide an essential foundation for school and life success. And we know that high-quality, intentional, and ongoing social, emotional, civic, and academic instruction needs to be paired with systemic efforts to ensure that every child feels safe, supported, and engaged in order to provide the optimal foundation to support the whole child.[2]

In tandem with these research findings, international organizations have begun tracking markers of student safety and well-being, including questions on major surveys designed to gauge trends in everything from the level of bullying students are experiencing to citizenship skills. Over the last twenty years, the independent International Educational Association (IEA) has studied academic achievement as well as students' knowledge and understanding, beliefs, and behaviors related to civics and citizenship in more than sixty countries and a hundred educational systems. In 2015 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), an international study of student proficiency in math and science, began to ask students whether they were bullied. And in 2017 the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which randomly samples several thousand fifteen-year-olds every three years, began to ask questions about students' well-being, in addition to their reading, mathematical, and scientific literacies, in order to assess how well each country's educational system is preparing its young people for success. And the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is actively furthering international conversations and prosocial professional development support in their Future of Education and Skills 2030 efforts.[3]

As researchers and practitioners who have spent decades researching and working nationally and internationally on violence prevention and social, emotional, civic, and academic learning and improved school climates, we felt the time was ripe to undertake a survey of how different countries understand what factors lead students to feel unsafe and to highlight the types of policies and programs being putting in place as a result. We are very aware that there are terrible gaps between, on the one hand, research-based understandings about what children need to grow up in healthy ways and, on the other, current educational policy and practice guidelines. The eleven country chapters as well as the commentaries in this volume all highlight these terribly problematic gaps between current research and policy.

In an overlapping manner, this volume grows out of the work of the International Observatory for School Climate and Violence Prevention, a twenty-year-old international coalition of research, policy, and practice leaders who are invested in two goals: advancing the science of school climate and other prosocial (e.g., SEL, character education, mental health promotion, school climate) K–12 school improvement, as well as school safety efforts that support children's development, school, and life success; and supporting helpful research-policy-practice conversations that promote effective and sustainable

school climate, social-emotional learning (SEL), and violence prevention efforts.[4] Many of the contributors to this volume have been active coleaders in the Observatory's learning and work. This volume honors and, we hope, supports the learning and work of many, including Ron Astor, Claire Beaumont, Rami Benbenishty, Eric Debarbieux and Catherine Blaya (who cofounded the Observatory), Veronica López, Mao Yaqing, Phillip Slee, Barbara Spears, Mitzura Taki, and Grace Skrzypiec.

There is a significant and growing interest in the prosocial, or nonacademic, aspects of K–12 education for two reasons. First, there is growing concern about how prevalent it is that students feel socially and emotionally unsafe, unsupported, and/or disengaged from school life and learning. Violence in schools is a major concern around the world. As we detail in chapter 1, this includes a growing appreciation that there is a spectrum of behaviors that undermine students feeling safe that range from normative moments of misunderstanding, to intentional acts of bullying and cruelty, to even more extreme forms of disrespect, like sexual harassment, date rape, and rape. Curiously, and tragically, there has been a deafening silence in K–12 education about how prevalent and toxic sexual harassment, date rape, and rape are. And we have not even begun to talk about the complicated set of "grey zone" sexual-social-emotional experiences that normatively color adolescent development. Yet, there is a growing appreciation that integrating SEL and school climate improvement efforts into K–12 school life and learning prevents school violence and also powerfully supports school and life success.

This volume will appeal to a wide range of interested readers focused on preventing and helpfully addressing bullying and school violence. This includes educators who are increasingly attuned to the importance of SEL, well-being, school climate, and mental health promotion efforts, including education policy and practice leaders around the world; education graduate students who are focused on bullying and school safety, international and cross-cultural studies, and prosocial educational efforts that include SEL, well-being/mental health, character education and peace education; members of the eighteen-nation International Observatory for Violence in Schools; and concerned citizens attuned to the foundational importance of our children feeling and being safe.[5]

This comparative study of eleven countries spanning five continents features chapters that assess the state of progress toward safety among students. We wanted to learn about a range of countries and continents and polled

colleagues around the world to learn about possible countries we all could learn from. We thought it important to include a mix of countries, those that have been thinking about the issue of student safety for decades as well as those that are just beginning to focus on social and emotional as well as physical safety. We decided not to include low-income, or "developing," countries because these nations present their own unique sets of needs that differ considerably from those we focus on here.

The chapters in this volume evidence a growing appreciation, and early consensus, around the world that we can and need to recognize and promote the social, emotional, civic, and academic aspects of student learning and school life. Some countries have been leading the way in developing and evaluating innovative approaches to violence prevention and have seen reductions in bullying and other forms of school violence not seen in the US and elsewhere.

The volume begins with a chapter in which the editors explain the context that shaped our inquiry by introducing a spectrum of biopsychosocially informed experiences that contribute to children feeling and being safe. Part I contains the eleven country profiles. Authors of these chapters address a common set of questions designed to explain how their countries understand what it means for K–12 students to feel and be safe and how these understandings shaped educational policy and practice guidelines school improvement goals, strategies, and measures in their countries. These chapters also include recommendations for how teachers and educational administrators can make progress toward enhancing student safety. We asked the country case study authors to consider the following essential questions:

1. *understandings*: How does your country understand the nature and spectrum of mean, bullying, and/or disrespectful behavior, and how does this behavior manifest itself?
2. *goals*: How does this understanding shape bullying and/or school violence prevention policies and practice goals in your country?
3. *strategies*: What are the national trends that shape improvement strategies designed to actualize these goals?
4. *measures and measurements systems*: What measurement trends potentially help school leaders understand the extent to which their strategies have, or have not, helped school leaders actualize improvement goals?

5. *improvement trends*: How have educational policies and/or practice guidelines increased, or not, students feeling safe, prevented school violence, and/or promoted prosocial instruction and schoolwide efforts to create even safer, more supportive, and engaging climates for learning?

6. *recommendations for teachers, principals and superintendents/regional leaders*: What are the most important research, policy, and/or practice recommendations?

Part II offers four commentaries by international educators who have been involved with SEL, school climate, and/or violence prevention research policy and practice efforts. These chapters consider and comment on the trends in the eleven countries to further our learning and future international efforts. The editors' concluding chapter (written with the help of America J. El Sheikh) considers the significant themes emerging from each of the country chapters.

This volume highlights positive trends as well as gaps in research about effective educational, prevention, and intervention efforts on the one hand and current policy and practice on the other hand. Our hope is that this volume will further research, policy, and practice conversations that support children around the world in feeling and being safe—an essential foundation for healthy development and the ability to learn.

—Jonathan Cohen