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# Contents

Background .....	1
Key Insights .....	2
School in the Park's Support in Development .....	3
Pulse Checks: Aggregated Experiences Across Contexts.....	4
Student Confidence, Self Esteem, and Self Efficacy .....	6
Student Engagement.....	7
Persistence.....	10
Relationships Between Teachers and Among Students .....	12
School in the Park's Impact .....	14
Self-Identities as Learners.....	15
Impact on Lesson Structure and Classroom .....	16
Family Engagement in Schooling.....	19
Recommendations .....	22
Conclusion.....	23
References.....	26

# Background

**School in the Park (SITP) is a comprehensive museum-based education program located in Balboa Park, San Diego, California. Designed to integrate formal classroom instruction with informal, experiential learning, SITP leverages the rich cultural, historic, artistic, and scientific resources of Balboa Park's institutions. The program primarily serves students from the City Heights community—a historically low income area —through the provision of enrichment opportunities. For many students, SITP provides an exposure to museums, institutions, and experiences that might otherwise be out of reach.**

School in the Park (SITP) is a comprehensive museum-based education program located in Balboa Park, San Diego, California. Designed to integrate formal classroom instruction with informal, experiential learning, SITP leverages the rich cultural, historic, artistic, and scientific resources of Balboa Park's institutions. The program primarily serves students from the City Heights community—a historically low income area —through the provision of enrichment opportunities. For many students, SITP provides an exposure to museums, institutions, and experiences that might otherwise be out of reach.

SITP began in 1999 at Rosa Parks Elementary School as a creative solution to address overcrowding. From its inception, the program aimed to provide high-quality educational experiences to students who are often underserved. Since then, it has grown from four to ten participating institutions, including the San Diego Zoo, Air & Space Museum, San Diego History Center, Fleet Science Center, The Old Globe, Natural History Museum, San Diego Junior Theatre, Museum of Us, Mingei International Museum, and the newly added Comic-Con Museum.

Now in its 26th year, SITP continues to be a vital part of the academic calendar for four schools in the City Heights area—Rosa Parks Elementary, Central Elementary, Wilson Middle School, and Clark Middle School. Central Elementary was a recent addition and joined the program in the 2023–24 school year. The program is focused on grades 3 through 6 and served 958 students in the 2024–25 school year.

Structured around a standards-aligned curriculum, SITP hosts classes and rotates them through six to seven museums a year. Each week's afternoons from 12:00 to 4:00 p.m. are spent immersed at one of Balboa Park's institutions and focus on topics such as science, history, and the performing arts. Classrooms hidden within these institutions, serve as learning spaces where students receive instruction from museum educators, SITP facilitators, and their classroom teacher. Students explore exhibits, engage in hands-on activities, and return to their museum classrooms to reflect and build on what they've learned. Each week culminates in a student-created product—such as a play, comic strip, or handmade book—that reflects the students' learning. This blend of traditional and experiential learning aims for students to develop a deeper understanding of academic content while fostering curiosity and engagement.

Independent from SITP, students in the City Heights area also benefit from extended learning opportunities through the Ocean Discovery Institute (ODI). This program includes three visits per year, beginning with an in-class lesson led by ODI staff, followed by a themed field trip, and concluding with a visit to the Living Lab — a science education facility that serves 6,000 students annually. There, students engage in hands-on science activities, interact with professionals, and reflect on their learning. ODI's intentional focus on accessibility reinforces the message that City Heights students can pursue careers in science and conservation.

These extended learning experiences are key for SITP's goal of cultivating curiosity, competence, confidence and character among students. By engaging with the diverse institutions that make up Balboa Park, students gain access to learning experiences that aim to deepen academic, behavioral and social-emotional growth.



# Key Insights

To assess the impact of SITP on students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development, we gathered data from SITP-related activities and administrative records of San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD). This data collection includes analysis of existing administrative records, supplemented by new data from student pulse checks, impact surveys, and observations. In addition to twelve observations at SITP institutions, three site visits were conducted at the Ocean Discovery Institute to help contextualize SITP within student's experiences with extended learning experiences in City Heights. The Promising Practices Rating System – a research based observational tool to better understand after-school programs was used in both environments.

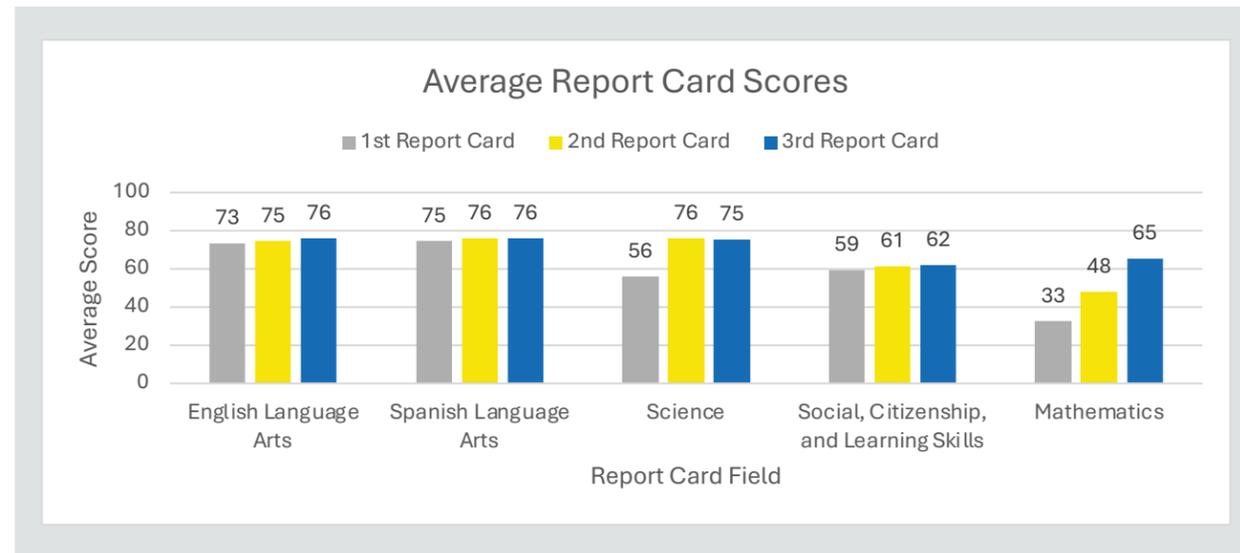
The evaluation strategy employed a mixed-methods approach, with SDCOE conducting both quantitative and qualitative analysis. This dual approach will not only measure the effectiveness of SITP but also provide insights into the broader context of the district's challenges and successes in using SITP to enhance outcomes for children. Below, we have arrayed our findings by evaluation questions.



