

Measuring Well-Being Through Panorama

How do we know if our Well Being and Joy approach is working to enhance learning? What can we tweak to be more effective? Evaluation and data are key components in monitoring our progress.

Since 2018, the District has been using an evaluation system called Panorama. Panorama measures social emotional well-being factors in our elementary, middle and high school students. All students in grades 3-12, staff, and parents are asked to fill out a Panorama survey at the beginning and end of each school year. Over time, this growing body of data enables District leaders and teachers to gauge how we are doing to ensure our students, staff and families are well. The data can be drilled down to school building, grade level, classroom and even individual students. The data set is compared to aggregate Panorama data nationwide to inform all staff how we compare by age and by specific measures.

Questions on the Panorama surveys measure student social emotional competencies and perceptions of school environment, equity and inclusion. These are big terms, but survey questions are broken down to identify whether student qualities such as growth mindset, emotional regulation and confidence to succeed are healthy and robust. Panorama helps the District gauge whether students and staff feel as if they are engaged, safe, included and challenged. Most importantly, Panorama helps the District measure whether students have key relationships with adults and peers to succeed.

“Well-being and joy isn’t fuzzy,” said Superintendent Sharonica Hardin-Bartley. “It is highly measurable, and when we have exact data points, we can see what’s working and make adjustments where there are opportunities. Students have a hard time learning if they don’t feel safe, if they feel isolated, if they are marginalized, and frankly, if they don’t feel loved.

Well-Being and Joy in a Pandemic

Our youth are dealing with one of the most significant health crises of the modern age. The coronavirus isolated students, more adversely harmed African American and poor communities, disrupted education, triggered past trauma and anxiety, and put key developmental and social milestones on hold. Recent studies find students struggling with disturbing amounts of mental health issues. In 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Children’s Hospital Association together declared a national state of emergency in children’s mental health.

In University City, District students encountered dual pandemics – both COVID-19 and racism. They experience a world in which COVID exacerbated existing racial disparities regarding health, social status, income and neighborhood resources.

“Just like around the nation, we are seeing emotional challenges with our students due to COVID and other factors. They are dealing with very heavy stuff,” said Gary Spiller, executive director of student services and innovation. “Panorama goes far beyond typical indicators like grades and staff perceptions to accurately help us understand our students. Panorama data speaks directly to our three pillars of humanizing, personalizing and problematizing our student experience.”

Recent Panorama data reflected both challenges and victories during a global pandemic. For example, the District scored in the top 20th percentile nationally for cultural awareness and action. Teacher-student relationships saw significant growth in both elementary and secondary grades. Our third- through fifth-graders scored in the 80th percentile nationwide. Growth mindset among students also scored high at all grade levels.

However, as anticipated, COVID taxed our students' emotional bandwidth. Perception of self efficacy – the belief that they can grapple with and solve hard problems – dropped. Perceived student engagement in schoolwork and activities also dropped in grades 3-5.

Targeted Resources

Joe Miller, chief of staff for organizational health and effectiveness, said these data points led the District to increase resources in specific schools. For example, well-being specialists have been deployed in all schools to supplement existing counselors and social workers. At the high school, programming has been added for mental health. Last year, in the high school, funding was used last year for a Be the Change mental health campaign. This spring, the District is planning a community resource fair for students, parents and caregivers.

The District also increased mental health services for families through longtime partner KHAOS Kids, which stands for Keep Healing And Overcoming Struggles. Additionally the District added significant well-being spaces for students and staff in all schools.