

2017-18 Evaluation of the Social and Emotional Learning Initiative

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At-a-Glance

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a strategic approach to build skills, knowledge, and attitudes that students need to be successful in school, work, and life. The Dallas Independent School District (ISD) Board of Trustees has adopted a policy to implement SEL on all campuses by 2025. The SEL initiative, also known as SEL Dallas, has adopted the basic framework for social-emotional learning promulgated by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). This framework features five core competencies: Self Awareness, Self Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. Dallas ISD's partner in coordinating SEL Dallas in Out-of-School-Time (OST) programs is Big Thought, a non-profit organization.

The SEL initiative was funded by \$1,198,460 in Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants funds and \$1,280,070 in Title II funds. Additional funding was received from a Wallace Foundation grant, with \$1,188,338 allocated to Dallas ISD campuses and \$1,070,876 to Big Thought for OST programs.

Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative

The Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative (PSELI) is a national effort to bring together urban school districts and out-of-school time organizations to help children gain greater opportunities for social and emotional learning. The Wallace Foundation, a national philanthropy based in New York City, is funding PSELI in six grantee cities: Boston, Dallas, Denver, Palm Beach County, Tacoma, and Tulsa.

RAND Corporation, in partnership with the Wallace Foundation, selected seven elementary schools as PSELI Lead schools, to receive intensive training and study over four years. Seven more schools, selected as matched comparison sites, will not introduce new SEL activities during the same period, while still pursuing ongoing school improvement efforts and other district priorities. During this Initial Implementation Phase, each comparison site will receive \$5,000 each year in recognition of its assistance in data collection.

In the Expanded Implementation Phase, from 2021-2023, each comparison school and its afterschool partner(s) will receive \$100,000 over two years from the Wallace Foundation to introduce and align new, intensive SEL activities, benefitting from the lessons

and experiences of the pilot sites. During the Initial Phase, comparison schools will receive \$5,000 each year in recognition of their assistance in data collection and their OST partner(s) will receive \$1,000.

Table 1 shows the Dallas PSELI lead schools and comparison sites. All schools have a primary OST partner.

Table 1: PSELI Lead and Comparison Schools

Lead Schools		Comparison Schools	
School	OST Partner	School	OST Partner
Bayles	Parks & Rec	Lipscomb	BGCD
Cowart	Parks & Rec	Medrano	St. Simon's
De Zavala	Thriving Minds	Budd	Parks & Rec
Kiest	Parks & Rec	Russell	Parks & Rec
Silberstein	Parks & Rec	J. Adams	Parks & Rec
Webster	DAS	Johnston	DAS
Weiss	Parks & Rec	Macon	Parks & Rec

Note. BGCD = Boys' and Girls' Club of Dallas; DAS = Dallas Afterschool; Parks & Rec = Dallas Parks & Recreation; OST=Out of School.

Training and Development

Initially, SEL training was to be offered to 39 schools in the first year of a phase-in plan. Later, SEL was consolidated with Restorative Practices (RP) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) under the designation of Student Engagement. A professional development sequence incorporating aspects of all three programs was offered to 113 district schools, called SEL Partners. Nine coordinators were assigned supervision of the program at groups of the participating schools, including PSELI campuses. Each participating school named a Campus Champion to coordinate on-site SEL training and other activities at that campus.

Due to the receipt of the grant award in midsummer, training of Campus Champions could not be completed early in the school year, and was scheduled to be rolled out over several months. Training at the schools, led by the Champions, was scheduled at the discretion of campus principals. While some campuses participated in all training modules offered, others were unable to complete the sequence during their first year of participation, due to conflicts with other school training priorities. The plan for 2018-19 was redesigned to schedule all training sessions earlier in the year.

Schools that had not completed the sessions from the first phase, which focused on adult acquisition of knowledge and practices, were scheduled to complete these sessions before beginning the second phase of the program and rolling out SEL instruction to students, alongside ongoing adult training. Program management determined that following a yearly schedule was less important than reaching a level of understanding of SEL, and comfort with using SEL practices in the classroom, before proceeding to the next phase.

Student Outcomes

Student Attendance

No consistent change in student attendance from 2016-17 to 2017-18 was found in PSEL, SEL Partner, or other groups of schools.