# School in the Park's Support in Development

San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting citizenship alongside traditional academic subjects. Citizenship is assessed three times annually on student report cards, alongside core domains such as English language arts, mathematics, and science. High scores in this area reflect students who consistently meet expectations, complete work on time, come prepared to learn, participate actively, show respect for others, and contribute positively to their classroom community. According to data provided by SDUSD, citizenship remains one of the lowest-rated domains across students at Rosa Parks and Central Elementary. This underscores a need for continued support.

Aligned with the district’s goals, School in the Park (SITP) helps to promote social, citizenship, and learning skills. Through this evaluation question, SITP’s impact is examined across four areas: student confidence, engagement, academic persistence, and relationship-building.



# Pulse Checks: Aggregated Experiences Across Contexts

To assess SITP’s impact on students’ academic, behavioral, and social-emotional skills; we analyzed student responses from pulse checks administered in both traditional school settings and during SITP throughout the school year. Each pulse check asked the same set of questions focused on key domains of student experience: self-efficacy, engagement, confidence, peer relationships, teacher relationships, and family relationships.

Five students from each class were randomly selected to receive the pulse checks. These students filled out the pulse checks each week they attended SITP and a corresponding number of times in which they were in their traditional school setting. This led to a rich dataset stemming from repeated measures throughout the school year of the same students over time and across two contexts.

It’s important to ensure that the random selection of five students from each class selected to participate in pulse checks is representative of the rest of the classes. School in the Park supported 519 students from Rosa Parks and Central Elementary in the 2024-25 school year. Of these students, SDUSD provided demographic information for the majority (n = 501). Records show that 74.5% were Hispanic, 61.4% were English Learners,

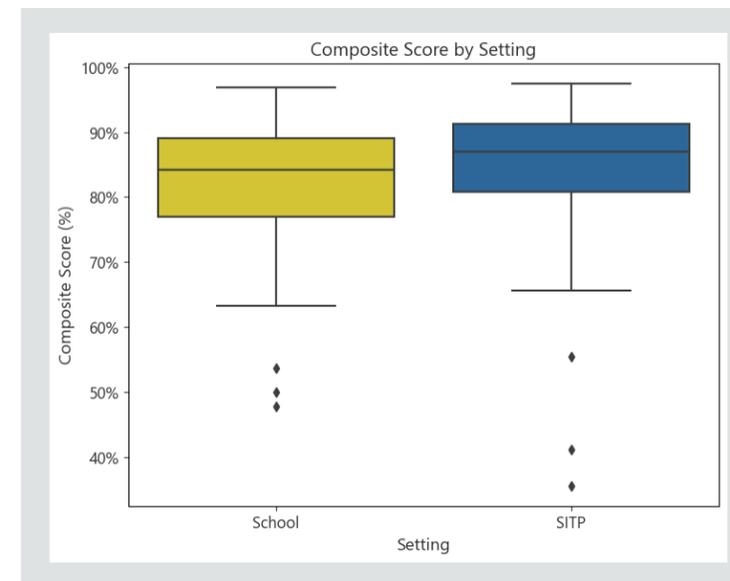
18.2% were disabled and 33.7% were low income. Our sample of students who received pulse checks had similar demographics.

We tested if there were differences between students who participated in pulse checks and students who did not. There were slightly more Hispanic students who received pulse checks compared to students who were not selected. However, none of the other demographic flags showed a statistically significant difference (Chi-squared  $p > .05$ ). Additionally, absences in the year prior did not differ. So, we can assume that the sample is fairly similar to the population at large.

From the pulse check responses, we created a composite score for each pulse check by dividing the total points a student attributed by the total possible points. This yielded a percentage score representing the students’ overall perception of their experience with higher percentages reflecting more positive experiences. The composite scores for each SITP institution range from 79% to 86% with school pulse checks ranging from 81% to 84% for Rosa Parks and Central, respectively.

For the analysis, all SITP responses were further aggregated into one average score. To ensure consistency and reliability, the analysis was limited to students who completed 10 or more pulse checks over the year with at least five pulse checks each submitted in the school and School in the Park setting. This filtering resulted in a final sample of 88 students.

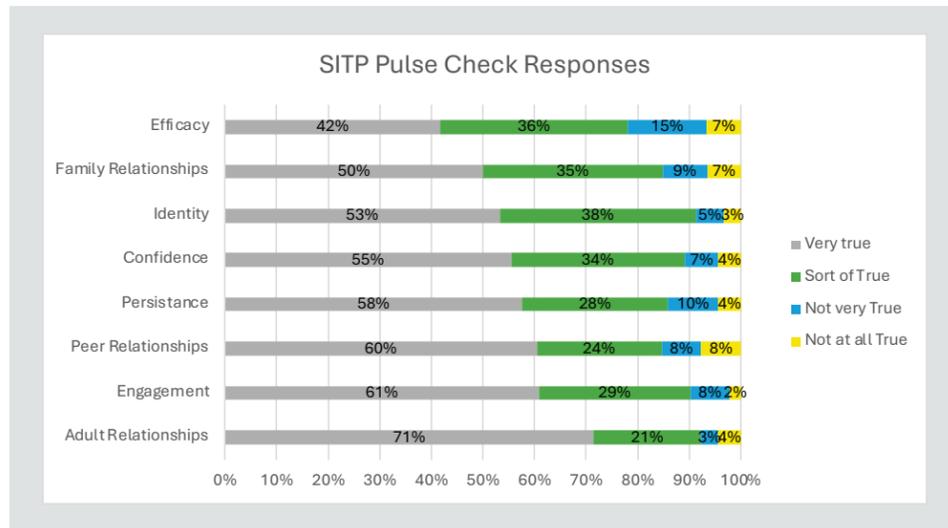
A paired samples t-test was used to statistically test whether there was a significant difference between students’ experiences in the two settings. This method compares two related sets of scores—in this case, each student’s average composite score in school versus SITP settings. While comparing students to themselves through a paired t-test is favorable when comparing related measurements across the same students, a matched control group would be beneficial to account for more variables.



