

# Perceptions of Staff's Social and Emotional Learning in AISD

As part of the SEL 2.0 strategic plan, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Department in Austin Independent School District (AISD) has focused on staff's professional learning related to SEL knowledge and competencies as a means of fostering optimal teaching and learning environments. To better understand the impact of SEL-related professional learning, this report attempts to answer the following questions:

- What is the relationship between teachers'/administrators' perceptions of SEL knowledge, skills, and competencies and the frequency with which staff report using SEL skills in their work?
- What is the relationship between teachers'/administrators' perceptions of SEL knowledge, skills, and competencies and other aspects of school climate and culture?
- What is the relationship between teachers'/administrators' perceptions of SEL knowledge, skills, and competencies and broader SEL implementation at school?

Findings are based on analyses of staff's responses to the 2019 Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) and the 2018–2019 Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey. The 2019 ECS asked campus staff about their use of SEL skills at school (see sidebar for a complete list), while the 2018–2019 TELL Survey asked staff about numerous aspects of school climate and culture (a complete list can be found [here](#)). In total, 656 teachers and 56 campus administrators (principals and assistant principals) completed the ECS, representing 12% of AISD teachers and 19% of AISD campus administrators. Of ECS respondents, 85% of teachers and 100% of administrators also completed the TELL Survey.

Spearman's rank correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) were calculated to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between survey responses. The majority of correlations discussed in this report are positive (i.e., agreement with one survey item is associated with agreement on the corresponding item), of moderate or strong effect (i.e.,  $r > .30$ ), and statistically significant (i.e., the relationship between items is meaningful and unlikely by chance).

## Greater Confidence Associated With More Frequent Use of SEL Skills

As displayed in Table 1, teachers were significantly more likely to indicate frequent use of SEL skills when they (a) felt confident implementing SEL in their daily work, (b) effectively used multiple strategies to manage their emotions in the classroom, and (c) created structures to promote students' SEL skills in the classroom. Similarly, administrators who indicated they used multiple strategies to regulate their own emotions were significantly more likely to indicate frequent use of SEL skills when interacting with teachers ( $r(47) = .41, p < .05$ ) and students ( $r(47) = .32, p < .05$ ). As referenced earlier, SEL 2.0 focuses on staff's professional learning related to SEL knowledge and competencies in order to foster optimal teaching and learning environments. With evidence that more positive self-perceptions of SEL knowledge and competencies were associated with more frequent use of SEL skills, these findings established a foundation to confirm whether SEL knowledge and competencies are associated with more optimal teaching and learning environments for this sample of teachers and administrators.

Table 1

**Relationship Between Teachers’ Self-Reported SEL Skill Use and Frequency of Use**

Spearman’s rank order correlations for teachers’ 2019 ECS responses	2019 ECS		
	I feel confident in my ability to implement the SEL instructional resource in my daily work.	I effectively use multiple strategies when I have a strong emotional reaction in the classroom.	I create structures in the classroom to promote SEL skills.
Frequency of SEL skill use when:			
- Interacting with staff	$r(611) = .31^{***}$	$r(614) = .28^{***}$	$r(608) = .28^{***}$
- Interacting with students	$r(609) = .37^{***}$	$r(611) = .32^{***}$	$r(605) = .40^{***}$
- Modeling strategies to help students monitor and regulate behavior	$r(610) = .39^{***}$	$r(613) = .37^{***}$	$r(607) = .43^{***}$
- Promoting, acknowledging, and re-enforcing positive student behavior	$r(612) = .37^{***}$	$r(615) = .33^{***}$	$r(609) = .39^{***}$
- Helping students resolve conflict in the classroom	$r(608) = .38^{***}$	$r(611) = .37^{***}$	$r(605) = .45^{***}$

Source. 2019 ECS

\*\*\* =  $p < .0001$

**Leadership Support and Competent Colleagues Associated With More Positive School Climate and Culture**

To further clarify the relationship between staff’s SEL skills and competencies and the classroom environment, teachers’ and administrators’ ECS responses were compared with their corresponding TELL Survey responses. As detailed in Table 2, teachers were significantly more likely to hold favorable perceptions of their school’s climate and culture when they agreed that (a) fellow educators were effectively trained to promote students’ SEL skill development and (b) school leaders supported teachers’ SEL skill development. These findings support prior Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) research (Fayles, 2019) highlighting the importance of coordinated leadership to successful campus SEL implementation. Furthermore, the strength and consistency of these correlations did not hold for ECS items that asked about self-perceptions of SEL skills and competencies. This distinction—between self- and other-oriented perceptions of SEL—indicates that school climate and culture benefit when teachers believe their colleagues and administrators similarly support an SEL approach.