Student Discipline

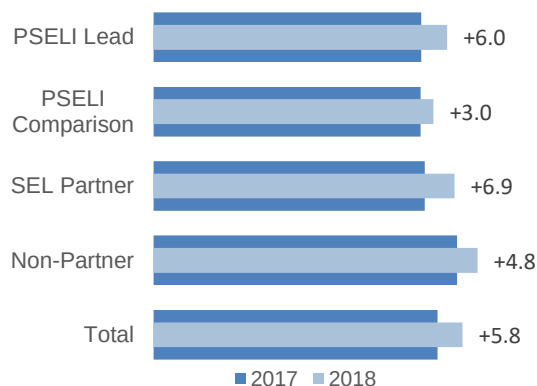
Discipline referrals were greatly reduced in both SEL Partner and non-Partner schools at all grade levels from 2016-17 to 2017-18. Total referrals decreased by 41.9 percent in elementary schools, 19.4 percent in middle schools, and 24.5 percent in high schools. The largest decreases were in Level I and Level II offenses, for which disciplinary action is at the discretion of local school officials. Level I offenses are violations of the Student Code of Conduct, most commonly classroom disruption (85% in 2017-18) and dress and grooming code violations (13%). Level II (Discretionary) offenses most commonly include fighting (46%), profanity or obscene gestures towards personnel (19%), and Class C assault, student on student (11%). For these offenses, prevention and intervention strategies may be used in conjunction with or instead of disciplinary actions. Level III and Level IV referrals also decreased, but only in middle schools.

The widespread reductions in discipline referrals may be the result of increased awareness of SEL, RP, and PBIS practices throughout the district, even at those campuses where staff have not yet received staff training.

Student Achievement

Elementary students at PSEL Lead schools had greater *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)* reading gains from Spring 2017 to Spring 2018 than those at the Comparison schools (Figure 1). While reading *STAAR* Approaches + (Approaches Grade Level and above) rates were almost identical at the matched schools in Spring 2017, in Spring 2018 the Lead schools' overall Approaches + rate exceeded that at the Comparison schools by more than three percentage points. Similarly, the gains in Approaches + rates at SEL Partner schools were greater than those in non-participating schools.

Figure 1: STAAR Reading Approaches + Results by Program Implemented, Spring 2017 and 2018, Grades 3-5

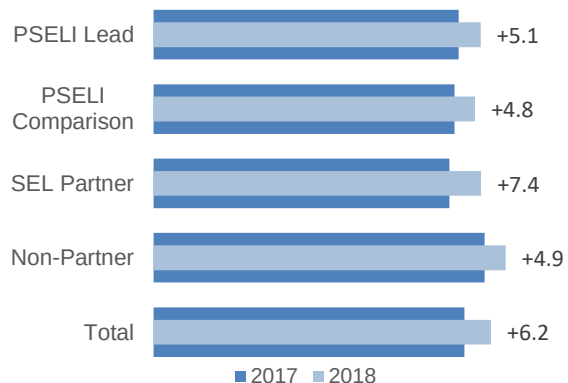


Source: District STAAR files

Note: STAAR = *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness*. PSEL=Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative. Approaches+ includes all students in the Meets Grade Level and Masters Grade Level categories. One-year trends shown in percentage points.

Gains in Mathematics in grades 3-5 followed a similar pattern (Figure 2), although the difference in increase between the Lead and Comparison schools was smaller.

Figure 2: STAAR Mathematics Approaches + Results by Program Implemented, Spring 2017 and 2018, Grades 3-5



Source: District STAAR files

Note: STAAR = *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness*. PSEL=Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative. Approaches+ includes all students in the Meets Grade Level and Masters Grade Level categories. One-year trends shown in percentage points.

In grade 4 writing, all groups of schools experienced a decrease in Approaches + rates. Decreases at both Lead PSEL and other Partner schools were smaller than those at Comparison and other non-Partner schools.

In grades 6-8, Partner schools had smaller increases than non-Partner schools in reading, mathematics, and writing. *STAAR EOC* changes in Approaches + rates for

the English I, English II, and Algebra I tests were inconsistent across school groups.

Staff Outcomes

Teacher Attendance

Teacher absences increased slightly across all school groups from 2015-16 to 2017-18, although no consistent pattern was found differentiating between SEL Partner and non-Partner schools.

School Climate

Changes in elementary staff responses to Districtwide Climate Survey items and scales from Fall 2016 to Spring 2018 were more positive at PSEL and SEL Partner schools than at comparison sites and non-Partner schools. Most notably, the changes in Lead school staff responses were more positive than those of all other school groups (Comparison, SEL Partner, and non-Partner schools) on seven of the eight scales and items analyzed. Changes in secondary staff responses at SEL Partner schools were less positive than those at non-Partner schools.

Recommendations

- **Develop a database system, through collaboration with program management and evaluators, to document training sessions offered and staff attendance at all participating campuses.** Because of changes in departmental organization and staffing, training content and sequence, and the increased number of schools implementing SEL, assessing the level of implementation at individual campuses was extremely difficult. A consistently maintained database accessible by campus Champions and other trainers, as well as program evaluators, would provide valuable and timely information.
- **Include evaluator-developed questionnaires or surveys in the 2018-19 evaluation, as needed, to identify issues affecting SEL implementation and outcomes.** Particularly in middle and high schools, unrelated campus-level difficulties may create obstacles to full SEL implementation. It is important to recognize such issues early in the implementation process so that assistance can be provided from the best sources.

An electronic version of this report can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888. For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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