The results of the t-test showed a T-statistic of 4.3219 with a p-value of 0.000041, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two settings. This provides evidence that students’ overall experience was more positive in the SITP setting. Further, 69% of students had a higher average composite score in the School in the Park setting. These findings suggest that the extended learning programs not only offered a different learning environment but also fostered stronger student-reported outcomes in areas such as engagement, confidence, and relationships. Other data sources, in conjunction with this pulse check data, may be used to dive further into SITP’s areas of interest.

# Student Confidence, Self Esteem, and Self Efficacy

Student pulse check responses, observations, and teacher impact survey responses indicate that participation in SITP meaningfully contributes to student’s confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Students reported feeling confident applying what they learned in SITP to other areas of their lives more often than they did with their regular school experiences—89% and 85%, respectively. This suggests that the immersive, hands-on learning environment of SITP may foster a stronger sense of confidence and application of knowledge.



Self-efficacy, measured by students’ agreement with the statement “I can solve problems by myself at School in the Park,” showed more mixed results. In the SITP setting, 42% strongly agreed and 36% agreed with the statement. While many students demonstrated problem-solving skills during SITP—such as critical thinking or exploring alternative solutions—some still relied on their peers, educators, and facilitators. When asked the same question

about their regular school setting, only 22% strongly agreed and 55% agreed. This was the lowest level of strong agreement across both settings, suggesting that while SITP may present challenges to developing full independence and self-efficacy, it may offer a more supportive environment for building self-efficacy than the traditional classroom.

Teachers had a positive perception of SITP’s impact on confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy with 60% strongly agreeing and the remainder agreeing that SITP benefits these

areas. One teacher noted, “Being surrounded by the sights, sounds, and feels of learning is so impactful for students who struggle in a traditional classroom.” Teachers also observed growth in students’ understanding, engagement, and reading comprehension.

These findings suggest that School in the Park supports confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, they also highlight an opportunity to intentionally support self-efficacy – a measure that is lower among both school and SITP settings.

# Student Engagement



“It’s exciting and engaging. They look forward to their museum visits and lessons.”

Student engagement emerged as one of the most consistently positive outcomes of the School in the Park (SITP) program. All responding teachers agreed that SITP increases student engagement, with 67% strongly agreeing. Many described students as more excited to learn and more actively involved during their time in the program.

SITP appears to be particularly impactful for students who may struggle to engage in conventional academic environments. Several teachers noted that students who are typically quiet or withdrawn in the classroom often become more expressive and participate more during SITP. As one teacher observed, “Many students that are disengaged in a traditional classroom often find success in the SITP program,” while another shared, “Some, who are normally very quiet, are not shy at SITP.” These experiences suggest that SITP not only generally improves engagement but particularly supports those who may not feel as connected or enthusiastic in a traditional classroom setting.

The teacher’s perceptions were supported by student pulse check data. When asked whether they look forward to attending, students showed greater enthusiasm for SITP than for their regular school setting. Strong agree-

ment was higher for SITP than school (61% vs. 50%), while agreement was 29% vs. 38%, respectively.

This contrast of strong agreement suggests that SITP offers a more engaging environment for students. The program’s hands-on, immersive approach appears to foster a sense of excitement and curiosity that translates into higher levels of participation and enthusiasm for learning.

In addition to participation and enthusiasm, another measure of engagement is attendance. To assess SITP impact on attendance, we tested whether students who participated in the evaluation had better attendance on the weeks they attended SITP. Students on average missed about 88 minutes of school per week when attending School in the Park compared to 95 minutes when attending school. While this is an absolute difference, there is no meaningful difference in attendance at SITP compared to school.

Attendance: School vs. School in the Park

Setting	N Weeks	Mean Days Absent	SD Days Absent	t-statistic	df	p-value
School	549	0.2440801	0.5969712	0.52	1093.8	0.603
School in the Park	574	0.2264808	0.5326307	0.52	1093.8	0.603

We also assessed if attendance the week after attending School in the Park was better compared to students attending two weeks of school at their regular school site.



Students on average missed about 93 minutes of school the week following SITP, whereas a student who attended their home school after a regular school week missed about 82 minutes. However, these are random differences and are not statistically meaningful.

To further assess attendance, we assessed if attendance varied by different demographic factors. None of the subgroups showed a significant Park-vs-School attendance difference at alpha = .05 (all p > .05). The maximum difference in attendance occurred in English learners who missed 74 minutes on average while at SITP completed to 90 minutes while in regular school. While 16 minutes per week for this group is important, the difference is not statistically meaningful.

**This shows that while SITP has a positive impact on participation and enthusiasm for learning, there isn’t a statistically significant impact on attendance rate.**

# Persistence

A majority of teachers reported that SITP positively influenced students' academic persistence, with 47% agreeing and another 47% strongly agreeing. One teacher noted that students demonstrated increased confidence, which empowered them to attempt problem-solving independently—an indicator of both persistence and self-efficacy.

Student feedback mirrored this sentiment. In the pulse checks completed during SITP, students indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement that they “keep trying when there’s a

problem” 86% of the time. This level of persistence was consistent with their responses in the traditional school setting, indicating high levels of persistence in general.

While the overall feedback was positive, one teacher expressed disagreement that persistence is positively impacted by the program. Observations showed that while many students showed persistence and strong ambition for problem-solving, some students required additional scaffolding to demonstrate persistence. While encouraging independence is

valuable, facilitators should balance this with guided supports when foundational understanding is lacking. If some students do not understand the reasoning or foundation, they may be left behind and persistence can weaken.

Especially during complex, multi-day projects, staff should ensure that all students remain on track and feel capable of completing tasks. Providing timely, differentiated support and ensuring activities can be accomplished by all students is beneficial to fostering persistence and preventing discouragement.

47%

AGREEING

47%

STRONGLY AGREEING

SITP POSITIVELY INFLUENCED STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE

## OBSERVATIONS

Many students showed persistence and strong ambition for problem-solving, but some students required additional scaffolding to demonstrate persistence.



# Relationships between teachers and among students

Within the School in the Park program, teachers adopt a supportive and facilitative role. While museum educators lead instruction, teachers are actively involved in supporting the learning environment. Teachers circulate around the classroom, providing help or asking guiding questions, as well as maintaining order, when needed.