Table 2

**Relationship Between Teachers’ Perceptions of School Climate and SEL Training and Support**

2018–2019 TELL subscale	2019 ECS	
	Teachers at my school are effectively trained to promote students’ SEL skill development.	School leaders support the development of my SEL skills.
General Climate	$r(563) = .36^{***}$	$r(560) = .37^{***}$
District Vision	$r(562) = .30^{***}$	$r(560) = .33^{***}$
School Leadership	$r(566) = .36^{***}$	$r(563) = .42^{***}$
Principal Leadership	$r(565) = .34^{***}$	$r(562) = .39^{***}$
Facilities and Resources	$r(566) = .33^{***}$	$r(563) = .31^{***}$
Teacher Leadership	$r(566) = .34^{***}$	$r(563) = .38^{***}$

**Relevant Survey Items from ECS and TELL**

**Employee Coordinated Survey**

Staff were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following:

- Teachers at my school are effectively trained to promote the SEL skill development of all students.
- I feel confident in my ability to implement the SEL instructional resource in my daily work.
- School leaders support the development of my SEL skills.
- I understand how student responses (positive and negative) affect my emotions and my behaviors during lessons.
- I effectively use multiple strategies when I have a strong emotional reaction in the classroom.
- I create structures in the classroom to promote SEL skills.

Staff were also asked to indicate the frequency with which they used SEL skills when:

- Interacting with staff at school
- Interacting with students at school
- Modeling strategies that help students monitor and regulate their behavior
- Promoting positive behaviors by encouraging students when they display effective social skills and effective work habits
- Helping students resolve interpersonal conflicts for themselves that come up during lessons

**TELL Survey - SEL-themed items**

Staff were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following:

- All campus staff interact with one another in a way that models social and emotional competence.
- There is a clear vision for academic, social, and emotional learning in AISD.
- My principal models social and emotional competence in the way that he/she deals with students and faculty on an everyday basis.
- This school’s discipline practices promote social and emotional learning.
- Staff have enough time to implement the social and emotional learning approach at this school.
- I participate with a group of my campus colleagues to support students’ social and emotional competence.

2018–2019 TELL subscale	2019 ECS	
	Teachers at my school are effectively trained to promote students' SEL skill development.	School leaders support the development of my SEL skills.
Professional Development	$r(564) = .33^{***}$	$r(562) = .36^{***}$
Achievement Press	$r(565) = .37^{***}$	$r(563) = .39^{***}$
Community Support	$r(561) = .32^{***}$	$r(558) = .36^{***}$
Student Conduct	$r(564) = .45^{***}$	$r(562) = .42^{***}$
Instructional Practice	$r(564) = .35^{***}$	$r(562) = .36^{***}$
Professional Learning Communities	$r(564) = .31^{***}$	$r(562) = .30^{***}$
Team/Department Data Use	$r(556) = .32^{***}$	$r(553) = .31^{***}$
Job Satisfaction	$r(563) = .26^{***}$	$r(560) = .30^{***}$

Source. 2019 ECS and 2018–2019 TELL Survey

Note. Self-Efficacy, Individual Data Use, and Professional Attachment subscales are not included due to  $r < .3$  for both ECS items.

