

# Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): An Examination of Model SEL Schools



## How were model SEL schools identified?

Beginning in 2014–2015, using an observation rubric developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL program staff developed a method to identify schools demonstrating best practices in SEL. To do so, SEL program staff conducted observations and interviews with school staff and principals to determine their eligibility. SEL program staff also worked with principals to ensure that serving as a model school was beneficial to the school and the Austin Independent School District (AISD). Once selected, these schools welcomed campus visits from district stakeholders, community members, and other school districts interested in observing effective SEL implementation. As an incentive to allow visitors, model schools received a stipend to spend on further SEL development. The selected schools served as a model SEL school for 3 years. SEL program staff are currently developing new methods to identify model SEL schools. Data included in this report will help inform their decisions.

The first cohort of model SEL schools is listed and described in Table 1. Additional school demographics can be found on each school’s [website](#). Each school’s demographic information was compared to the district’s demographics to determine if the model SEL schools reflected [district-level demographics](#). For example, in 2016–2017, 53% of AISD students were identified as economically disadvantaged; however, only students in three of the 11 model SEL schools were similarly identified. Additionally, in 2016–2017, 28% of AISD students were identified as being English

Table 1.  
Most model SEL schools have participated in SEL for at least 5 years, and few are Title I schools.

School	Years in SEL	% ED	% ADA	% Disp.	% Chronically absent	% ELL	% Special education
Baldwin ES	2	13%	93%	0%	3%	12%	11%
Blazier ES†	3	73%	86%	2%	9%	33%	9%
Highland Park ES	5	5%	95%	0%	3%	1%	7%
Lee ES	5	17%	92%	1%	7%	5%	11%
Pease ES	6	17%	96%	2%	4%	1%	7%
Bertha Sadler Means YWLA MS†	2	91%	81%	8%	10%	48%	12%
Covington MS	6	64%	87%	7%	13%	17%	17%
Fulmore MS†	5	68%	87%	21%	16%	29%	11%
O. Henry MS	6	27%	92%	10%	10%	9%	10%
Akins HS	3	64%	83%	9%	17%	14%	12%
Crockett HS	6	66%	85%	9%	18%	15%	15%

Source. 2016–2017 AISD demographic data; 2015–2016 AISD attendance data

Note. ES = elementary school; MS = middle school; HS = high school; ED = economically disadvantaged; ADA = average daily attendance, Disp. = Discipline infractions; ELL = English language learners

† Title I school



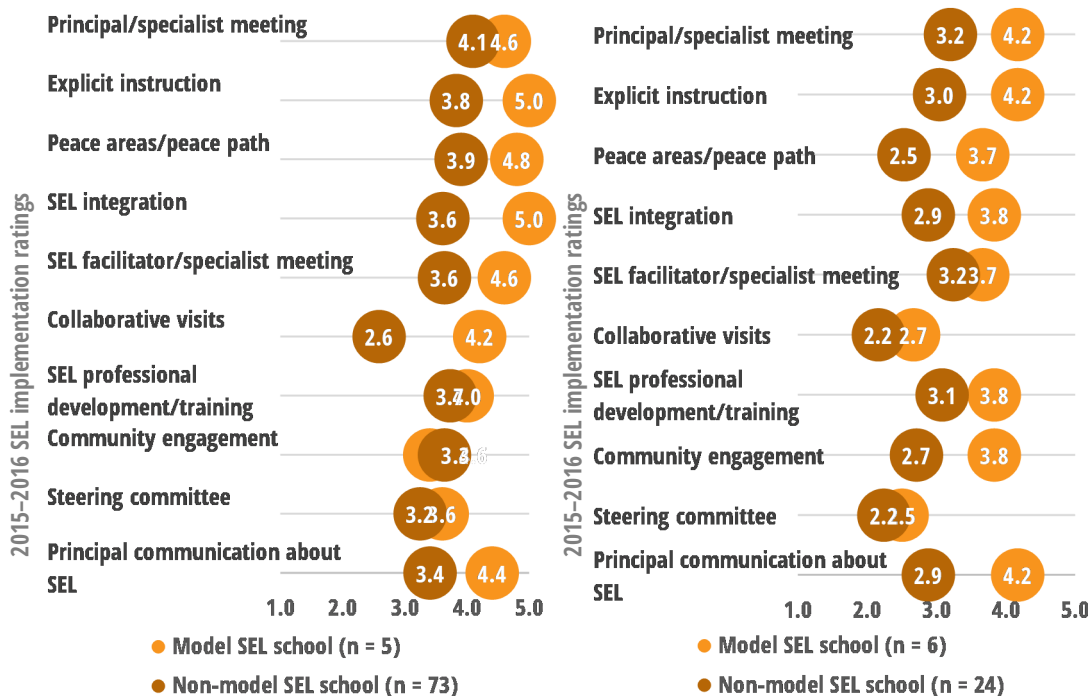
language learners (ELL), and 10% were receiving special educational services. Of the 11 model SEL schools, three had student populations similar to that of the ELLs at the district level, and all but four schools had student populations similar to the district’s population. Finally, most schools had implemented SEL on their campus for at least 5 years.