Teachers also participated in some of the hands-on activities with their students. One example is with kite flying – an end of the day activity at the Air and Space Museum – where the teacher was engaged with the activity alongside her students. Additionally, when exploring exhibits, teachers would often try to build excitement or engagement. These interactions create opportunities for teachers to connect more with their students.



Teachers largely viewed SITP as beneficial to their relationships with students. In survey responses, 68% strongly agreed and the remainder agreed that the program has a positive impact on these relationships. Student feedback aligned with this sentiment. When asked if they have strong relationships with adults, students responded more favorably in the context of SITP than their regular school environment—71% versus 63% strongly agreed, and 21% versus 23% agreed, respectively. These results suggest that SITP creates an environment that supports and develops student-teacher relationships.

School in the Park's impact on peer relationships showed mixed results. More students strongly agreed that they enjoy working with peers at SITP than at school—60% compared to 45%. However, the combined percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed was slightly higher in the school setting—87% versus 84%.

Observations during the program documented a range of class arrangements including individual, paired, and group activities. Success of paired activities varied. Assigned pairs that were actively moving around the museum exhibits faced challenges in building peer relationships and sometimes students would leave their pairings or reshuffle partners. Seated pairs and groups were largely observed to be more successful in fostering collaboration.

Teachers had a more positive perception and recognized SITP's impact on peer relationships with 60% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing that SITP improved peer relationships. One teacher commented that “the shared experiences lift my students’ language skills and give them more to talk about.”

While students more often indicated that they enjoy working with peers at school, the higher percentage of strong agreement at SITP suggests that the program is effective at promoting strong peer relationships for most students.



**The shared experiences lift my students’ language skills and give them more to talk about.**

# School in the Park's Impact

Nineteen teachers from Central Elementary and Rosa Parks Elementary were asked to share their perceptions of SITP's impact through a survey. Of the 19 teachers invited to participate, 16 had complete responses (84%). The majority of respondents are experienced with 94% reporting having more than 11 years of experience working in a classroom setting. Additionally, over half of the respondents (56%) have been engaged with the SITP program for 11 or more years.

The depth of familiarity that many teachers have with the School in the Park (SITP) program—both in its current form and through its evolution over the years—offers a uniquely valuable perspective. Understanding how the program has changed over time provides a deeper context and understanding of its current impact and effectiveness. Teachers who have experienced these transitions are able

to offer informed insights that reflect not only the program's growth but also if it has adapted positively to better meet students' needs.

Additionally, with Central Elementary recently joining the cohort of schools served by SITP, the survey captured a diverse range of perspectives—from seasoned participants to those newly introduced to SITP. This blend of experience levels enriches the feedback, offering both long-term reflections and fresh impressions. As a result, the data collected provides a well-rounded and insightful view of SITP's perceived impact on both the students and instructional practices.

Moreover, these teachers bring a comprehensive understanding of the students themselves, having engaged with them across multiple learning environments—including the traditional classroom, SITP sessions, and other extended learning opportunities such as ODI. This multifaceted

familiarity allows teachers to assess the program's influence on student engagement, relationships, confidence, and other facets with a high degree of context.

Teachers consistently reported that the SITP program positively contributes to various areas of student development. Teachers largely agreed that SITP positively impacts students' engagement, relationships with peers, confidence, self-identities as learners, relationships with teachers, as well as academic persistence.

Many teachers elaborated that students benefit from direct exposure to museum exhibits, museum staff, and the SITP facilitators. The museum settings throughout Balboa Park promote discovery and engagement in ways that a standard classroom cannot replicate.

# Self-Identities as Learners

School in the Park also aims to shape students' self-perception as capable and curious learners. In pulse check surveys, students indicated a positive response when asked if SITP activities match what they like to do 91% of the time. This was notably higher than the responses at school in which 80% of responses were positive. This suggests that SITP may be more successful in engaging students in ways that resonate with their personal interests and learning preferences.

Teachers reinforced this positive perception, with all teachers strongly agreeing (53%) or agreeing (47%) that the program improves students' self-identities as learners. SITP was described as making learning tangible, easier to understand, and memorable for students.



**School in the Park provides students with a unique, hands-on learning experience outside the traditional classroom, which helps deepen their understanding of academic subjects through real-world connections.**

Within several museums, staff intentionally positioned students as scientists, artists, or historians—encouraging them to engage in practices such as “slow looking,” detailed observation, and note-taking. In one museum, students had the opportunity to meet a paleontologist, prepare questions, tour exhibits, and reflect on the experience. These moments not only enriched academic understanding but also helped students envision themselves in professional roles.

Teachers noted that these experiences were especially impactful for students who may not typically see themselves represented in such careers. As one teacher shared:

**SITP gives our lower-income students a window into the possibilities of different occupations and interests they might not otherwise get.**



This exposure to real-world roles and professional environments contributes meaningfully to students' self-perception as learners. During observations at ODI, staff also meaningfully fostered student's self-identities as learners, but there was a particularly strong focus on career pathways. Staff at ODI intentionally explained their path to their current position, how their interest in science grew when they were the student's age, and how they grew up in the same or similar neighborhood. ODI staff also coordinated for a professional in the marine or conservation science field to virtually meet with students, tell the students about themselves, and answer questions. After students are encouraged to reflect on what they found interesting and what similarities they saw between themselves and the field expert.

Though through different means, ODI and SITP can help students see themselves as learners and contribute to their self-identities.