\*\*\* =  $p < .0001$

## Noteworthy TELL Correlations

The following sections highlight significant relationships between teachers'/administrators' perceptions of SEL and school climate and culture:

### SEL and Student Conduct

The TELL Survey asks teachers and administrators about their school's disciplinary practices (e.g., "This school's discipline practices promote SEL"). Teachers who indicated greater confidence in their own SEL skills were significantly more likely to support their school's disciplinary practices and to indicate greater alignment with SEL ( $r > .30$ ,  $p < .0001$  for all pairwise correlations). In addition, administrators were significantly more likely to support their school's disciplinary practices and to indicate greater alignment with SEL when they believed teachers at their school were effectively trained to promote students' SEL skill development ( $r(43) = .63$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

### SEL and Self-Efficacy

The TELL Survey measures teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy, or the extent to which an individual believes they can successfully manage their own motivations and behaviors and successfully navigate their environment. Teachers reported higher self-efficacy ratings when (a) they were confident in their ability to effectively use multiple strategies when experiencing a strong emotional reaction in the classroom ( $r(575) = .30$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and (b) they created classroom structures to promote students' SEL skills ( $r(567) = .31$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

### SEL and Achievement Press

The TELL Survey asks teachers and administrators about their school's expectations of academic standards and continuous improvement. Teachers were significantly more likely to agree that staff, students, and parents at their school maintained high academic standards and pushed for continuous improvement when they similarly agreed that they felt competent and effective when using SEL skills, that their leaders supported SEL, and that their peers were effectively trained to implement SEL in the classroom ( $r > .30$ ,  $p < .0001$  for all pairwise correlations). Similarly, administrators who believed their teachers were effectively trained to promote students' SEL skill development were significantly more likely to agree that their school community maintained high academic standards and pushed for continuous improvement ( $r(43) = .58$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

### ECS and SEL-Related TELL Items

The TELL survey has five items that specifically reference SEL (see sidebar). As detailed in Table 3, teachers were significantly more likely to agree with SEL items on the TELL Survey when they (a) believed their peers were

effectively trained to promote students' SEL skill development and (b) agreed that school leaders supported their SEL skill development. Teachers reported significantly higher ratings across all ECS items when they collaborated with colleagues to support students' SEL competence ( $r > .30$ ,  $p < .0001$  for all pairwise correlations). Taken together, these correlations align with findings discussed earlier about the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school climate and culture and their assessment of external support for staff SEL-related professional learning.

Table 3

### Correlations for Teachers' Perceptions of SEL Across ECS and TELL Survey Administrations

2018–2019 TELL Survey–SEL-themed items	2019 ECS	
	Teachers at my school are effectively trained to promote students' SEL skill development.	School leaders support the development of my SEL skills.
All campus staff interact with one another in a way that models social and emotional competence.	$r(549) = .33^{***}$	$r(548) = .30^{***}$
There is a clear vision for academic, social, and emotional learning in AISD.	$r(557) = .34^{***}$	$r(553) = .35^{***}$
My principal models social and emotional competence in the way that he/she deals with students and faculty on an everyday basis.	$r(550) = .30^{***}$	$r(544) = .39^{***}$
The school's discipline practices support social and emotional learning.	$r(549) = .42^{***}$	$r(543) = .40^{***}$
Staff have enough time to implement the social and emotional learning approach at this school.	$r(553) = .43^{***}$	$r(551) = .38^{***}$
I participate with a group of my campus colleagues to support students' social and emotional competence.	$r(563) = .32^{***}$	$r(560) = .33^{***}$

Source. 2019 ECS and 2018–2019 TELL Survey

\*\*\* =  $p < .0001$

## Conclusion

These findings provide correlational evidence that SEL-focused professional learning for staff is associated with a positive teaching and learning environment. Survey responses, however, were likely influenced by social desirability (i.e., the tendency to provide positive responses because it is expected) and potential confounding variables (e.g., access to resources, organizational capacity) not analyzed in this report. Despite these limitations, the strength and consistency of certain relationships (and not others) across separate survey administration dates supports the validity of these correlations. Future research will explore the causal relationship between SEL professional learning and the classroom environment, possibly through analysis of classroom SEL implementation and professional learning participation. In addition, more nuanced analyses by additional characteristics (e.g., school Title I status, school level, teacher race) will be conducted when sample sizes permit.

## References

Fayles, C. (2019). *Social and emotional learning: Best practices and barriers to successful implementation*. Austin Independent School District.

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