## Did model SEL schools receive higher implementation ratings than did non-model SEL schools?

Descriptive analyses were conducted separately, based on school level (i.e., elementary and secondary), to determine if model SEL schools received higher SEL implementation ratings than did non-model SEL schools. Because there were few model SEL schools, tests of significance were not conducted.

At the elementary-school level, model SEL schools received higher ratings than did non-model SEL schools on all but one implementation area (community engagement; Figure 1). The largest discrepancy was in ratings of how frequently SEL specialists met and worked with campus staff (i.e., collaborative visits). At the secondary level, ratings were also higher at model SEL schools than at non-model SEL schools. Ratings were most discrepant for how principals communicated about SEL (Figure 1). However, because SEL specialists provide ratings, thereby introducing subjectivity, it is important to include other outcome measures when comparing model and non-model SEL schools.

Figure 1. Elementary and secondary model SEL schools received higher SEL implementation ratings in most categories than did non-model elementary SEL schools.



Source. 2015–2016 SEL implementation ratings

Note. SEL implementation ratings ranged from 1 (not evident) to 5 (clearly evident); ratings were conducted by SEL specialists.

## SEL index

### ELEMENTARY INDICATORS

Students’ personal development skill report card ratings averaged across all four grading periods:

- Interacts cooperatively with peers
- Interacts cooperatively with adults
- Manages emotions constructively
- Responsible decision making
- Respects self and others

### SECONDARY INDICATORS

- Percentage of students who are chronically absent (inverse)
- Percentage of students with discipline infractions (inverse)

### CLIMATE INDICATORS

Agreement with the following Student Climate Survey items (response options ranged from 1 = never to 4 = a lot of the time):

- My classmates show respect to each other.
- My classmates show respect to other students who are different.
- Adults at this school listen to student ideas and opinions.
- Adults at this school treat all students with respect.
- It is easy for me to talk about my problems with adults at this school.
- Students at my school are bullied (teased, taunted, threatened by other students; reverse coded).
- I use ways to calm myself down.
- I don’t give up even when I feel frustrated.
- I know what people may be feeling by the look on their face.
- I get along with my classmates.
- I say no to my friends who want me to break the rules.

### INDEX RANGE

At the elementary school level, scores ranged from 52 to 62; at the secondary level, scores ranged from –24 to 38.



## Did model SEL schools have better school-level outcomes than did non-model SEL schools?

Model SEL elementary schools had slightly higher attendance rates and State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) passing rates in reading and math than did non-model SEL schools (Figure 2). At the secondary level, attendance, chronic absenteeism, and discipline looked similar regardless of model school status (discipline and chronic absenteeism were not examined at the elementary school level due to the low rates; Figure 2). Percentage changes in STAAR passing, attendance, chronic absenteeism, and discipline rates from 2011–2012 through 2015–2016 were also computed and examined for each school status. Results showed that the percentage changes in these rates were similar for most outcomes regardless of model school status (see Appendix A).

Figure 2.

Elementary students at **model SEL schools** had slightly higher STAAR passing rates than did students at **non-model elementary SEL schools**. Outcomes were similar at secondary **model** and **non-model** SEL schools.



Source. 2015–2016 AISD attendance, STAAR reading and math (elementary only); 2015–2016 AISD discretionary removals and chronic absenteeism (secondary only)

Note. Discretionary removals exclude mandatory removals and truancy; chronic absenteeism was defined as 15 or more absences a year.