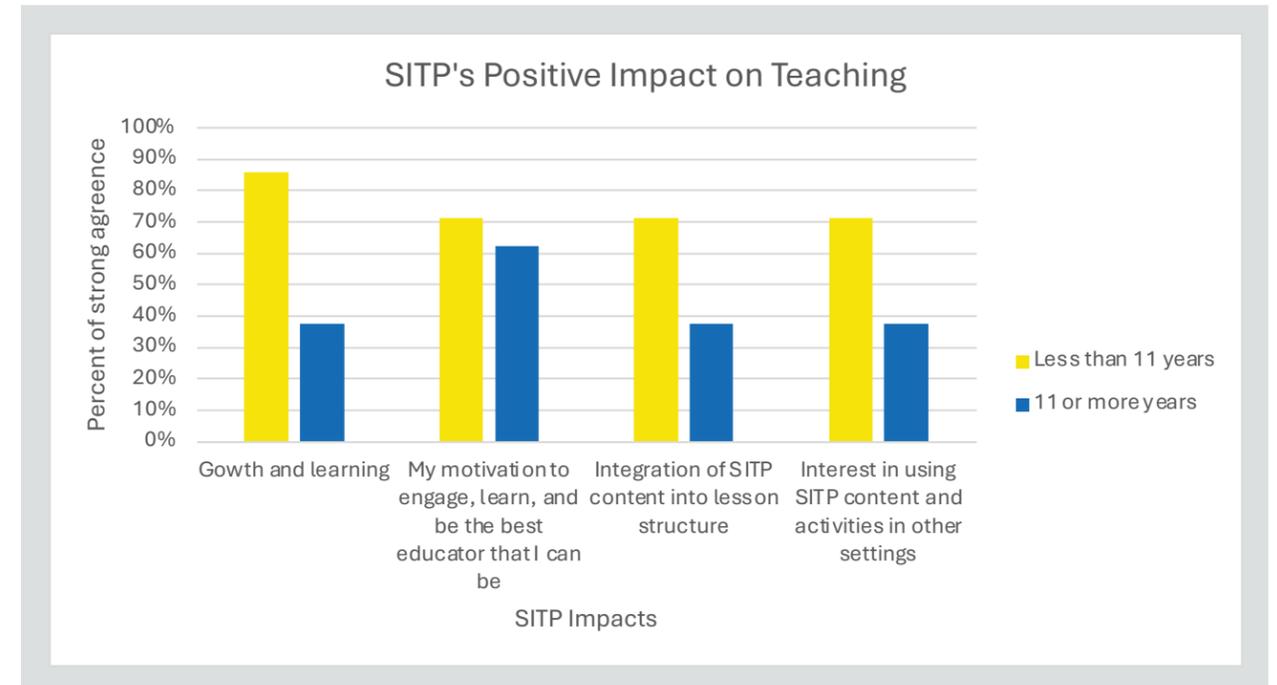
# Impact on Lesson Structure and Classroom

In addition to positive impacts on student identities as learners, the School in the Park program also promotes professional growth and instructional enrichment for teachers. Survey results of SITP's impact on the classroom were compared between more experienced teachers (those with 11 or more years of experience with SITP) and less experienced teachers (those with fewer than 11 years). Survey results from teachers at Central and Rosa Parks Elementary Schools showed that less experienced teachers were more likely than their more experienced counterparts to strongly agree that:

SITP positively impacts their professional growth and learning; <b>86%</b> and <b>38%</b> , respectively	SITP content is effectively integrated into their lesson structure; <b>71%</b> and <b>38%</b> , respectively	They are interested in using SITP content and activities in other educational settings; <b>71%</b> and <b>38%</b> , respectively
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These findings suggest that teachers newer to SITP may be particularly receptive to adapting their instructional practices based on SITP's content. Their openness to change classroom content highlights a potential opportunity to provide targeted resources and supports that help bridge SITP experiences with classroom instruction.

The graph below displays these differences in perception across experience levels.



## BRIDGING SITP AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Teachers reported that SITP not only benefits students but also meaningfully influences their own teaching practices and classroom instruction. Teachers emphasized how the hands-on experiences, knowledgeable museum educators, and unique environment provided by SITP benefits instruction as teachers are able to “bridge” the content. Teachers echoed that making connections between SITP lessons and topics covered in the classroom allows students to make more connections to what they are learning.

“**School in the Park creates lasting memories that students are able to bridge with our classroom learning.**”

Teachers described SITP as a foundation upon which they build future instruction. Specifically, there was a large emphasis that hands-on experiences contribute to greater understanding of concepts among students. For example, one teacher shared how a visit to the zoo alleviated the need for classroom instruction as concepts were easier for students to understand in an interactive method of instruction rather than textbook-based instruction. School in the Park intentionally fostered these connections. This year, SITP partnered with teachers at Central and Rosa Parks schools to develop bridging lessons, incorporating classroom visits for teaching and co-teaching when feasible, with encouraging outcomes.

In addition to reinforcing content knowledge, SITP was also reported to improve student motivation and engagement in the classroom. Teachers commented on how students often return from SITP experiences with increased curiosity and a willingness to participate more actively in classroom activities. This, in turn, has encouraged teachers to adapt their own instructional practices to become more interactive and student-centered.

It encourages teachers to be more creative and hands-on with their instruction, bringing in elements of experiential learning that improve how students absorb and apply knowledge.



#### SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS WITH SCHEDULING AND SUPPORT

While SITP is widely perceived by teachers as having a meaningful impact, some also highlighted logistical challenges. Participation in SITP requires adjustments from both teachers and families—teachers adapt their instructional schedules to accommodate SITP weeks, and families adjust to later pick-up times due to the extended day.

