

**SUMMARY OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH’S (AIR)  
REPORT ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) IN THE AUSTIN  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (AISD), 2014**



**What were the key findings of the AIR report?** Based on interviews with AISD SEL program staff and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) consultants, AIR evaluators described the growth in AISD’s implementation of SEL as “strong.” Despite this endorsement, AIR evaluators reported more room for improvement when it came to students’ ratings of social and emotional competencies.

**1. Implementation of SEL has improved since 2011 according to the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) implementation rubric.** The CDI implementation rubric, also referred to as the “district rubric,” was designed to assess SEL implementation among the eight participating CDI districts. To determine AISD’s ratings, AIR researchers coded available district data and interviews conducted with program staff and CASEL consultants. Although not based on tests of statistical significance, AIR determined that AISD’s implementation of SEL improved in two domains since Spring 2013. It should be noted that although scores were positive (i.e., above 3.0; Table 1), they remained flat from 2013 to 2014.

**Table 1. AISD’s Scores on the Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) Social Emotional Learning (SEL) implementation rubric from Spring 2011 to Spring 2014**

Rubric domain	2011	2012	2013	2014
1. Needs and resources	--	3.0	3.5	3.5
2. Vision	2.4	3.5	3.5	4.0
3. Central office expertise	2.4	3.0	3.0	3.0
4. Professional development programs	2.0	3.0	3.5	3.5
5. Align resources	2.8	4.0	4.0	4.0
6. Communications	2.2	2.0	3.0	3.0
7. SEL standards for prekindergarten–grade 12	1.6	3.0	3.0	3.0
8. Evidence-based programs	1.6	3.0	3.5	3.5
9. Integrate SEL with other initiatives	2.0	2.5	2.5	3.0
10. Continuous improvement	1.6	2.0	2.5	2.5
11. Positive climate	1.6	3.0	3.5	3.5
12. Stakeholder commitment	2.2	3.0	3.0	3.0
13. Roles and responsibilities	--	3.0	3.5	3.5

Source. Table 2. Austin’s Rubric Scores from 2011 to 2014 in Tabular Form  
Note. 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.”  
-- Indicates the rubric domain was not included on the 2011 version

**2. Ratings of social emotional competencies were high in Spring 2014.** To assess students’ social emotional competencies (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision

**What were the goals of AIR’s evaluation in AISD?** CASEL partnered with the NoVo foundation to create the CDI to monitor implementation of SEL programs across eight school districts. Evaluation of CDI has been conducted by AIR. In addition to describing SEL’s ongoing implementation in AISD, AIR’s Year 3 report evaluated the effectiveness of SEL in AISD using CDI’s implementation rubric and students’ ratings of social and emotional competence.

**Understanding the data.** The following data sources were used in AIR’s analyses:

- 2013–2014 interviews with CASEL consultants and AISD SEL program staff to assess AISD’s implementation of SEL
- 2013–2014 ratings on CDI’s SEL implementation rubric
- Third-grade teachers’ ratings of five of their students’ social emotional competencies (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making).
- Seventh- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students’ self-reported ratings of social emotional competence

making), AIR evaluators worked with staff in the AISD Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) to administer surveys to a sample of 3<sup>rd</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>-, and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students. Third-grade teachers were each asked to provide ratings of the SEL competencies for seven randomly selected students. Additionally, a sample of 7<sup>th</sup>- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students completed self-assessments of their SEL competencies. At the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade level, teachers rated 75% to 80% of their students as *frequently* or *almost always* displaying socially competent behaviors. This finding was similar to that presented in the 2012–2013 report. Third-grade female students received higher ratings than did their male peers on all five competencies. Across all five social emotional competencies, White, Asian, and Latino students were rated as more socially emotionally competent than their African American peers. Between 77% and 86% of students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade reported that they *frequently* or *almost always* displayed social emotional competence, which was similar to results from Spring 2013. Ratings were generally higher among female students than male students across all competencies, and White students generally provided higher ratings of their SEL competencies than did their Latino and African American peers.

**Recommendations and limitations.** To improve the quality of AIR’s evaluation of SEL, the following recommendations have been made to AIR:

**1. Include results from tests of statistical significance.** The AIR report describes favorable findings with regard to SEL implementation; however, these differences were not documented with tests of statistical significance. Although students’ social emotional competencies across various student groups were tested for statistical significance, actual results from these tests were excluded from the report. Including this information (e.g., *p*-values, results from *F*-tests) would be beneficial to AISD’s ongoing internal evaluation of SEL.

**2. Conduct analyses with appropriate comparison or reference groups for SEL schools (e.g., conduct longitudinal cohort analyses controlling for level of program implementation).** Analyses of SEL competencies at the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade level showed that non-SEL schools had higher ratings of social awareness than did SEL schools. (Non-SEL schools may have also had higher ratings of the remaining four competencies, but this was unclear in the document.) This comparison is problematic because SEL schools were compared with 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 potential influence of SEL implementation levels. For example, DRE’s 2013–2014 SEL evaluation report, available online, analyzed outcomes based on SEL cohort.

**3. Include data from available sources.** Although AIR obtained data from a sample of AISD teachers regarding their attitudes toward SEL-related activities (which were collected by AISD’s DRE on the Spring 2014 Employee Coordinated Survey), data were not included in this report. AIR evaluators indicated that it was unnecessary to include these data in the report because information was shared with program staff in an earlier summary. Including teachers’ attitudes toward SEL-related activities would have added more context to evaluation findings.

AISD’s DRE has incorporated these recommendations in the 2014–2015 SEL program evaluation plan, and the first in a series of reports is available online. AIR evaluators also have addressed some of these limitations for future work, and DRE staff will continue to collaborate with AIR staff to ensure that they provide a robust evaluation of SEL.