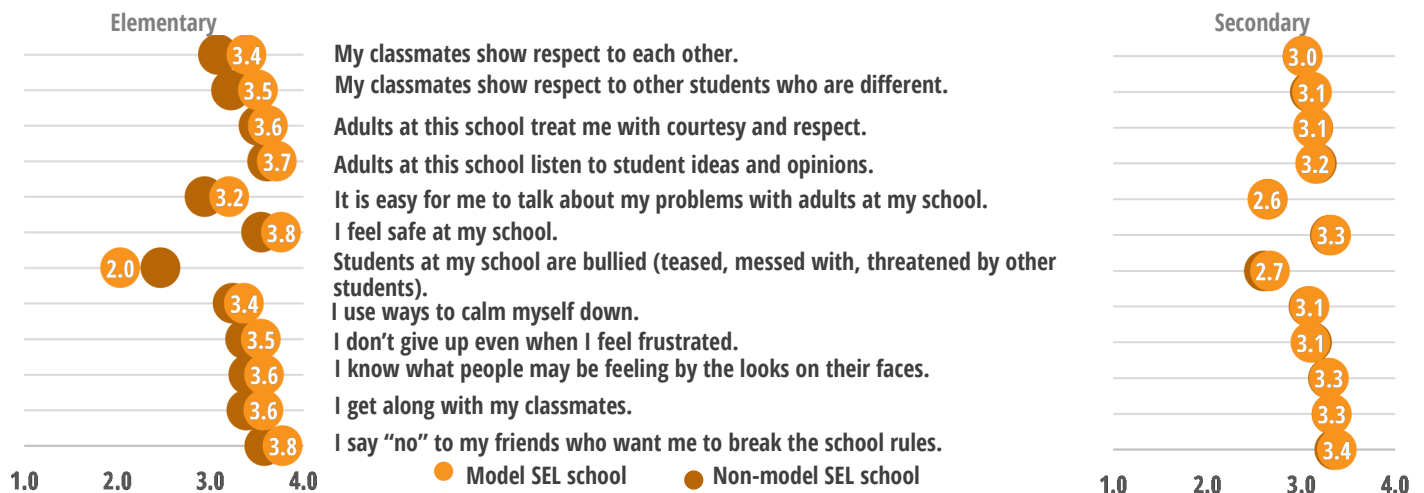


## Did students and staff from model SEL schools report better school climate than did students and staff from non-model SEL schools?

Although tests of significance were not conducted, elementary school students' responses to items related to school climate and their SEL skills were slightly higher at model SEL schools than at non-model SEL schools (Figure 3). At the

Figure 3.

Elementary students at **model SEL schools** had slightly higher climate ratings did students at **non-model elementary SEL schools**. Secondary students at **model** and **non-model** SEL schools provided similar school climate and SEL skill ratings.