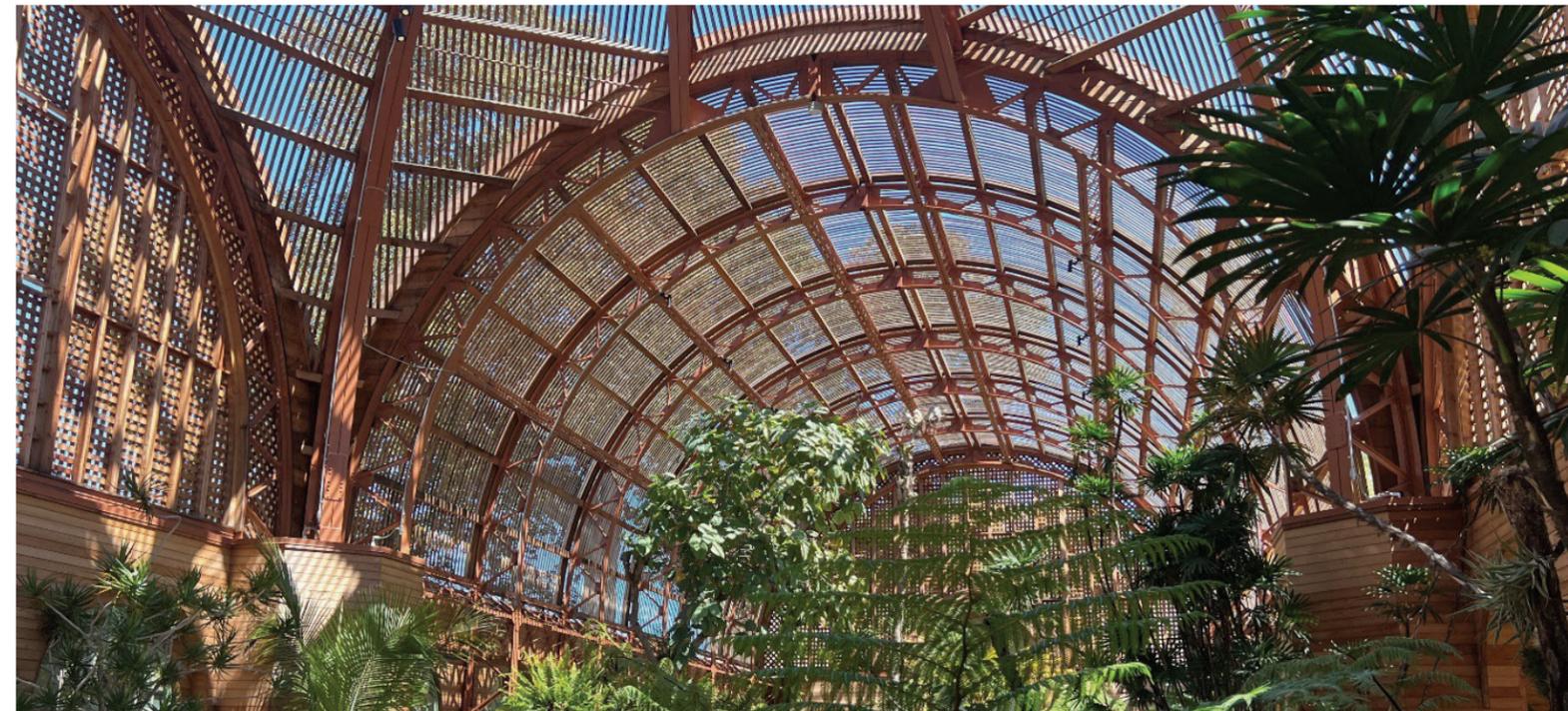


Unfortunately, the time spent in the park does impact classroom instruction time. I feel that time spent at SITP is well worth it

Teachers acknowledged that SITP participation can place pressure on classroom schedules. Some expressed concerns about meeting instructional requirements, especially during periods leading up to standardized testing. However, most emphasized that the benefits of SITP—such as increased student engagement, exposure to hands-on learning, and enrichment opportunities—outweigh the disruptions. As one teacher noted, “It does create a squeeze on your instructional time, but with creative planning this can be overcome.”

To better support the integration of SITP, teachers suggested aligning the schedule more intentionally with the academic calendar and providing structural supports. Suggestions included extending school days or offering programs at the school site to reinforce grade-level expectations. Another emphasized the importance of institutional support, stating, “The school needs to communicate that this program is part of their students’ learning.” As teachers continue to amend their schedules and lesson plans, increased support and thoughtful schedule alignment may benefit classrooms further.

