

**SUMMARY OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH (AIR)'S  
REPORT ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) IN THE AUSTIN  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (AISD), 2013**

**What were the key findings of the AIR report?** In general, AIR described findings from their research on the AISD’s implementation of SEL as “promising” particularly given the fact that SEL was first implemented in the 2011–2012 school year. Five major findings of the 2013 AIR report are presented below, along with additional considerations.

**1. Implementation of SEL has improved since 2011 according to the CDI implementation rubric.** AIR used a rubric designed by CDI that is designed to assess SEL implementation nationally. To determine AISD’s ratings, AIR researchers coded available district data to determine reliable and consistent ratings of each domain. Although not based on tests of statistical significance, AIR determined that AISD’s implementation of SEL has improved over time and that ratings in most domains were positive (e.g., above 3.0; see Table 1 below). Results from interviews with CASEL consultants suggest that implementation of SEL in AISD was going “spectacularly” well. It is important to note that the CDI implementation rubric did not evaluate SEL implementation at each campus. In the future, assessing program implementation at each campus will provide the district with detailed information regarding which schools are exemplars and which schools might need additional support.

**Table 1. AISD’s Scores on the CDI SEL implementation rubric from 2010–2011 to 2012–2013.**

Rubric Domains	2011*	2012	2013
1. Needs & resources	--	3.0	3.5
2. Vision	2.4	3.5	3.5
3. Central office expertise	2.4	3.0	3.0
4. PD programs	2.0	3.0	3.5
5. Align resources	2.8	4.0	4.0
6. Communications	2.2	2.0	3.0
7. SEL standards for PK–12	1.6	3.0	3.0
8. Evidence-based programs	1.6	3.0	3.5
9. Integrate SEL with other initiatives	2.0	2.5	2.5
10. Continuous improvement	1.6	2.0	2.5
11. Positive climate	1.6	3.0	3.5
12. Stakeholder commitment	2.2	3.0	3.0
13. Roles & responsibilities	--	3.0	3.5

Source. 2013 AIR report

Note. \* Not defined in AIR report.

-- Indicates the rubric domain was not included on the 2011 version.

According to AIR, “2011 rubric items were realigned to match 2012 and later constructs, and scores were converted from a 5-point scale to a 4-point scale.”

**What were the goals of AIR’s evaluation in AISD?** In partnership with the Collaborating District Initiatives (CDI) evaluation of national SEL programs, AIR used qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the following areas as they relate to the effectiveness SEL in AISD: (1) implementation of SEL; (2) district outcomes (e.g., district ratings of climate, commitment to SEL, and clarity of roles and responsibilities for SEL); (3) school outcomes, (e.g., school climate); and (4) student outcomes (e.g., students’ social and emotional competence, academic performance, attendance, and suspensions).

**Understanding the data.** AIR used the following data in their analyses:

- Interviews with CASEL consultants and key district stakeholders
- CDI’s SEL implementation rubric
- AISD’s student climate survey
- AISD’s employee coordinated survey
- Student academic outcomes (e.g., 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade TAKS performance in reading and mathematics)
- Student behavioral outcomes (e.g., attendance, suspension, graduation, and dropout)
- Students’ social and emotional competence

**2. Student and staff perceptions of campus environment were generally positive at SEL schools but were not significantly different from non-SEL schools.** AIR reported that students' ratings of academic self-confidence and teacher expectations were positive but remained flat since the implementation of SEL. While not based on statistical tests, there appeared to be no difference in students' ratings of school climate at SEL schools compared to students' ratings at non-SEL elementary schools. Ratings appeared to be higher at SEL middle schools compared to non-SEL middle schools; however, students' ratings at non-SEL high schools appeared to be higher than students' ratings at SEL high schools. In general, teachers at SEL schools seemed to express more positive attitudes toward SEL related campus activities and support than did teachers at non-SEL schools. Additionally, teachers at elementary and high schools with SEL seemed to exhibit more favorable attitudes toward SEL related campus activities and items related to support than did elementary and high school teachers at non-SEL schools (Table 2).

**Table 2. The percentage of SEL and non-SEL teachers who strongly agreed with SEL related survey questions.**

Item	Elementary		Middle		High	
	SEL	Non-SEL	SEL	Non-SEL	SEL	Non-SEL
1. Promoting students' social and emotional learning is a central part of the mission of our school.	45%	29%	29%	23%	34%	28%
2. The district central office provides adequate professional development and coaching support to promote social and emotional development of all students at our school.	18%	7%	8%	4%	12%	7%
3. The district central office provides adequate materials and curricular resources to promote social and emotional development of all students at our school.	19%	5%	4%	7%	8%	7%
4. Teachers at my school are expected to promote the social and emotional development of all students.	43%	30%	20%	21%	32%	21%
5. My principal supports me to promote social and emotional development in our students.	38%	29%	20%	16%	56%	23%
6. The culture at my school supports social and emotional learning.	42%	23%	18%	12%	23%	21%
7. My school has successfully integrated social and emotional learning with instruction.	32%	17%	12%	7%	13%	13%
8. I am comfortable with the topics of social and emotional learning that I am expected to teach to my students.	34%	25%	12%	19%	40%	19%
9. I have improved in my ability to teach and model social and emotional skills over the past year.	29%	21%	8%	16%	28%	26%
10. My school's social and emotional learning approach is culturally and linguistically relevant.	31%	17%	13%	7%	13%	13%
11. My school uses data effectively in an ongoing cycle of inquiry to inform and improve social and emotional learning practice.	17%	13%	11%	7%	11%	12%

Source. 2013 AIR report and 2011-2012 AISD Employee Coordinated Survey

Note. Data are displayed showing percentage of teachers who *strongly agreed* with each item only. Response options ranged from "don't know," to "strongly agree." Data in the above figure are a subset of the data presented in Table 4, Appendix B.