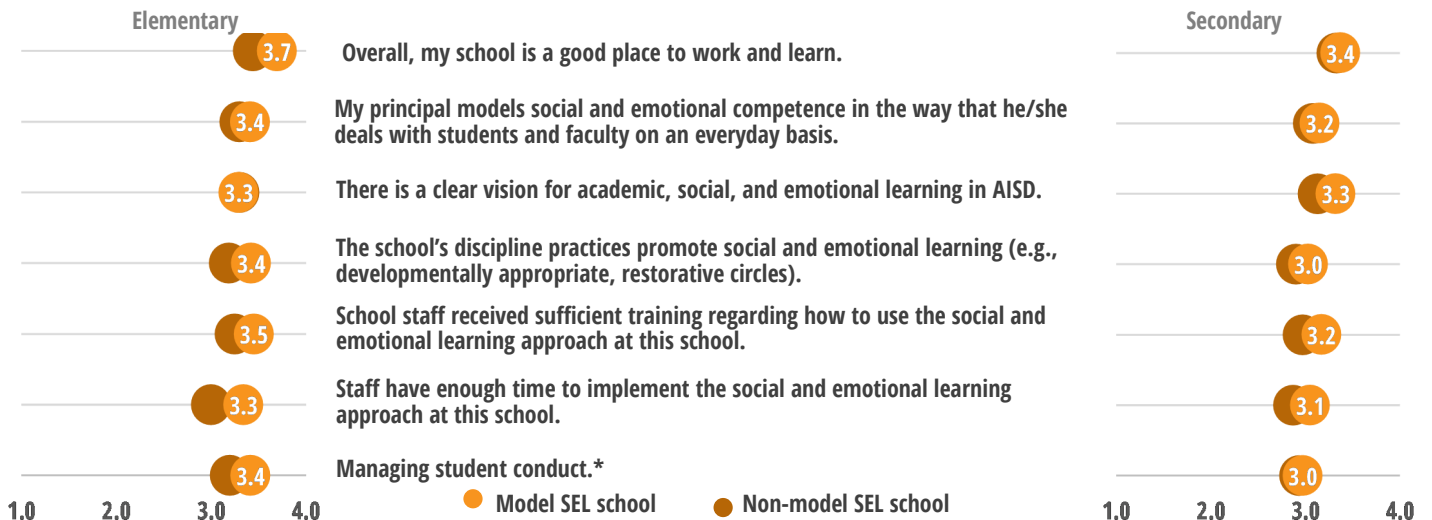


Source. 2015–2016 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Response options ranged from 1 (never) to 4 (a lot of the time)

secondary level, students' responses to school climate and their SEL skills were similar for most items regardless of model school status (Figure 3). At both school levels, staff at model SEL schools provided somewhat more favorable responses to SEL-related items than did staff at non-model SEL schools (Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Staff at elementary and secondary model SEL schools had slightly higher climate ratings than did staff at non-model SEL schools.



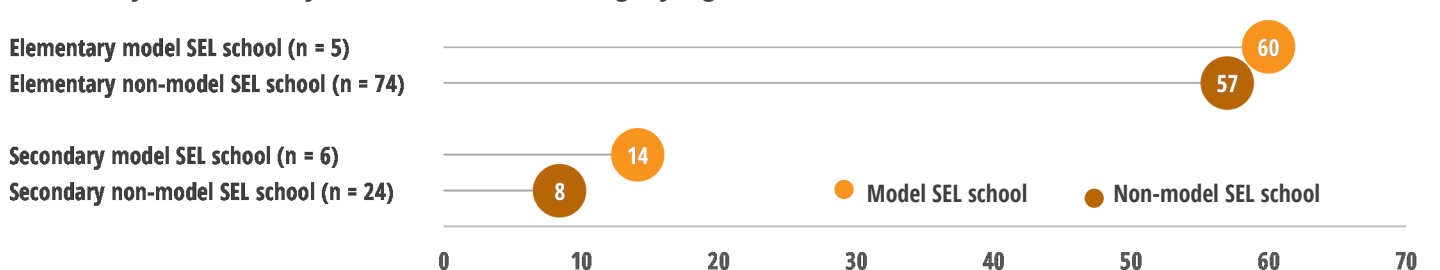
Source. 2015–2016 AISD TELL Survey  
 Note. Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).  
 \* items corresponding with this subscale are in Appendix B

Students' responses to the item "My classmates show respect to each other" improved slightly more at model SEL elementary than at non-model SEL elementary schools. At the secondary level, students' and staffs' ratings of most items improved more over time at model SEL schools than at non-model SEL schools (Appendix A).

### Did model SEL schools receive higher SEL index ratings than did non-model SEL schools?

Recently, researchers in the field of SEL have been urging those evaluating SEL to use multiple measures or an index to more accurately assess students' SEL skills and program fidelity (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Krachman, Arnold & Larocca, 2016). Responding to this need, an SEL index was created using multiple measures thought to contribute to effective SEL implementation in AISD. Because rates of discipline and chronic absenteeism were low at the elementary school level, these measures were excluded; instead, teachers' ratings of their students' personal development skills were included (page 2 lists all indicators; Appendix C lists SEL index scores for each model school). Although not significant, SEL index scores were slightly higher at model SEL schools than at non-model SEL schools (Figure 5). Future work will refine this index and include an analysis at the student level.

**Figure 5.** Elementary and secondary model SEL schools had slightly higher SEL index scores than did non-model SEL schools.