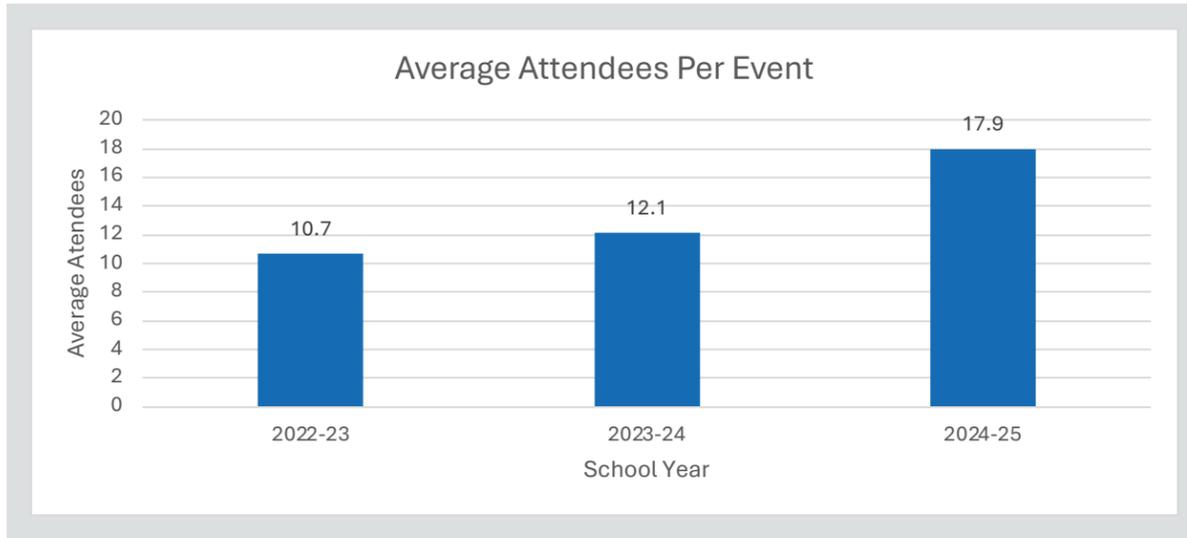
# Family Engagement in Schooling



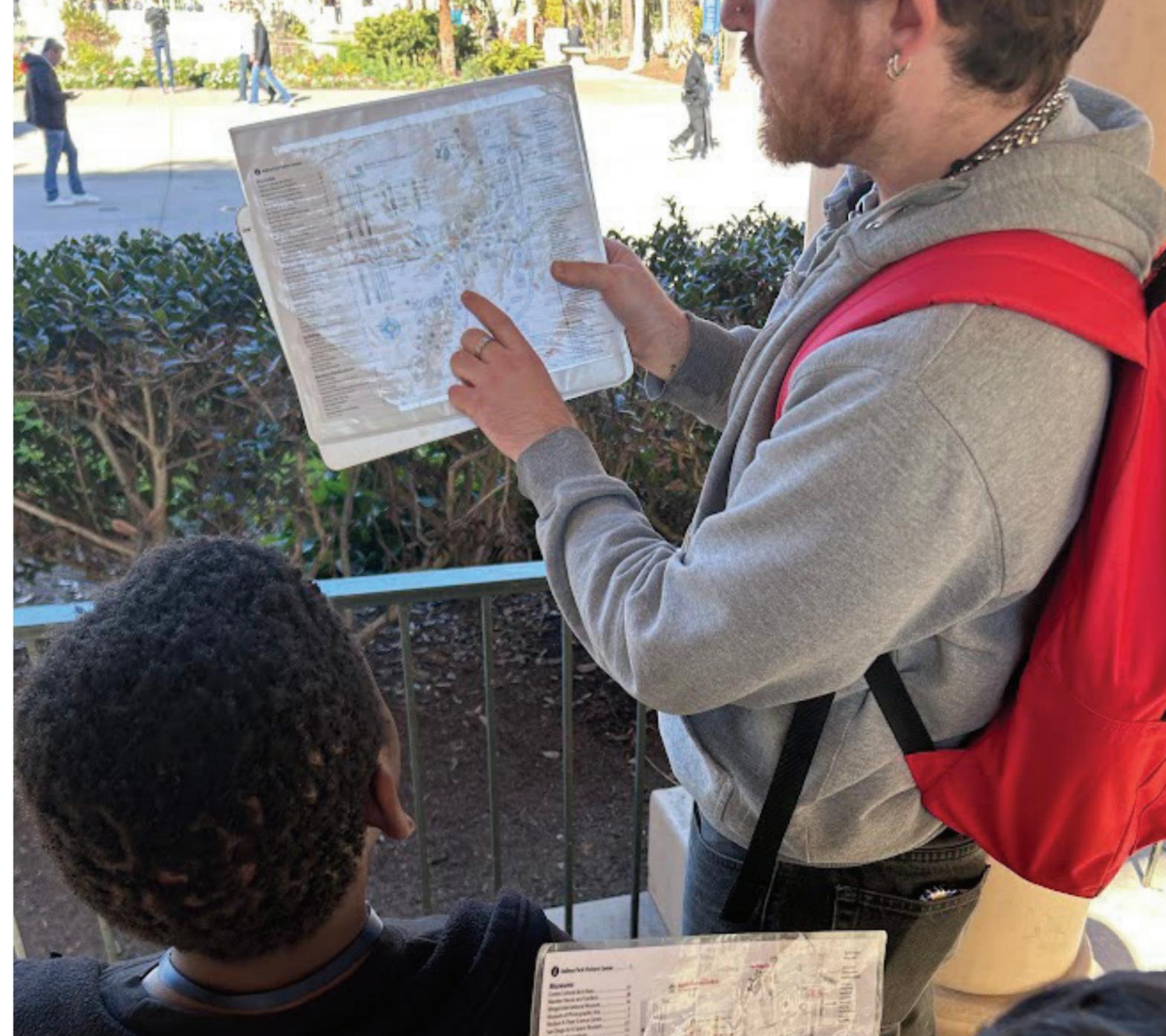
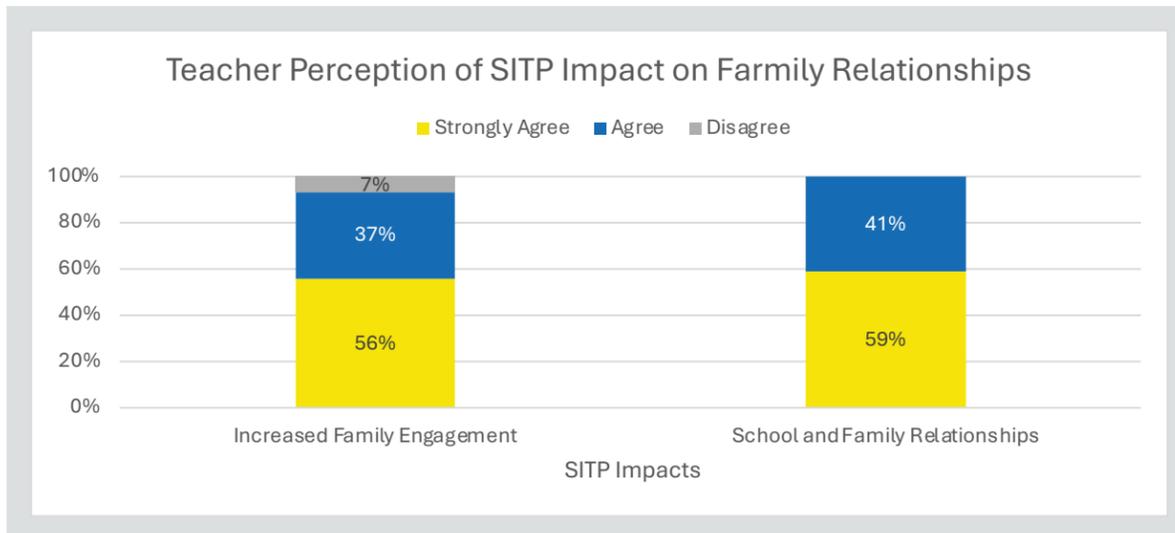
School in the Park seeks to not only encourage children’s engagement in schooling but also build family engagement. SITP promotes family engagement in two primary ways: through Families in the Park events and by providing museum access passes. Increasing attendance and engagement has been a notable area of growth in the 2024 – 2025 school year, particularly through the Families in the Park events that SITP regularly hosts.

Museum passes, which allow free entry for up to four visitors, are distributed both through children’s schools and at the Families in the Park events. This year, Rosa Parks families checked out 65 passes, and Central families checked out 44. An additional 269 passes were distributed during event days, enabling families to explore Balboa Park’s museums together after the events.

While the total number of events and attendees has varied year to year, a key indicator of growing engagement is the increase in average attendance per event. In 2022–23, the average was approximately 10.7 attendees per event. This rose to 12.1 in 2023–24 and increased to nearly 17.9 in 2024–25. This upward trend of family engagement suggests not only sustained interest but also greater participation from families.



Survey data corroborates the positive impact SITP has on family involvement. In the Impact Survey, the majority of teachers reported agreement that SITP significantly increases family engagement in students' education with 56% strongly agreeing and 37% agreeing. Additionally, all teachers strongly agreed that the program strengthens positive connections between school and home with 59% strongly agreeing and 41% agreeing. These results suggest that SITP is not only impacting student's learning and social emotional skills but also reinforcing the role of families as active participants in their children's education.