**3. While performance for all AISD students improved, there were no significant differences in academic outcomes of SEL and non-SEL schools.** To determine if students' achievement scores have improved over time, AIR conducted a time series analysis using both TAKS proficiency levels and TAKS scale scores. These analyses were only conducted for students in grades 10 and 11. AIR used students' TAKS scores in 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 as baseline data with TAKS data from 2011–2012 as the outcome<sup>1</sup>. Results presented in AIR's report suggest that while performance for AISD students improved, there were no significant differences in student performance at SEL schools compared to non-SEL schools. It should be noted that non-SEL schools may not serve as the best comparison group for SEL schools because of the difference in school characteristics of SEL and non-SEL. In particular, schools first selected to implement SEL were chosen based on characteristics that likely differed from the needs of non-SEL schools (e.g., school need status, school disciplinary referral rates, school dropout rates, school academic performance). Thus, differences between groups are confounded. Additionally, the groups of SEL and non-SEL schools used in these analyses appeared to include vertical teams that did not implement SEL until 2012–2013. With the goal to implement SEL districtwide by 2015, longitudinal analyses (when applicable) within school and by SEL cohort will serve as a better way to determine whether the program has facilitated changes at the campus level over time.

**4. While performance of all AISD students improved, there were no significant differences in behavioral outcomes of SEL and non-SEL schools.** To determine if students' behavioral outcomes have improved over time, AIR conducted a time series analysis using student level attendance, suspensions, dropouts, and graduation rates in 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 as baseline data, with 2011–2012 data as the outcome<sup>1</sup>. Analyses comparing SEL schools to non-SEL schools resulted in no significant differences; however, for reasons described above, comparisons between these two groups might not be reasonable. Most importantly, these analyses were not described in detail, but they appear to have included groups of SEL and non-SEL schools from vertical teams that did not implement SEL until 2012–2013.

**5. Students' social emotional competences have improved in some areas since 2011–2012, and SEL students improved more than their peers at non-SEL schools in one instance.** To assess students' social emotional competence, AIR developed measures to assess the five dimensions of social emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Third grade teachers rated 7 randomly selected students on these dimensions, and a random sample of 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students completed a self-assessment on these dimensions. Although the data were not analyzed for statistical significance, students' ratings of social emotional competence were considered positive, with ratings above 3.0. Additionally, 75% of students "frequently" or "almost always" displayed socially and emotionally skilled behaviors. AIR urges the readers to be cautious when interpreting these results as the data are from a sample of all students. Data were analyzed to determine if there were significant changes in students' scores over time. Results suggest that 7<sup>th</sup> grade students' ratings of relationship skills and decision making have improved in 2012–2013 compared to their ratings in 2011–2012. Although 7<sup>th</sup> grade students at non-SEL schools provided higher ratings of self-management and self-awareness than did 7<sup>th</sup> grade students at SEL schools, the self-management of 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEL students improved more than that of their non-SEL peers. Average scores or rates of change for these domains comparing SEL to non-SEL schools were not included in the report.

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<sup>1</sup> 2012–2013 data were unavailable at the time analyses were run for the AIR report

## What should be considered for future research?

To improve the quality of future SEL program evaluation, AISD has made the following recommendations to AIR:

**1. Conduct appropriate tests of significance (e.g., correlations, t-tests, Cohen's d, ANOVAs, etc.) where possible.** The AIR report describes a variety of favorable findings with regard to SEL implementation and district performance. However, many analyses were not tested for statistical significance. Furthermore, most analyses of statistical significance that were conducted found no significant differences between SEL schools and non-SEL schools. Evidence gathered from AISD's internal evaluation of SEL also suggests that there were no significant differences between SEL schools and non-SEL schools for similar outcomes (e.g., school climate, disciplinary referrals, graduation rates, student academic performance, students' SEL skills, etc.). Visual analysis of changes over time or differences between groups should be avoided.

**2. Conduct analyses with appropriate comparison or reference groups for SEL schools (e.g., conduct longitudinal cohort analyses controlling for level of program implementation).** The lack of significant differences found between groups is likely a result of unreasonable comparisons between SEL schools and non-SEL schools. In these reports, SEL schools were compared to non-participating SEL schools without matching techniques to identify similar SEL and non-SEL schools based on school characteristics (e.g., school need status, school disciplinary referral rates, school dropout rates, school academic performance). Additionally, analyses did not consider SEL implementation cohorts or the likely influence of SEL implementation levels. Future analyses may benefit from the inclusion of control variables such as school characteristics and SEL implementation ratings.

**3. Measure and include school SEL program implementation level.** The phase-in of SEL by school vertical team and for specific teacher groups (e.g., new teachers in AISD) provides a lack of distinction between schools with and without SEL. The measurement and incorporation of school SEL implementation ratings will become increasingly valuable to future research regarding the potential influence of SEL in AISD.

AISD's Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) will implement these recommendations in the 2014–2015 SEL program evaluation. Additionally, DRE staff will collaborate with AIR to ensure that the aforementioned recommendations are met. To that end, staff have already worked with AIR to revise the data sharing agreement to provide access to raw data necessary the recommended tests of statistical significance. AISD will benefit from a more robust evaluation of SEL.