Source. Items from AISD's 2015–2016 Student Climate Survey, 2015–2016 students' personal development skill ratings (elementary only) and 2015–2016 AISD school level discipline and attendance records (secondary only)

## Appendix A. Percentage Change in Attendance, Discretionary Removals, Chronic Absenteeism, and Student and Staff Climate Survey Items with Longitudinal Data by School Level and Model School Status

	2011				2016				% Change			
	Elementary		Secondary		Elementary		Secondary		Elementary		Secondary	
	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM	M	NM
<b>School</b>												
Attendance	92%	85%	83%	83%	92%	86%	86%	85%	1%	6%	4%	3%
Discipline infractions	—	—	16%	19%	—	—	11%	15%	—	—	-42%	-30%
Chronic absenteeism†	—	—	19%	18%	—	—	14%	16%	—	—	-19%	-14%
STAAR math	86%	74%	—	—	88%	76%	—	—	3%	3%	—	—
STAAR reading	90%	76%	—	—	90%	74%	—	—	0%	-3%	—	—
<b>Student Climate Survey</b>												
My classmates show respect to each other.	3.1	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.4	3.1	3.0	3.0	11%	5%	7%	4%
My classmates show respect to other students who are different.	3.3	3.1	2.8	2.9	3.5	3.2	3.1	3.1	6%	5%	11%	7%
Adults at this school listen to student ideas and opinions.	3.6	3.5	3.1	3.1	3.6	3.5	3.1	3.1	2%	1%	8%	3%
Adults at this school treat all students with respect.	3.6	3.6	2.9	3.0	3.7	3.6	3.2	3.2	2%	2%	8%	4%
I feel safe at my school.	3.7	3.5	3.1	3.2	3.8	3.6	3.3	3.3	2%	0%	8%	3%
Students at my school are bullied (teased, taunted, threatened by other students).*	2.2	2.4	2.7	2.6	2.0	2.5	2.7	2.6	-5%	3%	-1%	-1%
<b>TELL</b>												
Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.	3.8	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.3	-5%	2%	4%	1%
Managing student conduct.	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.8	3.4	3.2	3.1	3.0	-5%	1%	5%	4%

Source. 2010–2011 through 2015–2016 AISD Student Climate Survey and TELL data; 2010–2011 through 2015–2016 PEIMS records for attendance, discipline, and chronic absenteeism.

Note. Due to the small number of students with chronic absenteeism or discretionary removals at the elementary school level, the percentage change was excluded from this table.

M = model SEL school;

NM = non-model SEL school

† The baseline year for chronic absenteeism was 2011–2012

\* The baseline year for this item was 2012–2013

## Appendix B. Items Included in the Managing Student Conduct Subscale

The following items are included on the Managing Student Conduct subscale from AISD’s TELL Survey. [Campus](#) and [district](#) reports are available online. Response options ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*.

Students at this school follow rules of conduct.

School staff clearly understand policies and procedures about student conduct.

Administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.

Administrators support teachers’ efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.

Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.

All campus staff work in a school environment that is safe.

Non-teaching staff consistently enforce rules for student conduct.

This school’s discipline practices promote social and emotional learning (e.g., developmentally appropriate consequences, restorative justice).

School staff received sufficient training regarding how to use the social and emotional learning approach at this school.

Staff have enough time to implement the social and emotional learning approach at this school.

Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.



## Appendix C. Model Schools' SEL Index Scores

School	SEL index	Level Average Index Score
Baldwin Elementary School	61	57
Blazier Elementary School	59	57
Highland Park Elementary School	61	57
Lee Elementary School	62	57
Pease Elementary School	61	57
Bertha Sadler Means Young Women's Leadership Academy Middle School	21	8
Covington Middle School	19	8
Fulmore Middle School	1	8
O. Henry Middle School	20	8
Akins High School	12	8
Crockett High School	12	8

*Source.* 2010–2011 through 2015–2016 AISD Student Climate Survey and TELL data; 2010–2011 through 2015–2016 PEIMS records for attendance, discipline, and chronic absenteeism

*Note.* Due to the small number of students with chronic absenteeism or discretionary removals at the elementary school level, SEL index scores differ based on school level. For more information, see page 2.

## References

Duckworth, A. L., & Yeager, D. S. (2015). Measurement matters: Assessing personal qualities other than cognitive ability for educational purposes. *Educational Researcher*, *44*(4), 237–251.

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