SITP also empowers students to build family engagement. When families visit Balboa Park, students are encouraged to act as guides for their families, sharing what they've learned and showcasing their knowledge of Balboa Park's history, architecture, and exhibits. For example, during their week at the San Diego History Center, students created guidebooks highlighting notable buildings, sculptures, and plants—resources they then could use to lead their families through Balboa Park. This

experience promotes self-efficacy and confidence, encouraging students to apply the knowledge they accumulated at the park to educate and engage their family members. Further, according to Pulse Check data, students generally reported that they often talk to their families about what they're doing at SITP. Notably, student agreement about talking to their families about school was lower in the school environment compared to SITP. This 3% difference suggests that the program may contribute to more conversations between students and their families.

# Recommendations

## 1 EMBED CAREER CONNECTIONS MORE PURPOSEFULLY

While School in the Park includes some career-focused activities, these connections should be more intentional and consistent across different institutions. Teachers see an opportunity for children to learn more about roles and professions in the SITP setting. As one teacher said, “they’re introduced to careers and fields of study they might not encounter in a regular school setting.” SITP could capitalize on this foundation through more explicitly integrating career exploration into the curriculum. SITP can further link activities to career paths and introduce students to professionals in those roles. This would build on existing strengths in promoting self-identities as learners while helping students better understand the range of adult pathways available in history, science, and arts fields.

## 2 ESTABLISH THEME CONSISTENCY BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS

Bridging of content between SITP and the classroom is very well received and impactful for both students and teachers. While SITP encourages teachers to bridge content between SITP and the classroom, there is also room for museum facilitators to bridge content within SITP’s institutions. SITP could support these connections through encouraging facilitators and teachers to reference past museum experiences during discussion and reflection activities. SITP staff could also intentionally anchor questions or reference past applicable activities that help students link prior visits with current themes. Highlighting these shared themes can help students build on prior knowledge and draw meaningful connections throughout the year. When possible, educators and facilitators should intentionally reference past museum visits and draw comparisons to current ones to reinforce these connections for students. This would expand SITP’s impact on bridging content and would allow for a more integrated learning experience.

## 3 SUPPORT PERSISTENCE THROUGH ACCOMPLISHABLE CHALLENGES

To encourage persistence, activities should be designed at a complexity level to challenge students yet be achievable by all. This could be done through open-ended or tiered challenges. For example, during observations, some institutions assigned tasks to individuals or small groups and if they accomplished them, they were encouraged to also discover another way to solve the problem. This allows for additional problem solving for those who are ahead of the class but also allows for those that need more assistance to accomplish the day’s activities and not get discouraged, fall behind, or have a lack of fundamental understanding. Implementing this type of differentiated design consistently across all institutions would foster greater persistence and help every student experience a sense of accomplishment.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, this evaluation of the School in the Park program highlights the program’s impact on student development – academically, behaviorally, and social-emotionally. Across observations, surveys, and pulse checks, SITP was corroborated as being a contributor to student’s confidence, academic efficacy, academic-persistence, engagement, and relationships. Students not only demonstrated increased enthusiasm and engagement for learning but also began to build their self-identity as learners. Teacher’s support of the program through bridging of instruction allows for SITP’s benefits to continue past the Balboa Park visits and into the classroom. Further, SITP helps to foster meaningful relationships: between students and their teachers, among peers, and between their families and the educational journey. The paired t-test comparing student’s average assessment of SITP and the traditional school settings shows a statistically significant difference, suggesting that the SITP program benefits students in many areas overall.

There are some limitations of this evaluation. Limitations include not having a control group, which limits

our ability to confidently attribute improvements in pulse check scores solely to SITP and account for other variables. Further limitations include the exclusion of students who were not present for all pulse checks and the 84% completion rate for the teachers’ impact survey, which, while strong for a survey, leaves some perspectives missing. Observations were conducted at least one day at each of the institutions. While helpful for understanding the activities and projects that take place, this is just a snapshot of the activities that are organized throughout the week among the different grade levels. Additionally with any self-reported data, there is an opportunity for bias in those results.

Looking ahead, SITP continues to show commitment to refine its model and best serve the children in the program. SITP seeks to move forward by refining the optimal number of weeks that will yield the greatest benefit for students. This reflection, combined with the recommendations in this report – embedding career connections, establishing theme consistency, and supporting persistence – will help SITP continue to improve and evolve.

# Appendix

Tell us what you think	Not at all true	Not very true	Sort of true	Very true
I look forward to coming to School in the Park.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What we did in School in the Park this week matched what I like to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can solve problems by myself at School in the Park.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I have problems at School in the Park, I keep trying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can use what I learn at School in the Park in other things I do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The adults at School in the Park are happy to see me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like working with other kids at School in the Park.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I talk to my family about what I'm doing in School in the Park often.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tell us what you think	Not at all true	Not very true	Sort of true	Very true
I look forward to coming to school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What we did in school this week matched what I like to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can solve problems by myself at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I have problems at school, I keep trying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can use what I learn at school in other things I do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The adults at my school are happy to see me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like working with other kids at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I talk to my family about what I'm doing in school often.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**OVERALL GOAL:** To evaluate SITP's impact on students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional achievement.

Summative Questions	Measurement Tool	Measurement Tool Cont.
<b>1) How does SITP support the development of</b>		
a) Student Confidence (self-esteem; academic self-efficacy)	Observations: Promising Practices Ratings System Impact Survey	Pulse Checks on Identity, Efficacy, Persistence, Confidence, and Relationships
b) Student Engagement (participation, attendance)	Observations: Promising Practices Ratings System Impact Survey	Academic Records
c) Academic Persistence	Observations: Promising Practices Ratings System Impact Survey	Pulse Checks on Identity, Efficacy, Persistence, Confidence, and Relationships
d) Relationships Between Teachers and Students and Among Students	Observations: Promising Practices Ratings System Impact Survey	Pulse Checks on Identity, Efficacy, Persistence, Confidence, and Relationships
<b>2) In what ways does participation in SITP impact:</b>		
a) Student Self-identity as Learners	Pulse Checks on Identity, Efficacy, Persistence, Confidence, and Relationships Impact Survey	Impact Survey
b) Teachers' Perceptions of Students	Impact Survey	
c) How Teachers Structure Their Lessons	Impact Survey	
d) Families Engagement in Students Schooling	Impact Survey Pulse Check	Document Analysis of Family Attendance

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